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Revolutionary Days in the Carolinas, by Sara Beaumont Kennedy**

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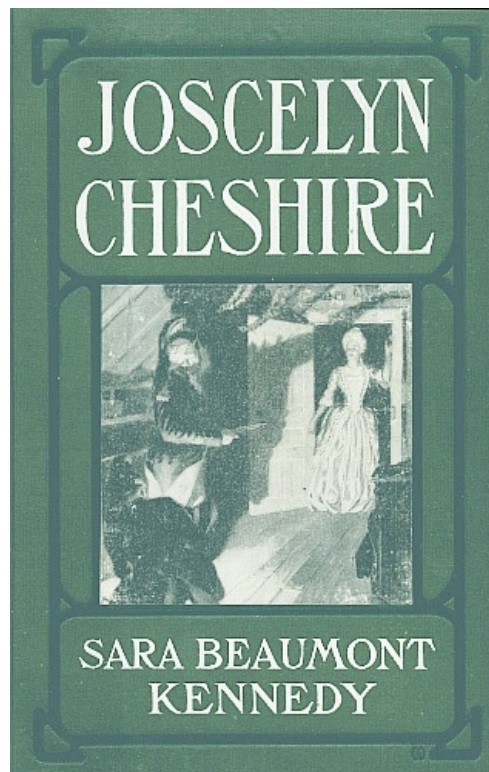
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REVOLUTIONARY DAYS IN THE CAROLINAS ***



JOSCELYN CHESHIRE

**A STORY OF REVOLUTIONARY DAYS
IN THE CAROLINAS**

BY

SARA BEAUMONT KENNEDY



NEW YORK

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**"SHE SWEEPED HIM A COURTESY FULL
OF OPEN DEFIANCE AND RIDICULE."**

To my Husband
WALKER KENNEDY
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

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JOSCELYN CHESHIRE.

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CHAPTER I.

CUPID AND MARS.

"Thy head is as full of quarrels as an egg
is full of meat."

—SHAKESPEARE.

He threw the door wide open and, with one foot advanced and his weight on the other hip, stood at pose with uplifted arm and sword; as gallant a figure as ever melted a maiden's heart or stormed a foeman's citadel. There was great suggestion of power in the straight limbs, a marvellous promise of strength in the upward sweep of the arm, which, for a moment, held the inmates of the room in silence of admiration. Then an avalanche of exclamations broke loose.

"Richard, Richard!"

"Master Clevering!"

"A health to the young Continental!"

"Oh, the new uniform, how bravely it doth become him!"

"The buff and blue forever!"

"What an air the coat gives him."

"And the breeches have never a wrinkle in them. I have ever said, my son, that you were not over fair of feature, but that the Lord made it up to you in the shape o' your legs." The last speaker was his mother, who, passing behind him, ran her fingers caressingly along the seams of his military outfit.

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The young man lowered his sword and answered with a boyish laugh: "And truly did the Lord owe me a debt in that He gave me not your beauty, mother."

"He balanced His account," was the complacent answer, "for you are a fit figure to please even a king."

"Nay, I care not to please the king—but the assembled queens!" He doffed his hat, and bowed with courtly grace to the group of young women in the centre of the room.

Full of laughter and chaffing they crowded about him—his sister Betty, her friend Patience Ruffin, Mistress Dorothy Graham, who had come in to learn a new knitting stitch of Betty, and pretty Janet Cameron, who had followed Dorothy to hear the gossip which must necessarily flow freely where so many women were assembled. Immediately they surrounded the young soldier, and there was much laughter and talking as they relieved him of his sword and gun.

"Only a private in the ranks, and yet here am I attended like a commander-in-chief," he said, laughing. "Methinks no hero of olden romance had ever such charming squirage. Are you going to give me your gloves and fasten your colours on my helmet, that I may go forth to battle as did the knights of yore?"

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"Yes; kill me a Redcoat for this," and Janet tossed him her glove, while Dorothy tied a strand of the bright wool from her knitting ball upon his sleeve. "An you win not a battle for each of us, you are no knight of ours."

But the fifth girl of the group, after one glance at him upon his entrance, had turned abruptly to the window and stood gazing into the street, tapping the air to "King George, Our Royal Ruler" upon the panes. No part of her face was visible, but her attitude was spirited, and the poise of her head bespoke defiance. Richard Clevering's eyes travelled every few minutes to that straight, lithe figure, and anon he called out banteringly:—

"Hey, you, there at the window, are King George and his army passing by that you have no eyes for other folk?"

"I would that they were," was the short answer, and the fingers went on with their strumming.

"Come, Joscelyn, leave off sulking and see how brave Richard's uniform doth make him," said Betty, coaxingly, eager that her brother's unspoken wish should be gratified.

"And truly doth he need somewhat to make him brave, seeing he is in arms against his king," Joscelyn retorted, but turned not her head.

"In arms against the king? Aye, truly am I; and yours be not the only Royalist back I shall see 'twixt this and the end of the campaign, Mistress Joscelyn Cheshire."

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"Then, forsooth, will they be in luck—not having you to look at."

But the others had caught his meaning, and her retort was half lost in the shout of laughter that greeted him.

"Aye, I warrant me when the fighting comes you will see the backs of so many Redcoats that you can e'en cut their pattern in the dark," declared Dorothy.

"Then will his head be twisted forever awry with looking so much over his shoulder behind him."

"My Lady Royalist's ears are in the room though her eyes be elsewhere," laughed Janet.

"And neither is her tongue paralyzed. Turn about, Joscelyn, and let us see you have also other power of motion."

"Not quite so much as some folk who turn like a weather-cock in every gust of a partisan wind."

Thus the sparring went on until the visitors took their departure, followed to the gate by Mistress Clevering and her daughter for that one last word which women so love. Richard bowed them out and closed the door upon their backs; then, marching straight to the window, he placed himself by Joscelyn, who immediately turned her face in the opposite direction. He spoke to her, but only a shrug of the shoulders answered him.

"You *shall* look at me," he cried, with sudden determination; and, seizing her by the shoulders, he twisted her about until she faced him; but even then he did not accomplish his purpose, for she covered her face with her hands, declaring vehemently she would rather see him in his shroud than in the uniform of a traitor.

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"Traitor, forsooth! You know not whereof you speak. In what button or seam see you aught that is traitorous?" He dragged her hands from her face, and held them in his strong grip; but still he was foiled, for her eyes were tightly closed. "An you open not your eyes immediately, I will kiss them soundly upon either lid."

Which threat had the desired effect, for instantly the lashes parted and a pair of sea-blue eyes looked angrily into his.

"So—I have brought you to terms. Well, and what think you of my uniform?"

"Methinks," and her voice was not pleasant to hear, "that 'tis most fitting apparel for one who

refuses allegiance to his king and—uses his greater strength against a woman.”

He flung her hands away with what, for him, was near to roughness. “By the eternal stars, Joscelyn, your tongue has a double edge!”

“A woman has need of a sharp tongue since Providence gave her but indifferent fists.”

“In sooth, it is the truth with you,” he cried, his good-humour restored as he again caught one of her slender hands and held it up for inspection. “Nature wasted not much material here; methinks it would scarce fill a fly with apprehension.”

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But she wrung it out of his grasp, and, with an exclamation of annoyance, turned once more to the window. His expression changed, and he stood some moments regarding her in silence. At last he said:—

“Joscelyn, ‘tis now more than two years since you came to live neighbours with us, and for the last half of that time you and I have done little else than quarrel. But on my part this disagreement has not gone below the surface; rather has it been a covering for a tenderer feeling. I have heard it said that a woman knows instinctively when a man loves her. Have you spelled out my heart under this show of dispute?”

She shrugged her shoulders mockingly. “I am but an indifferent speller, Master Clevering.”

“Right well do I know that, having seen some of your letters to Betty,” he answered with ready acquiescence. Whereat she flashed upon him a glance of indignant protest; but he went on calmly, as though he noted not the look: “But you are a fair reader, and mayhap I used a wrong term. Have you not read my heart all these months?”

“It is not given even unto the wise to read so absolute a blank.”

It was his time to wince, but the minutes were flying, the women might return from the gate at any moment, and this would be his last chance for a quiet word with her. “Let us have done with this child’s play, Joscelyn. To-morrow I march with my company; ‘twill be months, perhaps years, before we meet again. I love you! Will you not give me some gentle word, some sweet promise, to fill with hope the time that is to come?”

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“What manner of promise can you wish?” she asked, her back still toward him.

“A promise which shall mean our betrothal.”

“Betrothal?—and we always quarrelling?”

“Quarrels cease where love doth rule,” he answered softly.

“But I have no love for you.”

“You might have if you would cease dwelling so much on the king’s affairs and think somewhat of me. I would give you love unqualified if so you would but lean ever so little my way.”

“And think you, Master Clevering, that I would turn traitor for your love? Nay, sir; I am a loyal subject to King George, and can enter into no compact with his enemies.”

“Then will I be forced to conquer you along with the other adherents of the tyrant, for have you I will,” he cried impetuously. “An you yield not to persuasion, you shall yield to force. From this day I hold you as a part of the English enemy who needs must be subdued; and I do hereby proclaim war against your prejudice for your heart.”

“And I do accept the challenge, foreseeing your failure in both causes.” She swept him a courtesy full of open defiance and ridicule, and again turned her back upon him as Betty entered the room.

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But Master Clevering was neither dismayed nor discouraged by the turn his wooing had taken. He had never thought to win her lightly, and his combative disposition recognized in the prospect before him the elements of a struggle, so that he was filled with the keen joy of a warrior at the onset of the fray. The possibility of final defeat did not occur to him.

Bidding Betty an affectionate good-by, Joscelyn quitted the house, declining his proffered escort, nor did he speak with her again for a space of many hours; for when the company, bidden that night to a farewell feast with him, assembled about the board, the chair set for her was vacant. Betty and Janet glanced meaningly at each other, for they had seen her at dusk in company with Eustace and Mary Singleton, and the Singletons were among the most pronounced Tories in the county. But at the other end of the table Richard only laughed as he thrust his knife into the fowl before him and felt for the joint.

“Tell her, Aunt Cheshire, that our loss does not equal hers, since she gets none of this bird, which is browned to the taste of Epicurus himself.”

His tone was careless, and in truth he was not surprised at her defection, for he, too, had seen the Singletons at her gate; and later on, as he stood at his own door, had seen her, through her lighted parlour window opposite, take off, for the entertainment of her guests, his own theatrical entrance in his uniform that afternoon. She was an excellent mimic, and her sense of humour enabled her to give a ludicrous side to the scene, which drew forth peals of laughter from her auditors. The vanity, the swagger, the monumental pose, were so exactly reproduced that Richard felt a quick tingle of irritation flush his veins. And that picture was still in his mind as he

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sat at table among his guests.

It is questionable whether it would have been an added nettlement or a relief had he known that she had been aware of his presence across the way, seeing him distinctly against the hall light behind him, and that the scene enacted was more for him than for her visitors.

CHAPTER II.

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THE MARCH OF THE CONTINENTALS.

“Thou art gone from my gaze like a beautiful dream.”

—LINLEY.

The Cheshires and Cleverings were not akin, although the young people gave titles of kinship to the older folk. Mistress Cheshire had been twice married, her first husband being brother to James Clevering. After her second widowhood she had moved from New Berne to Hillsboro'-town, to be near her brother-in-law, for neither she nor her last husband had any nearer male relative this side of the sea. There had been no quarrel with the Cleverings concerning her second marriage, so that she found in Hillsboro' a ready welcome. The inland town promised more peace than the bustling seaport whence she had moved. There news of king and colony came in with every vessel that cast anchor at the wharves, and, as a result, the community was in a constant state of ferment. All this was very repugnant to Mistress Cheshire, who was a timid woman with no very decided views upon public questions. Her one ruling desire was for peace, no matter whence the source; she had lived quite happily under the king's sceptre; but if Washington could establish a safe and quiet government, she would have no quarrel either with him or fate.

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But Joscelyn was different. Her father had been an ardent advocate of kingly rule, and she had imbibed all of his enthusiasm for England and English sovereignty. He had died just before the battle of Lexington set the western continent athrob with a new national life. Consequently, the removal from New Berne had been much against Joscelyn's inclination, for she desired to be in the front and press of the excitement. But seeing how her mother's heart was set on it, she finally withdrew her opposition. Still she carried to her new home the bitter Toryism with which her father had so deeply ingrained her nature. In another atmosphere this feeling might have spent itself in idle fancies and vain regrets; but in daily, almost hourly, contact with the Cleverings, whose patriotism was ever at high tide, she was kept constantly on the defensive, and in a spirit of resistance that knew no compromise. The elder Cleverings and Betty looked upon her outbreaks good-humouredly, treating them as the whims of a spoiled child. But not so Richard. His whole soul was in the revolt of the colonies; every nerve in him was attuned to war and strife, and he was vehemently intolerant of any adverse opinion, so that between him and Joscelyn the subject came to be as flint and steel. He did not scruple to tell her that she was foolish, obstinate, logically blind, and that her opinions were not of the smallest consequence; and yet the stanch loyalty with which she defended her cause, and the ready defiance with which she met his every attack won his admiration. Very speedily he separated her personality from her views, and loved the one while he despised the other. Nothing but fear of her ridicule had hitherto held him silent upon the subject of his love.

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While the merry-making went on at the Cleverings' that last night of his stay at home, Joscelyn sat playing cards with the Singletons, whom she persuaded to remain to tea, making her loneliness her plea.

“It passes my understanding,” said Eustace, as he slowly shuffled the cards, “how these insurgents can hope to win. Even their so-called congress has had to move twice before the advance of his Majesty's troops. A nation that has two seats of government in two years seems rather shifty on its base.”

“It must have been a brave sight to see General Howe march into Philadelphia,” said Joscelyn. “Methinks I can almost hear the drums beat and see the flags flying in the wind. Would I had been there to cry ‘long live the king’ with the faithful of the land.”

But Mary shuddered. “I am content to be no nearer than I am to the battle scenes. The mustering of the Continental company to-day has satisfied my eyes with martial shows.”

“Call you that a martial show?” her brother laughed derisively. “Why, that was but a shabby make-believe with only half of the men properly uniformed and equipped. Martial show, indeed! Rather was it a gathering of scarecrows. I prophesy that in six months the ‘indomitable army of the young Republic,’ as the leaders style the undisciplined rabble that follows them, will be again quietly ploughing their fields or looking after other private affairs.”

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“And while you are prophesying you are playing your cards most foolishly, and I am defeating you.”

"True, you have me fairly with that ace. Let us try it again—'Deprissa resurgit,' as the Continentals say on their worthless paper money."

"Joscelyn," said Mary suddenly, "did I tell you that Aunt Ann said in her letter that Cousin Ellen wore a yellow silk to the ball given to welcome General Howe to Philadelphia?"

"I do believe you left out that important item," laughed Joscelyn.

"Why, how came you to be so remiss, I pray you, sister? The flight of congress from the Quaker city, and its seizure by his Majesty's troops, are but insignificant matters compared to the fact that our cousin wore yellow silk to the general's ball," teased her brother. Whereupon Mary went pouting across the room and sat at the window, calling out to the players at the table the names of those who went in and out of the house of festivity opposite.

"Yonder are Mistress Strudwick and Doris Henderson—dear me! I wonder what it feels like to be so stout as Mistress Strudwick? Billy Bryce and his mother are just behind them. I see Janet and Betty through the window. Betty has on that pink brocade with the white lace."

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"Then I warrant some of those recruits will go to the war already wounded, for in that gown Mistress Betty is sweet enough to break any man's heart."

"Eustace, I do believe you are halfway in love with Betty."

"Why put it only halfway, my dear? The whole is ever better than a part."

"What think you, Joscelyn, is he in earnest? And how does Betty like him?"

But Joscelyn laughingly quoted the biblical text about being "unevenly yoked together with unbelievers," reminding Mary that Betty was a Whig, and Eustace a Loyalist, and this was a bar that even Cupid must not pull down. Whereupon Eustace laughed aloud; and Mary was satisfied.

Early the next morning Betty ran over to make her protest against Joscelyn's absence of the night before. "Richard seemed not to care, but mother and I were much chagrined that you did not come."

"I certainly meant no offence to you and Aunt Clevering," answered Joscelyn, "but Richard and I have a way of forgetting our company manners which is most unpleasant to spectators."

"Yes; mother read Richard a most proper lecture this morning about the way he quarrels with you, and he is coming over later to make his peace; he says he thinks that perhaps mother is right, and that he will feel better to carry in his heart no grudge against any one when he goes into battle. And you must be very kind to him, Joscelyn, for it is a great concession on his part to apologize thus. Supposing if—if anything happened to him, and you had sent him away in anger!"

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Joscelyn drew the young girl to her. "So you have appointed yourself keeper-in-chief of my conscience? Well, well; I will hold a most strict watch over my tongue during the next few hours, so that it may give you no offence. Still, I am not easily conscience-stricken, and neither, I think, is Master Clevering."

"The Singletons passed the evening with you, did they not?" asked Betty, who had glanced across at her friend's window the night before, and had seen them playing cards together.

"Yes; and Eustace said some very pretty things about you and your pink frock. What a pity you are of different political beliefs, for—Why, Betty, what a beautiful colour has come into your cheeks."

"Stuff, Joscelyn! But—what said Master Singleton?" And when the speech was repeated, the girl's sweet face was redder than ever.

For a few moments Joscelyn looked at her in consternation. Betty cared for Eustace! It seemed the very acme of irony. Then tenderly she stroked the brown hair, wondering silently at the game of cross-purposes love is always playing. Uncle and Aunt Clevering, with their violent views, would follow Betty to her grave rather than to her bridal with Eustace, for, besides the party differences, the older folk of the two families had long been separated by a bitter quarrel over a title-deed. Joscelyn's own friendship for Mary and Eustace had been the cause of some sharp words between her and her uncle; a thousand times more would he resent Betty's defection. "But they shall not break her heart!" she said to herself, with a sudden tightening of her arms about the clinging girl.

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An hour later Richard knocked at the door and was admitted by Mistress Cheshire, for Joscelyn had gone to her own room at the sound of his step outside.

"No, I will not come down. I have promised Betty not to quarrel with him, and the only way to keep my word is not to see him," she said to her mother over the banister. "Tell him I hope he will soon come back whole of body, but as gloriously defeated as all rebels deserve to be."

In vain her mother urged, and in vain Richard called from the foot of the stair; she neither answered nor appeared in sight.

"Tell her, Aunt Cheshire, that I never thought to find her hiding in her covert; a soldier who believes in his cause hesitates not to meet his adversary in open field; it is the doubtful in courage or confidence who run to cover." And he went down the step with his head up angrily

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and his sword clanging behind him.

In the upper hall Joscelyn held her hands tightly over her mouth to force back the stinging retort. Then, with a derisive smile, she went downstairs and sat in the hall window, in plain view of the street and the house across the way.

That afternoon his company marched afield. The town was full of noise and excitement, and the mingled sound of sobbing and of forced laughter, as the line was formed in the market-place and moved with martial step down the long, unpaved street, the rolling drums and clear-toned bugles stirring the blood to a frenzy of enthusiasm. The sidewalks were lined with spectators, the patriots shouting, the luke-warm looking on silently. Every house along the route through the town was hung with wind-swung wreaths of evergreen or streamers of the bonny buff and blue—every one until they reached the Cheshire dwelling. There the shutters were close drawn as though some grief brooded within, and upon the outside of the closed door hung a picture of King George framed in countless loops of scarlet ribbon that flamed out like a sun-blown poppy by contrast with the soberer tints of the Continentals. Here was a challenge that none might misunderstand. The sight was as the red rag in the toreador's hand to the bull in the arena; and, like an infuriated animal, the crowd surged and swayed and rent the air with an angry roar. The marching line came suddenly to a full stop without a word of command, and the roar was interspersed with hisses. Then there was a rush forward, and twenty hands tore at the pictured face and flaunting ribbons, and brought them out to be trampled under foot in the dust of the road, while a voice cried out of the crowd:—

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“Down with the Royalists! Fire!”

And there was a rattle and a flash of steel down the martial line as muskets went to shoulders. But Richard Clevering, pale with fear, sprang to the steps between the deadly muzzles and the door and lifted a hand to either upright, while his voice rang like a trumpet down the line:—

“Stay! There are no men here. This is but a girl's mad prank. Men, men, turn not your guns against two lonely women; save your weapons for rightful game! Shoulder arms! Forward! March!”

There was a moment's hesitation, a muttering down the ranks; then the guns were shouldered and the column fell once more into step with the drums, while the crowd shouted its approval. But above the last echoes of that shout a woman's jeering laugh rang out upon the air; and, lifting eyes, the crowd beheld Joscelyn Cheshire, clad in a scarlet satin bodice, lean out of her opened casement and knot a bunch of that same bright-hued ribbon upon the shutter. With the throng in such volcanic temper it was a perilous thing to do; and yet so insidious was her daring, so great her beauty, that not so much as a stone was cast at this new signal of loyalty, and not a voice was lifted in anger.

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And this was the last vision that Richard had of her—the vivid, glowing picture he carried in his heart through the long campaigns, whether it was as he rushed through the smoke-swirls of battle or bivouacked under the cold, white stars.

CHAPTER III.

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ONWARD TO VALLEY FORGE.

“He is the freeman whom the truth
makes free,
And all are slaves besides.”

—COWPER.

The colony of North Carolina had long been ready for rebellion against kingly authority. Governor Tryon had sown the seeds of discontent by his unpopular measures, and the taxes levied upon the people that he might build his “palace” at New Berne. This discontent had culminated in the insurrection of the Regulators and the battle of Alamance, where was made the first armed stand against England. But Tryon was victorious, and the captured leaders of the insurrection were hanged on Regulators' hill in Hillsboro'-town. But from that field of Alamance, the defeated people carried to their homes the same persistent, haunting dream of liberty which was to rise incarnate when the tocsin of the Revolution blew through the land.

That tocsin waked many an echo among the hills that surrounded the town upon the Eno. At the first call to arms, the older men had gone to the field, some marching away to the north, others serving under the partisan leaders throughout their own section. Now the younger ones—those who had been but boys when the cannon at Lexington made the pulse of the people first to quicken and throb—were going out to bear their share in the fray.

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For the past year the company of which Richard Clevering was a member had done service in the militia at home, keeping the Tories in a semblance of subjection, and now and then going to Sumter's aid when he made one of those electrical sallies which were like lightning flashes amid

the general storm. In this hard school Richard had learned his first lessons in soldiering; but graver and sterner military work was now ahead, for the company was marching northward to aid in recruiting Washington's regular army, reduced and discouraged by the terrible winter at Valley Forge.

When they started, the willows that fringed the Eno, that fierce little river that winds about Hillsboro', had already lost their winter grayness, and, with the rising of the sap, had taken on that wonderful golden brown which is the aureole of the coming springtime. The bluebirds had not yet come back to the fence corners, but the earth was soggy with the thaw, and from under the whirls of last year's dead leaves, crocuses were holding up green signals to the sun. But as the troop held their steady way to the north the spring signs disappeared, and hoar frost and bleak winds told that winter's reign was not yet over.

It was a long tramp up through the Virginia woods and along the salt marshes of the coast, and down and up the desolate streams hunting a ford. But youth and enthusiasm lighten many a burden, and to Richard the greatest hardship was lack of news from Joscelyn. The thought of her tugged at his heart, and if his step ever lagged in the line, it was because the memory of her face drew him back with that sickening sense of longing that youth finds so hard to resist. At every chance he sent her a missive.

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"Not that she will care, but just to show her *I do*," he said, trying to convince himself there was no bitterness in the thought.

Peter Ruffin, marching beside him, often looked at the knit brows and compressed lips and smiled, guessing something of the cause; he said to himself that it was safer to leave a wife behind than a sweetheart, since one was sure to find the wife waiting his return, while a sweetheart might be gone with a fresher fancy. But little Billy Bryce, who could never have kept up with the line had it not been for Richard's aid now and then, could not fathom the meaning of that dark look in his benefactor's face, and so was silent and sorry.

The March winds tore at them, and the storms pelted them as they tramped the rugged roads or slept in their thin tents, and the bullets that they had intended for the enemy, often went to provide game for their daily sustenance. The Tories of the districts through which they passed sometimes rallied to oppose them, so that they had to fight their way through ambuscades, or, when the enemy greatly outnumbered them, slip away under cover of night or by circuitous paths through the forest and swamps.

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And so, at last, toward the end of March, they reached their goal—the encampment at Valley Forge, and shuddered at the desolation they witnessed. As the little band marched down the streets of the military village, gaunt men who had survived the horrors of the winter came out to meet them with huzzas, and the drums beat a long welcome. Their coming was as a thrill that runs through a half-numb body, a sign of revivification and awakened hope. But under it all was a sense of unspeakable sadness that filled the hearts of the newcomers with a strange wistfulness of pity and admiration.

The succeeding weeks were given up literally to camp work, to ceaseless mustering and drilling under the vigilant eye of Baron Steuben, until the newcomers lost the air of recruits and bore themselves with the semblance of veterans.

"We had hoped to fight under Morgan," Richard wrote his mother, "but, doubtless for excellent reasons, we are to be assigned to General Wayne's command, which just now sorely needs strengthening. Save that Morgan is from our part of the country, the change matters not to me, since both men are fearless leaders. What I want is a fray, and with either of these men I am like to get my fill."

Here there was a long blot on the page, as though the back of his quill had been drawn along a line. In truth it had, for he had started to send a message to Joscelyn, and then with a sudden accession of determination had erased it, lest she come to think he had never anything in mind save herself. But he fondled the letter as he folded it, knowing that her fingers would doubtless hold each page and her eyes travel along each line, for his mother would share her news of him with her neighbours over the way.

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CHAPTER IV.

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THE COMPANY ON THE VERANDA.

"Heaven first taught letters for some
wretch's aid,
Some banished lover or some captive
maid."

—POPE.

For several weeks after the departure of the soldiers an expectant hush settled over Hillsboro'-town—the reaction of the mustering and drilling that had gone before. So few men were left in the town that Janet Cameron one day dressed herself in the garb of a nun, and, with the feigned humility of folded hands and downcast eyes, went calling upon her companions “of the convent town.” A ripple of merriment followed in her wake, for she made a most quaint figure. But the Reverend Hugh McAden, meeting her upon the corner, so reprimanded her for her levity that she ran home in tears and hid her gray frock and hood in the garret. Joscelyn sobered her own face and made the girl's peace with the reverend gentleman with such explanations as at last seemed to him reasonable. But Janet went on no more masquerading tours.

With both the work and the gayety of the town interrupted, there was nothing of moment to engage attention but the news that came once in a while from the camps and battle-fields. The interest in this was shared by every one, so that all the tidings, whether by message or letter, were looked upon as public property. News that came by word of mouth was cried out from the church steps or the court-house door, for no good citizen wished to keep his knowledge to himself. Thus it fell out when it became known that a missive had come from Richard to Joscelyn, that a score or more of women gathered about her door to learn the contents. She came out to them upon the veranda, her saucy beauty enhanced by the scarlet bodice, her eyes full of laughter.

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“Read you Master Clevering's letter?—As you will, Mistress Strudwick; you may perchance find more of interest in it than I,” she answered with that sweet courtesy she showed ever to her elders. And so having enthroned Mistress Strudwick upon the wicker bench of the porch, while the others disposed themselves upon the steps and the grass of the terrace which sloped directly to the street, she unfolded her letter and cleared her throat pompously as is the manner of public speakers.

“I pray you have patience with me, good ladies,” she said, “if so I read but slowly. Master Clevering ever had trouble with his spelling; and as for the writing, 'tis as though a fly had half drowned itself in the inkhorn and then crawled upon the page.”

Then did she proceed to read them the letter from its greeting to its close, pausing now and then to laboriously spell out a word. There were accounts of the life at Valley Forge, of the drilling and the picket duty and the ceaseless watching of the enemy. Then there was an exultant description of the victory at far-off Stillwater, as it was given to him by a fellow-soldier who had been a participant.

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“Said I not the Continentals would win? Would I had been there to see! Five times was one cannon captured and recaptured. How glorious the fighting was; and think of the surrender! Well, well, it consoles me somewhat to think of that coming last surrender of that archest of all the Royalists. I shall bear a part in that, for it is to me the capitulation will be made—”

“Why, dear me, is Master Clevering to be made commander-in-chief of the American forces, that his Majesty's troops should yield arms to him?” Joscelyn broke off to ask with assumed innocence. “I heard naught of his rapid promotion.”

“Come, come, Joscelyn, leave off sneering at Richard and read us the rest.”

She laughed as she turned the page.

“Say to Mistress Strudwick that the fame of her gallant brother, Major William Shepperd, hath reached even this remote quarter, and his old friends glory in his prowess. Little Jimmy Nash has lost his wits and wants another pair—

(“A pair of wits! What can that mean? Oh, I ask your pardon, Mistress Nash; it is ‘mits,’ not ‘wits.’ Master Clevering hath so queer a handwriting.)

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“—and wants another pair; let his mother know, that she may knit them and send them by the first chance.”

There were other messages and news items which the girl read, and then came the signature.

“There follows here a postscript which perchance some of you may help me to unravel,” she added; and then, with the air of a town-crier announcing his errand, she proceeded:—

“To the girl of my heart say this, that I forget not I am fighting for her, and that I look upon every Redcoat my gun can bring down as one more obstacle removed from betwixt us. I think of her always.”

She paused and puckered her brow in a perplexed frown. “Now who, I pray you, is the girl of his heart? Cannot some of you help me to guess?”

“Methinks 'twould be an easy task for you,” laughed Mistress Strudwick.

“Me?” repeated Joscelyn, still with that air of perplexed innocence. “Nay, he was ever so full of jokes and quarrels that it never came to me he had a heart.”

“Mayhap it is Dorothy Graham he means,” said a voice in the crowd.

“More like 'tis Patience Ruffin.”

"Or little Janet Cameron—he set much store by her."

"Nay," said a teasing voice, "Janet is going to be a nun; such messages to her would not be proper." Whereat there was a general laugh. [Pg 29]

"Whoever she is, 'tis a pity she should miss her love message through her lover's obscurity and our ignorance," said Joscelyn. "What think you, Mistress Strudwick, were it not a good plan to post this page upon the banister here that all who pass may read? In this wise we may find the maid."

With a pin from her bodice, and using her high-heeled slipper—which she drew off for the purpose—as a hammer, she tacked the paper to the banister. But it had not fluttered twice in the wind ere Betty had snatched it down.

"Shame on you, Joscelyn, for so exposing my brother's letter!"

"Oh, I meant not to anger you, Betty," returned the girl, sweetly, as she took the letter again and thrust it into her bodice. "Since you like not this plan, we will have the town-crier search out the mysterious damsel and bring her here to read for herself. Let us see how the cry would run: 'Wanted, wanted, the girl of Richard Clevering's heart to read his greeting on Mistress Cheshire's porch!'"

She stooped to buckle her shoe, her foot on the round of Mistress Strudwick's chair, and so they saw not the laughter in her eyes. She knew well that Betty would not fail to write Richard of the scene, and she already fancied his anger; she could have laughed aloud. "Methinks I have paid you back a score, Master Impertinence," she said to herself, and then fell to talking to Dorothy Graham until the company dispersed. That night Betty, running in on a message from her mother, found Joscelyn using the fragments of the ill-fated letter to curl the long hair of Gyp, the house-dog, and she went home to add an indignant postscript to the missive to her brother, over which she had spent the afternoon. But even as she wrote she knew he would not heed her advice; and sure enough, in course of time another letter came to the house on the terrace:— [Pg 30]

"The girl of my heart is that teasing Tory, Joscelyn Cheshire, who conceals her tender nature under such show of scorning. One day her love shall strike its scarlet colours to the blue and buff of mine; and her lips, instead of mocking, will be given over to smiles and kisses, for which purpose nature made them so beautiful.

"Post this on your veranda for the town to read, an you will, sweetheart. For my part, I care not if the whole world knows that I love you."

But Joscelyn did no such thing. Instead, she thrust the letter out of sight, and refused to read it even to Betty, who had only half forgiven her for her former offence against her brother.

As the days passed, however, Betty was full of concern for the privations Richard endured, and out of sheer force of habit she carried her complaint to Joscelyn.

"Richard drills six hours a day, rain or shine," she said, with an expostulatory accent on the numeral. [Pg 31]

"Dear me, is he that hard of learning? Methinks even *I* could master the art of shouldering a gun and turning out my toes in less time than that. It seems not so difficult a matter."

"And even after all this," Betty went on, taking no heed of the other's laugh, "he may not rest at night, but must needs do picket duty or go on reconnoitring expeditions. And he hath not tasted meat in two weeks, not since he hath been in camp."

"What a shame! A soldier such as Master Clevering should sit among the fleshpots and sleep all night in a feather bed."

"I knew you would laugh," Betty said with sudden heat. "You treat Richard as though he counted for naught; but the truth is, Joscelyn, you are not half good enough for him."

And Betty flung out of the house with her chin in the air, while Joscelyn kissed her hand to her with playful courtesy, but with a genuine admiration for her spirit.

But she softened not her heart toward Richard. Because of his impatience with her opinions, and the personal nature of their disputes and oppositions, he had come to typify to her the very core and heart of the insurrection. She knew this was foolish, that he was in truth but an insignificant part of the general turmoil; and yet he was the prominent figure that always came before her when the talk turned on the Revolution, no matter in what company she was. His masterful ways of wooing and cool assumption of her preference also grated harshly upon her, and even in his absence her heart was often hot against him. She listened indifferently to his mother's and Betty's praise of him. [Pg 32]

Her position in the community was rather a peculiar one; for while many of her companions disliked her tenets, they loved her for her merry ways and grace of manner, and so they refused to listen to some of the more rabid members who counselled ostracism. Her mother, too, was a strong bond between her and the public; for when the patriotic women of the town met together to sew and knit for the absent soldiers, Mistress Cheshire often went with them, and no needle was swifter than hers. It was her neighbours she was helping; the soldiers were a secondary

consideration. She was not going to quarrel with Ann Clevering and Martha Strudwick because their husbands had fallen out with the king; that was his Majesty's affair, not hers, and she did not believe in meddling in other people's quarrels. But Joscelyn shut herself in her room on these days and read her English history; or else, being deft with her pencil, made numerous copies of the historical pictures of King George and his ministers, which were pinned up on the railing of her balcony as a new testimonial of her loyalty. But no sooner was her back turned than some passer-by tore them away, sometimes leaving instead a written threat of retaliation that made her mother's heart cold with a nameless dread.

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It was in the end of March, some six weeks after the departure of the troops, that sad news came from the south. Where the Pedee widened toward its mouth a blow had been struck for liberty, and Uncle Clevering had fallen in a charge with Sumter.

There had been a body of Tories to disperse, a wagon-train to capture, and despatches to intercept; and Sumter's troops, knowing this, rode all the windy night through moonshine and shadow to surprise the enemy in the daffodil dawn of that March morning. Swift, silent, resistless, like spectres of the gray forest, they came upon the astonished Redcoats—and kept their tryst with Victory! The prisoners, the wagon-train, the despatches were theirs; but one of them had ridden to his rendezvous with death. The elder Clevering's horse was led back through all the long miles to Hillsboro' with the stirrups crossed over the saddle; and Ann Clevering sat in her house, bereft. Each day Martha Strudwick and other friends went to her with words of kindly commiseration; but it was Mistress Cheshire who did most to comfort the afflicted widow, so that these two were drawn yet closer together with that bond of sympathy that comes of a mutual loss. And in Betty's or Mistress Clevering's presence Joscelyn never again talked tauntingly of English prowess, since it was an English bullet that had wrought such sorrow to her friends. But even this death, shocking as it was to her, in no way shook her allegiance to the cause she held to be right.

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CHAPTER V.

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WINDING THE SKEIN.

"How do I love thee? Let me count
the ways."

—BROWNING.

It was April, and the days came with a sheen of blue sky between rifts of rain.

Quick steps sounded at the Cheshire door, and the brass knocker beat like an anvil through the house, setting the maid's feet in a run to answer it. Joscelyn came down from her room with wide eyes of curiosity to find Eustace Singleton in the parlour, a great nosegay of roses in his hand.

"From the knocking you kept up, I thought the whole Continental army must be at my door! You have brought me the first roses of the year," she exclaimed; "how kind!" and she stretched out her hand for the flowers.

"No—they are not for you—not exactly," he stammered, holding them out of her reach.

"Mother will appreciate them, and I shall enjoy them quite the same."

"No, she will not, for I had her not in mind when I plucked them."

"Oh!"

"I was thinking of—of—'n faith, Joscelyn, I was thinking of Mistress Betty Clevering."

"Of Betty Clevering! Red roses for Betty Clevering!"

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"They are not all red. See this one; it is near as buff as her own party colour."

The girl nodded, smiling at his eagerness. He walked the length of the room, then stopped before her abruptly.

"Joscelyn, I leave for the front to-night."

"I did not know—"

"Yes; I have but waited orders from Lord Cornwallis. This morning a messenger brought them, and I am to report at once. His lordship has been most kind because of my father's friendship when they were boys, and I am appointed aide upon his staff."

She held out her hand impulsively. "'Tis what we hoped for you."

"But," he went on hurriedly, "I cannot go without first speaking with Mistress Betty. Methinks I cannot fight against her people without first asking her pardon. Oh, of course, that sounds foolish; but will you help me, Joscelyn? It would be useless for me to go to her house; the door

would be shut in my face.”

“And you want me—”

“I want you to ask her here now, and then go away upstairs like the dear girl you are, and give me a chance.”

“Aunt Clevering would never forgive me.”

“She need not know; think up some excuse for sending for Betty.”

“And Betty herself might be angry.”

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“Not with you. She may turn me away. I have small hope, for she has always been so shy, and public questions and private quarrels have kept our families so far apart. You know how seldom we meet; but speak with her I must, for who knows whether I shall ever come back? My departure to-night must, of course, be in secret, for were my intentions known, I should be apprehended and held, mayhap hanged for treason. This is my one chance to see Betty; you are going to send for her, Joscelyn?”

She hesitated: she hated deception, and she loved her Aunt Clevering. Then there came to her the memory of Betty’s face when she had teased her about Eustace, and her own resolution to be the girl’s friend where so much heartache and opposition awaited her. This was her opportunity; if she refused it, she would be abetting the general harshness the girl was likely to encounter. She left the room without a word, and presently Eustace saw through the window her little maid dart across the street and into the opposite gate.

“Thank you,” he said jubilantly, taking her hand when she reëntered the room.

“Wait and see if she comes. She is here but seldom these days; partly because she is still angry with me about Richard, and partly because of the sorrow that came to her a month ago. She may not accept my invitation.”

But even as she spoke, a clear voice cried in the hall: “Joscelyn, Joscelyn, are you upstairs?”

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“Nay, I am here,” and she met the girl at the door and drew her into the parlour.

Eustace came forward smiling. “Now, Mistress Betty, I call this a lucky chance to have dropped in here when you were coming to sit with Joscelyn. Fortune does sometimes favour even so humble a subject as I. Let me move this chair for you.”

Betty’s cheeks had reddened faintly, and she glanced quickly from him to Joscelyn, but found in neither face any confirmation of a suspicion that stirred in her mind. Joscelyn was turning over a great pile of coloured worsteds.

“You promised to help me sort the colours for my new cross-stitch—you have such a fine eye for contrasts. But since Eustace is here, methinks we had best put it off; men are so impatient over such matters,” she said.

“Nay, nay,” he protested; “you slander me along with the rest of my fellow-men. Mistress Betty here shall prove it, for I will hold those tangled skeins for her, and she will find that I am patience itself.”

“Very well, we will put you to the test. What think you, Betty, will this green do for the flower stems?—You like that shade better?—Hold out your hands, Eustace. Now, Betty, wind that while I find a blue for the flowers.”

Never was anything brought about more naturally and deftly. Almost before she was aware, Betty found herself seated in front of Eustace, who was making great show of resignation.

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“How does a man sometimes fall from the high estate of his manhood and dignity and become no better than a wooden frame whereon to hang a length of yarn,” he said, laughing; then coloured with pleasure as Betty bent toward the table and put her face close to the roses lying there.

“Ah, how sweet! I have only a few buds, as yet. Master Singleton brought them to you, Joscelyn?”

“On the contrary, he said expressly they were not for me. There is no blue in this lot of wools, I must have left it upstairs. ’Tis a shame I have to mount those steps again. I hope you will have that skein wound by the time I find the blue one.” At the door she paused and looked back archly at Eustace; then, blowing a kiss to Betty’s unconscious back, she went away, shutting the door softly behind her.

“God bless you, Betty dear; I hope I am acting for your happiness,” she said to herself on the stairs.

Betty added to her soft ball in unruffled silence for a minute. Then, glancing up, she met Eustace’s gaze, and her hand faltered in its winding.

“Do you know for whom I brought the roses?” he asked, bending toward her.

“Stay, Master Singleton, you are dropping the skein—and you promised to be so patient.”

“True, true; I have it all in a mess. Wind your ball up closer that we may pass it through this loop.”

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And so they set themselves, with here a turn and there a backward twist, to that old task of unravelling the snarled skein. Now and then their fingers touched, and both hands trembled and both faces reddened; Eustace's from the exquisite pleasure of the contact, for never before had they been so alone, so near together, and out of pure joy he would have prolonged the happiness. But the shadows were already lengthening backward to the east, and with nightfall he must be away. And so when Betty's little hand was again near to his he seized it in both of his.

"Betty—sweetheart—I love you!"

The thread was snapped apart, and the ball fell to the floor, but he held her hands fast.

"Nay, you must listen to me, for this night I go away to bear my share in the war, perchance to give my life for the cause I hold to be right. But before I go I must tell you what is in my heart—tell you that I love you as a man loves the woman to whom he gives his name, with whom he leaves his honour. And not only must I tell you that, but I must hear you say that, believing as I do, you do not blame me for going to the war. You do not blame me, do you?"

Her hands lay still in his, but her head was bent so low he could not see into her eyes.

"This war means everything to me, for the enemies of the king against whom I shall have to fight are my neighbours and acquaintances, and, worse still, the near and dear relatives of my love. Under such circumstances you do not think I would fight save from principle?" [Pg 41]

"No."

"And you do not condemn the step I am taking, even though it sets me against your dear ones? I cannot see things as they do."

She lifted her head and looked at him squarely for a moment. "Every man should follow the dictates of his conscience."

"I knew your heart would recognize the justice of my case. And when it is all over, and I come back, you will not let this stand between us—you will be my wife?"

But she drew her hand away, shaking her head with downcast eyes, and his pleading was futile. "To promise you would be to go against my mother, and it were undutiful in me to add to her present distress; now that my father is dead and my brother gone to the war, my mother has only me to comfort her."

"Then at least let me carry away the glad assurance that you care for me; that will suffice, for, if you love me, you will wait for me."

"You—you will find me waiting," she whispered; and then her lips trembled under the kiss that he put upon them.

But there was a sound at the door, a warning rattle of the knob, and out of consideration for her he let her go.

"Aunt Clevering is calling you, Betty," Joscelyn said, but she did not enter. "She'll be there directly, Aunt Clevering," she called from the front door. And presently, when Betty passed her with Eustace's colours flaming in her cheeks and his roses on her breast, she knew that Redcoat and not Continental had won this battle in her parlour. [Pg 42]

"She would not promise me," Eustace said, wringing her hand; "but I am so happy, for there are some things that are better than a spoken promise."

CHAPTER VI.

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THE FÊTE AT PHILADELPHIA.

"Drink to her that each
loves best;
And if you nurse a flame
That's told but to her
mutual breast,
We will not ask her
name."

—CAMPBELL.

The sixth day of May dawned clear at Valley Forge. In the crowded huts and tents was an unusual stir, a brushing and repairing of ragged uniforms, and a burnishing of bayonets and sword-hilts. Then the bugles sounded their stirring call, and the morning sun looked down upon the army drawn up in two lines upon the drill plateau. Richard, gazing down the line in front of him, and knowing that the one in which he stood was but its ragged prototype, felt his heart swell with admiration and a sickening pity; for everywhere were the marks of privation and starvation.

Only the faces, transfigured by the radiance of a new hope, told of the unconquered wills that lay dormant under the scars of suffering.

Thus they heard the news for which they had been mustered into line—France had acknowledged the independence of the colonies, and would send them substantial martial aid. Franklin had won, and the *fleur-de-lys* was to float beside the star-studded banner of the young republic fighting for her life.

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When the proclamation was read, a salute of thirteen guns boomed out, each the symbolic voice of a State pledging allegiance to the new alliance. Down the lines went the rattle of musketry, and there rolled up a shout that filled the blue hollow of the sky with its hoarse echo.

“Long live the king of France!”

“Long live the new Republic!”

“Hip—hip—huzza!”

It was as if the prisoned joy of months had broken into song. Scars and tatters and hunger, pains and aching wounds were forgotten, and only the radiance of peace and freedom yet to come shone in the dazzled upturned eyes.

“Long live the lilies of France!”

When it was all done Richard sat down to write by the light of a pine knot one of those letters that Joscelyn hated.

“I am much grieved at the news of you in Betty’s last letter. She says you daily draw upon yourself the disapproval of the townsfolk by your public rejoicing over news of any British success. This is not wise in you, for the people are in no temper to be mocked; and I feel my hands grow cold at the thought that some danger may come near you, and I too far away to stand between you and it! Go often to see my mother, both because she loves you and because the friendship of so good a patriot will be a safeguard in the community. Betty hath writ me so queer a page about trying to love my enemies, and her hope that I will look carefully at every man toward whom my gun is pointed so that I shoot not a neighbour, that I am at a loss to understand her meaning—unless, indeed, she hath been tainted by your Toryism. What think you hath come to the little minx?”

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She would not answer the epistle, of course—she never did; but it was such a relief to put his feelings into words. That she would be angry at some of his words he knew, but it made him laugh to think of the disdainful lips and flashing eyes.

He must have laughed aloud, for a man stretched upon the ground suddenly asked him what the joke was.

“Oh, just a passing thought,” Richard answered. “A man has to think funny things to keep alive in this state of inactivity into which we are called.”

“You would like a little excitement?”

“Indeed I should. ‘Tis now six weeks since I came into camp, and only that one secret trip with you down the river has broken the monotony of drilling and mounting guard.”

The man, a Virginian named Dunn, one of the most daring and capable scouts of the army, smoked a moment in silence.

“How would you like to witness the festivities in honour of General Howe before he leaves Philadelphia?”

Richard’s eyes lit up. “Take me with you, Dunn!” he cried, with great eagerness.

“H-u-s-h!” said Dunn. “Nothing is arranged yet; but there will be much to learn of the enemy’s intended movements, and when would there fall so fine a chance as these days of festivity when wine and tongues will both run free? If I can so fix it, you shall go with me; you suit me better than Price, for you are quicker to catch a cue. You have got just one fault for this kind of business—you are always so d—n sure of yourself and your own powers; a little humility would improve you.”

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Richard laughed and wrung his hand. “You can knock me down for a conceited coxcomb, only take me with you.”

For a few days the French alliance was the all-absorbing theme of talk; and La Fayette’s laughing prophecy that France’s recognition of a republic would one day come home to her seemed, to these aroused sons of Liberty, like an augury that the countries of the Old World would one day follow in the paths their swords were blazing out—the paths that lead over thrones and crowns to self-government. But Richard soon had other things whereof to think. Dunn was planning his expedition into the lines of the enemy; but two weeks went by before he came to Richard’s tent and beckoned him aside.

“To-night at eight, by the pine tree down the road. I have spoken to your captain, so there will be no hubbub about your absence. Bring no arms but your pistols.”

Under the young May moon Richard kept his tryst with the veteran scout, as eager as a lover to meet his mistress. [Pg 47]

"Sit down," said Dunn. "I shall tell you my mission, for I do not work by halves. Sometimes an assistant has to act on his own responsibility, and he spoils sport if he does not know the plan. First, we are to find out when the British are to move, what is their destination, and by what road they will go. If an attack is to be made before-hand on our camp, we must bring back the plans. If there is a chance for our men to strike a blow, we must know it."

"And how are we to learn these things?"

"By keeping our ears and eyes open and our wits sharpened. It will take cool heads and steady nerves. We are to gain entrance into the city as ordinary labourers. In this bundle are the necessary clothes. Circumstances must govern us after we are there. Now to get ready."

It took but a few minutes to transform the soldiers into workmen, so far as dress makes a transformation. Leaving their uniforms in the hollow of a tree, where Dunn's man was to search for them, they mounted their horses and set off by an unused road toward the distant city. The direct route would have given them about twenty miles of travel, but the numerous diversions they were obliged to make added a fourth of that distance to their journey, so there was a gray streak of dawn in the sky ahead of them when they drew rein at a lonely cabin on the edge of a wood, beyond which were the cleared fields of a farm that skirted the city. On the door of this hut Dunn struck three sharp taps, then one, then two. After the signal was repeated the door was cautiously opened by a man within, who, upon being assured of the identity of the newcomers, bade them enter; and Richard found himself in an humble room whose rafters were hung with drying herbs that gave out a pungent odour. [Pg 48]

In a few words Dunn explained to the man, whom he called George, something of their purpose.

"Well, I was expecting you. My vegetable cart starts in two hours; one of you can go with me, the other must straggle on behind, for two would be more than is safe with one cart. My daily pass allows me an assistant."



"THUS THEY PASSED, WITH SMALL PARLEY, THE PICKET POSTS."

When their horses had been hidden in an out-house, Richard and Dunn threw themselves down and slept heavily until the carter aroused them. The smell of breakfast, along with his eagerness for the coming adventure, made Richard quick to answer the summons, and in a short time the three were on their way. It had been arranged that Richard, who knew nothing of the city, should go on with the carter, and that Dunn should take his chances and follow. But in the public road, where other carts were beginning to appear, they overtook a black-eyed lass carrying a huge basket of eggs. It took but a few glances, flashed coquettishly across the road, to bring Richard to her side. There were some gallant speeches, a protest that ended in a pouting laugh, and then the two went down the road like old friends, merry with the carelessness of youth, she swinging her hands idly, he carrying her basket. Thus they passed, with small parley, the picket posts, for the guards knew the girl who came and went daily with her market wares. [Pg 49]

Once they were in the city, Richard bade adieu to his companion, and, after some little search, joined Dunn behind the market-house, the latter having slipped in by an obscure alley. They soon

knew from the talk on the streets and the general air of bustle that the fête they had come to witness was to begin on the water, so they repaired to the pier above the city and waited for a chance to slip into the crowd. The opportunity came through a boatman, who wanted two men to help row his barge down to the appointed landing. They readily bargained to go, and took their places in the boat, which was soon filled with a gay crowd of ladies and their escorts, all in gala humour and attire. Richard, sitting in front of Dunn, forgot all about his oar as he watched the flutter of the brilliant throng, the glowing faces, the flashing smiles. Never before had he seen so many magnificent costumes or such an array of masculine and feminine beauty. But there was one face that seemed strangely familiar—a face with dark eyes and tropical colouring of olive and carmine. Where had he seen it? Nowhere, he felt sure, for a girl like that was not to be forgotten. And yet his eyes went back to her as to a friend. Who, then, was it she resembled? He was searching his memory for a cue when suddenly something struck him sharply on the arm, and Dunn said in a whisper:—

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“Mind your oar and quit gaping that way; the whole company will be noticing it directly, and coming over to examine you, and that’ll be a pretty kettle of fish!”

Richard picked up his oar quickly, ashamed of his defection; but for the life of him he could not keep his eyes from the dark, vivacious face across the boat, until her escort, a splendidly dressed officer of Howe’s staff, laughed and said to her:—

“I told you all hearts would be at your feet this day, and see, even the boatman over there is worshipping from afar.”

The half whisper reached Richard, and as the girl turned toward him their eyes met. She laughed, and then threw up her head with a disdainful toss, turning back to her companion. But the gesture had cleared the doubt in Richard’s mind. It was Mary Singleton over again, and the vivid likeness was to her. This must be her Philadelphia cousin, of whom he had often heard. She would know much of the plans of the British, for her father was an intimate of Howe, and she herself said to be betrothed to his chief of staff. This much Richard remembered from Joscelyn’s talk, and glad he was to recall the idle chatter which at the time had bored him, since it kept him from more personal conversation. It was of Joscelyn and himself that he had always wanted to talk; but she had declared lightly that neither subject suited her, for her own charms were too patent to need comment, and his were too few to bear exposure, and had gone on to tell him of the Singletons, whom she knew through Mary’s letters. A plan that seemed like the gauzy web of a fairy tale began to weave itself in Richard’s mind as he bent to his oar.

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The river was full of boats of every description, from barges like the one he was in, to giddy cockleshells that seemed a dare to Providence as they careened and dipped and darted in and out among the larger craft, like monster dragonflies rather than conveyances for human beings. And each one, great and small, was packed from prow to stern with a laughing, singing crowd in festal array. As the gay fleet approached the appointed landing-place, it passed in line between two men-of-war strung with flags and sun-kissed garlands; and then, amid the music of hautboys, the braying of trumpets, and the booming of guns, the company landed and proceeded to the grounds laid out for the tourney which was to be the chief event of the day. It was a dazzling picture upon which the afternoon sun looked down. In the centre stretched the tourney ring, around which beautiful women, gorgeously gowned, sat on mimic thrones to watch their gallants—tricked out like knights of old—contend for the honours. The multi-hued throng of spectators filled out the picture which had for its foreground the river with its decorated craft, and for its background the deep green of the forest, with the city’s clustered roofs to one side. Thousands of flags and garlands and streamers of ribbon tossed in the wind, while the music, like the invisible incense of pleasure, drifted like the sunshine everywhere.

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And the man for whom this was all planned sat on his daïs, the embodiment of soldierly bearing, of courtesy and gratification; for this splendid demonstration told unequivocally the appreciation in which the army held him, notwithstanding the implied disapprobation of the home government in so promptly accepting his resignation, tendered, no doubt, in an hour of chagrin and hurt pride at the strictures passed upon him at home.

As soon as the barge was tied to its pier, Richard and Dunn mingled with the throng, bent on seeing the sport. Richard longed to become a part of the merry-making, but knew he must be content to be a spectator. He looked about carefully for the black-eyed girl, and finally located her through a remark overheard in the crowd:—

“Mistress Singleton occupies the place of honour on the right of the master of ceremonies.”

And when he had pushed his way farther on, he saw her. So he had been right; this was Ellen Singleton, the *fiancée* of Grant, one of the most accomplished officers under Howe. All the afternoon he lingered in her vicinity, but unable to advance in any way the mad scheme he had in mind. When darkness fell, the company repaired to the hall where the tourney victor crowned his queen, and the dancers took their places to spend the time until supper was announced. More than four hundred guests sat down to that table, over which twelve hundred waxen candles shed their radiance. As Richard leaned into one of the low windows, absorbed in the scene, he noticed that Grant was whispering earnestly to his fair companion, and that she looked serious, even alarmed. Before he had finished wondering at the cause, some one touched him on the arm, and he turned to find Dunn at his elbow.

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“Hist!” said the latter; “something is afoot. Couriers have come, and General Howe spoke with

them apart in the anteroom, and you should have seen his face light up as he listened. It is, of course, something about our troops. I heard La Fayette's name, but can get no particulars. Grant is leaving the table; keep him in sight if possible while I try the couriers."

Mistress Singleton also had risen, and was leaving the room on Grant's arm. Quitting the window hastily, Richard was at the door when they came out of the hall.

"I must speak with you," Grant said earnestly, in a low tone, to the girl on his arm. The lawn was practically deserted, and the mimic thrones erected for the tourney stood unoccupied in the blended light of the moon and flambeaux. "The general's pavilion yonder is our best place. There are some ladies and gentlemen on the far side, but at the corner, there where the shadow falls, no one is sitting. Come."

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He led her across the open space, and Richard saw them take their places in the dim light, the girl's white dress marking the spot even from where he stood. He followed slowly, not knowing what next to do, for he was too new in the *rôle* of scout to willingly play at eavesdropping, so he stood irresolutely near the pavilion watching the quiet couple at one side and the bevy of laughing revellers at the other. Evidently Mistress Singleton was much agitated, for her hand rose in frequent gesture, and her voice was a trifle shrill. Presently two young men from the other party came down the pavilion steps, and one of them dropped his long military cloak in the shadow at the end of the step, saying he would find it again after the dance. Then they passed on. Behind them two soldiers came at quickstep, and Richard heard these words:—

"Grant's division has the orders. Quick work of the whole crew of rebels."

In the light of the flambeaux at the banquet-hall door Richard saw Dunn, and hastened to join him. Putting together what they had gathered, they made out that La Fayette had left Valley Forge with a body of troops, intending to do whatever mischief he might, but that his movement had been discovered, and Howe was planning to capture his whole force, and Grant was to be detailed for the work. But what his course would be, when he would set out, and what force would be with him were things yet to learn. However, these were the very things La Fayette would want to know. Dunn was waiting for Howe to leave the banquet-hall, so Richard went back to his vigil near the pavilion. As he approached, Grant was coming down the steps.

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"I shall not be gone twenty minutes. You are quite safe, for Mistress Hamlin is just behind you, and I'll send one of the officers to sit with you. Wait for me, for it may be our last meeting."

Evidently the girl consented, for she kept her place while he sprang down the steps and strode toward the lighted hall.

The wild plan Richard had cherished all day was to speak with this girl on equal terms. It might cost him his life, but a very dare-devil spirit of adventure took possession of him. Now was the hour of which he had dimly dreamed. He did not stop to think, but stooping into the shadow, he snatched up the long cloak lying there and wrapped it about him, turning up the collar jauntily. Then with his heart thumping against his ribs, but with a smile on his face, he came to the side of the steps nearest the girl and went boldly up into the pavilion.

CHAPTER VII.

[Pg 56]

A DARE-DEVIL DEED.

"Thou fool, to thrust thy head
into a noose."

—ANON.

The girl was leaning back with her hand over her eyes, evidently in deep thought.

"Ah, Captain," she said, as Richard paused, mistaking him for one of Mistress Hamlin's party from across the pavilion, "you have come to bear me company in Major Grant's absence?"

"With your permission," answered Richard, gallantly, "and if Providence is kind to me, General Howe will find much to say to him."

"That is not likely, since the plans are all laid."

"Yes; they were not long in the forming," he ventured cautiously. "The division marches to-night."

"So soon? I thought it was at ten in the morning?"

"No doubt, then, I was misinformed; I was not at the meeting with the couriers. If Major Grant said ten in the morning, then it must be so," he hastily corrected himself; but he had learned one needed item.

"I hoped it had been hurried up that it might the sooner be over."

"This French marquis is inclined to give us trouble and himself airs."

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"Indeed, yes; but General Howe will have his revenge when, after this fight to-morrow, he sends the young upstart back to England in chains."

"That will he. It would be a glorious sight to see our gallant general capture him with his own hands."

"Oh, Major Grant will attend to that," she replied loftily. "General Howe will do his share when he receives the prisoners at Chestnut Hill."

So Chestnut Hill road was to be their route. Richard mentally recorded it, while he said with incisive compliment, "Major Grant has the place of honour."

The pleasure in her voice when she answered told that the arrow had hit its mark. "Major Grant could have circumvented the rebels with half the five thousand men assigned to him."

"He takes so many? 'Tis a large force for so skilful an officer, unless, indeed, the enemy should be very strong."

"Oh, I think they reach not half that number."

With the hour of starting, the route and the force to be sent, Richard now knew all he had hoped to learn. Grant might return any moment, so that his peril was imminent; and yet the audacity of the adventure gave it such spice that he lingered unwilling, as he was unable to frame an excuse for withdrawing, filling in the pause with comments on the day's festivities.

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"Your company does not go with the attacking party?" she said presently, as though it were something they both knew positively.

"No," he replied, catching the cue, but wondering which company was supposedly his, and for whom had she taken him.

"Major Grant told me you would go as the general's escort to receive and guard the prisoners."

"That sounds very tame after his own share in the work. Major Grant was surely born under a lucky star, to be so favoured as he is by Mars and the little blind god of love." There was a tone in his voice that she could not fail to understand, and she laughed coyly in answer. He ought to go, he knew; but still he lingered, and presently, urged on by the spirit of recklessness that possessed him, he said: "You have relatives in the south, Mistress Singleton?"

"Yes. How did you happen to know?" She turned toward him so abruptly that he was for a moment disconcerted.

"Why, it is not a government secret," he said, laughing.

"But you are not from the south; you are English. How should you know, and why should you think of it just at this time?"

She had scarcely looked at him before, being too busy watching the door of the banquet-hall for Grant's return; but she had now lifted her eyes directly to his face. Discovery seemed imminent. Cursing himself inwardly, he hastily put up his hand to smother a pretended cough, thankful that the light was behind him. But her scrutiny continued.

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"Captain Barry—" she said, with that in her voice that told him she was not quite satisfied.

"At your service—would that I could say forever," he said, putting all the tenderness possible in his voice, and clicking his heels in a low salute. Was everything over with him? Fool that he was to have tempted fate by such an allusion.

She pushed her chair back as though to rise, but at this moment there was a stir about the lighted doorway across the sward, and Grant came out. If he reached the pavilion before Richard found an excuse to retire his neck would pay the forfeit of his daring. He was thinking hard and fast. The girl sank back with a sigh of pleasure, her doubt of her companion momentarily forgotten in the joy of her lover's return.

"Your superior officer," she laughed softly and proudly.

"Yes," he replied, with that audacity which, even in danger, could not be quelled; "my superior in the ways of wooing as well as in the ways of war, since against him I have no chance to win a smile from your lips. You will have much to say to him in these last moments—and Mistress Hamlin is going," he added with a quick throb of gratitude as the party across the pavilion left their seats.

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"You need not leave us," she said with half-hearted politeness; but already Grant was at the foot of the steps, and, with an audacious kiss upon the hand she held out to him, Richard turned, and, with a beating heart but no seeming haste, fell into the rear of the company across the pavilion, descending the steps so close behind them as to seem to an onlooker to be a member of the party. Every moment was precious to him, and yet he loitered along the lighted sward as if eternity were his. As he reached the corner of the building he heard Grant call:—

"Barry, Barry!"

But he pretended not to hear, and sauntered on into the shadow. There his pace quickened. No one stopped him, for his military cloak completely disguised him, and presently he found himself near the landing. In an empty boat-house he cast aside his borrowed garment, and soon found Dunn near the barge at the appointed place of meeting. The old scout listened to his adventure with amazement not unmixed with anger.

"You confounded dare-devil, you might have spoiled the whole plan," he cried; yet acknowledging inwardly that he knew no one else who would have dared to thrust his neck so far into a noose. He himself had not been idle, and piecing together their bits of information, they made out that La Fayette had crossed the Schuylkill and taken a post of observation on a range of knobs known as Barren Hill, and that Howe's plan was to capture him as a brilliant close to a campaign that had been so much criticised. It became therefore instantly necessary to warn the marquis of the plot. The details Richard had gotten from the unsuspecting girl gave them all they needed to round out their plan; the one thing now was to escape and carry the information to La Fayette. This Richard found more difficult than he had imagined from their easy entrance; for they had no friendly carter and market-maid beside them, and despite the festivity, the pickets were keeping strict watch at the outposts. Finally, by creeping on their hands for half a mile behind a hedge, they managed to evade detection; but the sun was already high over the eastern horizon before they gained the banks of the Schuylkill. Keeping close to the stream and avoiding the open road, they finally came upon a row-boat hidden among the reeds in a cove. This, without ceremony, they appropriated, and were soon making more rapid progress on their journey. For a long while nothing but the oars was heard; then suddenly Richard laughed aloud.

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"Suppose that young gallant had come back for his cloak while I was talking with the girl?"

"You'd have had to content yourself with the angels—or the imps—hereafter," growled Dunn.

But Richard laughed again. "Well, I'm glad he stayed away, for 'tis pleasanter entertaining beautiful girls. It will be great sport to say in my home letters that I, a private in the Continental army, was one of Mistress Singleton's attendants at General Howe's *fête!* Mary will get it all from Joscelyn and write it back to the lady, and she will then know who the supposed Barry was. Who is Barry, anyhow?"

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"One of the finest of the young officers that wears the red—a soldier and a lady-killer, so they tell me." Long afterward Richard recalled the words.

Presently Dunn, who had been looking intently ahead, said: "This is the place; yonder are the two dead oaks by which I always locate Matson's ford. We will tie up here and cut across country to the hills, trusting to luck to find the way to La Fayette. Grant's guides, knowing their road, give him the advantage, for I have never been sent to this part of the country, so am ignorant of my bearings. It must be near to noon, and the British column has long ago started."

"Will they guard this ford, do you think?"

"Hardly, for it is nearer to the English than to us. La Fayette will retreat as he came, by the one higher up."

"Will he fight first?"

"He may be forced to; otherwise, no. It would be folly to deliberately engage the superior force sent against him. If we only knew the direct path!"

"If we only had some breakfast," sighed Richard.

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They wanted to ask their way at the scattered cottages and of the men at work in the fields, but they knew not friends from foes. Once they lay for an hour under a plum thicket, not venturing to move, while two men, who had met in the road, stopped their horses for a talk. The afternoon was beginning to wane when they came to a secluded farmhouse where an old woman gave them something to eat, and, thinking they were Tories, warned them that a body of Americans was said to be camped three miles to the southwest. They thanked her, but once out of her sight they turned joyfully in the forbidden direction, and in less than an hour were called to halt by two men with bayonets.

"Take us to your general, and take us quick," said Dunn.

La Fayette recognized Dunn, instantly, and received his news with much emotion, for he had hoped to strike a telling blow on some of the outposts, and maybe cut off a foraging party, whose members would be valuable prisoners for exchange. Now there was nothing but to turn back. But even as they were making ready for a retreat over the road by which they had come, his scouts came flying through the lines with the news that Grant was close upon them in the rear, having made a circuitous march in order to get between them and their camp at Valley Forge. La Fayette set his teeth as he said:—

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"Then 'tis fight, though that means death to every brave man here."

But Dunn told of Matson's ford still unguarded, and the commander was quick to seize the one chance left to save his men, and before midnight the little band was safely over the river, with their faces toward Valley Forge. There they were received with cheers by their comrades, who, having heard some wild rumours brought by two countrymen from beyond the Schuylkill, had feared the worst for them.

That night, long after Richard was sleeping the sleep of healthy but exhausted youth, Dunn sat in the officers' quarters and told how, with a military rain-coat over his workman's blouse, Richard Clevering had played the gallant to the beauty of Philadelphia and the *fiancée* of Howe's chief of staff.

CHAPTER VIII.

[Pg 65]

A MAID'S DREAM AND THE DEVIL'S WOOING.

"A pleasing land of drowsyhead it
was:
Of dreams that wave before the
half-shut eye;
And of gay castles in the clouds
that pass,
Forever flushing round a summer
sky."

—THOMPSON.

It was June-time in the beautiful hill country along the Eno. Down the long road that sloped to the bridge from the west two horses took their leisurely way, while their riders talked or were silent at will. Below them, in the curve of the river, lay the town in a green summer dream; the roadside was lined with nodding blossom heads, and the thickets were a-rustle now and then with the subdued whir of wings, for the song season of their feathered tenants was done, and sparrow and wren and bluebird were busy with family cares.

"Joscelyn, you are not listening to a word I am saying," complained Mary Singleton, petulantly, after repeating a question a second time and getting no answer.

"I beg your pardon, Mary; I believe you are right."

"Of what were you thinking so intently?"

"I was not thinking. It is too delicious this afternoon to do anything, even think. I am just resting my mind." [Pg 66]

"Well, I find you very dull under such a process."

"A friend should bear a friend's infirmity," quoted Joscelyn.

"Dulness is not an infirmity; it is a crime."

"Then methinks the world must be full of criminals."

"And those who are so intentionally and voluntarily should be punished like other wrong-doers."

Joscelyn laughed. "Well, pass sentence upon me, most wise judge, if you think I was not born that way and that the sin is intentional. Am I to hang for it, or will you be merciful and make it a prison offence?"

"Oh, you'll get the hanging soon enough if you go on wearing that red bodice and stringing pictures of King George on your balcony!"

"So mother says. And hanging is not a becoming way to die; one has no opportunity to say that 'prunes, prisms, and preserves' sentence that leaves the mouth in such a charming pucker. Well, since my lips are to be awry, I trust they will give me time to put on my new silver-buckled shoes. It would be a comfort to know that at least my feet looked their best."

"Joscelyn! You are perfectly horrid."

"You mean I would be without the 'prunes and prisms' expression."

Mary struck her horse and rode forward a few yards, but presently fell back again beside her companion. [Pg 67]

"What I asked you just now related to Eustace. Do you think—"

"I said I was not thinking."

"Well, begin at once. Is there any danger that Eustace will really try to marry Betty Clevering?"

"Danger is a wrong word, Mary. If Eustace is ever so fortunate as to win Betty, he should spend the rest of his life in thanksgiving. She is as true as steel, and better tempered than either of us."

"I am not disparaging Betty, and I have often wished our parents were not at outs, so that she and I might be better friends; we only meet at your house or places of entertainment. But, Joscelyn, you know—you must know what we all have hoped for you and Eustace."

Joscelyn turned her eyes fully and calmly upon her companion. "Yes, I know. I should have been even duller than you pronounced me just now not to see through your plan. Diplomacy is not your *forte*."

"You knew I—we all wanted you to marry—"

"Eustace? Yes; he and I have often laughed over it to each other. And now that you have mentioned it, I want to tell you frankly that there is not the faintest possibility of such a thing. As a friend Eustace is charming; but as a husband—"

"Don't! Your mouth looks as if you had bitten a green persimmon."

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"Well, I think with Eustace as a husband life would be all green persimmons, without any prunes or prisms to break the monotony. It would be quite as bad on him as on me; you would make us both utterly miserable."

"I cannot believe it. I know Eustace looks at Betty with the utmost admiration, and manages often to meet her; but 'tis much the same way with every pretty girl,—he must be saying sweet things to each of them. But in his heart I feel sure he prefers you above all the rest, only your indifference holds him aloof. Here is a letter I had this morning, in which he devotes a whole page to happy imaginings about a soldier's welcome home when the war shall be over. He grows really poetic about shy eyes and the joy of holding a white hand in his. Whom can he mean but you?"

"Betty has shy eyes, and Janet has the whitest hands I know anywhere. As you said, Eustace has a roving fancy."

Mary sighed. "I intended to read the letter to you, but here we are at the bridge, and we will now be meeting so many people."

"Give it to me; I will read it at home," Joscelyn said, stretching out her hand with sudden interest. "It would be preposterous to waste all that sentiment on a mere sister; it takes an outsider to appreciate touches like that. Oh, it shall be read with all the accessories of a grand passion—sighs, smiles, blushes, and suchlike incense." She laughed as she tucked the letter into her belt, but she did not say who the reader would be, and Mary took much comfort in the thought that she would appropriate the sentimental parts to herself. Whose eyes were softer than Joscelyn's, whose hands whiter or sweeter to hold?

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And so, each thinking her own thoughts, they crossed the wooden bridge that spanned the river, the horses' hoofs making a rhythmic clatter on the boards. In the street beyond they came upon Mistress Strudwick carrying an uncovered basket heaped high with hanks of yarn. The road was a slight ascent, and the corpulent dame was puffing sorely.

"Why, Mistress Strudwick, you with such a load as that? What does this mean?" cried Joscelyn.

"It means that that little darky of mine has run away again, and that there'll be one less limb on my peach tree to-night when he comes back."

"Will you not take my horse and ride?"

"It's been thirty years since I was in a saddle, and I'm not honing to wear a shroud."

Joscelyn leaned down, and catching the handle, lifted the basket to the pommel of her saddle. "I will not see you make yourself ill in this way. Were there no other servants to spare you this exertion? You are all out of breath."

A curious light came into the old lady's eyes as she saw the girl steady the basket in front of her; but she checked the words that had sprung to her lips and trudged slowly along, the riders holding back their horses to keep beside her.

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"What have you two been plotting together this afternoon?" she asked, looking from one to the other with the pleasure age often finds in contemplating youth and beauty.

"Have we the appearance of dark conspirators?" laughed Joscelyn.

"Nay, you both look sweet and innocent enough; but somehow I'm always giving that Bible verse a twist and reading it: 'Where two or three Tories are gathered together, there is the devil in their midst.'"

"You should not twist your Scripture, Mistress Strudwick."

"Mayhap not, but sometimes it makes an uncommon good hit."

"Well, you were wrong to-day. Two Loyalists have been congregated together; but Cupid, rather than the devil, has been our co-conspirator."

"So! It was sweethearts you were discussing? Tell me now, was it your match or Mary's you were arranging? There is nothing pleases me more than a wedding."

"I thought you took no interest in matters concerning King George's subjects."

"King George has naught to do with the wooing of our maids; and love is love, whether it be Redcoat or Continental," replied the old matchmaker.

Joscelyn laughed. "I verily believe you'd like to know the courtship of Satan himself, provided he had one." [Pg 71]

"Of course he had, my dear, and a most engaging lover he made, I'll be bound, seeing he is so apt a beguiler in other things. Oh, yes, everybody knows that Satan is a married man."

"Where got he his wife?"

The old lady threw up her hands with quizzical scouting: "'Tis not set down in the books, but it would have been just like some soft-hearted creature to creep after him when he was exiled from heaven. And she is not the only woman who has followed a man to perdition, either,—more's the pity!"

"You are seeing things awry to-day, Mistress Strudwick."

"Mayhap, mayhap," puffed the old lady. "I haven't much of a prophet's eye, but I see things of to-day plain enough, and I know that you are a pair of uncommon pretty girls, and are like to have many a beau on your string; but when marrying time comes, take an old woman's advice and choose a man who is hale and hearty, for as sure as you are born, love flies out of the heart when indigestion enters the stomach."

"Truly, Mistress Strudwick, you are better than 'Poor Richard's Almanac,'" laughed Joscelyn.

"Oh, my dear, I've seen it tried. Courtship is the finest thing in the world, but after the wedding love is largely a question of good cooking; and although you two are rank Tories, and so deserve any punishment the fates might send you, still I'd be glad, because of your comely looks, to see you escape your deserts. But here we are at my gate. I wonder what the town will say, Joscelyn, when they hear that you, Tory that you call yourself, brought a basket of wool for Continental socks from Amanda Bryce's to my door." [Pg 72]

The girl's face flamed with a sudden heat. Then she said with that beautiful courtesy that older folks found so charming:—

"It was not for the Continentals, but for my good neighbour that I brought the basket. I am not minded to see her kill herself in so bad a cause; rather do I want her to live and repent of her mistakes, that she herself may not be the first to solve that riddle of the devil's wooing." And kissing their hands jauntily to the old woman, the two girls rode away into the purple twilight.

"Bless her bonny face and quick tongue!" the old woman cried, waving her hand after them.

That night Mary cried herself to sleep over her shattered hopes, and in the privacy of a white-curtained room, Joscelyn read aloud the letter to her whom Eustace had in mind when he thought of the welcome of shy eyes and clinging white hands. And Betty fell asleep with the letter under her cheek, and all the soft June night was filled with flitting cadences and starry dreams.

CHAPTER IX.

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ON MONMOUTH PLAIN.

"Wut's words to them whose
faith and truth

On war's red techstone rang
true metal;

Who ventured life and love and
youth

For the great prize o' death in
battle?"

—LOWELL.

And it was June-time, too, in the far-off New Jersey country across which an army, glittering with scarlet and steel, took its way. Slowly it moved; for with it went a wagon-train conveying many of the refugees from the evacuated city of Philadelphia, people who could not crowd into the transports that went by sea, but who feared to meet the incoming Americans and so sought safety in New York. Children and delicately reared women slept in army tents, or sat in their coaches all day, listening to the crunching of the wheels in the sand and looking back through the slowly increasing distance to the horizon, behind which lay the deserted city where pleasure had held high carnival during the months just passed. And with them they carried everything that could be packed into coach or hidden in wagon; and though they went with the semblance of victory and almost of pleasure-seekers, it was a sad procession; for who could say when or upon what terms they might ever see their old homes again? Often Clinton looked back impatiently at the crawling train, for he had not liked to be so hampered, and yet had been quite as unwilling to abandon these people to the vengeance they imagined awaited them. [Pg 74]

Almost before they had lost sight of the spires of the city, Arnold, with braying bugles, marched

his column down the echoing streets, and set up the standard of the republic where late the British lion had wooed the wind.

For nearly a week that long train crept on its way, held back by its own cumbersome weight and the varying roughness of the route. And ever on its flank hung the lean but resolute army of the Continentals, waiting and longing for a chance to strike. All the suffering of Valley Forge was to be avenged. Every wrong they had sustained was whispering at their ears and tugging at their memories; every dead comrade seemed calling out to them for retribution through the sunshine or the midnight silence. And it should be theirs; the utmost atonement that arms, nerved with patriotic and personal vengeance, could achieve should be claimed—if only the hour would come. But still that long train moved onward, and there came no word to fight.

Then, from out the blue sky-reaches of that June-time dawned Monmouth day.

“We are to fight at last!”

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And every man in that thin, dishevelled line felt his heart throb with the exultation of action long desired and long delayed. Every man but one, and he the one on whom rested the responsibility of the attack.

“Anybody but Lee!” Dunn had said with a groan, when he heard who was to lead the attacking column. And Richard, having gone with him to report some scouting work to the council of officers, and recalling Lee’s fierce opposition to any plan for battle, groaned too.

“His envy of General Washington and his imprisonment among the British have made him half Tory. He is the senior officer, it is true,—but if he had only persisted in his first refusal to lead the division and left it to La Fayette!”

But in Richard’s thoughts there was no time for doubt when, in the brilliant light of the next morning, he swept with his column over the brow of the low hill and on down the narrow valley toward the scarlet line that marked Clinton’s post. It was his first real battle; for compared with this the engagements under Sumter had been but skirmishes, and the frenzy of the fight was upon him. “For home and Joscelyn!” had been the war-cry he had set himself, thinking to carry into the hottest of every fray the memory-presence of the girl whom he loved. But when the test came she was forgotten, and only the menace ahead, the death he was rushing to meet, was remembered. Every musket along that steadfast scarlet line seemed levelled at him alone, and into his heart there flashed a momentary wish to turn and seek shelter in flight from the leaping fire of the deadly muzzles. But in the quick onset, the shouts, the growl of the guns, and the challenging call of the bugles, this fear was conquered; and in its place a wild, unreasoning delirium seized upon him, and the one thought of which he was conscious was to kill, kill, kill!

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To those blue-clad men, burning with the memory of their sufferings and their wrongs, it seemed as if nothing could stand before them; but British regulars were trained to meet such an advance, and the red line was as a wall of adamant. Between the attack and the repulse there seemed to Richard scarcely breathing-time; for they were repulsed, and, fighting still, were driven back through that narrow defile, expecting every moment that Lee would send them succour so that they might again take up the offensive. But instead of reënforcements, there came that strange order to retreat. Retreat? Had there not been some mistake? The officers looked at each other incredulously, suspiciously, half-inclined to disobey; for the battle was hardly yet begun, and this first check was not a rout. Then full of rage and doubt they repeated to their subordinates the orders of the couriers, and the regiment fell back sullenly, clashing against other regiments who had not struck a blow, but to whom had also come that mysterious order to fall back. What was the matter, what was this paralyzing hand that had been laid upon them! No one could tell; but men retreated looking longingly over their shoulders at the enemy. Confusion grew almost into panic as those still further away saw the retiring columns pursued by the Redcoats, and knew not the cause nor yet what dire disaster had befallen.

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Then suddenly upon the field there came the Achilles of the cause, and the rout was turned.

“The general—thank God!” the officers sobbed; and the men cheered as those who are drowning cheer a saving sail.

Richard was too far off to hear the fierce protest and rebuke heaped upon Lee, but in a few minutes an aide galloped up to his regiment and cried out to Wayne:—

“General Washington says you and Ramsey are to hold the enemy in check here upon this hillside until he can re-form the rear.”

And the blue line swung about and steadied, and met the English face to face; and Richard Clevering’s battle-cry rang full and clear amid the yells that well-nigh drowned the roar of the musketry. About that sun-scorched knoll there fell the fiercest part of the fray. The palsy of hesitation was gone, and desperation had made the men invincible. Again and again that red wave from the open space before surged against them, broke and recoiled and gathered and came again like some strong billow of the ocean that rolls itself against a headland—fierce, blind, futile.

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Then came the climax of the splendid tragedy. Upon Wayne’s right was a Continental battery from which a great gun sent its deadly challenge to the foe. Again and again its whirring missives tore great gaps in the red ranks, until Clinton gave orders to silence it at any cost.

Careless of danger, unconscious of his impending doom, the gunner loaded his piece anew, and lifted the rammer to send the charge home. Behind him stood his wife, who had left the safety of the wagons to bring him water from a wayside ravine, for the sky was like copper and the dust blew in suffocating gusts. She saw what he did not, the shifting of the enemy's gun in the plain below, the turning of its deadly muzzle full upon the knoll where they stood. But there was no time for so much as a warning cry; for instantly the flame leaped out, the ground shook with a strong reverberation, and a groan went up from the Continentals as they saw the dust fly from the knoll and their own brave gunner throw up his arms, swing sidewise, and then fall dead. For one awful moment no one moved; then two men from the line sprang forward to take his place, but some one was before them—some one with the face of an avenging Nemesis. There was the flutter of a skirt, a woman's long black hair streamed backward on the wind, and Moll Pitcher stood in her husband's place like an aroused lioness of the jungle. Fury gave her the strength of a Boadicea, and the rammer, still warm from the dead man's grasp, went home with a single thrust; the flame flashed over the pan, and with a roar that shook the heavens, the big gun sent back into the red ranks the death it had witnessed. When the smoke had lifted, the breathless men saw the woman, one hand still upon the great black gun, stoop down and kiss the dead husband she had avenged; and all down the Continental line eyes were wet and throats were cracked and dry with cheering.

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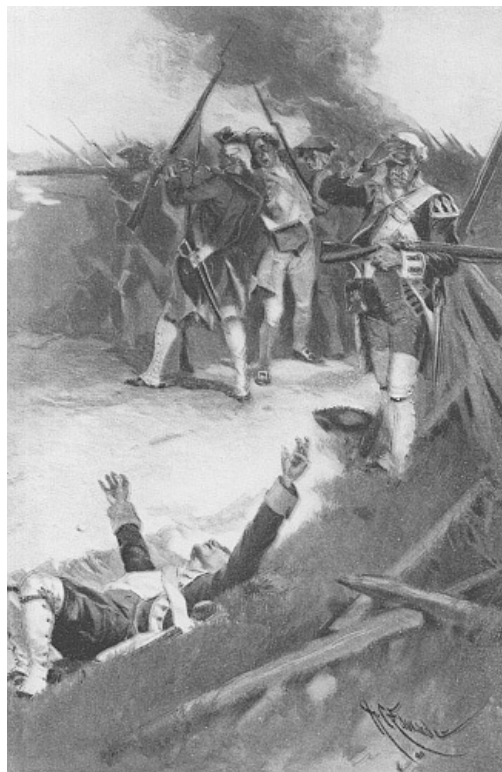
All the rest of that fateful day, with the eyes of her dead love watching her staringly, Moll Pitcher held her place beside the gun, solacing her breaking heart with its flash and roar, holding back her woman's briny tears until the silent vigils of the night, when her mission was accomplished.

And in the meantime, in the rear, the voice of a single man, with its trumpet tones of inspiration, was bringing order out of chaos. Regiments were re-formed, scattered companies gathered, batteries turned, and defeat robbed of its surety. Men, who a moment before had been panic-stricken with the confused marching and counter-marching of the day, looked into the face of the commander and felt their hearts beat with an answering calm. Confidence was restored, and the routed corps were turned into attacking columns. And so when that red wave broke for the last time against Wayne's and Ramsey's divisions on the hillside, reinforcements were close at hand.

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But they came too late for some of the brave men who had saved liberty and honour that day, for the red wave, receding, took as its flotsam all the men in buff and blue who, in their enthusiasm and temerity, had advanced too far beyond the ranks.

And among these prisoners went he whose battle-cry had been, "For home and Joscelyn!"



**"RICHARD WAS DRAGGED ALONG
WITH THE BRITISH UNTIL THEIR
POSITION WAS REGAINED."**

CHAPTER X.

IN CLINTON'S TENTS.

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"Give me liberty or give me death."

—PATRICK HENRY.

Hatless, furious, half-blind from dust and the trickling of the blood from the wound in the head that had dazed and rendered him powerless to escape back to his own ranks after meeting the enemy, Richard was dragged along with the British until their position was regained, and thence despatched to the rear, where the other prisoners were held under guard. There he lay on the ground for an hour, listening and longing feverishly for the sound of Washington's assaulting guns; but the twilight deepened into starlit dusk, and no rescue came. Then finally he knew by the preparations about him that no further attack was expected, but that a retreat was intended. Clinton dared not await the return of daylight and the fight it would bring; and so in the still hours of the night, while the Continentals slept the sleep of utter exhaustion after the marches and counter-marches and combats of that sultry day, he drew his force away, leaving his dead unburied upon the field, and his sorely wounded in the deserted camp. To the very last moment, Richard had listened for an attack, hoping that Washington had waited to plan a surprise; but over in the direction of the American camp all was silent. During the last half of that awful night Richard marched with the squad of prisoners along the road that led to the sea. The wound in his head, although but slight, made him dizzy with its throbbing, and his heart called out fiercely for freedom and Joscelyn. He had asked not to be put into the wagon with the wounded, protesting he was more able to walk than some others; but in reality he was meditating an escape, and knew it would be more easily accomplished from the ranks than from a guarded wagon. Eagerly he watched for a chance. The bonds that at first held the prisoners together had been removed to expedite the retreat,—there was no time that night to spare for any kind of lagging,—so that he was free to go alone if the opportunity came. Always his gaze was ahead, every shadow across the road held a possibility, every dark hollow was entered with hope. But the guard, as though divining his intention, closed in compactly at these points and made egress impossible; and so he plodded on until, with the returning daylight, they found him reeling like a drunken man with fatigue and loss of blood, and, putting him into an ambulance, carried him on toward Sandy Hook. From utter weariness and hopelessness he fell asleep in the jolting vehicle, and only waked at the prod of a bayonet to find the sun well past the zenith.

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"Get up with you and let somebody take your place while you foot it a bit," a rough voice said; and Richard sprang from the vehicle and helped little Billy Bryce, of his own town, into his place, exclaiming vehemently against his own selfish slumbering.

"Nay, nay," said the lad, "I am not wounded, more's the shame to me for being taken! Besides, I have had a long rest under the wagon here, for we halted before noon. I begged the guard not to waken you, but I put your rations aside. Here—you must be near to starvation."

Richard caught eagerly at the pork and ship biscuit which the lad held out; it seemed ages since he had tasted food.

"And you'll be better with your head washed," the guard said, not unkindly, pointing to a little stream that trickled by the roadside; and Richard was quick to obey.

In a little while they were in motion again, this time more leisurely, and once more thoughts of escape filled Richard with a restless energy. The country was more broken here; to hide would be easier, and he waited impatiently for the coming of the dark, determined at all hazards to make the attempt—another sunset might put him behind prison bars. But he was doomed to disappointment, for they were not to march all night, but with the early stars pitched their tents upon a flat stretch of country that opened to the east.

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Worn out by the long marches and the cloying sand through which they had toiled, the army soon slept profoundly. Tied together for greater security, the prisoners lay like so many sardines in their tent, before which trod a sentinel. At first there was much whispering among them as to their probable fate, and not a few solemn farewells to home and dear ones, with now and then a happy reminiscence such as often comes with the acme of irony to doomed men. One recalled his courting days, another the swimming pool under the willows; and yet another his baby's laugh. And set lips relaxed into smiling until suddenly the memory stabbed with a new pain.

"I shall never see my mother any more, for I know I shall die in that dreadful prison; but you'll be good to me, won't you, Richard?" groaned little Billy Bryce, who lay next to Richard with his right hand tied to the latter's left.

And Richard comforted him as best he could, and by and by the lad slept with the others.

"I hope they will always let me stay with you," had been his last sleepy whisper. For among the bigger boys Richard had been his hero and protector, and no service was ever too great for him to undertake for his idol. And Richard had petted and yet imposed upon him in the way peculiar to all boys of a larger growth, when a small one asks nothing better than to obey. It was really to be with Richard as much as to share in the war that he had stolen away from his mother and followed the Hillsboro' men to the field.

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At last the tent was quiet save for the deep breathing of the tired men, but Richard could not close his eyes; he meant to get away. After the watch was changed toward midnight was the time

he had set as the most favourable for his plan. All being then found secure, the new guard would be over-sure—and he, like the rest, was worn out with the trials of the past two days. Certainly that was the best time; a confident, tired sentinel ought not to be hard to elude. And he lay still, softly gnawing the rope that bound him to Billy. As he was at the end of the line, his right arm was free, and so his fingers aided his teeth to pick the threads apart. Thus an hour went by, and then the lad beside him stirred.

“What are you doing, Richard?” he whispered; then added quickly, as his arm felt the loosened cord: “Why, you have bitten the rope in two. You are going to escape? Take me with you, in mercy’s name, Richard; do not leave me to die in the prison yonder! Richard, let me go, too.”

“H—sh!” whispered Richard, sternly, for the boy’s excitement was like to arouse the whole body of prisoners, perchance even alarm the guard outside. “Be still, Billy! I cannot take you—two could never pass the guard. I am sorry; I—I—wish you had not waked.”

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But the lad, whose arm was now free because of the final severance of the cord, caught his hand as with a drowning grip: “You must take me—you must!”

“I cannot.”

“Oh, I will not go on to rot in that vile prison; I am so young, and my mother has nobody but me! Don’t you know how I have always loved you, Richard? You never asked me to do anything that I was not ready to try it. I’d never leave you here if I were going to freedom—never!”

To take him lessened his chances more than half, and Heaven knew how slender they were already; but the struggle in Richard’s mind lasted only a moment. Then he leaned over the boy’s body and began carefully and quietly to untie the cord that bound him to the next sleeper, stopping now and then when the man made any movement. The lad, guessing his consent by his action, spoke no word, but lifted his head and kissed him on the cheek; and Richard felt the tears that coursed down the smooth face.

“You confounded young idiot!” he whispered, but his voice was very tender, and presently, when the knot was loosed, he drew the lad close to him and told his plan.

“God grant we may both of us get safely away; but if only one of us succeeds, and that should be I, then will I carry your love to your mother.”

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“And if I escape, I shall do the like for you.”

“Ay, laddie, and more; for you shall say to Joscelyn Cheshire that even behind prison bars I am her lover; and if death comes, her face, or the blessed memory of it, will outshine those of the angels of Paradise.”

“You love her so, then?”

“As a man loves sunshine and warmth and beauty and life.”

“And she loves you?”

“No, lad, she loves me not.”

And the boy left the silence that followed unbroken, knowing the other wished it so.

A while later they heard the call of the watch farther down the beat, and presently the sound of steps outside and the welcome “All’s well!” of the relieved sentry. Turning upon their backs with the ravelled ends of the cords hidden close between them, they seemed asleep like their comrades when the watchman cast the light of his lantern through the flapping canvas door.

“Too d—n tired to give any trouble,” the out-going sentinel said as he glanced along the line. “You will have an easy time to-night.” Then he went away, and the two watchers in the tent waited for what seemed an eternity. Finally Richard lifted the edge of the tent and looked out. The sentinel leaned against a small tree in front of the tent, his gun held slack in his fingers. He was very tired, even to drowsiness.

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“Now,” Richard whispered, and crawled stealthily from under the rear of the tent, followed by Billy. Keeping in the shadow of the tents, they moved on hands and knees across the ground toward a clump of bushes that promised a hiding-place for reconnoitring. Only twenty yards the stretch was, but to those two crawling figures it seemed a mile. Every weed that swayed against its fellow had in it the sound of a rushing wind, and every twig that broke under hands or knees seemed like the crack of a rifle. To their overwrought senses each breath the other drew was as the sigh of a tempest, and they scarcely understood how the sentry could not hear. So slowly they had to move that it took fully twenty minutes to cover those few yards. Then, while Billy lay still in the shadow, Richard raised himself stealthily and looked about. They could have happened upon no worse place for their attempt. It was near the end of a short beat up and down which two sentinels trod, passing each other near this end, so that only a few moments intervened when one or the other did not command the whole beat with his eye and gun. Behind and on either side stretched the tents of the sleeping army, set thick with picket posts and guards. On the other side of the narrow road was a rock large enough to conceal a man, and beyond this was a field of high grass, to gain which meant freedom. Not a detail of the starlit scene escaped Richard. To go backward or to the right or left was to fall into repeated dangers; this was the way since they were here. If only the sentries passed each other in the middle of the beat, that there might be

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more time when this crossing in front of them would be a little longer unguarded!

He stood irresolute, trying to think accurately; but a noise behind left him no time for further hesitation. Something was amiss yonder in the rear,—perhaps their flight had been discovered. Billy, too, had heard, and rising, stood close behind; softly he put out his hand and drew the lad before him. One agile spring across the road, a moment's hiding in the shadow of the rock yonder, then the tall grass and liberty; but between the passing of the sentinels was time for only one man to cross to safety—only one man could hide yonder behind that rock! The little lad saw it, and his lips twitched.

“Good-by,” he whispered, trying to move back.

But Richard held him fast. In his hands was not the semblance of a tremor, but his face was ashen even in the dim light.

“Remember Joscelyn,” he breathed, rather than spoke; then, as the guard passed, he gave the lad a push. “Go.”

With a stealthy, gliding step Billy was across the road and behind the rock as Richard dropped to the ground and the guard turned round. Evidently the man's trained ear had detected some sound, for he paused and brought his gun to his shoulder. Richard's eyes were on the rock over the road; if Billy moved now, they were both lost; but all was still, and the guard once more took up his march. When he was gone a few paces Richard saw a dark object crawl from the shadow of the rock, and a moment later the tall grass shook as if a gentle zephyr had smitten it in just one favoured spot; then all was silent and moveless save the crickets and the night birds flapping past in the gloom.

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Billy had left the way clear, and when the next sentinel should be at the right place Richard meant to follow, and so he drew a deep breath and waited. But fortune was against him, for before the man was quite opposite to him another guard came out into the road from the camp behind and accosted him. As they approached, Richard heard in part what they said:—

“—couriers just arrived—enemy moving on the Brunswick road, supposed intention to out-flank us. All outside pickets are being doubled to prevent desertion, and I am sent to mount guard here at the end of your beat. Two Hessians were caught in the act of deserting just now.”

“I heard some kind of commotion.”

“Yes; 'twill go pretty hard with them to-morrow. When we first took them we thought they were a couple of those prisoners who were trying to escape, and the air fairly smelt of the brimstone we were ready to give them. The light came just in time to save them. Those Hessians are a d—d set of hirelings.”

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He stooped to adjust his shoe-latchet, and when the regular guard passed on to the end of his beat Richard dropped down quickly, but with an inward groan, for with that man stationed there at the end of the track escape was impossible. There had been but one chance, just one, and he had given that away. He would not regret it, but—he should never see Joscelyn again. It was all he could do to keep back the fierce cry that gathered in his throat. For a long time he crouched there, hoping in the face of despair; but the dawn was coming—if he was found thus, his punishment would be made the greater. There was no use in courting torture. And so, when a passing cloud obscured the stars, he crawled back across the clearing, and crept at last under the edge of the tent.

“Here, Peter,” he whispered in the ear of the next man, “Billy has escaped. I failed; but 'tis no use to tempt the devil to double my stripes. Wake up and tie this cord about my left arm that it may seem as if he gnawed it himself until it was loose.”

And in the morning the guard found him asleep with a bit of ravelled rope about his arm. Search and inquiry failed to reveal anything of Billy's escape or his whereabouts, and the incident, so far as the prisoners were concerned, ended in the volley of oaths and threats delivered to them second-hand by the guards from the officer of the day. They were not pleasant words to hear; but Richard only drew a deep breath, for he had feared Billy would linger waiting for him and so be taken.

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CHAPTER XI.

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FROM CAMP TO PRISON.

“My day is closed! the gloom of
night is come!
A hopeless darkness settles o'er
my fate.”

—JOANNA BAILLIE.

Many times during the day's march did Richard turn his eyes wistfully toward the blue hills to the south, and wonder beyond which of them Billy was speeding to rejoin his command. The thought had in it such an element of bitterness that finally he thrust it from him lest it wax into selfish envy.

Finally they reached their goal, and the vast body of men and animals halted beside the bay whose waters sparkled under the blue and gold tones of the summer sky. In the offing lay the English fleet, which by the happiest chance for Clinton had arrived inside the Hook in time to convey his exhausted army to New York.

The quick, salt wind whipping Richard in the face, gave him a sense of vigour and reserve strength, which was speedily nipped by a chilling realization of his hopeless captivity. Mechanically he ate and drank when the guard bade him; for the prison bars were now inevitable, and he would lie rusting his heart and manhood out while the fight went by outside. In an agony of despair he cursed the impetuous daring that had led him so far in advance of his column as to deliver him into the hands of the enemy. And he cursed both the moonlight that had flooded the road the first night of their march, and the guard whose lynx eyes seemed ever upon him; and finally he cursed himself more sorely than aught else, because he had not followed Billy at all hazards and let a bullet end the problem forever.

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But life is sweet to youth, and hope finds ever a place in the heart that is full of an unsatisfied love; and so by the time he had finished his spare meal he was ready to look at the future with more calmness. Outside in the free world Joscelyn would wait for him, and prison doors must sometimes yawn. The soldier who brought him his supper stayed for a few minutes to talk. He had a frank, friendly face that Richard liked.

"So we gave your sly general the slip after all, and held to our march as we at first intended."

"Did Clinton originally and intentionally propose to make a night march at almost double-quick over such roads as we have traversed? D—d queer military tactics."

The fellow grinned. "Oh, a little change of programme mattered not, so we lost not a single wagon of our train. See, they are yonder, as safe as a ship in port."

"Mayhap; but you saved your skins whole by stealing away from Monmouth like a thief in the night, and, leaving the foe you pretended to despise, camped on the battle-ground."

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"Oh, we begrudge not you fellows a camping ground—we are not that greedy."

"No; you wanted them, in fact, to have all the ground in the vicinity, even if you had to be so unselfish as to march all night to leave it to them."

"Come, your tongue's too sharp," the fellow said irritably.

"Sharper than your general's wits, if he took that march out of anything but necessity. He has saved his baggage train, but, mark you, he has lost his cause. Our victory at Monmouth will hearten up the doubtful and send them flocking to our camp."

The man laughed satirically at the word "victory," and then said:—

"Well, at all events, your part of the flocking is done for good. 'Tis not likely you'll see the outside of a prison for more months than you are years old—if by any chance your general hangs on that long, which is not likely."

Richard shivered at mention of a prison, but shrugged his shoulders with outward calm. "A man must bear the fortunes of war, if he be a true soldier. Prison life is harder than fighting, but some must carry the heavy end of the burden, and 'tis not for me to bemoan if it falls to me. Know you in which of your pest holes we are like to be confined?"

The soldier looked into the clear, steady eyes for a moment before replying: "You're a rum chap to take your medicine without a whine. I like your sort, and I hope, when this cursed war is done, you'll be found alive; but it isn't likely, for methinks you are to go to the old Sugar House in New York. 'Tis as full as an ant-hill now, but they'll shove the poor devils a bit closer together and squeeze you in. You'll have plenty of time, but not much room, to meditate on your evil doings against King George. Still, I hope you'll live through it."

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He picked up the empty can out of which the prisoner had been drinking, and moved on. Richard, who had been sitting upright during the conversation, sank back upon the ground and pulled his cap over his eyes. The old Sugar House! Too well he knew of the misery and degradation in store for those who crossed its threshold. No escapes were ever effected, and the hope of exchange, unless one were an officer, was too slim to dwell upon; Washington's captures went for higher game than privates and raw recruits. But two things could open these relentless gates to him—death or the end of the struggle; and the latter seemed far enough away.

And Joscelyn! would she care that he suffered and died by inches? Would she think of him regretfully, tenderly, when all was done? It was hard to love a girl of whose very sympathy one was not sure; and yet he knew he had rather have her mockery than another woman's caresses.

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For an hour he lay upon the ground, his heart convulsed with grief, but his body so rigidly quiet that his companions thought he slept. They could not tell that under his cap his eyes were staring wide, seeing, not the cap above, but a girl's face framed in soft meshes of hair and lit by eyes as

gray-blue as the sea when the tides are quiescent and the winds are fast asleep. By and by the intense heat of the evening set the wound in his head to throbbing, and rousing up, he begged the corporal of the guard for a little water and a bandage. The man—the same with whom he had talked before—brought these to him after a little delay, and found for him in his own kit a bit of healing salve, which his English mother had given him at parting.

“She said ’twould cure bad blood, and methinks yours is bad enough to put it to the test,” he said, laughing, and yet with a certain rough kindness.

“Well, since it hath not killed you, methinks I am safe,” Richard laughed back gratefully, while one of his comrades dressed the wound, which gave promise of speedy healing.

“What is your name?” he asked of the corporal.

“James Colborn, of the King’s Artillery.”

“Well, ’tis a pity you are in such bad employ, for you have an uncommon good heart and a face that matches it. When General Washington hath licked the boots off you fellows, come down south and pay me a visit. My mother’ll be so grateful for every kind word you have spoken to me, that she’ll feed you on good cookery until you are as fat as a Michaelmas goose.”

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“I’ll come,” the other laughed, “but I’ll wear my boots; it will be you fellows who will go barefooted from a licking.”

“Don’t wager your birthright on that; you’d lose even the mess of pottage.”

Under the relief the dressing of his wound afforded, Richard fell asleep, and his dreams must have been comforting, for on his face was a smile of happiness, and the words he murmured made the corporal of the guard laugh to himself as he trod to and fro before the open tent.

“Have you a favourite dog named Joscelyn?” he asked teasingly, when he roused Richard for supper.

“No.”

“A horse, then?”

Richard looked at him questioningly, half-inclined to be angry.

“You have been talking in your sleep.”

“Joscelyn is not a dog nor a horse; she is my sweetheart.”

“Mine’s named Margie.”

There was a moment of silence during which the two young fellows felt almost akin with friendly sympathy. They longed to shake hands and tell each other their love tales.

“Margie’s eyes are black,” said Colborn softly.

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“Joscelyn has sea-blue eyes.”

“I like black ones better.”

“I’d love Joscelyn’s eyes, were they as vari-coloured as Joseph’s coat.”

“Well said.” The speaker thrust his hand into his shirt and drew out a metal case which contained a picture of a buxom English girl. “It took a whole month’s pay to have that made, but I wasn’t coming to America without bringing a likeness of her to look at. When I am promoted to a captaincy I shall have it set in gold and brilliants. She is counting the months until I go back to her,” he continued with a burst of confidence, while his honest face flamed with a boyish blush. “For every week I am away, she drops a pebble into a china jar I gave her, that I may count the kisses she shall owe me when we meet. Never you doubt but I shall cheat in the count, though I have to carry back a pocketful of American pebbles to help me out!” Then, by way of prelude to that coming happiness, he kissed the picture with eager frankness before returning it to the case, saying there were already twelve pebbles in the jar.

Many times during the few days when the army lay encamped upon the sandy reaches of the Hook did Richard have occasion to be grateful to the young corporal for little acts of kindness, and in return he told him something of his own life, so that a curious friendship was formed between the two; and when the embarkation finally came, Richard was glad to find that the same guard and officers would have the prisoners in charge until the dreaded doors of the jail should close upon them.

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As they marched clankily down the streets of New York, he believed that now he knew how condemned men felt as they approached the gallows, only the gallows seemed better than those frowning walls yonder, at whose narrow windows the miserable inmates stood in relays that each might draw a few good breaths during the long and suffocating day. The old Sugar House! He set his teeth hard when at last they stood before its doors, and the first squad of prisoners passed out of sight within its gloomy portals. He was telling the sunshine and the clouds good-by before his turn to enter should come, when, to his surprise, the doors swung to, and the squad in which he marched was wheeled down another street. After a few minutes he caught Colborn’s eye, and read therein tidings of some new disaster. Whither were they carrying him and his unfortunate

companions! No faintest hint of their destination came to him, until, the city being crossed, they halted again, this time beside the water's edge, far to the east. As some delay was evident, the corporal bade the prisoners sit down upon the shore; and while his men formed in the rear to watch, he himself passed slowly up and down the water's edge, stopping at last beside Richard, who sat at the end of the line of captives as much to himself as possible, for his heart was heavy with a new forboding.

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"In ten minutes," said the corporal, speaking quickly and in an undertone, "I shall have parted with you, perhaps forever. I know you for a brave man and a generous one, and I am sorry for your fate. The plan has been changed. The Sugar House would not hold all of you; so, for lack of other accommodations, this squad of prisoners is ordered to—"

"Where?"

"—to the prison-ships lying across the bay."

Richard staggered up. "The hells, the floating hells!"

"Yes, that is what they are sometimes called."

"My God!" For a moment the fortitude that had sustained him during the last ten days gave way, and he sank down again, covering his face with his hands in a dry-eyed anguish.

"I wish from my soul that I might have helped you, but this is all I can do," the corporal said. "Pick them up as a gift from a brother in arms." He surreptitiously dropped some coins upon the sand, and Richard, more because of the friendliness of the gift than because he thought of their value, ran his fingers through the sand and picked them up, shoving them into a torn place in the lining of his boot.

"You have been good to me—" he began slowly, and with the look of a man who is talking unconsciously; but with an impatient shrug the other had moved away. When he had walked the length of the line and stood looking over the water a minute, he came again to Richard's side, apparently with no special object in view. His voice was very low as he said:—

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"True soldiers respect each other, no matter what the colour of their uniforms. I guessed—but I want to know for certain—did you let the little lad escape the other night rather than go by yourself and leave him?"

Richard nodded. Colborn took off his hat. Those who watched him from the sand and from the picket line thought he but bared his head to the cool sea breeze, but in truth it was to a brave man's self-sacrifice. A Scripture verse was running in his head: "Greater love hath no man than this, that he give his life for his friend." But he did not speak it, for a boat grating on the sand behind made him turn.

"The ship's warden to receive you," he said, with a quick-drawn breath. "God help you!" Then aloud: "Attention!"

The prisoners arose and lined up as the boat's crew came ashore. The warden conferred a few minutes with the corporal, went over the list of prisoners, counted them carefully, eying each one sternly as he did so; then turned again to the corporal, who, after another short conference, stepped out before the line of prisoners.

"Attention! My care of you ends here. The warden of the prison-ships will henceforth have you in charge." At a signal his men fell back, and the crew from the ship's long-boat took their places; the two officers saluted, and the corporal stepped aside.

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"Attention! Forward! March!" the warden shouted, pointing with his sword to the boat; and the handful of dazed and miserable captives, like so many automatons, caught step and sullenly moved to the water. As Richard, who brought up the rear, passed Colborn, the latter whispered:—

"Your Joscelyn shall know," and Richard's eyes spoke his thanks.

Then the boat drew away from shore, carrying its freight of helpless despair to the plague-infected hulk rocking in the tide, the plaything of the winds, the sport of every leaping wave that cast its crystal fringes to the sun.

CHAPTER XII.

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A MESSAGE OUT OF THE NORTH.

"I love thee, and I feel
That in the fountain of my
heart a seal
Is set, to keep its waters pure
and bright
For thee."

"It's all very well for our husbands and sons to be away fighting for their country—I'd horsewhip one of mine who sneaked at home; but for all that, this manless state of the town is a terrible test to the tidiness and the tempers of the womenfolk," said Mistress Strudwick, as she sat on her porch with some chosen cronies, and watched the young girls of the town promenading in the aftermath of the July sunset with never a cavalier among them. "Look at Lucinda Hardy, she's as cross as a patch; and yonder is Janet Cameron, who has not curled her hair for a week—just mops it up any way, since there are no men to see it."

"And there's 'Liza Jones without her stays," said Mistress Clevering.

"Yes, and looking for all the world like a comfortable pillow that has just been shaken up; but if there was a man under threescore in seeing distance, she'd be as trim as you please," replied Mistress Strudwick. "Heigh-ho, what a slipshod world this would be if there were nobody but women in it!" [Pg 105]

"And what a topsy-turvy place 'twould be with only men. Nobody'd ever know where anything was," said quiet Mistress Cheshire, with poignant recollections of striving to keep up with the belongings of two husbands. "Depend upon it, Martha Strudwick, the world would be a deal worse off without women than without men, for men never can find anything."

"I am quite of your mind, Mary. In sooth, I always had a sneaking notion that Columbus brought his wife along when he came to discover America, and that 'twas she who first saw the land," said Sally Ruffin.

"I don't seem to remember that there was a Mistress Columbus," said Ann Clevering, biting off her thread with a snap.

"Well, goodness knows there had ought to have been, for Columbus had a son," replied Martha Strudwick, greatly scandalized, although her own knowledge in the matter was somewhat hazy.

"How 'pon earth did we ever get to talking such wise things as history?" asked Mistress Cheshire, whose *forte* was housewifely recipes.

"We were saying as how men never could find things."

"Oh, yes."

"Well," said Martha Strudwick, thoughtfully, "that depends on what kind of things you mean. Now there's my husband—and he's a good man, good as common—he can find a fish-hook in the dark if it's good biting season; but he can't see the long-handled hoe in the broad daylight if it's weeding time in the garden and the sun is hot. Finding things depends more on a man's mind than his eyes." [Pg 106]

"Then there's a heap of them who lose their minds mighty handy," retorted Ann Clevering.

Mistress Cheshire pushed back her chair: "I shall run home and caution Dilsy about putting the bread to rise; she's that unseeing that I think Providence must have first meant her to be a man." Which was as near a joke as anything Mistress Cheshire ever said. As she trotted away the others looked after her affectionately.

"Mary is such a mild-mannered woman," said Ann Clevering; "many's the time I've heard her first husband—dead and gone these twenty-three years—say it was an accident little short of a miracle how Providence could make a woman with so little tongue."

"Joscelyn, with her goings-on, must be a dreadful trial to her," sighed Amanda Bryce.

"And not only to her mother, but to the whole town," snapped another woman.

"Hoity-toity!" bristled Mistress Strudwick, "what's the matter with Joscelyn? She is the very life of the place, now that the men are gone. If 'twere not for discussing her, and abusing her,"—with a withering glance at the last speaker,— "we should go tongue-tied for lack of somewhat to talk about. She's a tonic for us all, and without her we'd be going to sleep." [Pg 107]

"Sleep is a good thing," sniffed Amanda Bryce.

"Ay," retorted Mistress Strudwick, "when you are tucked in bed and the lights are out, it is; but not when you are standing up flat-footed with baking and brewing and weaving and such things to look after. Joscelyn's all right, Tory though she be. Look at her now, with all those red roses stuck around her belt; she's the finest sight on the street."

"Fine enough to look at, I'm not gainsaying you; what I object to is hearing her when she talks about our war."

"Well, Amanda, if our swords were all as sharp as her tongue can be, the war would soon be over."

"You always were partial to the lass, Martha."

"Ay, I often told Richard Clevering I'd be his rival were I a man, old or young; and truly I believe

Joscelyn would look with more favour upon me of the two," laughed the corpulent dame, remembering the soft little touches with which the girl sometimes tidied up her gray hair and unruly neckerchief, and the caress upon her cheek that always closed the job.

"I wonder you can take up so for her, Martha, when all your menfolk are in the Continental army, and she a rank Tory."

"Oh, I can forgive a woman her politics, because, like a man's religion, it's apt to be picked up second-hand and liable to change at any time." [Pg 108]

"Don't you believe men have any true religion?"

"Well, ye-e-s; if the rain comes in season, and the crops are good, and the cattle don't break into the corn, and their victuals are well cooked, they are apt to be middling religious."

"Remember you have a husband of your own."

"Yes, praise God, I have, and a good man he is, too; but when the dam in the levee breaks, or the cows get the hollow-horn, he's that rearing, tearing put out that he couldn't say offhand whether preordination or general salvation was the true doctrine; but the time never comes when he's too mad or too worried to know he's a Whig, every hair of him. That is what makes me say religion is a picked-up habit with men and politics is their nature. With a woman it's the other way; so I laugh at Joscelyn's politics, and kiss her bonny face and love her all the time."

"That is more than I can do. If it were not for her mother, I should forbid my daughter to have aught to do with her," said Amanda Bryce, sniffily, as Joscelyn passed the gate with Betty Clevering and Janet Cameron, and called up a pleasant "good afternoon" to the elder women.

"Well, your girl and not Joscelyn would be the loser thereby," retorted Martha Strudwick, regardless of the fact that she was in her own house; and there would doubtless have been sharp words had not Mistress Clevering interposed with some gentle remonstrance. [Pg 109]

A little later the whole party of young people began to move toward the tavern; for it was the day the post was due, if by good fortune it had escaped the marauders and highwaymen who, in the assumed name of war, infested the roads. Always there was a crowd about the tavern on Thursday afternoons, in hopes that news of the fighting and of friends would be forthcoming. This particular day they were not disappointed; for the women on the porch, looking up the street, presently saw that something unusual was to pay, and forgetful of bonnets or caps, they hastened to learn what it was. The postbag, with its slender store, lay neglected on the table, for the crowd had gathered eagerly about some one on the steps, and exclamations and questions filled the air.

"What is it?" demanded Mistress Strudwick, breathless from her haste, and the crowd divided and showed a lad, pale and worn, sitting on the steps.

"Billy, my Billy!" shrieked Amanda Bryce, and passing the other women, she caught him in her arms and hugged him frantically. For a few moments no one spoke or interfered, but after the dame had kissed every square inch of his face, and had felt his head, shoulders, and arms for fractures, Martha Strudwick interposed.

"Come, Billy, tell us where you come from and what news you bring from the front. Has there been a fight, boy?" [Pg 110]

"Ay, and a victory for us."

"A victory? Hurrah! When? Where? Talk quick!" cried a dozen voices shrill with their eagerness.

"At Monmouth town in Jersey. 'Twas there we overtook Clinton as he made for New York."

"We have already had rumours of it. And you did fight him and put him to rout? Who fell, and who was wounded? Can't you talk faster?"

"Truly we did fight when we got the chance, though Lee—the foul fiends take him!—tried hard not to let us. It was the hottest day I ever felt. The sand and dust—"

"Never mind about the sand and dust; tell us of the battle."

And so by piecemeal, with many a question and interruption, he told them the story of that remarkable battle and his own capture.

"And who was taken with you?"

"Master Peter Ruffin, Amos Andrews, and Richard Clevering from our company, and some threescore more whom I knew not."

But only a few heard the last clause of his sentence, for among the women were relatives and friends of each of the men mentioned, and there were sobs and moans for the fate of their loved ones. So great was the abhorrence in which British prisons were held, that death seemed almost preferable. Then presently Betty Clevering cried shrilly:— [Pg 111]

"And if you were captured, how comes it you are here?"

"I escaped."

"And how many escaped with you?"

"None—none; not even Richard."

Mistress Ruffin took him sharply by the arm. "Do you mean to say that a strip of a lad like you had sense enough to get away, and grown men were held? That's a pretty tale!"

And then with stifled sobs he told of Richard's sacrifice and his own getting away.

"For an hour I waited there in the grass, hoping for him to come; and when I dared stay no longer I crept to the hillside and hid in a little cave, from which I watched the army in the distance take up its march next day. I started once to go back and die with Richard in prison, but—"

"Talk not so, my son; 'twould have killed me and done Richard no good," cried his mother, caressing his curly head against her shoulder. "Richard did not want you back—God bless him for a generous lad!"

"No," sobbed the lad, "he is so noble, so good; and I let him go back, let him sacrifice himself for me, for had I but slept on he would have gotten away."

All this while Mistress Clevering had not spoken; now she lifted her head, and no mother of Sparta ever looked more proud or more resigned.

"Yes, you were right to come away; he gave you your freedom at the cost of his own, and it would have grieved him had you returned and made the sacrifice useless. 'Tis a beautiful thing to be the mother of a son like that. I am content." And Martha Strudwick leaned over and kissed her softly. [Pg 112]

"And how fared it with you when the British had marched away?" asked his mother of Billy.

"I reached the coast and followed it for two days, when I came to a village whence a trading vessel was leaving to smuggle its cargo to the south. The captain took me on, and after ten days I was put ashore near New Berne town, from which place I have made my way home, travelling with the post these two days."

"You have not then been back to the army?"

"No, but I shall start to-morrow, now that I have seen you, mother, and when I have given Richard's messages to Mistress Clevering and—"

He stopped; but his glance had travelled to Joscelyn standing at the edge of the crowd, and Janet Cameron laughed.

"What said my boy? Out with it!" cried Mistress Clevering, eagerly.

"He did send you his dear love, even as he was to bring mine to mother had I been the one left behind. I would I could tell you how reverent and tender his voice was when he spoke your name."

The Spartan in the woman broke down, and the mother prevailed. "My son, my dear son, did God give you in answer to my prayers only to take you away like this? What may he not be suffering at this very moment, and I who have watched him from his cradle powerless to help him! Oh, but war is a cruel thing! My son, my son!" [Pg 113]

Betty and Mistress Cheshire led her away weeping, and for a few minutes, silence held the women as they looked away to the north and thought of the strife enacting, and the pain being endured there for liberty. And besides those carried away into captivity, how many others—perhaps their own nearest and dearest—had been left on the battle-field?

"See," cried Amanda Bryce, turning fiercely on Joscelyn, whose eyes, full of a misty tenderness, were following Aunt Clevering down the street—"see what you miserable Tories are doing to us, your neighbours! Shame upon you, I say; shame upon you!"

"Ay, shame upon you!" cried several voices; and faces scowled and a few fists were clenched. The girl cowered back, amazed, affrighted.

"Pull those red roses out of her belt; we want no Tory colours here!" cried Amanda Bryce; and two or three hands reached toward the knot of scarlet blossoms. But Joscelyn, her eyes beginning to kindle, stepped back and raised her own hand warningly.

"Do not touch me! Yes, I am a Tory, as you are pleased to call us, and I am not ashamed that the king's army hath been preserved from destruction; but I am sorry, very sorry your friends and kindred are to suffer—though perhaps some punishment is necessary to rebels." [Pg 114]

Mistress Strudwick started to the girl's side, but little Billy Bryce was before her.

"Who touches Joscelyn must first pass me!" he cried to the angry women. "Mother, be silent! What share could a girl like this have in our capture; and what matters a few men taken when the victory was ours?"

"Yes, praise God, we thrashed the miserable cowards of Redcoats as they deserved."

"A great thrashing 'twas, when they lost not a wagon of their train, and took more prisoners than Washington," Joscelyn answered tartly.

A dozen voices answered her angrily, and she opened her lips to reply, but Mistress Strudwick clapped her broad palm over the girl's mouth.

"Hold your saucy tongue, Joscelyn; and you girls, there, be silent this minute. What, is the war to ruin the manners of our women that they can descend so low as to brawl in the public streets? Shame upon you, every one! What hath come of your senses that you thus demean yourselves and belittle the raising your elders gave you?"

The reproof had the desired effect; for the girl stood silent and abashed, and her angry assailants drew back. Taking advantage of the lull, Mistress Strudwick seized Joscelyn by the arm and almost forcibly drew her away.

"Begone to your home, and bide there till you learn some sense," she cried sharply. "What's the use in butting your brains out against a wall, when there's room enough to go around it? There is no fool like a self-made fool! Go." But when the girl had gone a few steps she made her return. "Promise me truly," she whispered, "that you'll go straight home and stay until the fire you kindled here burns down a bit—promise you will not stir from the house, or I shall not sleep to-night."

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"I promise, dear Mistress Strudwick," Joscelyn said, kissing the big hand that patted her cheek. "You heard me say I was sorry our townfolk were taken, and so I am."

"Yes, yes. Harkee, tell your mother I say to be sure and send Amanda Bryce a loaf of hot bread for supper—Billy will be hungry with running so far from Monmouth," she said, with a meaning wink. In truth, she intended the hot bread as a peace-offering to Mistress Bryce, for it was by such small acts of quiet diplomacy that she kept down the enmity against the Cheshires, or rather against Joscelyn, since she it was who aroused the resentment.

Slowly the girl went down the street thinking of the scene just passed. Mistress Strudwick was right; it was a disgrace for women to brawl thus upon the public thoroughfares; never again would she let her temper get the better of her in this way—only they should not touch her. And already half-forgotten of her resolution, she mounted her steps with flashing eyes and flaming cheeks.

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Presently lights began to glimmer through the dusk, and when the dark really came every house in the town showed a candle in its window in token of the advantage won at Monmouth, for since Washington held the field they deemed him victorious. Even in those houses where grief had entered, the light shone; for true patriotism is never selfish. Only the Cheshire windows were dark, so that the house made a blot in the street. Mistress Cheshire had gone to the Cleverings to condole with them over Richard; but Joscelyn, because of her promise to Mistress Strudwick, had bided at home, though she would much have loved to comfort Betty. From porch to porch the women called to each other, and some of the girls sang snatches of song here and there, like mocking-birds hid in the shadows. But Joscelyn sat at her upper window, silent and musing, thinking what a beautiful thing Richard Clevering had done to let the little lad go free while he himself went back to captivity. Suddenly a voice below her whispered:—

"Hist! Joscelyn, Joscelyn!"

She leaned over the window-sill. "Who is it?"

"It is I—Billy Bryce. I have only a minute, for mother must not know I came, but I have a message for you."

"From whom comes it, Billy?"

"From Richard. Come quickly."

She ran lightly down to the veranda and leaned over the railing to the boy in the shadow. He took her hands eagerly in his.

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"He loves you, Joscelyn!"

She did not answer. He was too earnest for a jest, so she only pressed his hand and waited.

"He is so noble, so generous, Joscelyn; even among us younger boys he never did a mean thing, and there's not a man in the company who is not his friend."

"Yes, I always knew Richard had a kind heart, and his letting you go in his stead was unselfish—beautiful; and I honour him for it."

"And do you not love him for it also?" the lad begged wistfully. "Say that you love him just a little."

"Nay, Billy; he is brave and kind, and he is my friend and Betty's brother, therefore do I wish him naught but good fortune and happiness; but, laddie, I do not love him."

"You are cruel—heartless!" he cried, flinging her hands away. "Richard's little finger hath more feeling in it and is worth more than your whole body."

"Your championship does you credit, Billy, and I shall not quarrel with you for appraising my value so low. Mayhap Richard thinks differently."

"Ay, that he does—more's the pity!" Then taking her hands again, he said vehemently: "An you come not to love him, I pray God to curse you with an ugliness so great that no other man may ever kiss or love you! For listen; as we lay in the dark that night waiting for the moment to

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escape, this is what he said: 'If you get away and I do not, say to Joscelyn Cheshire that even behind prison bars I am her lover; and that if death comes, her face, or the blessed memory of it, will outshine those of the angels of Paradise.' That was his message. I have faced many dangers to bring it to you. Now that you have it, I shall go back to my regiment, and if a ball finds me, well and good; Richard will know somehow and somewhere that I did not fail him."

The girl dropped her head low in the starlight.

"Good-by, Billy; you have filled your mission bravely. Heaven keep you safe and send you back once more to your mother and us."

He put up his hand and stroked her cheek softly.

"I do not wonder that he loves you, Joscelyn, you are so beautiful, and you can be so sweet—so sweet," he exclaimed, and then ran away into the dark, leaving her alone with the words of the love-message ringing in her ears.

So still she stood that a big moth flying wearily by rested a moment on her shoulder; across the way her mother was bidding Aunt Clevering good night with admonitions to sleep well, and from down the street came the voices of the singers chanting of victory and the home-coming of loved ones. But above everything the girl on the dark balcony heard a deep, strong voice saying, "Even behind prison bars I am her lover."

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Prison bars!

And suddenly she threw up her arms in the flower-sweet dusk and whispered vehemently:—

"Set him free, dear God! set him free!"

CHAPTER XIII.

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DREAMS.

"For thoughts, like waves that
glide by night,
Are stillest when they shine."

—OLD SONG.

"Rouse up, Richard! Rouse up, man! An you give way like this, you'll soon be taking the ship-fever and dying. 'Tis no use to wilfully hasten the end," said Peter Ruffin to the apathetic man beside him.

But Richard sat staring over the waters, saying only in a dogged way, "'Tis no use to retard it."

"Ay, but it is; something may happen—Washington may drive Clinton from New York—"

"He cannot, for he hath not the force."

"—Or we may escape."

Richard glanced around the deck where guards, armed to their teeth, trod in ceaseless vigil, and then looked away to the shore, where a few cabins marked the station of the shore patrol who took up the watch where the ship guard left off, thus making assurance doubly sure.

"With the sea and a double guard against us, the chance is not worth the counting."

"A resolute man could swim ashore from here."

"Methinks he could most easily, especially with the tide in his favour; but if he eludes the watch here, the patrol yonder will shoot him like a rat when he crawls out of the water. No, Peter, I have gone over it all in my mind, calculated the method of reaching the water, the length of the swim, and the best place to land. I have even tried to get speech with Dame Grant when she comes with her wares, to see if she could not be bribed to aid me; but the warden never takes his eyes from her until her sales are over and her boat ready to start. She has a solemnly sour face, but mayhap a gold piece would soften her heart to mercy. It was for this that I have hoarded Colborn's gold."

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"I, too, thought of the bumboat woman, but gave up hope of aid from her, seeing how she is watched. 'Twere as much as her life is worth to give us the smallest assistance," answered Peter.

"Yes, we are cut off from every chance, condemned—doomed—and seeing this, I have given up hope."

"I am some twenty years your senior, Richard, and I say to you that a sane man never ceases to hope."

"Then mayhap I am insane—sometimes I think it may be so. Surely, it was the arch-fiend himself

who put it into the hearts of the English to turn these disease-infected hulks into prisons; no mere mortal mind could have in itself conceived such a thought. The fever or the vermin—which were worse, 'twere hard to say. To rot here inch by inch, and the fight going on outside! God, but 'tis hard!"

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"Hist! the guard is looking at you suspiciously. 'Tis no use getting his ill-will; let us talk of something else." And when the sentinel passed slowly in front of them, the older man was talking of his boy who had died in childhood, and the younger one had dropped his head again upon his breast and sat in moody silence. Thus had life crept on for five weeks, each day of which was a slow-paced agony, each night a long-drawn horror.

Wallabout Bay, where the prison-ships were anchored, cut into the Long Island shore on the north, and was protected from the storms that rocked the outer deep. Most of the prisoners were seamen, but now and then a squad of land captives, for lack of some other place in which to confine them, were sent thither to starve and suffer and wait their turn to die. The wound in Richard's head had healed, thanks to Colborn's salve; but the confinement, together with the scant and rancid food and the foul air in the ship's hold where the nights were passed, was slowly undermining his strength of body and of will. Each morning the inhuman order, "Rebels, turn out your dead!" which the guard called down through the opened hatches, sent a shiver of horror to his very soul; and the feeling was not lessened as he aided in selecting the poor fellows who had died in the night, and saw them sewed into their blankets and rowed away to shallow graves upon the shore. Two of the prisoners were made to act as grave-diggers on these occasions, the guard going merely to superintend.

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Twice in the past weeks Richard and Peter had gone in the funeral-boat, and on each occasion thoughts of making a break for liberty had haunted them. But the futility of such an attempt was made apparent by the proximity of the shore patrol, within range of whose guns the graves were dug. The nearest cover was a line of sand-dunes and stunted brush-growth fifty yards up the level beach, before reaching which a man could be pierced by twenty bullets. Regretfully and angrily the two men noted this; and later on had it all doubly impressed upon them by the shooting of a prisoner who, one day, when the grave was half-filled, made the mad attempt to get away. Only one of the two impressed grave-diggers came back in the boat that day, for the other was buried where he fell; and the harshness of the ship-jailers increased toward those who remained.

"Look," said Richard, shuddering, the second time he and Peter were detailed to take a corpse to the sandy burying-ground; "already the waves have opened some of the graves and left the poor fellows but the scantest covering. Before long their bones will whiten to the sun."

"It is a sickening certainty! And all of this you and I might escape if so we would but go back yonder to the warden and take the oath of allegiance to the king, and change these tattered coats for gay uniforms of scarlet," answered Peter.

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"True; but like those who have gone before us, we will die in the ship yonder and fester here in the sand first. Between death and English slavery there is a quick choice, and we made it long ago. But promise me, Peter, that if I die first you will ask to come as my sexton, and dig me a grave deep enough to keep me from the sea for at least a little while."

"I will; and you will do a like thing for me. But as I told you the other day, you will go before me, and soon at that, if so you keep up this dreary moping."

But Richard could not bring himself to hope. The absolute helplessness of their position, the powerlessness of action of any sort took from him the ability to reason normally. Everything twisted itself backward to the wretched and relentless present, turn where he would for consolation. And so after the morning tasks of airing blankets and scrubbing decks were performed, he sat all day looking sullenly out over the water, studying the changing moods of the sea, watching the gulls as they flapped past or went soaring upward with the glancing sunlight on their wings. And all this while there was but one clear thought in his mind—Joscelyn. Plainer than the faces about him he saw her features, and above the ship noises and the restless wash of the waves, he heard the sweet accents of her voice. Incessantly he brooded over each memory of her, recalling the chestnut tints of her hair, the blue lights in her eyes, and the rose hues of cheeks and lips. Her beauty had never before appeared to him so great or so much to be desired as now.

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"Even behind prison bars I am her lover;" often he said the words to himself, wondering morbidly if Billy carried her the message, and what she said in answer. He would never know, of course, for his career must end yonder in the sand with his unfortunate fellows; but liberty itself would not be sweeter than some token, it mattered not how small, of her sorrow and her favour. How he longed for her, body and soul! Always in fancy he kissed her good night, holding the sweet face between his palms and watching to see the eyes droop under his ardent gaze, and the delicate lips quiver with the passion of his caress. He told himself it was only such fleeting fancies as these that kept him sane. For in these moments she was tender and loving, and she was all his; and the unknown husband—he who would one day claim her in reality when he himself, with his idle dreams, should be dead and gone—he hated with a jealous rage as vital as though the man stood before him in the flesh; and he looked at his fingers with a dull sense of their strangling powers, and longed to feel them tighten over a purpling throat. Peter talked of heaven, of its rest and peace; but how could there be for him either joy or peace, even in Paradise, while another man held Joscelyn in his arms? Often in his cloying misery he tried to make out who this other lover would be; but no one, not even Eustace Singleton, seemed to fill the place. Once, and his

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heart had been hot with jealousy at the thought, he had imagined that under hers and Eustace's frank friendship there lingered a warmer feeling; but this fancy stood no test of observation, for in no act of Joscelyn's was there a trace of that air, indescribable yet unmistakable, that marks the beginnings of love; and of late months Eustace had a way of looking at Betty that put strange fancies into Richard's head. No, Joscelyn and Eustace were not lovers; it would be some one else, some stranger who would claim all the sweetness of her love. And at the thought the murderous fingers writhed upon each other, and the sweat of agony was on his brow. Then his fancy would take another turn. There was no other lover, there never would be any other; by strength of his love she belonged to him here and would be his through all eternity. In heaven there is no marrying nor giving in marriage, so the Bible said; but surely God would be merciful to him, knowing how he had missed his happiness here.

This was the dream-palace in which he dwelt, while he gazed vacantly over the sunlit sea and waited to be sewed into his blanket and carried across to the white sands by those who, in their turn, one after another, should follow to the same end.

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And then, one morning when August was well on the wane, something happened that broke the spell of deadening despair that held him in its grasp.

CHAPTER XIV.

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NEWS OF LOVE AND WAR.

"Hidden perfumes and secret loves
betray themselves."

—JUBERT.

"Joscelyn, from my upper window I have seen a rider turn into the next street and make for the tavern. Perchance he brings news or letters. Will you come with me and see?" It was Betty's voice under her window, and Joscelyn put her head out a moment to say she would go; then ran downstairs. And go she did in spite of her mother's vehement protest.

"'Tis scarce three weeks gone since you were reviled in the streets as a Tory, and now you will go thrust yourself in place to receive the same treatment again. 'Tis folly—ay, worse than folly!"

But Joscelyn scarcely heard, for in the street Betty was pulling her along at such a pace.

"Methought you would be glad to get a letter from—well, from—It is something over three weeks since you last heard from—" a shy little laugh finished the sentence, and she gave Joscelyn an extra pull which set them into a run.

"How glad somebody would be to see you in such haste to get a letter written to me," panted Joscelyn, laughing.

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"Whither away so fast?" cried Mistress Strudwick from her door; but they did not stop to answer, only calling back merrily that a man, grown, yet not old, nor crippled, nor blind, had ridden into the square, and they were going to have a look at so wonderful a curiosity.

As they turned into the open space before the court-house, the town-bell struck a few resonant notes, a signal from the decrepit old ringer that there was news for somebody. In a few minutes the place was thronged with eager wives and mothers and sweethearts crying out for tidings of their loved ones. Did the man bring any? Yes, he was but now out of the north; whither he went mattered not to them, a man's mission was his own secret, but in his pouch were letters for towns along the route, and he brought, besides, news of the dreadful massacre in Pennsylvania. And when the few letters were distributed he stood upon the steps and told the pitiful story of Wyoming Valley.

"The able-bodied men were away fighting with Washington; only the old men and women and children remained. Upon this helpless band hundreds of British and Indians, led by Butler, fell, driving them to the fort. Thence the men, shaking with age, but not with fear, sallied to the attack, were defeated and captured, and in sight of those within were tortured with every fiendish device the savages could invent. Then the fort surrendered, and in spite of Butler's efforts tomahawk and scalping-knife did their deadly work among the helpless captives. Outraged women, spitted upon rails, saw their tender babes brained against rocks and trees. The yells of the captors were mingled with the cries for mercy and the shrieks of the dying, and night was turned into day by the light of burning villages. In all the beautiful valley not a house was spared; and where had been prosperity is now but a desolate wilderness strewn with graves and ruins."

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When he finished, women were weeping upon each other's necks, thinking of their own little ones and those other murdered babies. And fierce was the denunciation of Butler for enlisting in his army savages whose brutality could not be controlled. This was not war; it was assassination, as cowardly as it was cruel.

So bitter was the feeling aroused, that for a while the fact that the courier had brought some letters was quite overlooked, until Mistress Nash and Janet Cameron came forward with epistles which contained messages for many of those present. Then it was remembered that the other two letters had both been for Joscelyn Cheshire, and immediately a dozen voices demanded her. But she was already well down the street, her arm linked in Betty Clevering's.

"Come away, Aunt Cheshire will be wretched about you," the latter had whispered to her, remembering the scene in this very place a few weeks before and dreading a repetition of it, and in her secret heart wishing that at least one of the letters in Joscelyn's hand should not be read aloud to the public, knowing well that in it was some love-message for herself, for was not that why Eustace wrote so often to Joscelyn? And so she dragged her companion back the way they had come; but as they walked Joscelyn tore open the letter with the familiar seal, exclaiming gayly:—

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"Paper is not scarce with Eustace, since he sends me three whole sheets. Let me see—Betty—Betty—Betty—just in a fleeting glance I see your name some eight times. What a fondness he hath for writing the word!"

"Let me read with you, Joscelyn," cried Betty, her cheeks very bright; and drawing close together the two girls held the sheet between them and slackened their pace. But they were not left long to their privacy, for by the time they reached the Cheshire door a dozen neighbours were upon them.

"So, so, Joscelyn, be not running away with your tidings. Tell us what Clinton is doing in New York," exclaimed Mistress Strudwick, who had come with the others to give the girl countenance, if so she should need it.

"Ay, do not be playing the selfish, but give us the news," cried several voices.

"I am as ignorant as you of General Clinton's doings," the girl said, smiling at the first speaker; "for, as far as I have got, the letter is full of questions about somebody here at home."

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"Yes, a spying letter for information, no doubt," sneered Amanda Bryce. "The courier said they were both from some one in New York. Who writes to you from Clinton's army?"

"Eustace Singleton, a handsome lad whom you know right well, Mistress Bryce."

"He sends you two letters by the same hand? Faith! he is an ardent correspondent."

"Nay, this other letter is in a strange writing. I know not yet who hath sent it."

"Break the wafer and read it to us."

"I do not choose, Mistress Bryce, to give my letters to the public."

"Do not choose, because you do not dare."

"Do not dare?"

"Hush, Joscelyn, she does not mean what she says," put in Mistress Strudwick.

"Yes, I do mean it, Martha, every word of it. She dare not read it, because it is a spying letter,—asking information, mayhap, which may give us over to a massacre like to that of Wyoming: that's why she dare not."

A chorus of cries and hisses arose, but the girl on the step did not quail. Her delicate lip curled with scorn. "'Tis false! You do all know I would be incapable of such wickedness."

"Then read us the letter and prove it."

"I will not."

She thrust the letter into her bosom and faced them with flashing eyes, the very picture of defiance. But a touch from Mistress Strudwick quelled the storm within her. Turning swiftly, she put her arm around the old woman's neck. "There, I am going to be good. I would not distress you and mother again for the world. But you know I have the right of it."

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"Yes," echoed Janet Cameron, taking her place on the other side of Joscelyn. "We all know that though you are a Tory, you are no traitor; and I say, Out upon Mistress Bryce for hinting such a thing! I am a Continental, and my father is in Charleston fighting for the cause, but I would trust Joscelyn Cheshire to the end of the world!"

Out in the crowd the sentiment against the girl instantly changed, and all but Amanda Bryce applauded Janet's words.

"Eustace Singleton writes her naught but love-letters—let her keep them!" cried another girl. "Methinks I should not want the world to be reading my sweetheart's letters and counting the kisses he sends me."

"No, nor those he gives you," said Martha Strudwick, with a merry wink, and instantly there was a great laugh, for the girl had been caught kissing her lover the winter day on which the troops had marched, for which imprudence her mother had soundly boxed her ears.

"And now," cried Joscelyn, when the laugh had passed, "to prove that there is no treason in this

letter, I shall let Betty Clevering—as good a Continental as the best of you—sit down yonder on the bench and read every word of it before I myself have seen it. Here, Betty, be you the judge whether what is herein writ is of treasonable import; and mind you skip nothing, particularly the love passages.” She laughingly pushed Betty upon the bench, and leaving Eustace’s letter in her hands, came back to Janet’s side. [Pg 134]

“My letter was from my brother, Joscelyn; and he said he knew not where Richard had been sent. He himself is in the old Sugar House in New York; what he suffers he will not say, but we can guess, since so much has been said of the place.”

Joscelyn kissed the tearful face softly. “Perchance your imagination is over-vivid. It grieves me to the quick that any of our townfolk should suffer.”

“It will be a great relief to his mother to know that Richard is not in the Sugar House.”

“Yes, there is only one worse prison in the country, and that is for the captured seamen.”

“Do not let us talk of its horrors.”

So the conversation went on until Betty Clevering, her face like a budding rose, came forward again.

“This letter,” she said, holding up the missive, “is one of friendship merely; in it I find absolutely nothing against our cause, save a curse on the war that keeps the writer from—from her he loves.”

“Dear me, to see her blush one would think it were Betty’s love-letter, not Joscelyn’s.” [Pg 135]

“How shy she looks!”

“Betty, was it writ so tenderly that you, who are but an outsider, are abashed to read it? Truly, I wish Master Singleton would give lessons in love writing. My man talks so much of General Washington and his doings that he quite forgets to put in the love passages.”

“And ‘tis for those that a woman reads her letters,” said Mistress Strudwick. “The ‘I love yous’ and ‘dears’ and ‘kisses’ scattered through the pages mean more to her heart than the announcement of a victory. In faith, old woman as I am, I always read the last sentence first, knowing it will be the sweetest, if so the writer is in his senses.”

“That is why I wanted so much to read Joscelyn’s letter. I knew Eustace would never plot against his own town any more than she would, but an ardent love-letter makes good reading, no matter to whom it may be writ,” laughed Dorothy Graham, breaking a glowing rose from a nearby bush, and holding it playfully against Betty’s cheek, looking archly at her companions as she tapped first one and then the other with her finger, whereupon the laugh again arose, for some had long ago guessed at Eustace’s passion.

Meantime, Joscelyn, drawing somewhat apart, took the strange letter from her dress and broke the wafer. The missive covered but one scant page, but those who watched as she read saw her face grow pale and her lip tremble. [Pg 136]

MISTRESS JOSCELYN CHESHIRE, in Hillsboro’-town:

Richard Clevering, with ten of his comrades, taken at Monmouth field, lies in one of the prison-ships in Wallabout Bay. If he is aught to you,—you know best whom *he* loves,—bestir yourself for an exchange, for only that can save him from the sure death that lurks in those accursed hulks. I, one of the guard that carried him there, promised him that you should know, and at the risk of discovery and punishment I thus keep my promise. He is brave and generous. It were a pity to let him die.

JAMES COLBORN.

NEW YORK, this tenth day of July, 1778.

Even in the far southern towns the infamy of those prison-ships had been told, and with a sudden gesture of compassion the girl stretched her arms toward the opposite house.

“Aunt Clevering, poor Aunt Clevering!” and thrusting the letter into Mistress Strudwick’s hands, she exclaimed: “Here read it—read it aloud, then take it over yonder—I cannot.” And gathering Betty close in her arms she listened while the letter was read to the sorrowing women.

“Who are the others? Called he no names?”

“Oh, mayhap one is my son!”

“And another may be my husband!”

“Even the Sugar House had been easier than this! Mark you what we have heard of the ferocity of the jailers, the foulness of the food, the loathsomeness of the ships! They will die, our brave lads will all die there!” [Pg 137]

“Will die?—Nay, perchance they are already dead; ‘tis a month since this letter was writ, and two months since Monmouth fight.”

And the letter went the rounds of the town, carrying sorrow everywhere and a miserable dread

and uncertainty into many homes, for all of the men missing from Monmouth were not yet accounted for. Whose dear ones were suffering with Richard, mine or thine, or our neighbour's?

All the afternoon, Joscelyn paced her floor, her brows knitted, her fingers clenched. She knew best whom he loved? Yes, she knew. Every day for the past year he had let her see his heart; even in their quarrels over the war, he had not forgotten that he loved her. At first she had taken it for a passing fancy, and had treated him with laughing coquetry, fanning his love later on into the white flame of passion with that groundless jealousy of Eustace. Then it was she realized what it was with which she was playing.

And now he was lying in that loathsome ship, with the fever on one side and the harsh keepers on the other. Did she care as he wanted her to care? No, but her anger against him for his persistent assumption of her acquiescence in his suit was all forgotten; she remembered only the happy side of their friendship, and that he was Betty's brother. She could not put aside the appeal in Colborn's letter, for it was an appeal from Richard himself; and yet what could she, a mere girl without aid or influence, do to set him free? That was why her hands were clenched and she paced her floor with quick steps. Then at last she sat down, and opening her portfolio she wrote for half an hour, covering sheet after sheet. When they were done she gathered them up quickly and ran downstairs and crossed the street to the opposite house. There all was sadness and tears because of Colborn's news.

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"Here, Betty," she said, placing the folded sheets upon the table; "Eustace Singleton is on Lord Cornwallis's staff and must have influence with him, and through him, with General Clinton. I have written Eustace to use all effort and despatch in Richard's behalf, but you must add a postscript to make the plea effective."

"And why, I pray you, should he heed a postscript from Betty?" asked her mother, angrily, forgetful for a moment of her grief.

"Because," Joscelyn answered, facing her calmly, "he loves her, and the few words she writes will outweigh all my pages."

"What! That Loyalist, the son of Joseph Singleton, our old enemy, in love with my daughter? This is some mockery."

"It is the sober truth."

"I do not believe it; but if it be so, then will Richard and I have a word to say in the matter. Betty, put down that quill; I will not have you stoop to ask a favour of that family."

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"Not even for Richard's life and freedom, Aunt Clevering?"

"I do not believe he has any influence. In love with my daughter—what impudence!"

"Rather what good fortune, since it may save your son."

"Mother, it seems our one chance; bid me write." And Joscelyn joined in the girl's plea.

The older woman's features worked spasmodically, but presently she nodded slowly. "For Richard's sake, Joscelyn, yes; but mind you, Betty will set him out in short order if ever he presumes to declare himself. She knows her duty; no Singleton blood comes into my family."

She could not see Betty's face, for Joscelyn stood between them; but two weeks later Eustace kissed the blots where the tears had fallen just under her pleading little postscript:—

"Because of all you said to me in Joscelyn's parlour, because of your red roses which I wore in the privacy of my room until they faded, I beseech you, save my brother!"

"But oh, Joscelyn, suppose he can do nothing?"

"Then, dear, we must carry our plea to Lord Cornwallis. My father and he were friends in England; perhaps we may gain his ear through that old-time acquaintance."

"And how will you reach Cornwallis?" Mistress Clevering asked doubtfully.

"If need be, Betty and I will seek him in General Clinton's camp."

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Betty put her cheek close to the girl's. "Joscelyn, after all you are not indifferent to Richard," she whispered, half wistfully, half joyously.

But Joscelyn's face was almost stern. "This letter from Colborn is in truth a plea from Richard, since he must have bid the man write. Think you I could let such a thing pass unanswered—and from your brother, too?"

"God bless you, Joscelyn, though your heart is as hard as flint."

CHAPTER XV.

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AN AWAKENING AND A MUTINY.

"I can bear scorpion's stings, tread
fields of fire,
In frozen gulfs of cold eternal lie;
Be tossed aloft through tracts of
endless void—
But cannot live in shame."

—JOANNA BAILLIE.

Besides the patrol and the ship's long-boat only one other ever tied up to the prison-vessels, and that one belonged to Dame Grant, the bumboat woman, who brought such small luxuries as the prisoners were able to purchase. She herself seldom came on board, but sent up her tiny parcels by two boys who made their deliveries under the eye of the warden. This was the woman Richard had hoped to bribe to aid his escape, but with whom he had never found the smallest opportunity to speak at close range. She was corpulent and coarse of feature, and the boys who served her often felt the weight of her big hand; but Richard had once thrown her a jest over the rail, and she had laughed good-naturedly, showing that she had a soft side to her rough exterior. In the lining of his ragged boot were the few coins Colborn had given him, but not so much as a letter had he been able to bribe her to take. Often he cursed the watchfulness of the sentinel, longing to send at least some little message to those who thought of him in far-off Hillsboro'-town. [Pg 142]

The morning of his awakening from the despairing stupor in which nearly two months had been passed, it so chanced that Dame Grant brought in her boat a basket of pears. Very luscious they looked, for sun and dew had kissed them lavishly; but only the guards could pay their price, so the prisoners feasted with their eyes only. By and by, however, one of the sentinels who had purchased some of the fruit went to attend to some duty below, and left one of the pears on the rail of the deck. So transparent was his action and so subtle the temptation, that it almost seemed he had set a delicate trap for some unwary captive. If, indeed, it was a trap, it caught its prey; for one of the prisoners, a poor old man, starving, yet too ill to eat the mouldy biscuit and rancid meat that was their daily portion, saw the tempting fruit and stole it, hoping the owner would think it had rolled off into the water with the rocking of the ship. But nothing escaped the argus-eyed watch; one of the other sentinels saw him as he ravenously devoured it, and collaring the trembling culprit carried him to the warden. He acknowledged the theft, excusing himself on the plea of extreme hunger, and begged for mercy. He might as well have asked for the sun, whose rays whitened the deck and shimmered on the restless waves.

"I will make an example of him that we may have no more thieving on this ship. Order the prisoners out that they may see," commanded the warden, a big-thewed fellow with the face of a bulldog. [Pg 143]

The culprit, whose age alone should have protected him, was stripped to the waist and dragged to the middle of the deck, where he stood weak, scarred, emaciated,—as pitiful an object as the sun ever shone upon. In a wide circle about him were crowded the unwilling prisoners, their faces scowling with a helpless rage; and behind these were posted the guards with levelled guns. While the warden knotted his lash, Peter and Richard, after a whispered consultation with those nearest to them, stepped forward and touched their caps.

"If you please," said Peter, acting as spokesman, "we will all of us give something toward the price of the fruit, if you will spare this man."

The warden wheeled suddenly upon them and struck out with his whip, barely missing Peter's head. "Back with you, an you want not the lash upon your own backs, hounds that you are! The first man of you who stirs again shall have his share of this pastime." The ferocity of his look and voice quelled any further attempt at conciliation, and the prisoners turned their faces sullenly away.

"So it's delicacies your stomach craves, is it?" sneered the warden to the trembling man before him. "Well, does that taste like pears—or that—or that?" and the cruelly knotted lash swirled through the air, and fell again and again upon the quivering flesh of the helpless creature. The man staggered, screamed, reeled from place to place, and finally fell. A harsh laugh answered his cries for mercy, and the lash went on until the blood spurted from the livid welts upon his body, while his groans were horrible to hear; and the prisoners groaned in answer. But the warden's fury was aroused, and the blows fell until insensibility mercifully came, and the man lay still in a pool of his own blood. [Pg 144]

"So shall it fare with every thief among you!" cried the warden, throwing the whip down and facing around the scowling circle. But he saw there no intimidation, but a wrath that needed but a touch to burst into a storm, and he was quick to take the warning.

"Dismiss the prisoners below," he thundered to the guards, and went swiftly to his own cabin.

As Richard watched the cruel scene, something had stirred and then suddenly snapped within him; the inert, despairing stupor was gone, and in its place was a wild desire for action. Every nerve within him quivered with a savage impulse to give the brutal warden blow for blow—nay,

two for one; that was what he wanted to do. His fingers closed in a fierce grip, and only Peter's firm hand held him in his place.

"The guards would riddle you with bullets before you could get to him," the latter whispered, under cover of that other terrible noise of the flogging.

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"I have but once to die. Unhand me!"

"Yes, but death here would be wasted. Wait."

From that hour Richard was a changed man; the dulness of despondency was gone, and in its place there had come a recklessness, a demon of desperation, that nothing could still.

"I shall not stay quietly here to be flogged or to rot with the fever and starvation," he said to Peter, and his jaw was hard and square. "I shall get away or I shall die in the attempt."

Two days later the flogged man was sewed into his blanket and carried away in the funeral-boat; and the malcontent of the prisoners broke out in angry mutterings. Here Richard, who had been brooding over a plan of escape, believed he saw his chance. By night his plan was laid; and when the hatches were beaten down and they lay in serried rows in the stinking hold, he went from man to man and told his scheme. It was to be a mutiny, a direct revolt. At a given signal they were to rise in a body, fall upon the guards, over-power them—kill them—and then pulling up the anchor they were to run the ship to the open sea, beach her somewhere on the Jersey coast if she gave signs of leaking, and take their chance to hide along the shore until they could get away into the interior. Richard was to head them, for in his voice and manner the men recognized the spirit of a leader. He longed with something akin to ferocity to strike the first blow at the warden.

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"And besides," he said, "since I have proposed the plan it is but meet that I should assume the first risk. If I fall, Peter will take my place. Jack Bangs here has been on the sea all his life, and knows the coast hereabouts as we know our farms at home. What say you to giving him charge of the ship and letting him choose his own sailing crew?"

"Good; he is the man for the place."

"Very well," said Bangs; "but we cannot go down the Jersey coast, for we would have to pass too many posts of the enemy, besides the guns in the New York harbour. We must steer east through the sound, and if the ship is beached, it must be on the Connecticut or Rhode Island coast."

"Very well; that is not so convenient, since it takes us far from our army, but anywhere will be better than here."

They counted every risk: the difficulty of disarming the guards, the proximity of the other two prison-ships, the interference of the shore patrol in their swift-sailing boat, the disabled and sailless condition of their own vessel; but nothing turned them from their purpose. Every detail of the plot was arranged when toward morning the men lay down for a little rest and sleep.

All the morning Richard scrubbed or cleaned as the guards bade, and then sat on deck with his eyes alternately upon the sun and the ship.

But toward the middle of the afternoon Richard noticed signs of dissatisfaction among a few of the men near the stern, where there was an improvised back-gammon board. They were evidently angry about something. A quarrel at this spot was a daily occurrence, and occasioned no surprise among the sentinels; but Richard guessed that some other cause was at the bottom of this, and gradually made his way to Peter's side.

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"'Tis Henry Crane," Peter whispered, and his close-shut fists showed an emotion his face concealed. "He is jealous that the ship was given to Bangs rather than to him, and he and some of his fellows—his old crew—are threatening mischief."

"Fool, to risk his neck and liberty for a damnable vanity!" Rising, Richard crossed to the group of players, and sinking down upon the deck gathered the dice into his hand as though to take part in the sport.

"I play to win; and the man who fouls my game—for any cause whatsoever—has me to answer to," he said with stern emphasis, his fearless eyes fixed steadily on Crane's face. The man flushed and began to mumble an answer, but the guard, passing, said sharply:—

"Since you cannot play without a row, break up the game."

The players got up slowly. "You understand?" Richard said under his breath, and Crane nodded surlily.

The afternoon wore on and all remained quiet. Crane had evidently thought better of his foolish jealousy. It was growing late, and there was going to be a high wind, and that was well, for it would set the tide yet stronger in its outward sweep, and their flight would be all the swifter.

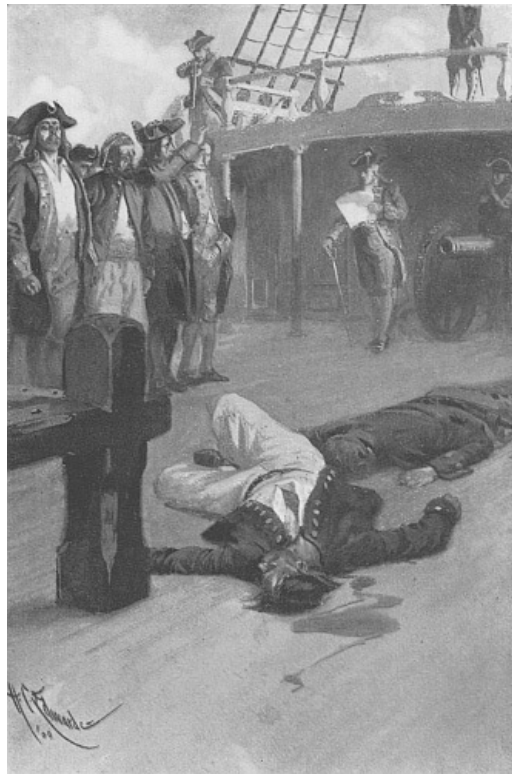
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It lacked only a little while before the drum-tap. Richard got up and stood with his face to the glowing west to take his last farewell of the dream-girl with whom he kept his tryst each evening at this hour.

"Good-by, sweetheart," he said in his inner consciousness. "I love you. On your dear eyes I kiss you—so—"

“Attention! First division carry down their bedding!”

He wheeled; for he was in that first division. A quick glance about the deck showed everything quiet as usual. Crane and a few others stood at the far end of the deck awaiting their order to go down with the rest of the bedding. This would take only ten minutes, then the drum-tap for the roll-call and—death or liberty.



“... THE PRISONERS LINED UP AND ANSWERED TO THEIR NAMES.”

Swiftly the first division seized their allotment of the bedding and passed below. Knowing what was to follow, they did not lose a moment; but, quick as they were, something happened up above. There was a sound as of a struggle, a fierce cry, the report of a musket, all so close together as to seem almost blended into one sound; and then the ship writhed and quivered with the reverberation of the cannon on the upper end of the deck. Richard sprang to the ladder, but thrust only his head above deck when an order to halt, accompanied by a touch of steel to his temple, brought him up with a pull. But a look showed him what had happened. Crane and three others lay motionless upon the deck, and the other two men who had stood with them were covered by the muskets of the guards, while the warden leaned against the cannon ready to sweep the deck with another shot should so much as a hand be lifted without his orders. He was absolute master of the situation. A signal was run up to the patrol boat, the two mutineers were bound and hurried away; then the drum tapped for roll-call. But no one made any show of revolt. With the guards aroused, the patrol alarmed, and that murderous cannon ready to rake the deck, it had been the act of madmen to resist; so, scowlingly and surlily the prisoners lined up and answered to their names, and then marched below, their plans all gone wrong. Richard threw himself down and sobbed like a child. The plot had failed through the malice of one man. Crane, thinking everything was ready, and that the men would all respond to the signal, gave it while Richard was below, thinking thus to snatch the leadership and gain control of the whole vessel. But the other men, watching only for Richard's signal, did not comprehend or respond to this unexpected whistle, only the five who stood immediately with Crane falling in with his plan. But even they were not quick enough, for the sentinel upon whom they leaped had time to cry out the alarm and discharge his gun, while the warden sprang to the ever-ready cannon.

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Although the prisoners felt the warden's anger in many petty ways, no other arrests were made; for the two captives took their punishment heroically and told no tales, and inquiry of course failed to elicit any information from the rest of the prisoners.

“I cannot stay here—I will not!” Richard cried vehemently to Peter. “I am going, and soon at that.”

“What is it you propose to do?”

“I do not yet know, but I am going, or they shall kill me with a rifle-ball instead of by slow starvation,” he said doggedly.

Then one night a month later, as they lay gasping for air in the black hold, he unfolded a plan that made Peter's heart sick with dread and uncertainty.

INTO THE JAWS OF DEATH.

"Let terror strike slaves mute;
Much danger makes great hearts most
resolute."

—MARSTON.

"Death, when unmasked, shows us a
friendly face."

—GOLDSMITH.

"**R**eBELS, turn out your dead!"

The inhuman call came down the opened hatches, and the prisoners, stupid with the foul air they had breathed all night, prepared to obey. So many times they had heard the cry that they had grown callous to its coarse brutality.

It was the end of September, and the delayed equinoctial storm would soon ravage the coast. For a week the sea-faring folk had been expecting it; and now at last the great gale or the forerunner of it was upon them, for all night the waves had been rolling in from the outside with the sound of thunder. The ship had pitched and tossed and strained at its moorings, while the living freight in its hold prayed that it might break away entirely. The hatches, when lifted, showed no blue sky, but gray clouds and scurrying mist wreaths. The men, coming up out of the hot and fetid air, shivered a little in the stiff breeze on the deck, then opening their mouths, drank it in like wine. The faces of the landsmen had an added ghastliness from seasickness, but they were all bad enough to look upon,—seamen and soldiers alike. In squads of six they took their breakfast, eating by sheer force of resolution what they loathed, that the hunger pains might not gnaw so hard.

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"How many dead this morning?" demanded the warden.

"Two,—Drake and Cowles," answered Jack Bangs.

"Nay, there are three, Master Warden," said Peter Ruffin, sadly; "I found Richard Clevering lying stiff and stark beside me when I got up. The bodies are there beside the capstan."

The three were stretched upon the deck; the corner of Richard's blanket, as if by accident, fell over the upper part of his face, but the mouth below was blue and drawn. With an exclamation of surprise and sorrow Jack Bangs crossed the deck and, lifting the blanket for a moment, looked at the face beneath. Then, reverently replacing it, he made the sign of the cross above the body, and speaking a few low words to Peter, went away. The warden, who had watched the scene satirically, gave each corpse a shove with his foot, cursing the while.

"D—n 'em! had to die the worst day of the month, that the burial might be the more troublesome!" He glanced at them again, gave each another kick, and checked off their names in his book. "Here, fix these hounds up, and cut your work short so they'll be in the ground before the storm breaks."

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"If you please, may I go in the boat this morning? Clevering was from my town, and I should like to pay him this last respect."

"No."

Peter knew better than to urge his plea, and so stepped quietly aside. But the warden, noticing the slow motions of one of the men to whom he had beckoned, shouted angrily, "Out of the way there, you infernal snail, or I'll fix you so you'll go in the boat and stay!"

Peter sprang into the man's place. "I will be very quick," he said, touching his cap; and without another word wrapped one of the bodies quickly in its coarse covering and took a few stitches with the needle his comrade held out. He was so deft, and the lightning was so vivid, that the warden grunted and let him go on. Under other circumstances he would have been put in irons for insubordination.

The stitches in Richard's blanket were few and slight, just enough to hold it about the body.

"What was the matter with that fellow? I never heard him say he was sick," said one of the sentinels, stopping to look on.

Peter's pulse stood still. "He has complained for some time of a pain about the heart. All last night he tossed and rolled, and just before the hatches were opened, he said to me that his time had come. He's hardly cold yet," he added hastily, as the man bent as though to touch a hand left exposed by a rent in the blanket.

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"Well, he'll have time enough to get cold in the ground," the warden said, coming up behind, and mistaking Peter's words for a plea for more time before the burial.

"He was a sullen chap to whom I've been looking for trouble. I'll warrant he gets not cold between this and the devil," the guard said, giving the stiff body a parting kick.

The waves tossed furiously, but the long-boat was launched, and two of the guard took their places in it, while the man who was to assist Peter at the graves followed to receive the bodies; for the sentinels never touched them, partly through fear of contagion, and partly out of contempt. The first two were finally lowered, and then came the moment Peter had dreaded; those other two had been stiff and stark enough, but he wanted no prying eyes looking on when he lifted this one, and so before he bent over to Richard, he glanced down the deck and raised his hand, quite casually, it seemed, to his face. Instantly, as though he had been on the watch for a signal, Jack Bangs started a funeral hymn, loud and wailing.

"Stop that devilish howling!" roared the warden, wheeling around.

Quick as a flash Peter, signing to his assistant, lifted the prostrate figure at his feet and swung it over the side. The ropes grated on the rail, and when the warden looked again, it was all over. Peter slid instantly down one of the ropes, and he and his fellow grave-digger untied the cords from the body and rolled it over beside the other two in the bottom of the boat, the guards having their hands full to keep the little craft from swamping in the waves. Then they cast off and pulled for the shore.

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"What makes you look at that carrion so confoundedly straight and scared," one of the soldiers asked Peter, sharply, noticing how often his eyes went to the figure at his feet.

Peter cursed himself inwardly, but he had been so afraid that the blanket would rise and fall with a strong man's involuntary breathing that he had watched it in a sort of fascination. Now he looked away, answering slowly:—

"I have known him since he was a baby; he used to play with my little boy that died, and so I keep thinking of those days."

One of the men laughed scoutingly, but the other growled out, "Let the fool have his fling, and give me a light, Carson; my pipe's gone out in this cursed spray." And while their heads were close together, Peter stretched his legs out over the body, that if so it lost for a moment its rigidity, they might not see.

It seemed to him an hour before the shore was reached and the landing effected; then he and his assistant carried the bodies high up on the sand. Richard's went first.

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"He is alive," Peter whispered, as they moved up the beach, "but if you give the faintest hint of it here or on shipboard by word, act, or look, I'll throttle you like a viper."

"You need not threaten—I'm no peacher; and besides, I liked the lad, and wish him well; but his chance is slim, and if he is taken, they will torture him like the incarnate fiends."

An officer from the patrol, strolling near the boat, called out:—

"How many to-day, Carson?"

"Three."

"That is an unusual haul; you are thinning them out fast."

"Not half fast enough; looks as if the cursed dogs held on to life to spite us."

"Well, 'tis said that Howe will bring back plenty of recruits from the French fleet to fill your gaps."

"How is that? What is the news?"

But Peter was listening eagerly, hoping to catch some bit of outside information. The officer pointed to him with elevated eyebrows, and the guard drove him with imprecations to his task.

"Your shovel?—Well, there it is, you son of perdition! Go on, and mind you be quick in hiding that carrion from the crows."

Beside the boat, with guns cocked and ready, the three men then talked over the war tidings, while thirty yards up the beach the two grave-diggers fell to their task. Rapidly the two first graves were made and the occupants laid therein with only a muttered prayer from Peter; and so were closed two human chapters in the varying story of life. The wind shrieked in from the sea, edged with foam or stinging sand caught up at the water's edge, and the heavens were like a vast slaty canopy torn now and then by jagged lightning flashes. The scene was a fit setting for the mournful work in hand. Once or twice while the two laboured, one of the guards walked over to look at them, and then wandered back to the boat and his companions.

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Over the first two graves the sand was heaped high, forming, as far as possible, a barrier for the third. Shallow that third grave was,—so shallow that a man could scarce lie therein and be concealed; but so it must be that the sand might not be too heavy on the body, and yet seem to be piled up. Tenderly Peter lifted that last silent figure and stretched it in the hollow made for it; then, while he still stooped, he broke the frail stitches of the blanket, and snatching two pieces of driftwood he put them crosswise over the head of the grave with their ends on the edges. The hollow space below might contain enough air to last a man a little while.

"Stay, here is piece of hollow cane in the sand," said the assistant, "keep one end of it over your mouth, Richard; we will leave the other just out of the sand; in this way you can breathe longer.— So."

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"Quick, quick; the shovels! The guard is returning," cried Peter.

It seemed to them that their shovels crawled, and yet they worked like mad. If the guard got there before they finished, all was lost. Spadeful after spadeful,—was ever a man so hard to cover? Another step and the sentinel would be upon them, and the blanket scarcely hidden, and those tell-tale boards and the cane yet in sight. It was a fearful moment. Peter's heart stood still, and his comrade's hands were like ice.

"What the devil are you so long about?"

But it was only the angry voice that reached them; a blinding lightning flash ripped the heavens wide open, and the wind with a demoniacal shriek rushed down the beach, throwing the sand in a swirling cloud about the on-coming man, making him stagger with its force and snatching away his hat and rain coat. Half blinded, he raced down the sloping stretch to regain his garments which more than once eluded him. Then in the lull he came back swearing furiously; and finding the men leaning on their shovels, he stuck his bayonet into each of the three mounds. Into the third it penetrated only a little way; but he did not notice, for the wind was again gathering itself for a fresh burst of fury.

"Now then, get you to the boats!" he cried, standing behind them.

Peter paused a moment and crossed himself reverently, saying in a loud voice, "Your bodies to the earth, your souls to God's care; and may you pass to liberty in the folds of the in-rolling fog."

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"Pass to hell and the devil! Get on, I say!" cried the guard, angrily, as he struck Peter across the shoulders with his bayonet. And Peter, having said his say, ran nimbly to the boat; and pushing it off, they leaped in, and were soon toiling amid the breakers to reach the ship's side.

It seemed to Richard that long months passed while he lay motionless under that weight of sand, breathing spasmodically through the bit of reed. The drift-boards kept the pressure partially from his chest so that he suffered very little. The guard's bayonet had grazed his leg without piercing it, but the thirst in his throat was something terrible. Peter's voice had penetrated through the boards and their thin covering of sand, so that he knew the fog was following the wind from the sea. It was for this he had hoped, and it was this Peter meant to tell him in those last words. Dear old Peter; how he had tried to dissuade him from this mad plan, and when that was impossible, how he had risked his own safety to aid him. Richard felt the tears on his face as he recalled his friend's unselfish offices. Several times during the wait for a stormy day he had been on the point of giving up the whole plan, lest it work a mischief for Peter; but the latter had said it would mean only a day in irons for him, and that he was willing to risk that much for his friend's liberty; it was for Richard himself that he feared. But even death had a smiling face for Richard, compared to a winter spent in the vile ship; and so the plan had gone on, and by Peter's care he was lying here in his grave, accounted of the world as dead.

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By and by his limbs began to cramp and ache. Through strong will power he had kept them rigid during those terrible moments of examination and removal from the ship. He would not have dared assay the plan had he not known how superficial, through repetition, had become the warden's inspection of the corpses—just a few questions and that savage kick. Each time there had been a death during the past fortnight, he had studied the details of the preparation and burial, until he was convinced that he could carry his scheme to a successful close if only Peter was allowed to be one of his sextons.

As the minutes now passed, the ache in his limbs increased, for the pressure of the sand was stopping the circulation. Then the dryness in his throat grew and grew, until he could bear it no longer. Had he lain there a year, or only a day? Slowly and cautiously he drew his hands up to his breast, then higher, and finally placed the palms against the board over his head. The first movement brought the sand in a shower upon his shoulders; but after a while he worked it far enough back to leave a crack between it and its fellow. This he could only feel, for knowing the sand would strangle and blind him, he had not as yet taken the blanket from his face, since moving it ever so little to receive the reed into his mouth. Next, he slowly pushed the other board downward until a rush of cold air told him he was once more in the world of humanity, not forever sealed in the haunt of ghouls. Cautiously he shoved the blanket from his face and looked up into the storm-hung heavens. It was mid-afternoon, and he had thought it must be midnight. Eagerly he drew in the air, cool and laden with moisture, and tried to forget his aching limbs. He dared not stir yet lest the patrol should see him. He must wait; and while he waited, how the moments lagged!

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The wind had fallen, but the waves still thundered on the shore, and the lightning now and then raced along the clouds. Afraid to raise his head, he could only lie still and stare straight above him into the square of mist and clouds. With a great throb of joy he watched the gloom deepen. He had not heard the sunset gun from the station down the beach, but the fog would befriend him; so when he could no longer bear the straitened position, he lifted his head and shoulders and looked around. The fog was everywhere; scarcely could he see the tumultuous waves that shattered themselves along the sand. He need wait no longer, no one could see him now; and painfully and carefully he finally drew his stiff limbs from under the sand. To stand at full length was not to be thought of, but he rolled over and rubbed and stretched himself until the cramp

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was relieved. Then he set himself to fill in and round up his vacated grave; for Peter's sake he must do this, that no suspicion might be aroused when the funeral boat brought its next cargo ashore. Swiftly he worked, using a piece of the drift-board for a shovel, and crawling from head to foot to be sure that all was right. His heart was full of gratitude when at last it was finished, and, with a sigh of relief, he threw the board aside and stood up straight,—a free man.

But at this moment something came out of the fog from the shore side, and as he steadied himself upon his feet, he found himself face to face with a man.

CHAPTER XVII.

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OUT OF THE SHADOW AND INTO THE SUN.

“O God, it is a fearful
thing
To see the human soul
take wing
In any shape, in any
mood.”

—BYRON.

For one awful minute neither man moved; then the patrol, with the horror in his face as of one who looks upon a thing of another world, gave a hoarse scream which was swallowed up in the roar of the sea. Richard did not know what an uncanny sight he made rising up from that grave with his hair unkempt, his face like ashes, and a burial cloth still bound about his jaws. He comprehended only that detection threatened, and detection meant death. With one bound he cleared the grave between them, and grappled with the guard. Under other circumstances he would have been no match for the man, starved and weak as he was; but desperation—that fierce, mad desire to live—gave him strength. It was not so much he as that aroused demon within him that gave back the patrol's blows, struck the gun from his hands, and finally gripped him about the throat. Not a word was said, not a cry was uttered, as they tossed and swayed backward and forward, to the right or left, sank on one knee and rose again to stagger and struggle anew. If Richard could keep that strangling hold, the fight was his, and with it the liberty for which he longed; if the other man could break it, then life would pay the forfeit. Doggedly he hung on, though his fingers strained and his head reeled, while the other beat him about the body and shoulders with blows that began to lose their force, for that iron grip upon his windpipe was telling at last. Richard was literally choking the life out of him. Backward he went—backward—until the muscles in his chest swelled, and the joints of his back and shoulders cracked—still backward, with everything dark before him. Then suddenly his knees collapsed, and he went down to the sand in a shapeless huddle. But even then Richard did not let go his hold; deeper, and yet deeper his fingers sank into the flesh under them, until not a quiver was left in the insensible limbs. Then finally he stood up and looked upon his work.

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God! he had committed murder.



**“FOR A LONG MINUTE HE STOOD
THERE, TREMBLING, HORROR-
STRICKEN.”**

For a long minute he stood there, trembling, horror-stricken; then the self within him cried out, and he roused up to thought and action. That dead body would tell its own disastrous tale when the relief watch came; should he bury it here in his own grave? Yes, that cheated sepulchre should have its inmate; and he reached for the board. But no; there would not be time; it would take hours to hide it, trembling and weak as he was, something else must be done, something quick. Should he run for the dunes and leave it where it lay? If found thus, search would be made for the slayer; he would be setting the watch upon his own track. He pressed his hands helplessly to his temples, staring meanwhile upon the horror there at his feet. Then suddenly the explanation came: the man's boat ended on a rock that dropped sharply into the water; he knew, for he had noticed when he came ashore before with the funeral boat. If he could throw the body down there, it would be thought the man had walked off in the fog and gloom; no suspicion would be aroused, and he would be free from pursuit.

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Shivering at the contact, he seized the body and dragged it along over the shells and pebbles. Once or twice he lost his bearings in the short journey, but a rising wind blew out trailing lengths of fog before him and, aided thus, in a little while he reached his goal. But he could not see the body enter the water; it would be like a second murder, and so with eyes close shut he pushed it off and groaned in his soul to hear the splash that came from below.

“God bear witness that I did not want his blood upon my hands!”

Then he looked away to the dunes and took one step toward them. But the gun—it lay yonder by the graves; he might as well have left the body itself there. Hastily he returned, smoothed over the sand where the struggle had fallen, and seizing the man's gun and hat, he sped again to the rock, placing them near the ledge, that they might seem to have been dropped there in an attempt at self-preservation. Then he was free to go. Into the fog he plunged, making for where the sand-dunes rose; and as he tottered down into the underbrush beyond, he heard the sunset gun from the station boom out through the mist. He had lived a whole lifetime in the last half hour.

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It had been his plan to cross the island and seek some means of escaping to the Jersey coast from the south-side villages, but the fog hid everything, and he seemed walking in a circle. He was weak from excitement and lack of food, and after stumbling blindly onward for a while, he turned to the left and kept on a parallel with the coast, the boom of the surf being his guide; but always he kept the sound far enough away to avoid the sentinels from the patrol. The fog had turned into a rain, cold and depressing, and so after walking an hour or two he was willing to risk something of danger for food and rest. He had passed several houses but had kept aloof through fear; now, however, he bent his steps to a tiny light burning ahead.

It was a fisherman's cottage close to an inlet that jutted in from the bay, and as good fortune would have it the old man, detained by the storm, was just getting home. Even in the little harbour the swell was unusually strong, and the man was having much difficulty in beaching his boat, so that Richard's aid was most timely.

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“Who are you, my friend?” the fisherman asked, when everything was snug and taut.

"A traveller who has lost his way."

The old fellow squinted his eyes for a closer look. "A traveller? Well, 'tis enough; we never ask names, my old woman and I, for in such days as these a man's name is oftentimes his most secret possession. We know not the rights of this war, and so we take no sides, but pray that justice may conquer. Now, how can I pay you for your help?"

"By giving me food and shelter."

"That will I, for without you I should have lost my whole day's take and that had been a terrible mishap. Fry an extra fish, mother," he called into the cottage.

"Ay, two of them, good mother. I pray you; for I am as a ravening wolf seeking what I may devour," Richard said, putting his head in at the door; and his voice was so bonny that the old woman filled the skillet with a lavish hand. And in that firelit hut he ate the first palatable meal he had had since Monmouth day. Then he set himself artfully to persuade the fisherman to take him down the Sound in his boat.

"Nay, I never go now, the journey is too much for me; and besides I must go to-morrow to the camp to sell my fish. But the soldiers go and come between here and New York every day; if you will come with me to the camp, I will get you company."

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But Richard evaded the invitation. After a while the old woman said: "There is Dame Grant who lives just over the inlet, she goes down the Sound day after to-morrow to see her people,—she hath recently heard that her niece hath a new baby (a fine girl weighing ten pounds in its skin and to be named for the dame), mayhap you could find passage with her."

But again Richard shook his head, shuddering inwardly at the thought that the old woman might recognize him and be tempted by the standing reward for escaped prisoners to give him again into captivity. He would find some other way, he said, and talked of the fishing in the Sound. When the old man's pipe was smoked out they went to bed, and in spite of that haunting scene beside the wind-swept graves, Richard slept profoundly through the night hours. Waking before the old couple in the gray morning, he crept down from the loft, and raking together the coals upon the hearth, he breakfasted on the remains of last night's supper, then stole out into the wet and sombre world.

How sweet it was to breathe the early air and feel the earth beneath his feet, and have the weeds and underbrush rap him about the knees as he pushed away to the interior! The fisherman's hut was a league behind him when he saw the east redden with the rising sun, for the besom of the storm had swept the heavens clear. What a wonderful light threaded the woods and glorified the tree-tops, sparkling and changing with every motion of the boughs! Often he had seen it among his native Carolina hills, this opaline opening of the morn, but never before with such a thrill of appreciation, such a rush of exquisite joy.

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"Good morning, Joscelyn; I am a free man to-day." And he bowed as though he had been in a ball-room, and picking a bit of blossom that nodded at him, he stuck it jauntily in his ragged coat.

If it had not been for that dead face playing hide-and-peek always among the bushes about him, he could have whistled as he walked. Now and then he sighted houses and cultivated fields, but he kept to the woods; not until he reached the sea on the other side of the island would he venture to show his face at a door. There were wild grapes in the thickets and sweet beach mass to eat; and a little past noon he found a late melon in the weeds of a fence corner, and feasted like a lord.

But half a mile farther on, his pleasure was forgotten in a keen excitement, for from a slight eminence, he saw the plain stretching to the right and left white with the tents of soldiery; and not ten paces from him a sentinel, with his back this way, sat on a fallen tree and read a letter. A few more steps, and he would have been in the hornets' nest,—a helpless captive. Instantly he dropped upon his knees, and crawled into the brush as stealthily as a creature of the jungle. He had evidently come too far west in his flight, for this was a part of Clinton's army, quartered here within easy reach of New York. Far away to either side the tents reached, dotting the whole expanse of country. To turn either wing looked like an impossibility; it would take him days to skirt those picket posts to the east; and on the west, he knew from what the fisherman had said that they must reach even to the hamlet whence the boats went daily to New York. To take that route meant a sure and swift destruction, since he would be thrusting himself into the very toils he longed to avoid. His one chance seemed to be a retreat the way he came, and then to beat his way to the northeast along the coast of the Sound, and get over to the Connecticut side on some fishing-boat. He would be weeks—perhaps months—longer in reaching Washington or home, but better that a thousand times than certain capture. He reasoned it all out carefully, lying under the thicket, and then lingered a few minutes to envy the unconscious sentinel his letter, for of course it was from home. How long it had been since he had heard aught of his loved ones—three weary months!

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Downcast and disheartened, he returned along his own trail, and in the early twilight heard the boom of the surf ahead of him. But he had missed his way somewhat, and came out of the brush on the side of the inlet across from the fisherman's hut. He found he would have to walk an extra mile or two to get back to that shelter for the night. He sighed and turned, but just at that moment there flashed upon his sight a light from a window some fifty yards down the inlet, and on the same side with himself.

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Stay; this was Dame Grant's hut, and she went to-morrow to the Jersey shore to visit her kin.

He did not go back around the head of the cove, but turned instead into the field before this other hut, whose friendly light was winking at him through the dusk. His resolution was taken, for good or ill.

Evidently the dame had company, for there was the sound of voices and laughter on the water front of the little house; and Richard stood still with a tingling sense of pleasure,—it had been so long since he had heard people laugh joyously and heartily, that the sound came like the echo of something loved but almost forgotten. Between a hayrick and the fence he finally lay down to wait; and while he waited he slept, for when he awoke the hut was silent, although the light still burned at the window. The chill of autumn was in the air, and he shivered as he crossed the enclosure and stood looking into the lighted room. It was a pleasant scene: the two boys slept upon a wooden bench, but the dame sat by the table, busy with a piece of bright-hued patchwork, and Richard took heart of grace that she smiled as she sewed. From his ragged boot-leg he had taken Colborn's gold piece, and now he used it to tap lightly on the small, diamond-shaped pane. The dame looked up in surprise to see a hatless man at her window; but he smiled cheerily and beckoned, holding the gold piece against the glass that she might see it. For a moment she looked at him frowningly, then the glitter of the gold won her, and she got up and opened the door.

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"What want you at this hour of the night at an honest woman's house?"

"I want an honest conversation with an honest woman, therefore came I to your door, knowing where to find both. In all true faith and respect I am here; so come, good mother, ask me in. Without your bidding I will not enter, for I would not wilfully intrude upon the privacy of a lady." He bowed low, clicking his heels as neatly as though he were her partner in a minuet.

"Go along with your fine ways," she said, but she laughed.

"No ways can be too fine for a lady." And he took her hand and kissed it with the air of a prince, clicking his heels again in that military salute.

"You young impudence! leave go my hand—you'll find it heavy enough on your ear presently. I'll warrant you have it in mind to fleece me out of something, so say your say and be done with it," but there was no real anger in her voice.

"Nay, I am no highwayman nor money beggar; for that which you do for me I will pay you well," he answered, again holding up the gold piece. "But would you not be more comfortable sitting?" He waved his hand toward the chair she had quitted, and the fine courtesy of his tone again called forth her laugh; but she took the hint and, turning, bade him enter.

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"Well, where do we begin?" she said, when they were seated.

"My mother always begins by asking a stranger to have something to eat—and you have bonny blue eyes like hers," he answered, with boyish audacity, pushing back her loose sleeve and patting the fat arm.

"'Tis a good place to start," she answered, shoving him off; and would have called the boys to serve him, but he held her back.

"I wish no one but you to hear what I have to say. You may trust me—I swear it." So she opened the cupboard herself and brought out plenty of cold food. Richard ate ravenously, praising everything (for in truth it had a heavenly taste), and telling her how blue her eyes were, and how pretty her patchwork—just like what his own mother used to make.

"A bit of a quilt for a bairn just born," she said, and smoothed it with her great hands.

And Richard asked the child's name, and said it had a sweet sound, and hoped it would have blue eyes with a twinkle in them like her own. And while he ate and talked she watched him narrowly. He knew it, but he did not care. Presently she said, as one asserting a fact:—

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"You are from one of the prison-ships."

He nodded, smiling; and his frankness evidently pleased her, for she nodded back. "That's right; no use to lie about it. I knew I had seen your face somewhere. How did you get away?"

"That is the one thing I cannot tell you, good mother, for it would implicate the man who helped me, and not even for your favour—though God knows I want it bad enough—will I betray my friend."

"Right again; hold fast to the man who holds to you; I like to see folk grateful."

Then he told her how he wanted to go in her boat to the Jersey shore, and how it was he happened to know her plans. But she shook her head; the risk was too great.

"There will be no risk at all. You are so well known to the soldiers at the different posts that you will never be questioned. It would be but natural for you to take some one stronger than your boys to help you in making so long a voyage. Find me but a coat and hat, and no one will give me a thought, for I know how to hold my tongue when occasion calls."

But still she refused. Her passport called but for three, and she was not going to run her head

into a noose for all his fine speeches and petting ways—for he had squeezed her hand and patted her gray hair while he talked. [Pg 175]

He would not listen to her refusal; if she did not take him, he was lost. And he got hold of her other hand, and in pathetic words described to her the agony he had suffered on the vessel; and then he dropped his head on the table and almost sobbed as he told her of Joscelyn and his yearning to see her.

“Oho, a sweetheart, is it?” asked the old woman, with aroused interest.

“Yes, as bonny a girl as you ever set eyes upon. And think you, good dame, of your own young days, of the time when the lads were at your beck and call,—for I warrant me those blue eyes broke many hearts,—would you not have been grateful if your lover had been in peril and some one had saved him for you?”

The dame chuckled. “Ay, ay, I had my fling with the lads, I did.”

“It goes without the saying. And there was one among them whom you loved?” The brown face grew suddenly very tender as with the shadow of a memory. “Then for the sake of him save Joscelyn’s sweetheart for her.”

But still she shook her head, and for a minute Richard was in despair. Then he began all over again, adding the gold piece to his argument. Thus for half an hour the plea went on, and just as he felt that he had failed, she suddenly nodded her head decisively, that softened light again shining in her face.

“One of the boys shall bide at home, and you may go in his stead, since you are so set on it; but mind, you help with the boat, and I have the gold.” [Pg 176]

“That and Joscelyn’s love shall be yours, you dear, bonny dame!” he cried rapturously, seizing her about the shoulders and kissing her heartily on either red cheek.

“Get out! Of all the lads I ever saw, you have the freest manners.” But the shove she gave him had in it no roughness. He had set her to thinking of her own youth and of a lad who had gone to sea one morning, kissing his hand to her, but had never come home again, though she had waited for him for many a day through shine of sun and wail of storm. Through all her life a woman’s first love is a touchstone to her sympathy, an open sesame to her tenderness; neither as maid, nor yet as wife, does she ever quite forget that first sweet spell upon her heart. Dame Grant scarcely saw the man beside her, but for sake of that other lad, whom nobody had been able to help far back in the years that were dead, she would save this other girl’s lover.

In an hour their preparations were made. From the loft of her hut the dame brought down a leather jerkin and a battered hat, and after her scissors had gone over Richard’s head, he was metamorphosed so that even she herself would scarcely have recognized him.

“You’d be a fine figure of a man if those wretches on the ship had not starved the shape out of you.” [Pg 177]

“My mother always said that in the way of beauty Providence had done more for my legs than for my face,” Richard laughed.

“Well, the warden hath undone the job, for thy breeches hang like a scarecrow’s. Now up into the loft with you, and find some straw whereon to sleep. ’Tis close upon midnight, and we start with the sun.”

But Richard was too full of joy and excitement to sleep much, and so when the dame and her boys came out the next morning, they found him sitting beside the boat, pulling on his boots after a plunge into the cold salt water. The feeling in his breast was indescribable when at last, after many injunctions to the boy who was left, they drew out of the cove into the open bay, in the pearl and purple morning, and he knew his journey was begun.

They went somewhat out of their way that Dame Grant might leave some parcels at the patrol station, their course taking them within a hundred yards of the three prison-ships rocking in the bay. At first Richard turned his eyes away with a sickening sense of pain and rage, then looked eagerly to see if he might recognize Peter on the deck. Yes, there he was, near the stern; Richard knew him from his height and from the cap he wore, and he had to hold his teeth clenched to keep from crying out to him. How dismal and condemned the three hulks looked, despite the transfiguring touch of the morning! And over there on the strand was his grave, the spot to which his mother’s thoughts would make many a sorrowful pilgrimage if so the news of his death should outrun him to the Carolina hills. [Pg 178]

At the station one of the guards remarked on the fact that the dame had a new hand aboard.

“Yes; Henry’s stomach’s apt to go back on him in rough weather, and at this season o’ the year we are like to get into a blow any time, so I left him and brought a stronger man. It turns my blood to see Henry heaving and gagging when he ought to be shortening sail.”

“Well, yon fellow hasn’t much the look of a sailor,” said the man, eying Richard suspiciously as he was making awkward attempts to pull in a flapping sail.

“Oh, he isn’t showing off, but he suits me well enough,” the dame answered, with a warning side look at Richard, who instantly gave better heed to his task. Nothing but her coolness saved him,

for the guard's word, coming so suddenly, had made him go very white.

Then a pæan of praise went singing itself through his heart, for the parcels were delivered, and pushing off from shore the boat sailed out of the bay and turned her nose to the west. Down the narrow waterway between Long Island and the city of New York they sailed all the morning, stopping here and there at signals from patrol stations to show their passports. But at none of these places were they detained very long, for Dame Grant had looked carefully to such matters, and so noon found them in a wide bay to the south of the city. No misfortune had befallen Richard, for he had kept a still tongue at every stopping place. In the afternoon the breeze quickened, and they went racing away before it toward the ever growing shore-line ahead, and in the gloaming they landed at a little hamlet on the Jersey side of the bay.

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High up on the beach the boat was pulled and tied to a stake, and then while the boy was gaping about him, Richard went back to the boat side and took the dame's big hand in his:—

"You have kept your contract, and the gold is yours; God bless you for a good, true woman!" he said, leaving the coin in her palm.

But she thrust it back vigorously: "Nay, I will none of it; I but put it in the bargain to test you. You have paid me twofold by your labour and your good gratitude. Tell your Joscelyn that I send you to her as a gift, and bid her use you well."

Nothing could prevail upon her to touch the coin, and so at last Richard turned away.

"Hist!" she said, holding him a moment, "'tis said there is a Continental force near Brunswick; keep to the southwest."

"Thank you, and God keep you!" And the gathering shadows swallowed him up.

At that very moment, on board the prison-ship *Good Hope*, Eustace Singleton was listening to the story of his death from the obsequious warden, and wondering how he was to write it to Betty.

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And far away in Hillsboro' Joscelyn and Betty were going slowly home in bitter disappointment, after seeing the post-rider distribute his few letters, and finding there was nothing for them. How many and how long had been the weeks since they wrote to Eustace; for then it was summer-time, and now the red and ochre tints of the autumn flamed in the woodlands. And still Betty cried, and still Joscelyn counselled patience.

CHAPTER XVIII.

[Pg 181]

"KISS ME QUICK AND LET ME GO."

"And to his eye
There was but one beloved
face on earth,
And that was shining on him."

It was a windy day in late November, one of those rare days when summer, repenting of her desertion, steals softly back to comfort the earth with a parting smile. Out in the brown fields the birds pruned their wings in the sun and sang a few notes softly, as a singer who recalls fitfully and doubtfully a long forgotten tune; the golden daisies by the door still burnt like stars late fallen from the far firmament; a revived butterfly hovered languidly over the faded aster beds, and venturesome wasps sallied from their castles under the eaves and buzzed droningly against the window panes. It was a day of shifting shadows, of subtle changes and soft surprises.

Joscelyn and Betty sat over their embroidery frames in the latter's parlour, talking over the events of the past two months—the long wait between their letter to Eustace and his sorrowful reply; the grief that clouded the two houses for four days following, before they knew that Richard had escaped and was not dead, and the intense relief and joy his short message had brought them.

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"It was like a hundred candles suddenly brought into a dark room," Betty said, snipping off her thread. "But do you know, Joscelyn, that you acted so queerly, scolding because you had cried so much, and cocking your head before the mirror to count the wrinkles your grieving had made,—though for the life of me I could never see one of them,—that I half believed you were angry that Richard had not died in truth."

"You give me credit for much feeling, I am sure," quizzed Joscelyn. "But in sooth, Betty, when a woman gets circles under her eyes, and crow's feet at the corners of her mouth, and a dismal whine to her voice through over-much sighing, she likes to know it has not been all in vain. Wasted grief is like wasted sweets—useless."

"I would to heaven all grief were useless and in vain."

Joscelyn shook her head. "That would not do; for without grief there would be no pity, and

without pity there would be no love, and life without love were not worth the living."

"Love? What do you know of love?" Betty asked, looking up quickly.

"You vain little minx! do you think Cupid wasted all his arrows on you and Eustace?"

"N-o; but Joscelyn—"

"But, Joscelyn," mimicked the other, still laughing; "from the doubt in your voice one would think you were own daughter to that biblical Thomas whose faith was so small. Trust me, Cupid has saved a shaft in his quiver for me." [Pg 183]

"You are such a queer girl, Joscelyn; one never knows how to take you. You sorrowed for Richard so vehemently at first—do you—can you mean that you care just a little for him?"

"My dear, I was much more in love with Richard dead than I am ever like to be with Richard alive. You see, Death is not unlike charity: it covers a multitude of faults."

"You heartless creature!"

And Betty got up and took her frame to another window. But she could never stay angry long, partly because of her gentle disposition, and partly because she knew that much of Joscelyn's seeming heartlessness was in truth but mischievous banter; and so their heads were close together again very soon, while their needles wrought silken poppies or blue-eyed violets into the meshes of canvas on their frames.

And while they thus talked and sewed, a horseman came galloping down the streets. A great commotion followed in his wake; for he rode with a free rein and so rapidly withal that his horse's hoofs struck sparks from the loose stones of the street. Straight to Mistress Clevering's door he went, and springing down stayed not to knock or parley, but entering without ceremony and meeting the astonished lady in the hall, hugged her with a will. [Pg 184]

"Why—it is—Richard—Richard!"

Her voice was half choked with giving back his kisses, but it reached the two girls in the parlour who, startled at first into silence, threw down their needles and rushed headlong into the hall, and, before they realized it, were kissed by the newcomer in a rapturous greeting.

Joscelyn's cheek burnt scarlet under his lips, but so glad was she to see him safe after all their anxiety that she submitted without protest. In faith, it was over so quickly, there had been no time for resistance. Devouring her with his eyes, he tried to retain her hand when the greeting was over, but after a moment she slipped it, not unkindly, from his grasp, and presently when he had told them briefly of his marvellous escape, she ran over to give her mother the news and to see if there was not a piece of his favourite cake in the cupboard. A warm tingle was in her veins, and she put her hand up to the cheek he had kissed. How pleasant it was to hear his voice in the house. If he would only leave the war alone, and—and quit making love to her, she would be so fond of him; they used to be excellent comrades before these two things came between them.

Thinking thus, she put a napkin over the cake and turned to leave the pantry; but Richard, under pretext of speaking to her mother, had followed her, and now stood in the door barring her exit.

"Joscelyn, how good it is to see you again! Have you thought of me?" [Pg 185]

"'Twould have been impossible not to think of you with nothing else being talked of in the house these two months past."

"But have you missed me?"

"Why, we miss anything to which we have been accustomed."

"And you sorrowed for me?"

"Truly, Richard, I should be a most hard-hearted girl not to sorrow over such suffering as has been yours."

"God bless you!" He was so full of joy over the meeting that he did not notice the lack of love-warmth in her voice, but when he would have put his arm about her, she pushed him off with quiet decision.

"Nay, Richard, do not begin that. You told your mother just now that you had but three hours to stay with us; let us not waste a single moment of the time in a useless love-making."

"But you kissed me for greeting."

"Nay, sir, 'twas you kissed me," she said, with a shimmer of laughter over her face like sunlight upon dancing water.

"Listen, sweetheart," he said, coming very close to her, his head swimming with the soft intoxication of her presence; "we may have but these few minutes together, but I want you to know that it was the thought of you that kept me alive in that vile prison and finally nerved me to escape. But for you,—for the fierce longing to see you, to touch you,—I should have stayed there and died like a rat." [Pg 186]

"Eustace did all he could," she broke in, "but our letter was long in reaching him, for General

Clinton had sent him to help repel the attack on Rhode Island, and he did not return to New York for more than a month."

"I know, and some day I shall thank him; but he could not have effected my release or exchange, only bought a little favour from my hard jailers, and I cared not for that kind of obligation from one of his name. It was you—the memory of your dear face—that steeled my nerves and broke my bonds. There is a species of numbing despair that comes upon a man sometimes over which a great love alone can triumph."

She put her hand upon his arm, for there was a pathos in his voice that touched her deeply; "Richard, I wish I loved you."

"And so you shall, and do," he cried; and instantly the tender spell upon her was broken, for in his tone and manner was the old arrogance and sureness that she so much resented. He felt the change, and said pleadingly, "The fisherwoman who rescued me said at parting, 'Tell your Joscelyn to use you well.' Are you so soon forgetting her injunction?"

"Nay; she was a good woman, and I shall pray for her."

"Love me instead—'twill be truer gratitude."

But his mother and Mistress Cheshire were in the hall, and so for answer Joscelyn pushed him through the door; and he went out to the older women, munching a bit of sweet cake like a boy. [Pg 187]

By this time the neighbours were all collected about the door, eager to hear of absent sons and husbands; and he went out to them and answered questions, and took messages and told anew the story of his escape, but with such omissions of names as to throw no suspicion on Dame Grant, if so the story found its way back to the north.

"And in writing to Peter," he said to Patience and her mother, who were grief stricken at his story, "say only that Dick Clevering told you where he was; he will understand, and anything else might arouse the warden's suspicions and bring punishment upon him."

He thought they would never have done with their inquiries and their bemoanings, so short was his time and so eager was he for one more word with Joscelyn. At last he said:—

"And now, my friends, I will carry as many letters as my pockets can hold, but they must be writ in short shift, for in an hour I go on my journey and shall not return this way when once I set my face northward."

And so they went away,—some to prepare their missives, others out of delicacy, feeling his own people must have him to themselves.

"Tell us all about your journey's purpose, Richard," said Betty.

"No, sister; a soldier's mission is not his property. Suffice it for you to know that another man, Dunn by name, and I go through the Carolinas, perhaps so far south as Savannah, on business for the commander-in-chief. He cannot weaken his present force by detaching any number of men to aid the southerners, but he wants to put them on their guard against the force Clinton is sending by sea from New York; and also to learn accurately the strength of the cause in these parts." [Pg 188]

"And where is Master Dunn?"

"He stopped for a few hours over the Virginia line to see his wife, and I rode the livelong night that I might have this glimpse of you. Methinks I should almost have deserted to come back for a look at you all, had I not persuaded Dunn to choose me on this expedition."

"And where are you to meet him?"

"At Charlotte, three days hence."

"When Eustace—when Master Singleton,"—Betty corrected herself, with a vivid blush, "wrote, saying you were dead, mother and I were like to go crazy with grief. He wrote it kindly, but for two days mother did not leave her bed."

"And what did Joscelyn say?"

"Oh, Joscelyn cried till her eyes were all red and puffed, and reminded us how you and she used to ride and read and walk together without even so much as a sharp word until the war talk came on. She did much to comfort mother."

"God bless her! But you were not long in suspense?" [Pg 189]

"No; but mother had already prepared to have a service in your memory, and Janet and Patience had practised the hymns."

"Well, there was at least a grave to sing over," laughed Richard; but his mother was crying, even to think of those sad hours.

"How thin you are!" she said, feeling his arms tenderly.

"Well, mother, when a man has been in his grave, 'tis not to be expected that he will look like one of the fatted kine. But I am plump as a rosy Cupid compared with what I have been; and this reminds me that I am hungry for some of your good cooking; do you and Betty get me up a bit of

dinner while I look to my horse."

But he knew his horse had been cared for, and instead of the stable, it was Joscelyn's door he sought.

"I have but a little while left," he said; "come and sit with us, that I may not lose sight of you for one of those blessed minutes. I am as a thirsty man with the cup held ever out of his reach."

"I thought you would wish to talk with your mother and sister alone."

"There is nothing I tell them that I would not quite as willingly trust to you; for though you are a Loyalist, yet you are loyal to your friends," he said, smiling at his own pleasantry, and she laughed too. Long afterward those words came back to him with a pang.

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As they crossed the street Mistress Strudwick hailed them from the sidewalk. "Hey, there, Richard! you are keeping bad company and will fall under suspicion, consorting with that young Tory," she cried. "Are your despatches in the pocket next to her?—if so, beware!"

"I have them in my heart, Mistress Strudwick."

"Then in faith are they already Joscelyn's," laughed the old lady, teasingly pinching the girl's cheek as the two came up to her.

"Come, Mistress Strudwick, Richard wears not his heart on his sleeve."

"But he pins it instead upon yours—which is quite as public. Ah, Richard, she is a sad dare-devil!" and she went on to tell him of some of the scenes of the past months. He had feared for her from the first, and in his mother's parlour he caught her arm almost fiercely:—

"Are you mad that you jeopardize yourself in this way?"

"Mistress Strudwick is over-alarmed; I can take care of myself," she answered, a trifle hotly.

But he was not satisfied; one word brought on another, and they were nearly quarrelling when Betty came to say his dinner was ready.

"Joscelyn," he whispered, with a sudden softening of manner as they went down the hall, and he took her hand and laid in it a shining gold piece, "this is all the gold I have in the world; it was to have paid the price of my flight, but the fisherwoman would not have it. Keep it for me till the war is done—I have a special purpose for it."

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After dinner the neighbours came with their letters and farewells, and he had no further talk alone with Joscelyn. She bade him a very gentle good-by, however, and ran across to her own balcony opposite, while he comforted his mother and Betty and said farewell to the assembled friends. When he was mounted and had waved them a last adieu, he made his horse curvet as though loath to start, and so brought up close to the rail of the opposite balcony.

"Joscelyn, keep the gold piece safe and in some hallowed place, for when the war is done it shall be made into our wedding ring—'tis for that I saved it. Good-by, sweetheart."

And then he was gone as he had come, with a free rein and a ringing hoof beat; and the crowd behind broke into small groups to discuss the news he had brought, while the girl leaning on the veranda across the way, turned a shining coin in her hand, looking at it pensively, with a curious light in her eyes.

CHAPTER XIX.

[Pg 192]

THE WEARING OF A RED ROSE.

"She gives thee a garland
woven fair,

Take care!

It is a fool's-cap for thee to
wear,

Beware! Beware!

Trust her not.

She's fooling thee!"

—LONGFELLOW.

The winter that followed was a quiet one in Hillsboro'. Joscelyn sewed at the flaming poppies of her embroidery during the mornings, rode with Betty or Mary Singleton over the commons in the afternoons when the snow was not too deep, and in the evenings played cribbage with her mother or sang to the sound of her spinet in the fire-lighted parlour. Now and then news of the outside strife came over the mountains or out of the far reaches to the north and east; but the red wave of war spent itself before it reached the inland town. Washington was jealously watching

the British in New York, and in the south the fate of Charleston was rapidly being sealed, while now and then a soldier, coming home on furlough or sick leave, brought tidings of the partisan warfare, ceaselessly waged through the Carolinas and Georgia by Sumter and Marion and other bold leaders; but Hillsboro', upon the Eno, dozed through the long winter months.

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"This war is worse than tiresome; it's perfectly hateful," Janet Cameron said, twisting her yellow curls about her fingers and pouting disconsolately; "it is making old maids of us whether the men wish it or not. Here I am, eighteen this coming Whitsuntide, and not a genuine suitor have I had."

"Fie, Janet! Where is Billy Bryce?" asked Joscelyn, in whose room the two sat. "Billy has loved you from your pinafore days."

"That baby?" with a scornful accent.

"You did not use to think him such a baby."

"Perchance not; for he is a whole six months older than I, and that is a mighty age!"

"What manner of lover do you want now?"

"Oh, a grown man—a big strong fellow with a will of his own, who never asks for a kiss, but just takes it."

"You little minx! what know you of kissing menfolk?"

"Nothing—that is just it—"

"Janet!"

"—for when Billy blushes like a peony, and politely and decorously begs to kiss my cheek, I am in duty bound to look shocked, and blush back, and say no; nothing else would satisfy my dignity, though I could pinch him for it! That is why I call him a baby," stoutly maintained the girl, her lips curling, and her voice full of mockery.

"He does not wish to forget his manners."

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"To say always 'if you please' for tender favours is not the manners for a lover."

"Since you are so wise, tell me what sort of manners a lover should have."

"Oh, you know without the telling! He ought to be headstrong and masterful and a—bold robber when it comes to claiming favours from his lady; and full of mock repentance after the theft."

"Well, when Billy comes from the war, I shall give him a hint as to how to mend his behaviour."

"An you did, I should hate you. Why, he does not even know how to write to a girl. Here is a letter from him in which he sends his duty to his mother—did you ever hear of such idiocy? A love-letter with a message like that! A love letter should be private and confidential, filled full of such sweetness that one pair of eyes alone should read it; and he sends his duty to his mother, forsooth! Why, that prying old creature would insist upon reading every line written here if I gave her the message—and Heaven knows she might, and be none the wiser, for all of sentiment there is in it is this last sentence, 'I would send you my love, an I dared; but I would not for the world make you angry or hurt your maidenly modesty.' Now that is a love-letter for you!"

"Well, it is not deliriously passionate," admitted Joscelyn.

"It is deliriously idiotic. I'd just have him understand that my modesty is not quite so thin-skinned as he imagines."

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Joscelyn fell back in her chair, shrieking with laughter, while the yellow-headed tempest before the glass shook her curls, and emphasized her words with a scouting gesture, "Why, Joscelyn, if I were that boy's great-grandmother, he could not treat me with more deferential respect."

"I think it is beautiful in him."

"Beautiful! Well, I think it is *imbecile*! Hurt my maidenly modesty, indeed!—one would think my modesty were a sore toe to be stubbed or trod upon. Stop laughing, Joscelyn Cheshire; you are as stupid as Billy." And when Joscelyn answered with another silvery peal, Janet, in high indignation, flung out of the room and down the steps, her heels clattering as she went; and the next morning her maid carried the offending letter to Mistress Bryce with a sweetly worded note, saying Billy had no doubt made a mistake in the address of his missive. And Billy swore his first oath when he heard of it.

Nor was Janet the only one who came to confessional in Joscelyn's room. It was there that Betty found the only outlet for her secret joy. In spite of the war and its sad consequences, the year had been such a happy one—the sweetest year she had ever known; for it had been full of dreams and fancies, of thrills and hopes. Even the self-reproach, with which she sometimes tormented herself because of her mother, had in it a touch of sweetness since it was linked with her love. The whole world was as a new place; the winter snows held an unthought of revelation of beauty, and each flower that budded to the spring sunshine was a fresh creation bearing on its petals an unspelled message of love. She would not write to Eustace, for that would be undutiful to her mother; but Joscelyn's letters were filled with tender messages for her, with now and then a little wafered note that burnt her fingers with a delicious sense of forbidden fruit, and which she read and re-

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read in the privacy of her white-curtained room, trembling and flushing at the story they told,—the future they painted.

But as the spring advanced, a shade of sadness crept over her happiness, a film like the impalpable dust that gathers on a fine picture hanging always in the light. Eustace had ceased to write. Two months had gone by, and no word had come from him. A strange, new fear was tugging at Betty's heart.

"Naught of evil has befallen him, or Mary would know; and you said they had no tidings?" she asked wistfully one evening, as she leaned against Joscelyn's window and watched the pale-petalled stars blossom through the purple gloaming.

"I rode all the way to the Singletons' yesterday afternoon on purpose to ask, and they know nothing."

"And his mother feels no uneasiness?"

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"None. She says Lord Cornwallis would immediately inform her if he should be killed."

Betty heaved a deep sigh; and then that latent fear came out, "I suppose he finds the ladies of the city so beautiful and entertaining that he has forgotten his—his friends here."

"S-o! that is what makes you so long of face these days? Well, I do not believe a word of it. Eustace is no jilt. You will find that you at least are remembered, and that his silence is from reasonable cause."

"His cousin, Ellen Singleton, is such a beautiful woman—you remember Richard told us of her in his letter about the Philadelphia fête. Like Mary, he said, only more lovely. They must of necessity be much together, for she, too, is in New York."

"And betrothed to Major Grant, you jealous child."

"But that need really make no difference so far as Eustace's admiration goes. Besides, there must be others as lovely."

"Of course; but you are pretty, too, when your face is not long and your eyes red with weeping."

Betty went home comforted; and that night, when her mother made some sharp remark about the Singleton household, she plucked up courage to say it was scarcely fair to judge the whole family adversely because of the father's shortcomings. And then, scared at her own temerity, she ran away to her room, and cried out her trouble to that insensate and inanimate confessor of wronged or sorrowing womanhood,—her pillow.

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A week later, Joscelyn, coming from the Singletons', tied a red ribbon on her shutter as a sign that she had news; and Betty, hastening over, soon learned of Clinton's long and tempestuous voyage from New York to Charleston, whither he went to subdue that city. Eustace had been badly hurt in the storm that wrecked so many of the transports, and had been laid up in the hospital at Tybee Bay for weeks, while Clinton went on to Charleston to begin the siege.

So the British had come again to the south to teach the people of that section their duty to their king, and the quiet that had reigned at Hillsboro' was broken by the coming and going of recruiting parties, and by the vacillating reports of victory or failure from the beleaguered city.

But it was not until August that the climax came. Then Gates, smarting with the defeat at Camden, halted the remnant of his flying army, scarcely a thousand strong, at the town on the Eno, to rest and sum up the full measure of the disaster that had befallen him. During the short time that he remained, the town was in a ferment. The way to the camp was thronged with sympathizers; kitchen chimneys smoked with the extra cooking, and in every house was a banquet of the best that could be had. Only in the Cheshire house was there no preparation, nor yet upon the door was there the blue and buff cockade that marked the others. There were not lacking those who called official attention to this fact, and so many comments and criticisms crept about among the soldiers that a couple of young officers, bent on a frolic and thinking to teach this wilful Joscelyn a needed lesson, stopped upon her porch and sent word that they would speak with her. And presently she came down to them, dressed fit to dance in a queen's minuet in silver brocade over a scarlet petticoat, the round whiteness of her neck and arms shining through foamy lace, a red rose in her powdered hair, and a black patch near the corner of her mouth giving a saucy emphasis to her lips. As she stepped out of the door, the young fellows who had been lounging on the porch rail instantly sprang up and uncovered at the sight of so much beauty and dignity. They had thought to find a country maid, mayhap a woman past her youth; and instead, this glowing creature stood before them.

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"What is your pleasure, gentlemen?" she asked; but the stiff courtesy of her question was belied by the laugh in her eyes.

They exchanged uneasy glances, and one took a step toward the porch exit; but the other, who was to be spokesman, summing up resolution, stammered and answered:—

"We found no cockade of the nation's colours on your door, and did but stop to ask the reason."

"Your general sent you?"

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"No, no; we were but passing, and came of our own accord."

"Oh, a friendly visit, with no official significance? I pray you present each other," and she courtesied at each name. "And now let us go into the parlour and see what can be done for your entertainment."

And in the parlour she gave them the best chairs, and set herself with much graciousness of manner to entertain them, plying them with delicate compliments, singing her Tory ballads with such laughing abandon that in the same spirit of fun they applauded her, thinking not a moment of the songs, but of the singer. Later on she brewed them a cup of tea, telling them it was a love potion to win a fair one's favour; and although they began by protesting vehemently, yet they ended by drinking it, for she first put her own lips to the cups, and then dared them with her eyes. After that they would scarcely have hesitated at hemlock. At the end of an hour she dismissed them, each with a red rose in his coat.

"The colour suits your handsome eyes," she said softly to one, with a ravishing glance, as she fastened the flower in place. And to the other she murmured, with downcast lids and a sweet similitude of faltering, "This is for memory," as though for them both this hour was to be a tryst for thought and tender recollection, and the rose its symbol.

Neither of them had the wish nor the will to tear the flower away; and so with a certain crestfallen exhilaration they took their leave, riding slowly down the street, swearing each other to silence. But the story got the rounds within the hour, for Mistress Strudwick, seeing them enter the house and fearing some danger or annoyance to Joscelyn, had followed quickly, and sat in the next room with the door ajar during the entire interview. And she was not slow in publishing it abroad, so that the young officers were twitted unmercifully at mess and headquarters; even General Gates, when told of it, forgot for a moment the humiliation of his late defeat, and laughed long and loud. Under the banter one of the men threw his rose away; but the other held stoutly to his, meeting the raillery with the assertion that it was a lady's favour and not a king's colour that he wore.

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"It was not kindly of you to take such mean advantage of them, Joscelyn, seeing how irresistible you can make yourself, but it was just the cleverest thing you ever did," Janet cried, squeezing Joscelyn's waist. "Mistress Strudwick has near had apoplexy with laughter, and even Mistress Bryce—who hates you like a double dose of senna and was the first to call attention to your undecorated door—could not keep a straight face to hear how neatly you outwitted the young coxcombs. But really, my dear, you deserve no great credit for it; for in that gown you are fit to melt harder hearts than Providence gave our gallant young soldiers."

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"I do not flatter myself their hearts were touched; it was only their vanity that melted like wax in the flame of my flattery."

"Well, they deserved what they got,—trying to teach you behaviour, indeed!"

The next day the army, refreshed and rested, took up its line of march, passing directly in front of the Cheshire homestead. On the veranda, in her brocade and brilliant petticoat and framed by the riotous rose vine, Joscelyn sat and made pretence to be very busy with her flax wheel; but from under her drooping lids she saw the whole procession.

Beside his company rode a young lieutenant, his eager gaze ahead of him until he reached the undecorated house; then his hat came off, and lifting his lapel on which hung a faded red rose, he cried up to the girl in the balcony:—

"This is for memory!"

And Joscelyn laughed and fluttered her white handkerchief with what might or might not be the suggestion of a kiss. And he, forgetful of military decorum, turned in his saddle and kept his gaze upon her until the troop passed beyond the corner.

"Do you know, Joscelyn," cried Janet, rushing up the steps, her eyes shining and her yellow curls flying in the wind, "that was Lieutenant Wyley from Halifax—and he is brother to Frederick—and Frederick danced with no one but me last night (you don't know what you missed in not going to the cotillion!)—and he has been at my house the livelong morning."

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"S-o! You have then a new beau to your string?"

"Oh, yes! and he is strong and masterful, and talks love beautifully, and he does not say 'by your leave' like Billy, but is just what a lover should be."

"Janet, Janet!" cried Joscelyn, reprovingly; but the laughing girl tossed her yellow curls coquettishly, the exhilaration of a new conquest upon her; then suddenly hid her face on Joscelyn's shoulder:—

"Joscelyn, dearest, did you ever feel a lover's lips against your cheek for just one little moment?"

And Joscelyn went suddenly as red as she, remembering that November day when Richard came home.

JOSCELYN'S PERIL.

"First time he kissed me, he but
only kissed
The fingers of this hand wherewith
I write;
And, ever since, it grew more
clean and white,
Slow to world greetings, quick
with its 'O list!'
When the angels speak."

—MRS. BROWNING.

Thus the months had come and gone, and come again, until three years had passed since Richard's company marched away that winter day to join their comrades at Valley Forge. Three years of warfare, and victory yet faltered to remain with either standard, but wavered like a fickle woman from side to side. And Joscelyn held to her allegiance, wearing her scarlet bodice in open rejoicing at news of an English victory, and decking herself in sombre mourning when tidings of the American triumph at King's Mountain thrilled the country with an awakened hope. And in these habiliments she walked the streets, or sat upon her balcony, that none might be in doubt as to her feelings.

"Joscelyn Cheshire be as good as a war barometer," said Mistress Strudwick; "one has but to look at her to know whether to rejoice or to sorrow."

Vainly her mother argued with the girl, showing the danger she ran of drawing upon them both the enmity of the community. [Pg 205]

"We are but two lone women, and what could we do against a mob? You go too far in this matter, my daughter. An you alter not your behaviour, we shall be driven from the town, or else have our house burned over our heads. Only yesterday Sally Ruffin was telling your Aunt Clevering of some threats she had heard concerning you."

But Joscelyn shrugged her shoulders. "They will not harm you, mother; you are too much of their party creed. And as for me, I fear them not; they will do naught more serious than to tear down my royal picture-gallery from the porch, and break a few more window-panes."

And truly martial events were crowding so fast upon each other that the community had no time to resent the caprices of a girl. All interest was now centred in the south. Greene had superseded Gates; Cowpens had been fought and Tarleton sent in rout to Cornwallis, who started in hot haste to chastise the victors and recover his captured troopers. But Morgan threw his battalion over the Catawba; Greene took entire command, and then begun that marvellous retreat, every step of which was as an American victory. The pursuit was close behind. The whole country held its breath at the spectacle of two great armies vying against each other on almost parallel roads for the far-off fords of the Dan. Twenty-five, even thirty miles a day they tramped it over roads deep in mire that held them back as with a fiendish purpose. It was a spectacle to stir one's blood, no matter on which side the sympathies,—this Titanic struggle, this heroic race. The rear-guard of the pursued, and the van of the pursuer, often bivouacked in sight of each other's watch-fires. Petty strife was at an end; the great principles of war alone held sway, and it were hard to say in which camp there was more of resolute endeavour. [Pg 206]

The flooding rains detained Cornwallis at the Catawba, and yet again at the Yadkin, giving the Americans somewhat of advantage, so that Joscelyn Cheshire said in her mocking way, that the "weather was supplying the deficiencies of nature and making a great general out of Nathaniel Greene."

"Rather is God aiding a righteous cause," Aunt Clevering retorted.

Hillsboro' was in a fever of excitement during those days, knowing that somewhere beyond the mountains that skirted her on the west, these armies, like mighty leviathans, were writhing on their courses. The town lay almost in the path of both, and each day was full of rumours and contradictions. The country people, both Whigs and Tories, crowded in to learn more speedily the news. The streets were thronged each day with anxious men and women, asking each other questions and exchanging surmises. And every day Joscelyn rode her horse from the bridge that spanned the Eno on the western edge of the town to the clump of boulders called the "Hen and Chickens," which cropped out of a common that lay high to the eastward. And always she wore in her hat, with jaunty grace, a cockade of scarlet ribbon; and Tories bowed low as she passed, and Whigs scowled and shrugged their shoulders, marvelling at her daring. [Pg 207]

But at last the news came that the race was done; Greene had crossed the Dan to the safety of Virginia, and a union with the reënforcements hastily spared him from the northern division, and Cornwallis was baffled. Disappointed, he turned southward once more, and one February day the vanguard rode haughtily into Hillsboro', and ere night the sloping commons, flanking the town to the east and northeast, were white with a tent city swarming with the soldiers of the king.

In the general excitement Betty ran across the street and, twisting Joscelyn's apron-string the

while, asked, "Do you think Eus—that is, that you will have any friends on Cornwallis's staff?"

"I am quite sure you will have one," answered Joscelyn, with a laughing accent on the second pronoun. "Mary is already in the parlour wanting me to go with her and hunt him; what message shall I carry that my welcome may be sure?"

"Oh, none!" hastily answered Betty. Then added, with a shy laugh, "Of course I shall have to see him and thank him for his efforts in Richard's behalf." [Pg 208]

"Methinks you will have to go through that disagreeable ordeal. When I see him I shall casually mention that I have asked you to be here at five this afternoon."

But Eustace did not wait so long to hear Betty's thanks. He laid no stress on his services save as a pretext to see her, and when his duties at headquarters were over he boldly presented himself at Mistress Clevering's door; and Betty, blushing and palpitating, came down to meet him; and seeing her thus, his heart surrendered itself anew. But her mother, following close in her wake, gave him no chance to say the things he longed.

"We deeply appreciate your efforts for my son, Master Singleton," she said, sitting stiffly on the extreme edge of her chair, as if ready to rise on the instant.

"I have called this morning, madam, not to receive your thanks, for I do not deserve them; but to say how sorry I was not to do more for him and for you, and also to express my sincere regrets over his death."

"Your regrets are misplaced; my son still lives."

He stood up, amazed; and the lady also rose as though to bid him adieu. "Still alive? You astound me, madam; I saw his death record."

"He escaped instead of dying."

"It sounds like a miracle; but I am glad of it." He turned to Betty, but her mother had not resumed her seat, and so he, too, stood in an awkward hesitation. But the girl put out her hands with an impulsive gesture, and he gathered them both close in his. [Pg 209]

"It was good of you—so good to go to that horrible ship!"

"I would have gone to the ends of the world to serve you. Your simplest wish would be my law, and I would count myself well paid with a smile or one gentle word." He had forgotten her mother standing there like a sphinx; and Betty's face went suddenly pale, and then as suddenly reddened and dimpled, for he bent down and kissed each of her hands lingeringly.

"Master Singleton!" The harsh tones recalled him to himself. He turned to the older woman. "My daughter joins with me in expressing our gratitude. Since your time must be short, we will no longer detain you."

Of course he went, and Betty fled to Joscelyn for comfort, for her mother had said sternly:—

"We have done our duty, let the matter end here; and let me say furthermore, that to be grateful one need not blush and dimple while an arch-enemy of the country kisses one's hand."

And Betty had almost choked with confusion, and while crossing the street had looked at her hands with a sense of tenderness that was new.

"Oh, Joscelyn, I am so miserable and yet so happy!" And Joscelyn told her all the sweet things Eustace had said about her at the camp, and sent her home as red and tremulous as a rose in the sun. [Pg 210]

There was joy among the Loyalists over the coming of the Redcoats, and consternation among those whose relatives were with Greene. Cornwallis established his headquarters at the inn on King Street, using the one-roomed building opposite as his office. Here he set up the royal standard, and issued a proclamation to the Tories of the vicinity to come to his aid. He looked for a general up-rising in his favour, but he looked in vain. The country folk rode into town to learn the latest news, or brought their wives and daughters to the commander's levees; but most of them rode home again, unconvinced of the permanency of his lordship's dominion.

Joscelyn watched them wrathfully as they took their departures, and strove by the courtesy of her own manner to atone for their lack of loyalty. Her house became at once the social rendezvous of the newcomers, and few hours of the day went by without a summons upon her knocker. Often she was in the cavalcade that drew rein before the general's office after a ride of inspection through the camp; for with the army were several Loyalist ladies who had fled from their homes to their husbands when Greene began his retreat, and with the Tory women of the neighbourhood they made a goodly company. Mistress Clevering was filled with rage when, from behind her closed shutters, she saw the scarlet-coated officers alight at Joscelyn's door. Mary Singleton was somewhat chary of her favours, fearing the public resentment when the British should have withdrawn. But Joscelyn took heed of no such consideration, and was withal so charming and so cordial that Lord Cornwallis, recalling his friendship for her father, unbent from his customary reserve, and exhibited in her parlour a courtesy of bearing which was of a piece with the humanity he showed upon his campaigns. Among the younger officers the "Royalist Rose," as they styled her, became a favourite ere the second sun went down upon their coming; so there was ever an escort waiting at her door when the staff rode forth to the outlying camp. [Pg 211]

And oftener than any one else this escort was Captain Barry, of the second legion. It was he who stood at the door of the general's headquarters when, on that first day, Mary and Joscelyn arrived to make inquiry for Eustace, and snatching off his hat he came out to receive them, for they made a very charming picture as they advanced modestly toward the entrance, piloted by an orderly. The first smile from Joscelyn's blue eyes did the whole thing for him. He surrendered at once, without one effort at self-defence; and when he and Eustace reached her veranda, having escorted the girls home, there was not so much as one poor little pennant left fluttering over the ramparts of his heart. From that hour his comrades, when he was wanted, knew in whose parlour to seek him, and he never failed to let Joscelyn know when there was a pleasure ride or a tour of inspection planned for the day.

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It was for an excursion of this sort that Joscelyn dressed herself with exceeding care one afternoon and, with an officer at either bridle-rein, went out to see the army parade for the commander's inspection. The conversation as they paced along was all of the movements of a suspected spy from Greene's host beyond the Dan.

"We cannot locate the fellow; but certain it is, the doings of our army are reported accurately to the insurrectionists. Yesterday a letter was discovered in a hollow stump on the mountain side, left there, of course, by preconcerted arrangement to be called for. The stump is being secretly watched, but as yet no results have been obtained. This is all well known and talked about, Mistress Joscelyn, and you, being one of us—" Barry's smile said the rest.

"Is it a townsman who has written these reports, think you?" asked the girl, going over in her mind the people who might be implicated, with a quick inward throb for some of her friends.

"I judge not, for there are references to the writer's journey back from the Dan. Evidently it is a follower of Greene who knows this country well. He is exceedingly artful, but his capture is necessarily certain, with all the precautions we have taken."

"And what would be his fate, if caught?"

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"A spy is shot—or mayhap his lordship will hang him on the hill yonder, where they tell me Governor Tryon swung up the traitorous Regulators in years gone by. 'Twould be but another chapter in the red history of this your Tyburn Hill."

The young soldier laughed at his own allusion, but Joscelyn shuddered; for the first time she seemed to fully realize the grim actualities of war. Her companions chatted on gayly, and finally she forced herself to join in the conversation; but somehow they could not get away from the subject of those surreptitious reports and their author.

The wide upland common had been turned into a parade ground, and was full of soldiers marching and counter-marching. The general and his staff were already afield and saluted the newcomers as they passed on to the "Hen and Chickens," about which a party of spectators, chiefly ladies, were already congregated. Here the officers left Joscelyn with some friends, and rode away to their different commands. It was some time before the parade began, and in the interim there was much laughing and talking around the rough boulders. And here again Joscelyn heard of the wary scout.

"Who are those men there to the left?" she asked, by way of changing the conversation, and pointed to five or six men in citizen's dress who were grouped apart by themselves. Some were mounted; some on foot.

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"Oh, those are the Tory recruits who came in this morning. They have not yet been assigned to their respective commands, and so are viewing the scene merely as spectators; to-morrow they will be put in the ranks. The tall one on the right was with Pyle when Lee surprised and routed him. I understand he says information of Pyle's movements was sent to Lee by some one within the town here—probably a Continental spy."

There was more to tell; but the parade was beginning and the conversation ended, much to Joscelyn's relief. It somehow unstrung her nerves to think of another hanging up on Regulators' Hill. From her saddle she watched the scarlet companies advance, wheel, pass directly in front of the general's staff, and finally take position in the long line which was thus formed across the field. It was a stirring sight, and her fingers relaxed their hold on the rein as she leaned forward to watch every movement. Suddenly a band stationed near the group struck up a lively air. The unexpected blare of the trumpets startled Joscelyn's horse; an upward toss of his head shook the rein from her inert hand, and then with the panic of fear upon him he wheeled about and dashed off at a mad pace. The women in the group behind screamed; for the rein was swinging about the animal's feet, and the girl in the saddle was utterly at his mercy. From the first plunge Joscelyn realized the peril of her position; for a few seconds she clung terror stricken to the horn of her saddle; then she shook her foot free from the stirrup and eased her knee from the pommel, for an awful memory had come to her. A hundred yards ahead, directly in the path of the frantic horse, was a deep ditch, ragged with rocks; there the race must end in death to the horse—and mayhap to the rider. Her one chance was to leap from the saddle. It took but a second for this to flash through her mind; but even as she turned slightly in her saddle, a voice rang out sternly above the braying horns and the thundering hoof beats:—

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"Do not jump, on your life!"

Her fingers closed over the saddle horn in spasmodic obedience; and then she saw that the horse

was running directly toward the group of men in civilian dress on the little knoll, and that one of them had sprung forward and waited with uplifted arm the coming of the runaway. Even through her terror there came a dim realization of the death he was courting; but in another instant the collision came. The man was knocked aside by the flying horse, but his hand had caught the rein, and half dragged, half running, he kept his place at the animal's head. Then his other hand, fumbling uncertainly, found the bit, and he was master of the brute. Almost upon the brink of the yawning ditch the horse ceased its plunges and stood still, quivering through its whole body. The other men who had followed now crowded about with exclamations and inquiries.

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"Will you dismount?" asked her rescuer.

And then as she stretched out her shaking hands for his assistance, she saw his face for the first time. He was deathly pale, and his hat, which some one had picked up, was drawn low over his brow; but the voice and the eyes were Richard Clevering's. She would have spoken his name but for a quick glance of warning from under his hat brim. Then a new sense of terror swept over her; for, by some swift and subtle instinct, it came to her that Richard was the hunted spy of whom she had that day heard so much.

CHAPTER XXI.

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TRAPPED.

"You trust a woman who
puts forth
Her blossoms thick as
summer's?"

—MRS. BROWNING.

Not a word was spoken as he lifted her to the ground, and when they turned to walk back to her companions, it was the tall Loyalist who led her horse. She listened as in a daze to the talk going on around her, answering briefly the questions of the solicitous group. But the presence behind her was the one she felt, and yet she dared not look backward until they were close upon the company at the boulders; then, lest she seem ungrateful, and also with a definite purpose to warn him, she turned to speak to him. He was not among those who followed in the rear. She breathed more freely, scarcely able to restrain a cry of relief, for surely he had escaped; and presently she said to the tall man:—

"Methinks I thanked not your companion sufficiently for the service he did me. Will you bear him a message of gratitude?"

"I will speak with him as soon as the parade is over."

It was best to end the matter thus, than to see him again face to face; for she felt she dared not trust her shaken nerves in another interview, lest the warning she wished to convey turn into a betrayal. He must have realized his danger, and gone at once.

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Her escape was the subject of much rejoicing; even Lord Cornwallis, to whom an account of the accident was carried, sent his aide with congratulations, and Barry came back at a lope, looking like a ghost with anxiety. She heard not a half of what was said, her mind was in such a tumult of perplexity as to her rightful course and of anxiety for her Clevering friends. Naturally her companions attributed her silence and abstraction to her recent fright, and gave no thought to it. She was infinitely relieved when the parade was over, and they were once more on the homeward road. Her horse had recovered from his panic, and was moving along quietly.

"If he had to run away, why could he not have given me the chance to save you?" Barry said, with much chagrin, longing to show his devotion and gain some hold upon her thoughts.

"Perhaps he knew that with you at hand he would have no chance," she answered with a forced smile, dragging her mind from the dread that haunted it.

It was mid-winter; the remnants of a snowstorm still bleached in the sheltered places among the fields, and whiter yet on the sloping sides of the mountains behind which the sun had just set, leaving them framed and fringed with yellow fire. The river at their base was hidden in its banks and could only be guessed at; but the nestling town had caught a reflection of radiance from the sunset banners flying above it, and stood out like some sculptured bas-relief against the downward-dropping hills. Like the fine colours in an opal, the lights came and went, brightened and faded. Joscelyn's pulse had begun to beat normally under the spell of the ethereal beauty of the scene, when suddenly far up the mountain road her keen eyes descried a moving figure. The trees were nude of foliage, and the snow lying along the winding road was as a reflector to show up the dark moving object, which for a moment was seen and then lost to sight behind a clump of cedars. Was it a cow, or a man on horseback? A strange curiosity took hold of the girl; she thought she alone saw it, and all sorts of speculations were in her mind when her reverie was rudely broken by the officer on her right.

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"Linsey," he said in a whisper which Joscelyn's straining ears caught, at the same time lifting his finger toward the mountain; "Linsey, an I mistake not, yonder goes our spy; gallop at once to Colonel Tarleton, and bid him warn his scouts."

The aide touched his cap and was gone ere Joscelyn's startled breath came back.

"Why, you are again all of a tremble," Barry said, leaning over to touch her hand, a world of anxiety in his eyes. [Pg 220]

"I—I suppose it was the sound of that other horse's hoofs," she said, angry with herself for her weakness. "You see I am not a soldier and used, like you, to face death every day."

"Thank Heaven you are not," he answered, holding one rein of her bridle with the joy of a strong man protecting beautiful womanhood. And thus near to her he whispered many tender things in her ear,—his tense, young voice vibrant with the awakened passion of his heart; and the girl's pulses stirred with a strange, sweet quiver.

So it was they rode home. There in her own room she went over this whole dread matter, with a womanish longing in her heart to talk to some one,—to ask advice; but her mother was too timid, and a glance at Aunt Clevering's dark house decided her that it would be cruel to arouse anxiety there. Then Barry's manly face and frank eyes came before her, and in a sudden fit of foolish hysteria, she put her face in her hands and cried. If she could only go to Barry! But that would have one of two effects,—it would either put him on Richard's trail, or else make him false to his cause by winning him to shield the fugitive. She could not risk either alternative. And what was true of Barry applied with equal force to Eustace. She would not, if she could, tempt him, through his love for Betty, to do anything that would dishonour him among his fellows. And besides, he would not be here to-night with the company she had invited, for he had said he was going with the relief guard to one of the outposts. No, there was no one to counsel her; she must think and act for herself. At first two torturing questions tore her judgment in twain. The Spartans gave up their nearest and dearest for the cause of their country, and should she withhold the identity of this man who had no claim of blood upon her, and who carried perhaps to the king's enemies information that would defeat the cause? Should she say, "I know him"; or should she keep her peace and let him go his way? Then she realized that her knowledge was too meagre to be of any benefit; his name was all she could surrender, and that were nothing to his pursuers, who knew more than she of his work and movements. And besides, there were Betty and Aunt Clevering and Richard himself. No, she could not play the part of the Spartan; she wanted to be of use to her cause, but she was keeping back no treasonable knowledge. And with this comforting assurance, she put the matter aside and dressed herself for the evening, lacing the brocade over the brilliant petticoat with a smile to think what Barry would say. Not for a moment did she believe Richard would be caught; he had the start, and he knew the country much better than his pursuers, and would outstrip them in the race. [Pg 221]

It was a brilliant company that assembled in her drawing-room that night,—handsome women and splendid officers, and even Cornwallis himself,—all come to enjoy her hospitality and to inquire concerning her accident of the afternoon. [Pg 222]

"Asked you the name of this brave fellow who saved you?" inquired the commander-in-chief, with a smile. "Methinks he should be promoted for so signal a service to his Majesty's loyal subject."

"Nay, your lordship, I asked it not," Joscelyn answered steadily.

"'Twas the fright made her seem so ungrateful," put in her mother.

"And small wonder, Mistress Cheshire, for she was in dire straits. But 'tis of no consequence; the name can be easily ascertained, and I shall myself make the inquiries. Half my staff are mad with jealousy at his good fortune, and methinks I myself envy him a bit the sweet thanks he will receive. Now if Mistress Joscelyn's nerves be not too much shaken, we will have some music."

So the spinet was opened; and the merriment began and went on far into the night, while the Cleverings over the way fretted behind their closed doors in bitter resentment of Joscelyn's conduct.

"Why, she is actually playing at cards!" cried Betty, who was secretly on the lookout, for the opposite shutters had not been closed nor the curtains drawn, so the inmates of the lighted room were in plain view. "Lord Cornwallis is her partner, but that Captain Barry sits beside her and whispers behind her cards. Mary Singleton is at the other table, but I do not see—" her voice trailed off into silence, for she never mentioned Eustace's name to her mother. [Pg 223]

Meanwhile Joscelyn was all unconscious and unmindful of this surveillance and, recovering from her fright, her spirits rose hourly until she had quite regained her accustomed manner. It was not until something after ten o'clock that an interruption befell their pleasure-taking. Then suddenly there came the sound of galloping hoofs down the stony street; many voices shouted and responded, a pistol shot rang out, and from somewhere under the darkness a guttural drum growled out its warning. Every man in the room was on his feet in an instant, and hands snatched for hats and weapons.

"It is a night surprise!" cried a dozen voices; but even at that moment the door was thrown open, and an orderly, bowing low, cried out to the general that the noise was being made by his own men, who had turned a spy back from the mountains, and chased him into the town where he was as a rat in a trap, and must immediately be taken. Every heart in the room ceased its mad beating

with relief at this news—every heart but one. Joscelyn could feel hers pounding against her ribs, and involuntarily she moved to the window and looked at the dark house opposite, shuddering as she thought of the grief so soon to enter there.

In ten minutes the hue and cry had swept down the street, and only faint echoes came back upon the wind. The whole town was astir, and Joscelyn's guests lingered a few minutes on the veranda, questioning those who came and went. [Pg 224]

"Yes, he went straight down this street, riding like one possessed," said one man to Barry.

"He has quit his horse, and the guard have captured it," cried out a messenger a moment later.

"Ah, well; then will they soon have the man too, even though they search every house, barn, and hen-coop in the town; Colonel Tarleton does nothing by halves," laughed his lordship. "Come, Mistress Cheshire, let us back to our game; ere we end it, the fellow will be in the toils."

They went slowly back into the house, Joscelyn striving to steady her nerves by long, deep breaths; but as they drew their chairs again about the tables, there came from the story above a crash as of breaking chinaware. Everybody looked up expectant, and Mistress Cheshire rose.

"I will go," cried Joscelyn, glad to escape, and pushing her mother gently back into her chair. "'Tis no doubt that troublesome cat again; he broke one of my flower jars last week." She tripped upstairs, calling back to his lordship to deal and have the hands ready for she would be absent only a moment.

In the upper hall all was silence and semi-darkness. She went first to her own room, pausing just long enough to press her hands hard upon her temples before passing from it to her mother's, calling the cat the while very softly. A fire of logs burned in her mother's fireplace, so that she wondered at the cold breath of air that smote her as she entered; then she started,—a back window was open and the pot of plants which had stood upon the ledge lay shattered on the floor. A swift annoyance flashed upon her at the maid's neglect, so that she went forward and closed the sash with a spirited promptness. Picking up a bit of the broken shard, and facing about from the window in search of the cat, she suddenly became aware of a man's figure in the shadowy corner opposite. Instinctively she opened her mouth for a nervous cry, but with an imperative gesture for silence, he stepped forward, and even in the dim light she knew it was Richard Clevering. The scream died upon her lips, and for a moment the objects in the room spun before her. [Pg 225]

"You—*you*?" and even in whispering her voice was strained and shaken.

"Yes; it was this or death—they had run me to the wall."

"But the house is full of British soldiers—Lord Cornwallis and his whole staff—"

"So much the better; the place will be above suspicion."

"Mistress Joscelyn, Mistress Joscelyn!" cried a dozen voices from below, while chairs were being pushed about, and some one struck a few notes on the spinet. [Pg 226]

"And I myself, sir, am a true Loyalist and cannot harbour—"

There was a footstep on the stair. "Mistress Joscelyn, we be coming up to help you catch the cat!" cried Barry's voice.

Richard sprang toward her, "My God, Joscelyn! you will not give me up like that?"

But the steps were halfway up the stair, and she was already turning the knob of the door, her face like marble in the leaping firelight.



**“MY GOD, JOSCELYN, YOU WILL NOT
GIVE ME UP LIKE THAT!”**

CHAPTER XXII.

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“SEARCH MY LADY’S WARDROBE.”

“Sweetheart? not she whose voice was
music-sweet,
Whose face loaned language to
melodious prayer;
Sweetheart I called her.—When did
she repeat
Sweet to one hope or heart to one
despair?”

—CAWEIN.

To the man crouching behind the door which Joscelyn had left open, the minute it took her to traverse the hall and gain the head of the stairs at the far end, seemed a lifetime. Even in his dire peril the thought of a bygone day came back to him—“loyal, though a Loyalist,” he had said of her, and had believed it. What a sweetheart to have coddled in one’s thoughts and dreamed of, waking and sleeping,—this girl who would in cold blood hand him over to death because of a fancied duty! Escape by the way he came was impossible; he could only wait here and sell his life at the highest price. Ay, there should be left in this room a memory that would exile her from it forever; the blood that had beat for her and which she had betrayed, should redden her floor and stain the dainty things she loved.

His sword had been thrown away when he quitted his horse, since it cumbered his flight; but his pistols and dirk were still upon him, and he made ready for their use. Then through the crevice of the hinge, he beheld Joscelyn as she faced about in the brighter light at the head of the stairs, and the weapon well-nigh slipped from his hand as he saw her hold up the bit of shard she still carried, and say, with a smile, to those below:—

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“’Tis not worth while your coming. What need to waste time on the senseless offender when the offence is beyond repair? My very last flowering almond is a hopeless wreck, and I had nursed it with such care!” She ended with a sigh and a pretty pout, and went slowly down the stair out of Richard’s sight; but the voices from below reached him distinctly, so that he heard the officers’ condolences and her laughing replies. Great drops of perspiration broke out upon his brow as the joyous truth dawned fully upon him.

She did not intend to betray his presence in the house to the scarlet-coated bloodhounds who would tear him limb from limb!

How could he ever have mistrusted her, this one woman whom he had loved with the passion of youth and of manhood? He sank to a sitting posture upon the floor, propping himself against the wall, for he was desperately weary with the long, hard chase, and this relief was as the opening of Paradise before his aching eyes. His limbs relaxed; but his ears were strained to catch every sound that came up the stairway. The game of cards had been renewed, and the merriment was at its height, when twenty minutes later there was again a commotion in the street and a loud summons at the door.

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"May it please your lordship," said Tarleton's voice, "the fellow hath give us the slip and is in hiding with some of his sympathizers. We wish a permit to search the houses in this neighbourhood, for hereabouts he must be, since he was seen last at yonder corner."

There arose a perfect Babel of voices, out of which Richard could make nothing clearly; but he knew the permit was given, for in a few minutes Tarleton opened the street-door, and ordered his men to begin the search at the house on the lower corner, and proceed thence up the street, missing no dwelling. Every other street and alley in the town had been sentinelled, so he assured Cornwallis.

The soldiers at the door dispersed, and a breathless silence filled the house. Richard dared not move lest his stiff joints pop, or his boots creak and betray him. He knew flight was impossible; for there was a stamping of horses in the rear court, proving that the house was surrounded. It were wiser to wait and face the fate that came to him, than go out to meet it on the way.

The minutes that followed seemed interminable. He felt that his doom was sealed, and then there came upon him an overmastering desire to hear Joscelyn's voice once more. Why did she not come to him on some feigned pretext or other? Surely she must know how he suffered! Death were not so hard to meet, if he could but first hold her in his arms and hear her say some tender word.

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Then the noise in the street grew louder, and he knew that the search was drawing near. His nerves were strained to tautness, when presently he heard the party stop in the street below, and a voice downstairs cried out gayly:—

"They be going to call upon your kinsfolk, the Cleverings, Mistress Joscelyn. Let us out to the balcony and see the fun."

In the confusion of scraping chairs and opening doors, Richard got to his feet. The cold and weariness in his limbs were forgotten in anxiety for his mother. A-tiptoe he crossed the room in the shadow of the furniture and gained Joscelyn's front window,—that window out of which he had seen her lean in her scarlet bodice the day he marched away so long ago. It was an easy thing to hide himself in the folds of the heavy curtains which had been drawn for the night; and thus concealed, to watch, through a crescent slit in the blind, the scene below, for the veranda was open with no roof to intervene.

It was full moon, and the figures in the street, twenty men-at-arms, were plainly visible. Three of these passed silently to the rear of his mother's house, while the others drew up in line before the door. Then the leader smote the panels until they rang like a drum. Twice was the summons repeated ere a voice from an upper window demanded what might be the matter.

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"Matter enough that I knock," replied the man, so insolently that Richard's blood took fire, for every word could be distinctly heard from his coign of vantage.

"Nay, we be but two lone women in this house, and we open not but to the proper authorities."

"Well, and we be the authorities," answered the man less rudely, for there was that in Mistress Clevering's voice that brought him to his senses. "We have here an order from the commander-in-chief to search this house for a rebel spy. Open the door and read the writ for yourself."

The window above was closed, and presently the click of the lock was heard, and then the door opened partially and Mistress Clevering, candle in hand, stood before them. Betty cowered behind like a frightened child.

"No one is here save my daughter and myself; to search the house were wasted time." And in her heart, Joscelyn thanked Heaven she could speak thus truly; but the soldier said brusquely:—

"We have judged the matter differently; lead the way, and see to it that you open every door. We will put up with no deception."

As they passed into the house, Joscelyn's voice from over the way cried out shrilly, "Neglect not to search the closet by the attic chimney; 'tis just of a size to hold a man, and perchance contains him whom you seek."

Mistress Clevering turned angrily toward the door as though she would answer, but the soldiers urged her on, and so it was Betty who called back:—

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"That is neighbourly! Tell all you know about your best friends, Mistress Ingrate; we have naught to fear."

At this Joscelyn laughed loudly, but to Richard the laugh was more hysterical than mirthful, like one under a great nervous strain. He felt his hands involuntarily groping for his pistols, as the opposite light flashed from window to window and he knew his mother was being ordered about

by those insolent Redcoats. The candle lingered longest in the attic; but at last it descended, and soon the disappointed soldiers stood in the street empty handed. Tarleton was furious and swore a great oath, but the soldiers protested they had overlooked no nook or corner where a man might conceal himself.

"'Tis a bootless errand, sir; unless, indeed, the man be in this house," said Tarleton, riding up to Joscelyn's door. "What say you, shall we search here also?"

Upstairs Richard's heart stood still, while down below Joscelyn's head swam. Then her laugh rippled out mockingly.

"Truly, your lordship, that is a reflection upon you and those of your gallant officers who have done me the honour to spend the evening under my roof! I pray you, gentlemen all, turn your pockets wrong side out that Colonel Tarleton may be sure you have not hidden his spy."

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"I jest not, mistress," answered Tarleton, who owed her a grudge in that she had manifested much personal dislike to himself. "What says your lordship?"

Cornwallis started to reply, and then hesitated; whereupon Joscelyn broke in haughtily:—

"An your lordship doubts my loyalty, pray let the search proceed—the doors are open."

"Ay, search; and fail not to look in my Lady Ingrate's wardrobe; 'tis just of a size to hold a man," came with a scornful laugh from over the way; for Betty was still at her door, and the street was not so wide but that the opposite voices reached her clearly.

"Of course," said Joscelyn, with the same haughty dignity; "search the wardrobe by all means; here are the keys." She threw the bunch at Tarleton's feet, calling to her mother to do the same, and then walked into the hall, her head up and her eyes aglow. Richard could not see her, and so ground his teeth in an impotent rage that she would thus tamely yield him up. But the next moment he guessed her purpose, realizing this was her surest way to avert suspicion, and he blessed her under his breath. If they found him, they should never know that she had for a moment connived at his concealment.

Tarleton stooped to pick up the keys, but Cornwallis interposed.

"Nay, sir; to search this house would be an affront to so loyal a subject as Mistress Joscelyn. Besides, the idea that the miscreant is hiding here is preposterous. He must have seen us through the windows, and to enter would have been to rush into the lion's jaws. Spies as a rule are wise men; not the fools of an army. Search the stable if you will, leave a guard in the alley; but enter not the house. And now, Mistress Cheshire, I see the ladies are going; we will also withdraw after returning thanks to you and your daughter for your charming hospitality."

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Richard clutched at the window-frame to steady himself as he realized the present peril had passed. What a glorious girl Joscelyn was, for all her Toryism and scoffing!

Joscelyn stood at the door, courtesying to her departing guests,—the picture of dainty, decorous hospitality. As Tarleton lifted his hat sullenly, she looked him straight in the eyes, and said graciously:—

"I will leave this door unbolted, that your sentry may come in and warm himself by the fire in the rear room as the night grows chilly."

To doubt her after that were impossible; and he excused his former brusqueness by saying a soldier's duty was oftentimes most displeasing to himself. She accepted the apology with a smile, and stood in the door until they all, even Barry, who was always tardy over his leave-taking, had gotten to horse; and then with a final good night, she shut them out. She did not stop in the hall, but went straight on to the stair, saying to her mother as she ran up:—

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"Will you see to the lights down here, mother? I will go up and look after your fire."

This was a reversal of the usual order of things, but her mother was too used to her caprices to take any notice. In the room above, Richard had already replenished the fire, and was waiting for her on the rug with eager, outstretched arms.

"Joscelyn!" he cried; but she silenced him with a gesture.

"Quick—off with your boots—mother must not know; there will be further inquiry to-morrow, and for very anxiety she could not keep the secret. Now, come." In the hall she leaned over the banister to ask her mother to leave something on the table for the sentry to eat; and when the old lady was gone back to the pantry, Joscelyn unlocked the door of the shed-like attic at the rear of the hall, and giving Richard the lighted candle she held, she pushed him in. "There are plenty of blankets on the shelves at the far end—make your bed on a pile of carpet that is behind the cedar chest."

"But, Joscelyn—"

"H-u-s-h, not so loud. As you know, the attic has no windows, so your candle cannot be seen outside. There is mother—I will come back if I can."

She was gone, and he knew that she had locked the door from without. Along with his sense of relief came an exquisite joy that he was her prisoner, that it was she who must minister to him,—

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she to whom he owed his life. It was some minutes before he remembered her injunction and set to work to make himself comfortable. He left the candle on the floor beside his boots and, wrapping himself in the blankets, found a cosy resting-place behind the big cedar chest. What thoughts and visions crowded his mind as he lay there under the spider-hung rafters that dropped almost to his head! Five days before he had quitted his command—impelled by a thirsty desire to see Joscelyn's face—to undertake the dangerous mission of his chief, and ascertain Cornwallis's actual strength. Unable to learn anything definite by hearsay, and catching idle rumours of Joscelyn's popularity among the English officers, the daring design had come to him to play the part of a Loyalist seeking enlistment in the British army, trusting to what little disguise he could add to his own altered looks to shield him. Following out this plan, and gaining at the parade all the knowledge necessary, he had stolen from the field, and would have effected his escape had he but taken the longer bridle-path around the mountain, rather than the shorter one directly over it. Joscelyn's accident had delayed him somewhat, and trusting to his citizen's dress, and the preoccupation of the whole force at the parade, he had thought to be beyond sight or pursuit ere the review was over. That his reckoning failed, has been already shown. Tarleton's henchmen, set on by Linsey, had headed him off and driven him back into the town. Passed through the peril, and strong man that he was, he yet shuddered as he thought how near to death he had been when he leaped from his horse at the corner yonder, and with a fierce cut sent the animal as a decoy down the dark adjacent street, while he plunged into the shadowy alley. At Mistress Cheshire's rear gate he had recognized his bearings, and entering without hesitation, he had crossed the yard, and by means of a grape-trellis climbed to the roof of the rear porch. To open the window was not difficult, but in entering he had upset that flower jar and betrayed his presence. He had heard the talk and laughter as he climbed up, and guessed who Joscelyn's guests were; but he trusted to her mother to hide him. How infinitely sweeter it was to know that, instead, it was her own hand that had saved him.

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For nearly an hour he lay thus, stretched at full length upon the restful pallet. Then, all at once, although he was conscious of no sound, he felt that she had come. Rising hastily, he met her as she slipped through the half-opened door. She shaded her eyes for a moment to concentrate the light, the candle was so dim; then crossing over to the chest, she placed on it a platter of food and a pitcher of milk.

"You must be half famished;" and although but a whisper, her voice was studiously polite. "I have brought you ample supply; for it may be late ere you get your breakfast in the morning, seeing I have to smuggle it to you."

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Never had he seen her so beautiful. The shining brocade set off every curve of her figure; under the lace of her bodice her bosom rose and fell with suppressed excitement, and her eyes were full of the starry lights he knew so well. And yet there was something about her that held in check the fire that leaped through his pulses. For the first time as he gazed thus upon her, he realized fully the menace he had brought upon her.

"Joscelyn, I should never have come here."

"It was, as you said, your only chance."

"I should not have taken that chance; rather I should have died beside my horse before bringing this danger to you."

"Hush! they will not harm me." Her head went up with a little triumphant fling as she said this; for she was thinking of Barry, and how, if detection came, he would surely save her.

"You do not know the penalty one pays for harbouring a spy; I will go this very night and free you from this menace."

"No, no," was the hasty answer. "We should both be undone—Tarleton's men will watch the house all night. To-morrow night perchance, or the night after; but not to-night. You are safe here for the present, for his lordship's orders will be obeyed."

He came close to her, so close that he saw the pallor of her face, and the perfume of her dress rose with a sweet intoxication to his nostrils. "Joscelyn, is it for love of me that you have done this thing?"

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"No."

"For what, then?"

"For sake of our old comradeship and for Betty. Besides, you saved my life this afternoon—a return of favours leaves no burden of obligation on either of us."

"Nay; you risk more for me than I did for you."

She shrugged her shoulders. "The accounts balance." Then glancing about solicitously, she added, "I would I could make you more comfortable, but our first care must be to avert suspicion. Good night."

She was moving to the door, but he caught her wrists just below the hanging lace of her sleeve; and holding her thus, he told her in a few graphic sentences all his thoughts as he had rested under the rafters behind the chest—the reason and the history of his scouting venture, the mental trysts he had held with her so often. All the intensity of his strong nature went into that

appeal; it seemed as if a heart of ice must have melted in it; and for a moment her head did droop and her hands tremble, then she shrugged her gleaming shoulders again, saying:—

“It had certainly been more soldier-like to have come for love of your cause, rather than for sake of a girl’s eyes.”

“For sake of both did I come.”

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“A spy—”

But she got no further; something in her tone stung him to the quick. “You need not speak so disparagingly. A spy’s work may not be pleasant, but it is absolutely necessary. Without the information he sends his general, false steps might be taken and hundreds of lives needlessly sacrificed. A spy has a humane as well as a dangerous mission.”

“’Tis well you think so highly of your calling. Good night again.”

“Joscelyn, do not leave me thus; this day we have each looked into the eyes of death—let us at least part as friends.”

She turned back, her face dimpling with a smile that was like a gleam of sunshine, “Good night, Richard, and a safe awakening.”

Then she was gone; and he threw himself down to sleep the sleep of utter weariness.

Joscelyn sat on the rug before her almost burned-out fire, trying to disengage the attic key from the big bunch her mother habitually wore at her belt, and thinking rapidly of the events of the day. She knew that the end had not been reached, but she was determined to brave it out; there was nothing else to do,—there had been nothing else from the first. And she must stand alone. Fresh inquiry would be instituted to-morrow, and her mother’s veracity could not stand the strain to which it might be put if she knew all. Neither could the secret be shared with Aunt Clevering, for her mother-heart might betray its anxiety, and so would another family be involved. She must bear the burden herself; must evade, pretend, even *lie*, if need be, to keep the knowledge from any one else. The man had fled to her for sanctuary; which were worse, she asked herself bitterly, to soil her lips with an untruth, or her hands with a betrayal, a breach of trust and of hospitality? From Betty and Aunt Clevering she could expect no mercy of neglect, because of that hasty speech about the attic closet. It had been made thoughtlessly, to establish her own footing more securely by a great show of loyalty; but would, she knew, act as a two-edged sword, cutting away part of her safety. To-morrow she would not dare leave the house all day lest something terrible transpire in her absence; she must feign some pretext for staying indoors—perchance a headache from the effects of her fright.

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And then having planned her course fully and carefully, woman-like she began to cry tempestuously at the position in which she found herself; blaming with equally unreasoning impatience the band, Richard, and her horse for her predicament. If she were only a Whig, doing this thing for her country, or else if she were but in love with Richard, how beautiful, how romantic, it would all be! But—but—

And even after she was in bed, she went on sobbing softly to herself.

CHAPTER XXIII.

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IN TARLETON’S TOILS.

“The brave man is not he who feels no fear,
For that were stupid and irrational;
But he whose noble soul its fear
subdues,
And bravely dares the danger nature
shrinks from.”

—JOANNA BAILLIE.

After a troubled sleep that brought little rest, Joscelyn opened her eyes on what she supposed would be a day of danger,—certainly a day of small deceptions. But in one way fortune favoured her; the morning was cold and raw, with now and then a flurry of snow, so she would have no occasion to leave the house, and need worry over no excuse for biding at home. But the early hours were full of quavers and starts; the least quick noise sent her blood racing through its channels. Her first real fright came when the guard in the back yard discovered bits of fresh mud upon the trellis of the porch.

“’Tis nothing,” she said, with a touch of asperity when he showed it to her; “the maid threw a broken flower pot from the upper window, and this earth was no doubt spilled out as it fell—there are the remnants of the jar by the fence.”

The guard bowed and withdrew; but there was a supercilious smile on his face, which filled her with nervous apprehension. In a hasty resentment that the man perhaps guessed at her duplicity, she could have struck him.

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And yet a second time was she thrown into consternation, when her mother discovered the loss of the attic key from her bunch.

"Oh, it is not lost! I broke the string yesterday night, and doubtless I missed this one when I strung them up again. It is in my room this minute, I dare swear. Is there aught you need in the attic now?"

"Nay, I but feared the key was lost."

"Well, let me first finish this round of knitting and I will hunt it. Mother," she went on, after a pause, during which she picked up her stitches industriously, "had you not better go over and make my peace with Aunt Clevering? She was most angry with me last night."

"And good cause she had, Joscelyn; methinks I never heard any one make so rude a speech. What put you to it?"

"In faith, mother, I cannot tell. It was cruel and unwarranted, and you may tell her I say so, and that I am bitterly sorry. Make any excuse you please, only make it at once, for you know Aunt Clevering's displeasure grows like a mushroom when left to itself."

She had small hope that her aunt would be appeased, but she wanted her mother out of the way that she might carry her prisoner something to eat. It was close upon one o'clock, and not a morsel had she been able to give him. She drew the bolt of the front door after her mother, who was nothing loath to go upon this peace errand; and hurrying to the dining room, made hasty preparation to relieve Richard's needs. She was not used to doing things upon the sly, and her heart was in hot rebellion that she must stoop to such a thing among her own servants. There were hard lines of determination about her mouth, but the hands that sliced the meat and buttered the bread shook a little. Even when on the stair, she turned back, startled by a sound in the hall; but it was only the cat romping with her little ones, and so once more she went on. Softly she unlocked the attic door, and stepped in. The room was in partial twilight, having no window, but she saw Richard coming to meet her.

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"No May-day sunshine was ever half so welcome," he whispered, taking her hand in both of his. "Tell me how matters have gone this morning. I have fretted myself into a fever lest I bring some annoyance upon you. And now you must promise me that if discovery comes, you will forswear all knowledge of my being here. I shall claim that the key was in the lock, and after I was inside, some one came and closed the door. Thus will you be free from blame."

"And think you any one will believe so flimsy a story? Nay, the only safety for either of us lies in your not being discovered. I understand that Tarleton is furious over his failure, and has already ordered a new search. I rely upon my own loyalty, and upon his lordship's order for our exemption. But if the worst comes, we must be prepared."

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"I am." He touched his pistols and drew himself up until his magnificent figure was at perfect pose. "I shall die, Joscelyn, but like a soldier; not on the gallows."

She shuddered, and her eyes lost their coldness; the woman in her was touched by his cool courage in face of such a danger.

"Yes," she said, with a hesitating gentleness, "but I pray it come not to that. By being prepared I meant we must leave no tell-tale traces here such as these,"—she pointed to the platter and pitcher. "I shall take these away; your dinner I have brought in this bit of paper—leave no crumbs when you have finished. This jug contains water and this bottle wine; stand them in that corner with those empty bottles, and they will attract no attention."

"It shall be done, Joscelyn."

"Watch under the door; if there is an order given to search the house, I will try and warn you by a note."

"Joscelyn, desperate as I was, I should have sought some other shelter, had I not thought your loyalty would put your house beyond the shadow of suspicion. Will you not say you forgive me before you go? We may never meet again."

"There is nothing to forgive; you but put it in my power to requite an obligation," she said very gently.

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"That is scarce a pardon. I would have you speak as though the forgiveness came from your heart, rather than from your head. Between us there can be no question of a debt; my love makes me your bondservant, and as such my service is yours rightfully."

"Your name is not known," she broke in hastily, "but I understand it is suspected that my rescuer of yesterday is the escaped spy."

"That accounts for Tarleton's doubt of you. Joscelyn, I will not stay here a moment longer and expose you thus. My mother's house has already been searched—"

"And will be again ere nightfall. What you propose is folly,—worse than folly; it is death to you

and betrayal to me. There are double guards everywhere, for Colonel Tarleton is as much policeman as soldier. You could not leave this house and cross the street alive!"

"Then what must I do?"

"Why, in sooth, since you cannot go, you must remain." There was just a touch in her voice and smile which made him think of their early days of quarrel and make-up. It was such an intoxicating change from her manner of a moment ago that he lost his head and caught her for a moment in his strong arms. But she broke away, and gathering up the pitcher and platter prepared to go.

"There is just one thing," she said hesitatingly, "your despatches—?" He tapped his forehead. Again she paused irresolutely, the colour coming and going in her delicate cheeks. "I am saving you, not your despatches; do you understand?" [Pg 247]

"You do not mean—?"

"Yes, I mean that Greene must learn nothing from you if you escape."

But his hand was over her mouth before she could go on. "You cannot make a request so unworthy of you and of me! Think you for one instant that I would buy my safety with the information that may save my comrades? No, no, Joscelyn dear; you did not ask such a thing of me, for you would not dishonour me, although you say you do not love me. I make no such bargain with you; either I carry my despatches to my general, or I walk out of your house this minute, and let the first ball that can hit me put an end to my life."

His hand was on the door, but she dragged him back; her face like ashes. "No, no, Richard; I will not ask it—indeed, I will not!"

Silently he kissed the hand upon his sleeve, and as they stood thus looking into each other's eyes, there came a sharp rapping at the door below. She went deathly pale for a moment, then waving him back, she stepped out into the hallway.

"It is only mother," she said, after listening a moment; "she has been over to Aunt Clevering's to make my peace for last night's rudeness. What I said was in desperation; I know not what evil genius put me to it." [Pg 248]

He took her hand reverently for a moment. "'Twas no evil genius, but a brave spirit of self-sacrifice."

She locked the door, and went down the stair singing. At the foot she called out, "Coming, mother!" and ran to hide the dishes she carried, then back to the door and undid it, still singing her merry ditty.

"Why should you bolt the door, my daughter, seeing I was to be gone only a few minutes?"

"I was upstairs straightening things a bit, and the town is so full of confusion that I felt a trifle nervous."

"But here was the sentinel to protect you."

"Oh, I quite forgot him!" she smiled with deprecating politeness at the sentinel, who had paused at the steps and was watching her with an ugly frown upon his sullen face. He touched his hat with a shrug, and moved on upon his beat.

But a new terror came to the girl; evidently the man suspected her, and of course his suspicion would be carried to Tarleton. Why had she lingered upstairs talking with Richard? Everything she did worked the wrong way. Would the day never end? She strove to make amends for her false step by singing Tory songs as she went about the house, and by sending the guard a dainty luncheon. It was perhaps an hour before she remembered to ask her mother the result of her interview with Aunt Clevering. [Pg 249]

"Oh, but I had a sad scene of it! Joscelyn, your tongue will be the ruin of us; I know it, I know it! Neighbour after neighbour has taken offence at your outspoken Toryism; and now Ann Clevering, dear to me as a sister, says she hopes you will never darken her door again. And if you go not, why, neither can I; and so I am cut off from my best friend by your unneighbourly caprice! And think what we have been to each other!" Here sobs choked the unhappy woman's utterance, and she could only turn her eyes reproachfully upon her daughter.

Joscelyn was deeply moved, as she always was, to wound her mother; but she put the best face possible on it in order to cheer the disconsolate old lady.

"There, mother dear, 'tis not worth crying over. Not go to see Aunt Clevering because I cannot go? Why, that is nonsense. Of course you will go, and she will come here just the same. I will keep out of her way until she forgives me—for she will forgive me, never you fear. I am not surprised at her anger, but it will all come out right in the end; so don't cry, little mother, you break my heart with your tears."

But in her heart was serious question whether she would ever again be received upon friendly footing in the house over the way, which had been to her as a second home. She would never tell that she had made that speech to turn inquiry from her own house, where Richard was hiding; and she now doubted much if he would escape to tell the story himself. She sang no more that [Pg 250]

afternoon, but sat silently over her knitting. The weather did not tend to mend her spirits; for the drizzle of the morning had turned into a steady downpour, and the wind moaned about the gables and up the throat of the wide chimney like a lost spirit hopelessly seeking its reincarnation. Her mother was still brooding over the break with the Cleverings, and now and then lifting her kerchief to her face in a gesture that was a reproach to Joscelyn, who strove not to see it; and yet she watched for it persistently out of the tail of her eye. She grew more miserable each moment; and so hailed with delight the entrance of Barry and a fellow-officer, who had come to bask in the warmth of her smile.

"Your visit is a charity, gentlemen," she said gayly, as she gave them chairs; "this weather serves one's spirits and one's ruffles alike, in that it leaves them both limp and frowsy."

"Your mother seems more out of sorts than you."

"Yes; mother is doing penance for my sin of last night, Captain Barry."

"Your sin? Why, methinks you never committed anything more heinous than a misdemeanour. Come, make me your confessor, and I promise you complete and immediate absolution."

"'Tis not your absolution, but Mistress Clevering's that I need; she has excommunicated me for telling of the attic closet," she spoke with an air of mock penitence that set her visitors off in a roar.

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But Mistress Cheshire stopped them with a fresh burst of tears, "'Tis no matter for jesting with me, sirs. I am a subject of King George and wish him well, but he cannot take the place of Ann Clevering in my heart!"

"True, true," said Joscelyn, still with her air of pretence, only now it was playful; "she loves her king, but, you see, she lives not neighbours with him; and so, forsooth, she cannot compare her loaves with his on a baking day, nor ask the loan of his pie pans, nor offer her mixing bowl in return. Ah, gentlemen, there is a homely charm in proximity of which the poets wot not!"

And so the talk ran on for a few minutes, and the visitors agreed they had never found Mistress Joscelyn so charming or so witty. Then they fell to talking of the military news, of Tarleton's determination to ferret out the hidden spy, and of the burning of the Reverend Hugh McAden's library by that division of the army stationed at Red House, a few miles distant. To all of the first she listened with an outward show of indifference, but with an inward quaking. The other news interested her less; but for obvious reasons was also less embarrassing.

"I pray you, Captain Barry, why should the soldiers burn the reverend gentleman's library? 'Twas innocent enough, and he himself has been dead this twelvemonth."

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"Well, they found from his books he was a Presbyterian; and being that, he must perforce be also a rebel."

"And they consigned his books to the same fate they believed him to be enjoying—the fire? Pray you, sir, were the flames *blue*? Being the very essence of Presbyterianism, they should have been blue, you know."

"Capital! I shall tell his lordship of your excellent joke."

She hated herself for her little pleasantry, for she had sincerely admired the minister, whom she had known since childhood; but she must keep up a show of gayety, that these young men might carry a good report of her to headquarters.

With the growing cloudiness the day was visibly shortened. Joscelyn, glancing now and then at the window, watched the going of the light with secret satisfaction. Already the opposite houses were becoming indistinct, and as the shadows grew apace, just in proportion did her spirits rise; the danger was drifting away, and the man upstairs now had a chance for life. But just as she was congratulating herself that the ordeal was past, there came a trampling of hoofs at the door; and Tarleton's voice, giving some order, made her realize that the crisis had perchance but just now come. For one awful moment the power of motion forsook her; then with a masterly effort at calmness, she said:—

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"Mother, entertain the gentlemen while I see why Samuel does not bring the lights."

She managed to walk with becoming leisure to the parlour door; but once outside she almost flew up the stairs. Down on her knees before the fire in her room, she wrote rapidly upon a scrap of paper:—

"Be ready. Tarleton has come. They shall search *my room first*; that must be your refuge. When I open the attic door, stand thou close behind it; I will direct attention to the chest and shelves at the far end—then, if any, is your chance."

She rose to her feet; the hall below was full of manly voices, above which her mother called, "Joscelyn, Joscelyn, come at once, here are more visitors."

"Yes, mother." Then with a crash she dropped the key basket, which she had snatched up, just in front of the attic door, and while gathering up the spilled keys with one hand, she slipped the note under the door with the other, and instantly felt it grasped and drawn away to the other side. She knew Richard could read it by means of his tinder-box. Then flinging the keys into the basket, she ran downstairs. As she entered the parlour, and saw before the hearth the short,

square figure of Tarleton, the tremor passed out of her limbs. All day she had been starting and quaking; now in the presence of the real danger, she was calm and collected. She greeted the colonel with a fair show of hospitality, and fell immediately to talking of those ill-fated volumes of McAden. It was anything to gain time that the last lingering daylight might go. Tarleton let her run on for a few minutes, even let Barry repeat her poor little joke about the blue flames; then he cleared his throat and began:—

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“Mistress Joscelyn, it behooves—”

But she interrupted him. “Why, dear me, did not mother give you a cup of tea? You must have one at once to kill that cold in your throat. What a terrible ride you must have had to-day in this storm. A soldier’s life is indeed a hard one, and nobly does he win the fame which illumines his name! Two lumps, or three? Ah, you have a sweet tooth.”

But she could not stave him off after he had drained his cup. She wanted to tell him how they came by the tea since the tax had stopped its sale, but he cut her short.

“Another time, Mistress Joscelyn, I shall be glad to listen to your story, which is no doubt an interesting one. But just now I have graver matters to discuss with you.”

“Grave matters with me?” she repeated, with feigned surprise and a ripple of laughter that was like the tinkle of a silver bell. “That is an unusual kind of discussion for a soldier to hold with a woman. Are you going to ask my advice about your morning coffee or your next campaign? But I pray you, sir, proceed; I am all attention.”

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There was not a glimmer of daylight through the unshuttered window-sash. She felt the sinews in her hands and arms grow like iron, and her pulses beat with the perfection of rhythm. So does a great crisis sometimes steady a woman’s nerves.

The short colonel rocked himself from toe to heel a moment as he looked at her half in unbelief, half in admiration of her coolness. Truly she was superb. Then he said:—

“The spy of yesterday has not been taken.”

“So these gentlemen were telling me,” smiling over at Barry.

“But it is most important to the safety of our command and the good of our cause that he be found—dead or alive.”

She merely nodded, never taking her steady gaze from his face.

“That he could have gotten out of the town is impossible. My men ran him in from the west side, over the bridge of the Eno. The sentinels were at their posts upon the north, east, and south sides of the village; he could not have passed them without detection.”

Again he paused; and finding that something was expected of her she said, in a most matter-of-fact way, “I see.”

“Then the only conclusion to come to is, that he is still in the town. Well, now, every house in this vicinity, where he was last seen, has been thoroughly searched save yours. I have talked with Lord Cornwallis—”

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She stood up suddenly, with a dignity of movement that well-nigh disconcerted him. “I pray you, Colonel Tarleton, cut your explanation short.”

“Then in short, madam, I have here an order from his lordship to examine your house and premises.”

She stretched out her hand for the paper silently, imperiously.

Barry had risen and come to her side.

“You will see,” Tarleton made haste to add, “that your own loyalty is not impugned. The paper states explicitly that it is not believed you have any knowledge of the man’s whereabouts; but it is thought possible he may have concealed himself secretly in your house. I have spoken to his lordship, and—”

“It were unnecessary to say so—I know full well, without the telling, who has so poisoned his lordship’s mind against me. Every man, woman, and child in this community knows that I have never wavered in my allegiance to the king. I have been a target for Whig criticism, almost of persecution, because of that allegiance—and this is my reward!” she struck the paper sharply with her other hand. “Well, sir, I recognize the source!” she turned her eyes scornfully upon the man on the rug.

Tarleton ground his teeth, but his private orders were to use the lady with all gentleness, and he knew how to obey—under provocation. He began some sullen disclaimer, but she broke in imperiously:—

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“Enough, sir; such paltry excuses weary me. Let us to business.”

“You interpose no objection?”

“None, sir. In this house the mandates of his majesty’s representatives are obeyed. Let me see; is

it your wish to begin upstairs? Very well. Perhaps these gentlemen will be kind enough to watch the stair; the flight below the landing comes down just at this door."

"May I not come with you?" pleaded Barry, who was loath to have her out of his sight with the brusque colonel, lest some rude word be spoken to her,—a discourtesy he would have been hot to revenge even upon his superior officer.

Tarleton nodded assent, but Joscelyn laughingly interposed, "Nay, good captain, your boots show the effects of the weather; it would grieve my mother's housewifely heart to know they were leaving their impress upon her carpets. Wait here and guard the stair—are we three not enough to capture one?" She pointed as she spoke from herself and Tarleton to his orderly who had been standing at attention just inside the door. "I take it, Colonel Tarleton, that we shall be sufficient?" He bowed; and thrusting her knitting into her pocket, she moved out of the room, followed by the officer and his orderly. "Mother, look you to the comfort of these other guests; I shall return presently."

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There was a threat in Barry's eyes as they met Tarleton's in a fleeting glance; but he merely saluted in silence as that officer passed out. One day Tarleton should pay for this needless offence to a girl so unprotected and so beautiful. It was most evident from her bearing to see that she had nothing to fear from an investigation. Yes, one day he should pay for it.

In the hall Joscelyn stopped to pick up the key-basket and the one candle in its tall brass candlestick. Thus did she leave the lower hall unlighted save from the open parlour door, for she wanted no radiance thrown upward to the story above. She talked unceasingly as they mounted the steps, raising her voice presumably to over-top the noise of the heavy boots, but really as a warning to the man hiding above. Not for a moment did she allow herself to consider the probably fatal outcome of this search. She needed every faculty of mind and body to meet the moments as they came. In the narrow upper entry she paused and lifted her candle; a few chairs, a spinning-wheel, and a table formed its only furniture. A cat could scarcely have hidden there.

"Proceed, I pray you," said Tarleton, after one glance around.

Three doors opened on this passage; the nearest of these, which was the one toward the front, she threw open. The white bed, the frilled curtains, the dainty toilet articles upon the dresser, were heralds enough to proclaim the occupant. Even Tarleton hesitated.

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"To search here were useless."

"Nay, sir; I insist that you carry out your instructions."

She placed the candle on the table and waited haughtily while the inspection was made, nodding toward the wardrobe, "Open the doors and see if Betty Clevering knew whereof she spoke."

"There is no one here," said Tarleton, following her instructions, his big hand looking awkward enough among the pretty feminine garments. She picked up the light and opened the connecting door to her mother's room. Tarleton went with her first, however, nodding to the orderly to return by way of the passage, that none might creep by that means from the rear.

"An excellent precaution; I had not thought of it," said Joscelyn, detecting the unspoken order.

There was a bright fire on her mother's hearth, and she stood as though warming herself while the two men made their investigation. Her manner was so perfectly frank and unconcerned that Tarleton began to curse himself for a fool. At headquarters the other officers had opposed his plan, laughing at the evidence his guards had gathered—a little mud on a trellis in rainy weather, a locked door when a woman was left alone in her house in such troublous times! Truly, the short colonel was over-credulous to attach any significance to such trifles. Only by the most masterly persuasion had he wrung that order from Cornwallis. He did not relish the laugh he knew his failure would provoke, so he lingered somewhat in this room, examining the closet, and making the orderly climb up and look to see that no one was hidden on top of the tall tester. Finally, he announced himself satisfied.

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Joscelyn's hands were like ice as she took up the light and led the way into the hall, and there stopped in front of the attic door.

"This is the only other apartment on this floor. It is the attic over the pantry and kitchen, and extends to the right the length of this hall and of mother's room, which you have just quitted. There is no other entrance but this door in the corner, as you will see."

"Take the light, orderly," said Tarleton, as she turned over the keys in the basket. This was not what she wanted, but she yielded it without a demurrer.

The key turned easily, and opening the door she stepped in, still keeping her hand upon the knob, which action brought her within a foot and a half of the wall behind. Still holding the door and facing about she pointed down the long, narrow apartment.

"Will you make yourselves at home, gentlemen?"

Tarleton's spirits rose; the shadows and heaped-up odds and ends in the far side of the room seemed a covert for noble game. There was no furniture at this end against which the door opened, only bags of seed and dried peppers and herbs hanging along the wall in rear of the girlish figure. His quick glance took this in; then motioning his orderly to follow, he went down

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the length of the apartment, the light glinting on the pistols in each man's hand. On the shelves were carefully folded piles of bedclothes, and behind the chest a smooth roll of carpet powdered with dust. The hair trunks and the broken bureau gave up no guest, nor did the deep shelves reveal anything suspicious.

All this while a hand had been plucking at Joscelyn's skirt, but Tarleton had kept his side face to her so that any action was impossible. Now, however, he called sharply to his aide to place the candle on the floor and help him search the big chest, remarking in a low tone that "Caskets like that sometimes held living jewels."

Joscelyn laughed. "Then will it be in the shape of mice, of which capture I wish you joy. A rat hunt is noble sport for one of his Majesty's gallant officers!"

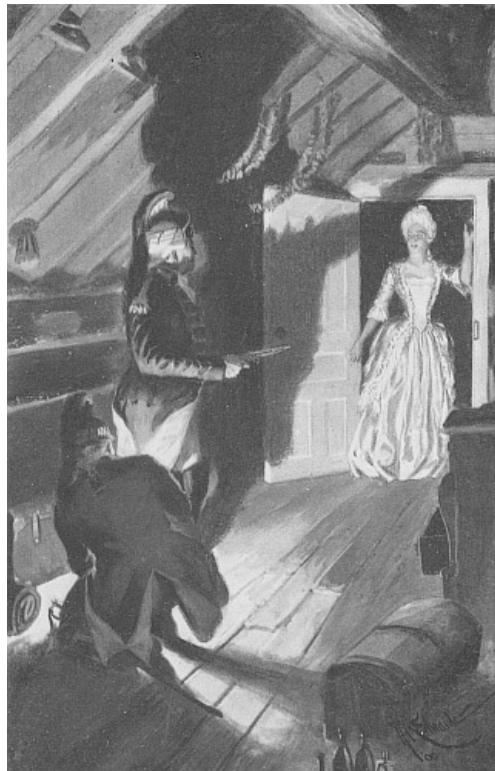
As she intended it should, this speech but spurred Tarleton on to greater exertions. They would soon be coming back to the door, and she dared not risk the closing of it with what she knew was behind. But there was not much time left for action; for, obeying orders, the aide placed the candle on the floor, and opening the lid of the chest began overhauling the contents; his chief's back was also toward the door. Now, if at all, was the moment for action. Joscelyn's hand had been on the yarn ball in her pocket; quick as a flash it was out and the thread snapped apart. The floor slanted straight from her to the candle. With a deft cast she sent the noiseless ball down the room; it struck the narrow-bottomed candlestick, which careened and rocked over—and the next moment the room was in total darkness.

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A cry broke from her and Tarleton simultaneously; his was an oath upon the orderly, hers a nervous relaxation of the strain that had been upon her.

"Colonel Tarleton, come quickly and guard the door whilst I find another light!" she cried, suppressing the dry sob in her throat; for in the momentary darkness she had felt a warm body crush past her on its way to the hall.

But at that instant the orderly found his tinder-box.



**"I HAVE SEEN NO HUMAN BEING
SAVE OUR PARTY OF THREE."**

CHAPTER XXIV.

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THWARTED.

"They laugh who win."

—SHAKESPEARE.

As the candle kindled under the orderly's hand Tarleton, who had sprung toward the door, found himself within a foot of Joscelyn, whom the light revealed standing in the open doorway

with a hand lifted to either lintel.

"You find me guarding the postern, colonel," she said, smiling, although her very knees were shaking under her with nervous trepidation.

"How came the light to go out?" he demanded angrily.

"Surely, that is a matter for you to explain. I was far from it at this end of the room," she answered coldly. Then presently added, "Perchance 'twas struck by some of the things you threw out of the chest; or did the orderly jar the plank on which it sat? You see the floor is quite a loose one. No fourth person could have put it out without my perceiving him, *and I swear to you I have seen no human being save our party of three* since coming up the stair."

This was the truth; for she had not once glanced behind the door, and she spoke the words slowly, looking the while straight into Tarleton's eyes. He turned his searching gaze from her, but evidently he was not satisfied, for as she moved from the door he snatched the light, and stepping beyond her, and so on up the hall, looked into both of the rooms he had recently examined. As he paused at her door with the candle lifted above his head, the scene swam before Joscelyn's eyes. If he entered, there would be discovery—murder. It seemed an interminable minute that he stood thus; then the blood came again to her heart with a rush, for he turned back from the threshold, and, calling for another light to leave in the hall, he went again to finish his examination of the attic. Not a box was left unemptied, not a barrel or chest or shelf that was not searched as for some tiny object that might secrete itself in a crack. Joscelyn, leaning against the open door, watched the process in silence save for occasional mocking suggestions or biting comments, to most of which he gave no heed. A lurking suspicion of her, added to his fear of ridicule at headquarters, made him doubly cautious, so that he never turned his back upon her for an instant, and now and then he paused and looked at her keenly and curiously; but she only gave him a satirical laugh for his pains. But the search could not go on forever, and at last he had to announce that he had finished. Joscelyn longed to leave the door open, that Richard might creep back; but they had found it locked, and so, fearful of arousing suspicion, she made no objection when Tarleton, having looked behind the door, locked it and handed her the key. On every step of the stair her spirits rose, so that her cheeks were brilliant and her eyes shining, when at the bottom Barry met them, and relieving her of her basket and candle, placed them on the table. There was no need to ask the result of the search; Tarleton's face was a proclamation of defeat. After a few pleasantries with Barry as to how he had guarded the steps, and how many ghostly spies he had seen gliding up or down, Joscelyn opened the dining room door, saying, with a return to her stately courtesies:—

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"And now, Colonel Tarleton, we will finish our task, and it please you. His lordship will be consumed with impatience for your return."

Sullenly Tarleton followed her lead; he intercepted the glance she shot at Barry, and felt himself a butt for her ridicule, and his temper was not improved thereby. The ransacked pantries and closets gave up nothing that was alive except a mouse, at whose wild antics, Joscelyn and Barry laughed like a couple of children, their mouths full of cake which the girl had cut from the loaf on the shelf. It was such a relief to laugh, to do anything to ease the tense strain upon her nerves and composure. It was raining without, and she sat with Barry by the dining room fire, while Tarleton and the orderly investigated the cellar and the outbuildings. Those few moments alone with her finished the subjugation of the young man's heart. He knew that for him there could be no happiness in the future unless she shared it with him; and he was telling her so in hesitating whispers—for his very earnestness had made him shy and awkward—when the return of the searching party put an end to the interview.

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Joscelyn stood upon the veranda as Tarleton mounted for the ride, and cried out with her tantalizing mockery:—

"Commend me to his lordship, and say that you came upon a fool's errand, and carry back but the fruit of such a quest."

She would have said more, but her mother plucked her by the sleeve with frightened command; and so with an enchanting change of manner she turned to Captain Barry, who had lingered on the step, and begged that he would ere long give them again the pleasure of his company. Her words were meant more as a rebuff to Tarleton by contrast with the sharp things she had said to him; but the younger officer construed them into an acknowledged preference for himself, and his quick pulses throbbed with a foretaste of that sweetest victory a man can win—the capture of a beloved woman's heart. As he rode away with his companion, he knew not if it still rained or was clear; the mud of the streets might have been drifts of bright-hued blossoms for all the notice he gave it; even his resentment against Tarleton was forgotten in this sweet dream of love which, amid the shadows of war, had suddenly opened before him as a flower unfolds its petals to the dawn. At supper with his fellow-officers, he heard none of the jests upon Tarleton's failure of the evening, so busy was he recalling every word and look of the girl who in one short week had made the world as a new creation for him. The time for his wooing would be short, and the morrow was too remote for his impatient heart; and so ere another hour went by he was again knocking at her door. Much to his chagrin, he found other guests before him, for hardly had he quitted the house ere Mary Singleton arrived and announced that she meant to tarry all night.

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"Eustace and some of his friends are coming later; so, my dear, you must let me run upstairs at once and change this damp gown for something more comfortable and becoming. When you see

who is with Eustace, you will understand why I want to look so charming. My maid has my bag in the kitchen. Come."

Another menace! Would she never be free from discovery, Joscelyn wondered. And taking her friend by the shoulders, she pushed her playfully into the parlour.

"'Tis easy enough to guess who is coming, by the happiness in your eyes. But there, go make your duty to mother while I have a fire kindled in my room; then shall you make yourself as beautiful as a dream ere it runs to a nightmare."

Upstairs she raced, stopping in the hall only long enough to unlock the attic door. In her room was a slight noise; and she was about to call Richard softly, when by the fireplace she perceived the maid blowing the coals into a blaze. [Pg 268]

"That will do, Peggy. Go down at once and get a pair of your dry shoes for Mistress Singleton's maid, that she may shortly be ready to help her mistress dress."

Peggy obeyed; and then Joscelyn heard her name called, and saw the curtains of the bed-tester shaken as by some one standing behind them, and Richard's head and shoulders came to view. Answering the look in his eloquent eyes, she put out her hand with a quick impulse to meet his; but at that moment the door was flung open, and Mary rushed in.

"They have come already, and 'tis as much as my chances with Edward Moore are worth to have him see me in this garb; so I fled for my life," she cried, laughing and panting together.

Joscelyn dared not look toward the bed curtain; surely, the fates had combined against her! She stood quite still and let Mary run on with her confidences concerning young Moore, salving her conscience with the thought that a second listener could not matter when a human life was at stake. But when Mary, too intent upon the mirror to look at the bed, shook down her hair and began deliberately to unfasten her bodice, Joscelyn grew desperate. She could not permit this.

"Wait until—until the fire burns, Mary," she cried, that she might gain a few minutes to think. But Mary only laughed and went on unhooking, raving about blue eyes and a tall figure; to all of which Joscelyn agreed, striving to fasten the hooks again until Mary pushed her off in a small pet. Then, with a last frantic effort, she upset, with a palpably awkward movement of her elbow, a pitcher that stood on the dresser; and as the deluge of water came down she cried to Mary to go at once to her mother's room, where was a better fire, and she would follow with her things. It was a most open bit of acting, without a shadow of plot or diplomacy; but Mary was too intent upon her love affair to notice, and so went obediently into the next room, talking still of Edward Moore. As Joscelyn gathered up some ribbons and lace from the bed, she whispered as though to the curtained post:— [Pg 269]

"The attic door is open—there is no one in the hall."

Then did the post seem suddenly alive, for a hand caught hers, and a voice full of love and gratitude said in her ear:—

"God bless you! Good-by."

Ten minutes later, trying the attic door, she found it locked from within; and, leaving Mary in the hands of the maid, she went down the stair with a light heart, for the day's trials were over at last, and she might cease to wrack her brain for expedients and deceptions. Other guests had followed Barry, and the house was soon full of echoing laughter and snatches of song, with the low hum of conversation, like the ripple of a brook, running ceaselessly underneath the lighter sounds. [Pg 270]

As soon as Joscelyn laid eyes on Eustace she knew something was amiss, and he was not long in letting her know what it was, upbraiding her bitterly for her cruel speech of last night.

"You were not content that those rude men were searching her house, but must add to her humiliation. What demon of cruelty possessed you?"

"It was the meanest thing I ever did," she said, with something like a sob; "and, Eustace, if you can only get Betty to forgive me, there is nothing I will not do for you."

"Small chance I have to win forgiveness for you or favour for myself," he answered gloomily. "I wish I had been here last night; she should have known she had at least one friend, though I lost my commission by it. Only once have I seen her, and then but for ten minutes, with her mother freezing the life out of us with her cold stare."

"If I arrange a meeting between this and your departure, will you spare a few moments from your wooing to plead for me?"

"Yes; but can you do it?"

"Slip away up to mother's room and write her a note; I will see that she gets it this night," and, mollified, he went.

Upstairs in the attic, shivering under the blankets behind the big chest, Richard hearkened to the subdued echoes of gayety from below and went over thoughtfully the events of the day. All the morning and afternoon he had felt the nets closing about him, and when he read Joscelyn's hasty warning he knew that death stood at his elbow. Not that hope died, but what could hope do in [Pg 271]

such straights? He made ready as she bade him, folding the blankets and straightening the carpet, putting his boots into a barrel under a lot of old shoes and odds and scraps. Then with his ear to the door, he had waited for what seemed a dragging age. Always his care was for Joscelyn. Even when, during the search, the door was opened, and he stood crushed against the wall with his would-be captors and murderers not six feet away, the uppermost thought in his mind was for her, anxiety for her safety, admiration for her magnificent courage. Slipping out of the room in that momentary darkness, he had felt like a traitor deserting the thing on earth dearest to him, and had cursed the fate that sent him away. But the supreme moment came when, crouching by her bed, he saw through the tester curtain the British officer pause in the door with his lifted light. One step out into the room, and the flimsy curtain could not have hidden the figure of the man behind it. On that one more step hung life or death. Breathless, Richard waited, his unsheathed dirk in his hand. He knew this man,—hated as no other Englishman was hated through the length and breadth of the land,—standing thus unconscious of any danger, was utterly within his power. One strong upward blow where the heart was left uncovered by the lifted arm, and the cause of American liberty would lose one of its deadliest enemies. But the guards below, the soldiers swarming in the street—and Joscelyn! At thought of her the murderous instinct in his soul was quelled, and without so much as a relaxed muscle, he saw Tarleton turn from the room. Then he had hidden himself more carefully and waited for her coming. Mistaking for her the maid who came to light the fire, he was near to self-betrayal; and he could not remember how he had gotten out of sight when later on Mary burst into the room; but lying now at full length under the sloping rafters, he smiled at the measures Joscelyn had used to dispose of her, recognizing that subtle loyalty which would, in dire straits, give up a friend's love secret to another, but would not without an effort sacrifice that friend's modesty.

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Brave girl, what a spirit and resolution were hers! And yet he had seen her cry over a dead wren and flinch from the sight of his hunting-gun. And how many trials and perils he had drawn upon her by his presence, although if taken he had resolved to live only long enough to proclaim her blameless. Well, when the revel down below should be over, he would steal away, for he would be a source of danger to her no more. And, besides, Greene needed his information. He must face his fate and take what chances he might; that was a scout's fate and duty; and so he planned his course. By and by he left his couch and stood at the door to try and separate Joscelyn's voice from the medley of sounds that made their way up to him; the least scrap of a sentence would be as balm to his aching heart. But he listened long in vain; all was a confused babble; then suddenly a voice called her, and she answered clearly that she was sitting on the stair with Captain Barry. And somebody said, "Of course." And then there was a general laugh that somehow set Richard's blood in a strange tingle of pain.

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So she was sitting there just below him, within sight if he but dared to crack the door. And such a longing came upon him that he did turn the key and made a little opening, and saw the back of her head and her scarlet bodice as she bent down to some one sitting below her. A keen jealousy smote him; who was her companion, was he handsome or homely? Of course he was making love to her; no one could look that close into her eyes and not love her. And she,—was she smiling with the sweet shyness he loved but wanted no other man to see? It was only by a supreme effort of will that he dragged himself away and fastened the door again. Would they never go, those idle gossiping people with their thoughts absorbed by pleasure and merriment—never go and let her come to him for just one minute of divine joy? How he hated them all for staying; and above all, how he hated that man on the stairs whispering his heart into her ear.

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Presently there came the clatter of dishes, and then he remembered he had had no supper and it must be close upon midnight. With the coming of the dark the wind had risen and the garret was bitterly cold; but busy with plans for his escape and with thoughts of her, he scarcely noticed how stiff and numb his limbs were.

An hour later there were calls of "good-by," and the sound of opening and closing doors below, mingled with shrill feminine voices calling for wraps, and out in the street the stamping of horses. Then silence reigned, and he knew the guests had departed. Presently there was a slow tread upon the stairs, and Mistress Cheshire called back some directions to those below. Then a lighter, quicker step followed, and Mary Singleton went singing to Joscelyn's room. Fifteen, perhaps twenty minutes of intense silence went by, and then a slender thread of light shone under the door; and so faint as to be almost inaudible, a tap fell on the panel. Quickly as possible he drew the bolt and opened the door, but only just in time to see Joscelyn enter her own room and close the door. On a table, in reach of his hand, stood a shaded candle and beside it was his supper. It was for this she had called him; but hungry as he was, he forgot it in his bitter disappointment that he was not to speak to her. Time pressed, however, and soon he was back in the attic, devouring the food she had left. Particularly grateful to him was the mug of steaming hot tea.

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"Tax or no tax, it cheers me up, temptress that you are, sweet Joscelyn. Perchance a Continental toast may override the Royalist poison lurking in it, and so I pledge Nathaniel Greene and his trusted scout—particularly the scout." He laughed softly as he drained the cup.

Physically he was strengthened and warmed for the flight before him, but his heart was heavy with disappointment and dread. Once he abandoned the idea of attempting to escape; the house had been searched and the guard removed, therefore he was safer here than anywhere else, and he must see her before he went. But more unselfish council prevailed; it was not his safety only that must be considered. The knowledge he had gained would be of inestimable value to Greene; the going of the guard left the way open to him, and it was duty, not personal inclination, that

must dictate his course.

He waited until the tall clock below chimed one, and then made ready for his departure. He had resolved not to tell Joscelyn of his plans even if he might have spoken with her, for he wanted her sleep troubled by no anxiety for him; but the yearning of his heart found expression in the farewell he left upon the senseless panels of her door. Then, boots in hand, he crept downstairs and into the dining room. Here the rear door fastened with a latch, the string of which was drawn inside at night. Softly he stepped out, closing it behind him, and stood a moment pushing the string back through its hole, that those behind might be safe; then, hugging the fence, he crept to the gate and was soon in the alley outside. The darkness, the soft mud, and the howling wind were all in his favour. He knew his way even in the gloom, and so, making now and then a detour to avoid a public street or a possible sentry post, he came at last to the outskirts of the town, keeping always in the direction opposite the British camp. The bridge he knew must be well guarded, and so must the road over the mountains; hence he kept directly across the fields to where the river bends under the cliff called "Lovers' Leap." Ahead of him, behind a clump of bushes, burned a low fire, and he crept up on hands and knees to hear what the two men sitting there were saying. One of them was surlily poking the fire:—

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"If we break camp to-morrow, how the devil can we march over such soggy roads?"

"The Guildford road is not so bad," was the answer; and although Richard waited a long time, he heard nothing else. And so like a ghost he crept into the drifting rain and soon gained the river, repeating to himself that last sentence which might be the keynote to the British movements.

His knowledge of the country folk stood him in good stead, for soon he was untying a canoe from a gum tree not far from a lonely cabin. Often, when a boy, he had gone with the owner fishing in this boat, tying it up to the tree roots when the day's sport was done. The river was turbulent from the recent downpour, and in the darkness he went further down-stream than he intended; but at last he drew into a cove of weeds and reeds, and leaving the boat there he plunged into the forest beyond. But he was not lost, and ere the dawn came he had found a friend, and well mounted he pressed on to carry the news he had gathered to the American camp; and as he rode, he thought always and with a gnawing bitterness of the view he had had of Joscelyn's head as she bent down to catch the love words of that invisible suitor.

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CHAPTER XXV.

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GOOD-BY, SWEETHEART.

"Yet all my life seems going
out
As slow I turn my face about
To go alone another way, to be
alone
Till life's last day,
Unless thy smile can light the
way!"

—ANON.

In the early morning, before the family were astir, Joscelyn dressed herself hurriedly and went to the attic door. It was ajar. With a quick premonition of evil, she entered and whispered Richard's name. No answer came; no one was there. Then the truth flashed upon her—he had gone, risking everything rather than further expose her to discovery and its dire results. How chivalric, and yet how insane! Of course he would be captured, or else he would perish with cold and hunger this bitter winter weather. She looked about carefully; not a scrap of a note had he left to say good-by. She had not dared to wait to speak with him last night, lest Mary discover them; but now she reproached herself, feeling that she might have prevented this mad mistake. She had meant to come back after all was quiet, but Mary talked so long that for very shame she had not dared to do so, dreading his man's judgment of a visit at such an hour.

She was now in a nervous tremor, and feared to have the maids come in, lest they announce that the spy had been taken; and when they came but said naught of it, she began to look for news from outsiders. Several times during the morning meal she glanced across to Aunt Clevering's house with such a tempestuous pity for the old lady's coming sorrow that her eyes shone with tears; and her mother, seeing them, thought that it was sorrow for the estrangement she had wrought between the two families, and resolved to tell Ann Clevering about it.

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"Come, Joscelyn," said Mary, looking up from her plate, "an you eat no breakfast and keep your mouth pulled down at the corners like that, we'll be thinking Captain Barry left unsaid the things he should have said last night."

"I know not what you think he should have said—but he was very charming," the girl said, rousing herself.

"Particularly when you two sat on the stair and whispered so long."

"The time seemed long to you because just at that time Edward Moore was talking with Pattie Newsom."

"Well," answered Mary, tossing her head, "it was quite as long to him, for he said it seemed years while he was from me."

"Poor Pattie!"

But all the time she jested her heart was full; and she kept her eyes on the opposite house or watched those who passed in the street to guess, if possible, if they carried news to the commander's quarters. The rain had passed in the night, but toward dawn the wind had crystallized it into sleet, so that in the sun the ice-dight world sparkled like a jewel catching the light upon its many facets and kindling each with a different flame; everywhere was a brilliant silvery glisten with gleams of amethyst and agate, ochre and opal like momentary meteors in the marvellous dazzle. What a day to be hunted across country like a wild animal by human bloodhounds! What a day to die by a bullet, or, worse still, on yonder historic hill as the Regulators died!

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The hours wore on, and still no tidings came. Joscelyn went restlessly from room to room, unable to fix her attention upon anything. It was close upon ten o'clock when the thud of hoofs resounded outside, and a minute after Barry entered the room. Evidently the news he brought was of a gloomy character, for his face was clouded.

"The spy—they have caught him!" Joscelyn cried, leaning heavily on her chair.

"The spy? What do you mean—what is the matter that you are so pale?" The solicitude in his voice was not unmixed with a curious surprise. Then when she hesitated over her answer, he said; coming quite close to her, "Why are you so interested in this spy?"

Then in a moment she was herself again. "They say it was he who saved my life on the commons; should I be true to my womanhood if I dismissed him from my thoughts? I tell you frankly I wish him well."

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She returned his gaze quietly, and he took her hand with a deference that was an apology. "And I, too, wish him well for that service, no matter what he may have carried to his general to our undoing—for he has not been taken. I am a soldier and a servant of the king, but in my heart of hearts your safety is more than the safety of Lord Cornwallis's whole command."

His reward was a dazzling smile and an invitation to sit with her upon the sofa, which action brought him within a foot of her. He longed to lessen even that distance, but comforted himself with the thought that his hand might creep to hers at the first softening of her manner.

"What made you think I brought news of the spy?"

"You were so grave I thought naught but an execution could be in progress."

"It is indeed a kind of execution, for this is to be my good-by," he said sadly. "We march in two hours; already camp is broken, and preparations are being made."

"And this decision was reached—?"

"Late last night at a council of officers. This spy has carried away information about our position that Greene could use to our defeat; that, with other reasons, brought about the decision. I did not sleep one moment for thinking of leaving you."

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"And the search for the spy is given over?"

"Yes."

She could not repress a sigh of relief, but he did not so interpret it. Mary had withdrawn to the window, and her mother had left the room; they two might as well have been alone.

"My God, how I shall miss you!" cried the young fellow at last, desperately. "You see I never loved a woman before, and so I know not how to bear this parting."

"You are a soldier," she said gently. "A soldier endures any pain manfully."

"Yes, but no sword thrust ever hurt like this. You are glad you have met me?"

"Very glad."

"And you will miss me and think of me sometimes?"

"Many times."

"And when the war is over, I may come back and—and claim your love?"

He had taken her hand, and she could not at once draw it away, for a strange hesitation was upon her. "I cannot promise," she said at last. "Ten days ago I did not know you."

"Yes, but ten hours taught my heart its lesson for life, and war makes quick wooing."

She slowly but firmly drew her hand away. "I cannot promise; but I love no one else."

"Then I will wait and hope."

A few minutes later a bugle sent its shrill call down the wind. He sprang up and hastily shook hands with Mary and Mistress Cheshire, who had just returned to the room; but, answering his pleading glance, Joscelyn followed him into the hall that the others might not witness the emotion of his parting with herself.

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"Try to love me," he said, and was gone; and watching him as he passed out of sight, she felt that her hands were wet with the boyish tears that had fallen on them as he carried them to his lips in a fervid farewell. And suddenly she asked herself what happier fate awaited her than to accept this love poured out so prodigally at her feet. The question brought serious thoughts, so Mary found her but dull company until other visitors arrived to say also their farewells. One of these brought a note from Lord Cornwallis. Would she not come and witness their departure?

"Mother," she said, coming downstairs in her habit, "I shall not be at home this afternoon; call Betty over to sort her wools out of my knitting-bag; she will find it on the spinet. And while she works over it, go you once more to Aunt Clevering's, if you please, and intercede for me; Betty will not mind being left."

Thus did she plan to leave the way open to Eustace for a hasty farewell to his sweetheart.

A little past noon the drums rolled out their hoarse commands, and the British army was on the move. An unrestrained excitement ran riot in the town. There were blaring bugles and flaunting flags, and everywhere glimmers of red as the corps passed onward. At the head of the British columns rode Lord Cornwallis, and at his bridle-rein went Mistress Joscelyn, the picture of good humour and coquetry, with a scarlet cockade in her hat, and an officer's sash tied jauntily across her breast from shoulder to waist. The rich colour of the silk brought out by contrast the sea-blue lights in her eyes and the glossy gleams of her hair. Men forgot the martial pageant to look at her; and when at the home pier of the river bridge the staff paused, the salutes from the passing soldiers were as much for her as for the general beside her. There the parting came, the officers falling in at the rear of the troops when the last company had passed over. As Eustace passed Joscelyn, he lifted the lapel of his coat, on which was a purple aster,—the like of which grew nowhere save in Betty's dormer window,—and said with a happy smile:—

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"Your plan worked well, sweet Joscelyn. Ten minutes of heaven compensate a man for hours of purgatory. May the fates be as kind to your own heart."

But it was Barry who lingered behind the others for one last look and word, and then went clattering over the bridge, and left the girl to return to the town with the few Tory women who had dared to share her ride. They had been bold enough at the start, with all the king's army at their backs, but to go back unprotected by martial power was quite another thing; anti-Toryism would now hold sway, and they knew what that meant; so at the entrance of the town the others turned aside to find their homes, which fortunately were near at hand. But Joscelyn lived at the far end of the town, and must needs pass the whole length of King Street ere she gained her door.

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The street, which for the past week had been almost deserted by the patriotic townspeople, now swarmed with eager men and women; but Joscelyn's thoughts were too full of Richard's escape and Barry's wooing for her to note the angry glances directed toward her. It was not until she was passing the wooden building that had served Cornwallis as headquarters for his staff, that she became aware of the hostility she was exciting. Then a voice called out to her to take off that hated insignia she wore; and ere she realized what was happening, four or five boys had surrounded her horse and were snatching at the sash ends that dangled from her waist. Her anger flamed up to a white heat at this insult, and she laid about her with her riding-whip until they let her be. A volley of light missiles followed her as she went on her way, her horse curbed to a walk because she was too proud to seem to fly. The same pride kept her from dodging the paper balls and bits of soft mud that rained around her, and now and then struck her skirts and shoulders. Thus, looking neither to the right nor the left, she went slowly onward until a little urchin, springing to the middle of the road in front of her, shouted insolently:—

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"Out upon you for a Tory jade!"

His companions screamed their encouragement, thinking to see her discomfited; but leaning out of her saddle she said, with that smile that had played havoc with so many older hearts:—

"Thank you, Jamie, for calling me such a beautiful name. Were the examples I helped you to work last week quite right? You must come again when you get in trouble over them, that I may save you from another flogging."

The boy, remembering her timely aid, drew back abashed, dropping the mud he had been wadding together in his grimy hand; and taking advantage of the momentary cessation of hostilities, Joscelyn waved them a laughing salute and cantered away to her own door. But in the privacy of her room she broke down and sobbed out the excitement and suspense of the past two days. The courage which had defied and cheated Tarleton and put the riotous urchins to shame melted away in that burst of tears, and a woman-like longing for protection and safety surged through her. If she might only go away, or if there were but some one to stand between her and this weary persecution!

The first object upon which her eyes rested as she lifted her head when the weeping was past,

was that ill-fated scarf with which Barry had decorated her that morning at headquarters. What a world of meaning there was in it! Perhaps nothing could so have drawn her heart to the absent officer as this silent messenger of his love. She folded it away carefully, lingering a moment ere she shut it from sight to recall those last words he had whispered in her ear ere he followed his comrades over the river. All the rest of the day they echoed in her thoughts, calming her by their earnest tenderness.

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"Betty came for her woools?" she asked her mother at bedtime.

"Yes. And I forgot to tell you that after I had gone from the house Eustace Singleton came to say good-by to you. When I returned from Ann's, I found him in the parlour, where his presence must greatly have annoyed Betty, for she was red and flustered. I am sure I was sorry, but I was in no way to blame for her disturbance." And then tearfully she went on to tell how her mission with Aunt Clevering had again failed.

The change that came upon Hillsboro' with the going of the British was as swift as it was pronounced. Where before had been sullen repression among the people, all was now animation and exuberance of spirits; the Tories were intimidated, and the place bristled with patriotic evidences. It was as though a slide had been slipped in a stereopticon, and a new picture projected upon the canvas. All the talk now ran on Greene, who had moved down from the Dan and lay upon the heights of Troublesome Creek, only thirteen miles from where Cornwallis had pitched his own camp. For nearly two weeks the entire country watched with panting interest these two generals play their advance-guards and reconnoitring parties against each other as though they were so many ivory figures upon a chessboard. Then came the meeting at Guildford Court-house, the fame of which blew through the land like a sirocco's breath.

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"Lord Cornwallis has won the game at Guildford," cried Joscelyn.

"Ay, won it so hard and fast that he has had to run away to hold the stakes," retorted Mistress Strudwick, equally rejoiced over the British retreat to Wilmington.

"Had the militia but done their share, we should have finished Cornwallis for good," Richard wrote to Joscelyn after the battle. "But praise be to Heaven, Banastre Tarleton is among the wounded. I do hope and believe it was my bullet that hit him, for I singled him out for my aim, remembering his bearing to you and my mother last month. If so I hear that his wound proves fatal, I shall wear no mourning."

And, truth to say, Joscelyn herself sorrowed never a bit over the short colonel's discomfiture. Later on came another letter:—

"We are on the march to the south to aid Marion, Sumter, and Pickens to snatch South Carolina and Georgia from the foe. We know of the terrible doings of Arnold in Virginia, and General La Fayette has been sent to check him, but much I doubt his success. Ye gods! what a soldier we lost when Arnold went over to the enemy in that traitorous way. He was the one man in our army who was Tarleton's match in a raid. If the Marquis catches him, however, I should like to be at the reckoning. A traitor with the fire of genius in his veins! At Guildford I looked at his old command, and said to myself that the day had gone differently had Arnold led them. Men followed him like sheep to victory or to death. Think you what a demon it takes to harrow one's country, to fight against one's own people!"

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As the weeks passed and the spring advanced, Joscelyn's position in the community grew more irksome, for Tory supremacy was at an end and the patriotic spirit was dominant. "Only the rudeness of some excited boys," the older folk had said of the incident of her homeward ride the day the British withdrew; but it was rather the true index of the public temper against her, and not a day went by but she was made to feel it keenly. Never was an occasion to annoy her neglected, until between her and her neighbours was a bloodless but harassing feud that destroyed utterly the old harmony and good will. She felt the change bitterly; every neglect or retort rankled in her thoughts until it became as a fester corrupting her happiness. But she kept a brave face to the world, and sang her Tory ballads on the veranda in the soft spring twilights, or as she worked through the sunny hours in the side yard where no flowers but those that blossomed red were permitted to blow. And Mistress Strudwick said to her cronies, with genuine admiration, that twenty Guildfords could not break the spirit of a girl like that.

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But necessarily the thing that hurt Joscelyn most was Aunt Clevering's treatment. Not content to be a spectator, she often took the initiative in the persecution the girl was made to suffer, ignoring her in public or noticing her only to taunt her with some uncivil word or look. A few sentences from Joscelyn might have swept away the barriers and restored the old friendship, but she would not buy her pardon thus. She possibly might not be believed without the proof of Richard's letter, that first short, fervid missive he had sent her on the eve of the great battle; and that she could not show, not even to his own mother, such a heroine did it make of her, such an ardent, grateful lover of him. Then, too, if this quarrel with Aunt Clevering should be healed, people would ask questions, and when the truth should be known she would be in no better plight—a Tory maid risking everything, even life itself, to hide a Continental spy! Neither friends nor foes would understand; her motives would be misinterpreted, her loyalty questioned; and so her last estate would be no better than her first. Thus did she hold her peace and hide her tears under cover of darkness, the while by day she sang her daring little ditties among the growing

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things of her garden.

Having been the arch-Royalist of the town, it was but natural that public resentment should be most pronounced against her. The Singletons and Moores were less outspoken, and so drew upon themselves less of contumely. Her caustic speeches, on the contrary, were not forgotten, until Mistress Strudwick threatened half tearfully, half playfully to clip her tongue with her sharp scissors. But the chief thing that kept alive the animosity against her were the letters that came to her now and then from Cornwallis's camp. She did not deny their reception, but steadily refused to divulge their contents; and as it was believed that in one way or another she contrived to answer them, the idea got abroad that she was in the employ of the British general to keep him posted as to the state of things in Hillsboro'-town. Nothing else could so have set the people against her as this supposed espionage, and all through the advancing summer she felt the weight of their displeasure. Mistress Bryce openly denounced her, boys shouted disrespectful things under her window at night, and the shopkeepers so neglected or refused her orders that, had it not been for Mistress Strudwick, she and her mother would have suffered; but that good friend stood stanchly by her. So loud were the outcries against her when she rode abroad that out of deference to her mother's wishes, and also to save herself from needless mortification, she never had the saddle put upon her horse.

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And yet innocent enough were those letters that caused so much of trouble, filled as they were, not with army news, but with a man's tender love throes,—the vehement pleadings of a heart swayed by its first grand passion.

CHAPTER XXVI.

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BY THE BELEAGUERED CITY.

"Peace; come away; the song
of woe
Is after all an earthy song:
Peace; come away; we do
him wrong
To sing so wildly: let us go."

—TENNYSON.

The summer seemed interminable, lit all along though it was with the glimmer of lilies and iridescent gleams of parti-coloured roses. It was the season of the year which Joscelyn loved best; but now the ceaseless sunshine, the mosaic marvels of the turf, the kaleidoscopic changes of earth and sky wearied her, so that she longed for the coming of autumn. It came at last, unfurling its red and yellow banners in the woodlands, and setting its russet seal upon the meadows. And with it came the news of the siege of Yorktown; and the town of Hillsboro' waked to new enthusiasm and thrilled or shuddered at every alternating rumour.

And in each of those far-away armies on the York was a man who watched the sun go westward every eve, and sent a silent message to a girl with dark hair and sea-blue eyes who pruned her roses in a new garden of the Hesperides beside the Eno. Unknown to each other, their thoughts had yet a common Mecca. But fate was not content that they should stand thus forever apart.

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In Yorktown, Cornwallis had thought to be safe either to escape to Clinton or be rescued by that general's fleet sailing down the Atlantic from New York. But instead to the east, in Lynn Haven Bay, De Grasse's ships held the passes to the sea; while on the land side—one wing on York and one on Wormley creek—in two great crescents stretched the lines of the allied armies, with Warwick creek running darkly between. Over the tents that gleamed in the autumn sunshine there flew, side by side, the stars and stripes of the Republic and the *fleur-de-lys* of France. And there were sallies and repulses, and daily encroachments and skirmishes between the allies without and the British within.

It so happened one day that Richard's company was detailed to guard the ditchers who were making a new trench, and throwing up a fresh line of breastworks that would enable them to draw yet nearer to the red-coated pickets. Already these latter had been forced—by the horns of that ever encroaching crescent—to withdraw twice, and now a third retreat seemed imminent. But not without a struggle would they yield their posts; and so presently, on that mellow autumn day, a flash of scarlet came in the sun as an assaulting column swept out toward the projected line where the shovels were at work; and the Continental guard, after discharging their guns with signal success, waited with fixed bayonets to receive the advancing column. It was a fierce contest fought almost hand to hand; then the Redcoats began to fall back, and with a quick rush the Continentals turned their retreat to a rout.

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Returning from that fierce charge with the flush of the fight upon him, Richard came upon a man lying prone upon his face in the stubble—the gallant English captain who had led the sally. He had seen him as he fell far in advance of his column. There the retreat had left him inside the new lines of the Continentals, and finding him still alive, Richard turned him over softly so as not

to start his wound afresh; and as he did so he caught one word from the pale lips:—

“Joscelyn.”

The name unlocked the floodgates of the young Continental’s sympathies.

“Dunn,” he said to the man in front of him, “give me a hand, that I may get this poor fellow to my tent.”

“The surgeon will find him here directly and have him moved to the field hospital.”

“He could not stand so long a trip; see how near he is already gone with this bullet hole in his side. Come, I have a fancy not to see him die here in the wet grass.”

So Dunn lent his aid, and the wounded man was put down in Richard’s tent, murmuring again that talismanic name.

“He may possibly live till morning,” the surgeon said, when at last he came from attending to his own men, “but he cannot be moved. I will try and send some one to look after him.” [Pg 296]

Richard touched his cap, “If you please, I am off duty to-night; I will willingly nurse him, if so you give me directions.”

And the man was left in his care; and during the slow hours, word by word and sentence by sentence, he patched together the fevered ramblings of his patient, until he knew that the Joscelyn of his own hopes and fears and dreams was identical with the girl of this other man’s thoughts.

With the knowledge something seemed to catch at his throat, to tighten about his heart; and he went out and stood awhile at the tent door, gazing up into the clear heavens whose steadfast stars were shining also on the distant Carolina hills, watching a window behind which a girl lay sleeping—dreaming perhaps of the man yonder on the pallet. Had he lost her through this other one? Was his life to miss its one strong purpose, in missing her?

By and by, when he was calmer, he came again to the pallet where the dying man lay, and picked up the sword which, along with his own, was propped against the canvas wall of the tent. It was of beautiful workmanship with a crest on the jewelled scabbard, and below a graven name which, by the light of the tallow dip, Richard at last spelled out:—

“Barry.”

He stood thinking for a moment. Why, this then was the man for whom Ellen Singleton had mistaken him that night he played the squire to her in a borrowed military cloak at the fête in Philadelphia. What strange fate had brought them thus together? “The finest officer who wears the red, and a lady-killer,” Dunn had said. And that tightness gathered again at Richard’s heart, for where else had he heard of the man? [Pg 297]

Stay, was not Barry the name—Yes, it was the very name he had heard coupled with Joscelyn’s that night while he lay hiding in the freezing attic. “She is sitting on the stair with Captain Barry.” The very tones of the speaker came back to him, bringing again that thirsty desire to open the door and look for her which he had not been able to resist, though life itself might pay the forfeit.

He went back to the pallet, and bent down that he might see the face of his patient. So this was the man who had won her away from the rest of her company, the man to whom she had bent down so low that from the rear only the dark crown of her hair could be seen as she sat on her steps—this was the man to whose love tale she had listened smilingly, while he himself was a prisoner hiding for his very life. A lady-killer, Dunn had said; and well he could believe it from the traces of manly beauty still lingering in the suffering face. A fierce jealousy tore at his heart. Evidently, from his ramblings, Joscelyn had listened to this other’s wooing, and had written him letters, while she mocked him and sent him never so much as one little line in answer to all the pages he wrote her. He had always known that other men would love her,—it could not be otherwise with her sweetness and her beauty,—but always in his thoughts she had kept herself for him. Had it been a false hope; had she loved this brave Briton who called upon her with such pathos of tenderness? If so, then was his own dream-castle in ruins. [Pg 298]

By and by, just before the end, there came a lucid hour. The wounded man turned his eyes questioningly upon his nurse.

“I found you after the fight, so far in our lines that your own men had missed you in their retreat, and the surgeon left you in my care,” Richard said gently.

“To die? Yes, I see it in your eyes.”

“You fell at the head of your men, as a soldier wishes death to find him.”

The other smiled faintly, “My mother will perchance be a little comforted by that. You will write her?”

“Yes—And Joscelyn?”

“Joscelyn?—how do you happen—?”

"You talked of her in your delirium. She lives in the Carolina hill country. I, too, know her and—love her."

And then each told something of his story to the other; and they clasped hands as brave men can when enmity and prejudice and jealousy are swallowed up in the wide sympathy that lurks forever in the precincts of the Great Shadow. [Pg 299]

"And when the war is over, and I tell her again of my love," said Richard, with that impulsive generosity that was ever one of his characteristics, "I will tell her also of yours—and mayhap she will choose rather to cherish your memory than to give herself to me."

And Barry turned his face to the wall and died, whispering his love for her to the last. It was a strange scene, this midnight confessional between two men who, all unknown to each other, had striven for the same heart-goal—who in life would have been bitter and unrelenting rivals, but who met and parted amid the shadows of death as friends and brothers. Richard wrote it all to Joscelyn, eloquently, passionately; portraying faithfully every emotion of the dying man.

"He loved you, Joscelyn, even as I do; only not so much, for methinks no man could do that. But he was brave and manly, and to have won his heart is proof of your sweetness and worth. He told me many things of that fearful night when I lay up in your garret, and downstairs you held your guests from all suspicion by your tact and courage. He hated Tarleton for his distrust of you, and I let him go to the far Shore in ignorance of how you saved me, fearing that he would not understand, and that his last moments would be imbibed by a useless jealousy.

"Did you love him? Am I breaking your heart with this news, my best beloved? If so, remember, I beseech you, how my own would break to know it." [Pg 300]

And Joscelyn read the letter by the fading sunset, and then sat with wet eyes through the star-haunted gloaming, thinking of the young life that had gone out in the red trail of war. She missed him as it did not seem possible she could have missed any one who had been so short a while in her consciousness.

And sitting thus alone with her sorrow, she felt a hand on hers and an arm slip around her neck.

"Joscelyn, I could not stay away any longer," whispered Betty's voice in the dark. "I had both of your notes; I know you are sorry, and I miss you so much!"

"Dear Betty, dear Betty, how glad I am you are come! I cannot tell you how lonely and wretched my life is, and now my—my true friend is gone!" and with her head on the girl's bosom, she gave way to a nervous sobbing.

"Did you love him?" Betty asked, when at last she understood.

"I—I do not know; but I have so few friends, and he loved me and trusted me, and I shall miss him."

"Did you wish to marry him?"

"I cannot say. Sometimes when I have been very lonely, and you all turned from me, I have thought I did. To marry him and go away to a new place and new friends seemed best. He was strong and brave, but he was gentle and considerate, and he never hectored me—a girl likes not to be hectored and quarrelled with in her courting." [Pg 301]

"No," answered Betty, sadly, understanding she had Richard in mind. Often, with a woman's instinct, she had pleaded with her brother to humour Joscelyn more in her way of looking at things; but he had chosen to attempt to set her right, or, at least, right as he saw it.

"I must be going; mother is at Mistress Strudwick's and will be angry if she knows I came here," Betty said at last, rising with a sigh. But Joscelyn held her back with both hands.

"Not yet, Betty, not yet; we can see her far down the street by the lights from the windows. Stay a little longer; it is such a comfort to have you."

"I wish I could come without this deception."

"I, too, with all my heart."

"You had a letter to-day; was it from Master Singleton?"

"No; it was this sad one from Richard, by the same messenger that brought yours. The last letter I had from Eustace was the one I sent you some two weeks ago. Since he was then on the eve of going to New York to carry letters to General Clinton, it is not likely he is among those in the beleaguered city of Yorktown."

"I have been so glad to think this," Betty answered, sighing. "Do you know, Joscelyn, I saw him in the parlour yonder for a few minutes the day the British marched?"

"Yes; I told mother to have you here, and then I sent him back from headquarters." [Pg 302]

Betty kissed her gratefully. "I might have guessed it. It was such a happy ten minutes! But, Joscelyn, mother never mentions his name except to remind me that his father and mine were bitter enemies."

"Wait until Richard comes home; he doubtless will look at matters differently; and as he says, so will your mother do."

"Not unless you plead for me; and even that may not now avail, for he may share mother's anger against you."

"Richard will not be angry with me when he returns," Joscelyn answered confidently; and Betty kissed her softly.

"Oh, Joscelyn, if it could only have been Richard instead of Captain Barry to win even this much of your heart! But there, I must be going; some one is coming down the street."

"You will come again sometime?"

"Yes, for I have wanted you so much."

"And I you."

They held each other close for a moment, and then Betty ran across the street and dodged into the shadow of her own door. Her visit helped Joscelyn immeasurably, in that it gave her a sense of sympathy. But she could not shake off the depression of Richard's news; it was a culmination of the long strain upon her nervous system. In the succeeding days she had fits of silent brooding which sometimes, in the sombre twilights, ended in tears. For the first time since the news of Lexington, her neighbours found her grave and preoccupied. The fearless badinage with which she had met every attack upon her partisan creed was suddenly stayed, as though she heard not their thrusts and innuendoes. And Mistress Strudwick watched her with a vague uneasiness, longing to see the old, quick passion flame up now and then.

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But this frame of mind was rudely broken by the thrilling news of the fall of Yorktown. She had expected it for days, but the reality roused all of her former spirit, and put her once more upon the defensive.

"Lord Cornwallis has surrendered?" she said calmly to Amanda Bryce and the two gossips, who had run in to tell her the news and to gloat over her discomfiture. "'Tis most courteous of you to bring me the information so swiftly; you are quite out of breath with your race. I shall immediately write my sincere condolences to his lordship that wrong has triumphed over right. Will you not have a cup of tea with me, ladies?—there is no longer any tax. No? Then I have the honour to wish you a very good morning. Pray come again when you have further tidings."

She set the door open for them with the air of a sovereign condescending to her subjects; and they went away humiliated and furious.

"From the airs she gives herself, one would think Joscelyn Cheshire had royal blood in her veins," they said angrily. But when Mistress Strudwick heard of the scene, she laughed long and heartily.

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"They deserved it, the carping crones! Would I had been there to see them routed. Thank Heaven her spirit has come back; how I love her for it, unreconstructed Tory as she is!"

Never again was Joscelyn to deck herself in her scarlet bodice in honour of an English victory; never again to tease her neighbours with her taunting Tory ballads. The war was over; she had lost her cause; and with her life all out of attune with her surroundings she must face the inevitable. Seeing the relief in her mother's face, she could not be sorry that peace had come, though the terms were bitter; and so even in her loss was there something of compensation.

CHAPTER XXVII.

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HOMECOMINGS.

"The bugles sound the
swift recall;
Cling, clang! backward all!
Home, and good night!"

—E. C. STEDMAN.

The war was over; the drums lay unbeaten, the snarling trumpets sang their songs no more upon the level plains or sloping sides of far blue hills; liberty had triumphed, and the scarlet insignia of kingly rule had gone from the land forever. But peace did not bring the desired order of things. The unstable government of an untrained congress could not control the spirit of maraud and chaos that had so long dominated certain classes of people. Eight years of warfare had left its scar on the whole country, but particularly in those portions where the fighting had fallen. The sanguine among the triumphant contestants had looked for an immediate rehabilitation of affairs, thinking that the taps of war would be the reveille of commerce and order and prosperity. But as yet Americans were better soldiers than statesmen. They had to

learn to govern themselves, learn to wield the mighty power they had won; and at first knowledge was slow in coming. Private wrongs were remembered, individual grievances were recalled. The spirit that refrained from shouting over a fallen foe at Yorktown manifested itself at home in many petty ways against the defeated Tories, so that among these latter was a feeling of unprotected helplessness that made them sullen and restive.

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"Joscelyn," Mary Singleton said, coming in one day when the winter was at its fiercest, "father says he is going to Canada to stay until things get settled. We cannot stir from our gate without receiving some rudeness, and our property is threatened with confiscation, piece by piece, on the ground that we used it to aid the king's cause. Will you come with us? We would love to have you."

"No, for my mother would not think of such a thing; and where she is, there will I stay."

"Well, you had no man in the war; but against us the enmity is strong, because Eustace actually bore arms in the king's service."

"Will Eustace go with you?"

"No; he writes that as soon as he gets his discharge, he means to return here and accept whatever fate comes to him."

"I am glad. That is the right way to take his defeat. Your father is old and worn with annoyance, but Eustace is young enough to meet the struggle and win his way. Trust me; all will be well with him in the end," and Joscelyn's eyes were on Betty's window over the way.

"Edward Moore joins us in New York," Mary said, with a blush.

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"And I shall not be there to play the part of bridesmaid! Well, I shall content myself with putting a handful of rice and an old shoe into your trunk."

After the Singletons were gone, Joscelyn was very lonely, for the only house at which a welcome always met her was Mistress Strudwick's.

"You may say what you please, Amanda Bryce, but that girl comes here when she likes, and stays as long as she pleases; and if there is anybody I'm gladder to see, I do not know who it is," said the stanch old lady.

Soundly she lectured Joscelyn at times, but the fault-finding always began and ended with a caress, so there was no sting in it. Here the girl sometimes met Betty; and the older woman, seeing the desire of their hearts shining in their faces, encouraged them to be friends. Here, too, Janet Cameron often came, and after the visit walked home openly with her arm in Joscelyn's, making merry little mouths at Mistress Bryce as they passed her door. These visits and walks were Joscelyn's chief pleasure, and she stood sorely in need of recreation, for of late she was thinner and more irritable than her mother had ever seen her.

"You need a course of bitters," Mistress Strudwick said, opening her medicine-box one day.

"I have been taking such a course for eight years."

"Yes, Amanda Bryce's tongue drips not with honey! But I shall talk with your mother, and between us we will take you in hand and get the edge off your nerves." So Joscelyn dutifully yielded herself to her two physicians, who took much delight in the teas and tonics they brewed for her.

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During all these autumn and winter weeks, Richard Clevering had lain in the field hospital at Yorktown, racked with pain and fever from the wound he got when—singing a song of the Carolina hills—his regiment stormed that gun-girt bastion on the British left, and the colonies were free!

Things would have gone better with him had he been content to lie still and let the bones knit; but he could not stay away from that last scene of the surrender, which made all the privations of the past worth while. To miss that was to miss the joy of life, the glory of the fight, the crown of the conqueror; and so he had pretended to be much stronger than he was, and had gone to stand in his place when the British, with silent drums and cased banners, marched from their surrendered fortifications, and stacked arms between the martial lines of French and Continentals. The sight compensated him for the pain the exertion entailed, so that he never complained when, afterwards, the surgeon shook his head gravely over the fever that flushed his veins. He had had his heart's desire; he would bear its results.

But in the early part of January, seeing a tedious recovery still ahead of him, and the hospital facilities being so limited, he asked to be sent home to be cared for by his own people. There would be no more fighting, and his stay was an unnecessary burden upon the army officials, whose hands were full trying to keep down the spirit of insurrection that was fermenting the camp over the delay in the soldiers' pay. To relieve the strain upon the moneyless army coffers, many of the men who had been invalidated were allowed to return to their homes. Thus it was, that Joscelyn, unconscious of the extent of the hurt that had come to him—for he had written no particulars home—and also of his dismissal, answered a knock at her door one bleak January day, and gave a great cry at sight of the weary man leaning against the veranda railing, with an empty sleeve pinned helplessly to the bandaged arm beneath.

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“Richard Clevering!”

“Ay, Richard come back with a crushed arm, but a sound heart to claim you, unworthy though he now knows himself to be of such a prize, Joscelyn, Cornwallis has struck his martial colours, will you surrender to me for love’s dear sake?”

He had come into the hall and closed the swaying door against the wind, while she retreated backward until she stood close to the wall, her hands behind her.

“I owe you life and all the gratitude that means, but it is out of my love for you, which has grown with every hour of my absence, that I ask this—will you come to me, Joscelyn?” [Pg 310]

She did not speak, but slowly she shook her head, her eyes meeting his with a curious compassion. For one long minute he looked at her, searchingly, yearningly; then his outstretched arm fell to his side.

“Then is the war not over for me,” he said sadly.

He went with her into the sitting-room, and, with the luxurious hearth-glow brightening his face and taking that deathly pallor out of it, the while her magnetic presence kindled a tempestuous fire in his veins, he told her the story of that final surrender and of his hurt, softening the former narrative as best he might, remembering how she had wished it otherwise. Then with a half-whimsical, half-pathetic touch upon his bandaged arm, he said:—

“The surgeon said that with time and care this would heal, but the accident has left me but one hand wherewith to begin that other campaign which means so much to me,—for if I win you not, I might as well have perished at the hands of the Redcoats.”

As she listened, while the afternoon wore away, she was conscious of some change in him. Not that his tone showed less of resolution to achieve his purpose; it was rather an absence of the over-weening self-confidence which had so offended her in the past. Five years of warfare and baffled wooing had taught him something of self-distrust, something of humility which became him well. The empty sleeve and the emaciated, listless figure touched her with a quick pity, in such violent contrast were they to his former robust activity and superb proportions, so that she sighed and turned her face aside. [Pg 311]

And he, on his part, was studying her, finding again, with a thrill of joy, the same saucy curves about her lips, the same glinting blue lights in her eyes that had held his heart captive in the past; and noting, too, the touch of womanly dignity which had in some wise supplanted the impetuosity of the old days. The girl of eighteen had become a woman of twenty-three since that day she had laughed down upon the Continentals marching away to Valley Forge. But there was not an attraction lost; rather was every charm ripened and perfected by the hallowing touches of growth and development. If he had loved her in the past, a thousand times more did he love her now in her splendid womanhood. Had she cared for Barry? Always the question was a stab; and with it now there came the first quick doubt of the final healing of his arm. Could she ever love him if he should be maimed like this forever?

Looking up suddenly, she found his eyes upon her face in such a wistful gaze that she flushed involuntarily, and a painful silence fell between them. Intuitively she felt that this was not the same Richard who had gone away, this earnest, tender man with not a trace of arrogance in his manner. Had he always been like this, they need not have quarrelled. She had been willing to overlook much had he only left her a right to her own opinions, and treated the views her father had taught her with respect. [Pg 312]

“Do you know,” she said, breaking the pause with a little nervous laugh, “that if you are to preserve the good will of your neighbours, you must stay away from me?”

“Then do I this minute forswear their friendship, for to stay from you would be to remain outside of Paradise. Only tell me one thing,—you did not hate me for the news I wrote you of Barry?”

“Nay, it was the one of your letters I felt drawn to answer.”

He took her unresisting hand and kissed it softly. “If you loved him, I would I had died in his place.”

And then again that silence fell between them, while at his heart was biting that most helpless of all jealousy—the jealousy of the dead. Against a living rival one may contend with hope; but when that on which the heart is set has come to be but a memory, incapable of blunder or cruelty, the contest becomes useless, or pitifully unequal. Yearningly Richard’s eyes studied the face before him, and yet he would not ask her the question that burned in his heart. Some day she would tell him the truth of her own accord; until then he must wait and suffer. [Pg 313]

His return, she foresaw, was to be to her at once a relief and an embarrassment, for she would not consent to his making public her share in his escape of the winter, lest it look like a plea on her part for a cessation of hostilities.

“I have held my own against them all these years; I will not ask for any terms, now that the end has come, and my side has gone down in defeat,” she said.

“But, Joscelyn, think how they would adore you for such a service to their country! My information was most useful to General Greene.”

"I did it not for sake of their country."

"Well, then, for sake of their countryman. They love me, if you do not." He leaned toward her laughing, yet pleading; and she noted how honest and pleasant were his eyes. But she held to her point against all of his arguments; and so he was feign to yield except in regard to his mother; there he was firm.

"I never dreamed but that she knew, for the quick movements of the last campaign left no time for letters to reach me from home. Had I not thought you would tell her as soon as the British were well out of town, I should have asked a furlough, and come home to set you right. To think what you have suffered for saving my poor life!"

And so it was that half an hour later Mistress Clevering came hastily in without the ceremony of knocking, and taking Joscelyn in her arms,—to Mistress Cheshire's amazement,—said many grateful and affectionate things. [Pg 314]

"When I think of what you have done for us, I am bowed down with humiliation for the cruelty with which I have requited you. Oh, my dear, my dear! had you only told me and your mother at the time, things would have been very different."

"Yes," answered the girl, demurely, "so different that Master Clevering's life would have paid the penalty of his daring. Nay, it was a game at which only one could play with safety. You could have done naught but share my anxiety, and that were no help."

"And to think how I have scolded and blamed you for the quarrel between me and Ann," said her mother, tearfully; but Joscelyn's tender answer comforted her.

"And here comes Betty to make her peace with you, too," Aunt Clevering said, as the breathless girl entered.

"Oh, Betty and I have been friends these many weeks, as dear Mistress Strudwick can testify," Joscelyn said, putting her arm affectionately around Betty, who with a grateful cry had sprung to her side. And from the doorway, Richard thought he had never seen a more beautiful picture.

Thus was the breach that had yawned between the two families healed; and the sorest ache in Joscelyn's heart was cured as she witnessed the happiness of her mother who, with a firmness scarcely to be expected, had given up her old friend and held stanchly to her daughter, although she held that daughter to blame. It was touching to see her childish delight in the renewal of the old relations. A dozen times a day she was in and out of the two houses, for Richard's wound afforded her many pretexts for kindly ministrations. He never left his bed except to lie on the sofa by the window, for his strength seemed suddenly to have failed him after the sustained effort he had made to reach home. Often he wished Joscelyn would come in her mother's stead; but for her own reasons the girl kept her distance, so that sometimes he did not see her for days together. And every day that she stayed away the jealous pain bit deeper into his heart. [Pg 315]

But one day she came of her own accord. There had been a knock and the sound of a man's voice at the door, followed by the maid making some excuse for Mistress Clevering; and presently, when all had grown silent, Betty came through the sitting-room with a face so white that Richard called out from where he lay to know what was the matter. But she did not stop to answer, and so he waited in a troubled doubt while the clock ticked off a slow twenty minutes. Then the door opened, and Joscelyn came straight up to his couch, a strange light of pleading in her eyes.

"Richard," she said, and his face brightened, for she had taken to calling him Master Clevering with a formality he hated. "Richard, if a man be true and honest and loves a woman, should he not have the chance to tell her so and win her?" [Pg 316]

"Most assuredly."

"And old feuds and differences of a former generation, with which he had nothing to do, should have no weight to hold him back?"

"Why—what mean you?"

"This; that even as you love me," and a brilliant colour dyed her cheeks at mention of it, "so does Eustace Singleton love Betty."

"I had half guessed as much—and I am sorry."

"And Betty loves him. Nay, lie still and look not so angrily at me. There is no one to blame; a woman's heart, like a man's, asks no permission in the giving of itself."

"But Betty knew—"

"Yes, she knew all the opposition in store for her, and she made her own fight; but love takes no dictation."

"Right well do I know that."

"Then you have no room for a quarrel with her; rather should your sympathy be on her side. All her happiness is set on Eustace; he is her true lover, has been for years,—and I have resolved so to aid her, that you and Aunt Clevering shall not break her heart by a cruel and useless separation." She stepped back and threw up her head; just so had she looked a year ago, when [Pg 317]

she bade defiance to the short colonel while he himself crouched in her shadowy garret. For a moment they gazed at each other steadily, then she was again beside him, her eyes luminous with a gentle entreaty:—

“Richard, if—if I loved you with all my soul, would you let my mother’s dislike, if she did dislike you, stand between us?”

“My God, no!”

“Eustace is a man like you—and Betty loves him like that.”

He saw the drift of her meaning but he did not answer, and thus for another minute they looked into each other’s eyes unwaveringly; then his gaze fell, and with a sudden delicious softening of manner, she stooped and took his hand.

“Richard, Eustace is yonder in my parlour,—come back like a brave man to begin life all over, and suffer anything to be near Betty. He has been denied entrance at your door. Bid me bring him here to you. If not—then will I take Betty to him, even though I should thus lose yours and Aunt Clevering’s friendship forever.”

“You make hard terms.”

“I am dealing with a hard man.”

“Think you so, sweetheart? Methought I had ever been gentle to you. Betty’s happiness is very dear to me—” he broke off, sighing. She still held his hand, or rather he held hers, for his was the stronger grasp. Suddenly, with that same enchanting gentleness, she bent close to him, and laid her cheek against his tingling fingers:—

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“Thank you, Richard, for yielding; I knew when once you understood, you could not be so cruel as to refuse. I will bring Eustace at once.”

“But, Joscelyn, I did not say—”

“Oh, but you looked your consent—and I never saw your eyes so beautiful, such a tender gray.” He flushed with pleasure, still, however, protesting; but she was already at the door, whence she looked back at him with a roguish smile, “I shall give you half an hour to make Aunt Clevering see things as we do. At the end of that time I will be here with Eustace; and if you wish to go on being friends with me, be sure to have on your very best manners and—and that beautiful light in your eyes.”

She kept her word; no one ever knew what passed between Richard and his mother, but an hour later Mistress Clevering, stiff of lip, but courteous of manner, bade Betty take Master Singleton from Richard’s room to the parlour, and find him some refreshment. And when Betty had obeyed, Joscelyn softly closed the door behind them, shutting them into a rose-hued world of their own, where it were sacrilege for another to intrude. Upstairs she heard Richard calling her entreatingly, but remembering by what means her victory over his prejudice had been won, she pretended not to hear, but ran swiftly into the street, and reached Mistress Strudwick’s door with such a glowing face that that lady exclaimed:—

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“Hoity-toity, child! still letting your cheeks play the Royalist, although the war is done? Your sweetheart should see you now. In sooth, I think Amanda Bryce would even agree that you are pretty. Come here and tell an old woman what all these blushes mean.”

And Joscelyn’s fibbing tongue said it was only the race she had run in the wind from her door.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

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AN UNANSWERED QUESTION.

“As o’er the grass, beneath the larches
there
We gayly stepped, the high noon
overhead,
Then Love was born—was born so
strong and fair.”

—GIPSY SONG.

Although Joscelyn continued to hold herself aloof from Richard, yet she was conscious of his protecting influence in other ways besides the healing of that family quarrel that had been such a burden to her and to them all. Most of the women of her set continued to cut her outright, or to treat her with the scantest courtesy; but there were no more threats concerning her; the boys who had hooted under her window left off their insolent ways, and the merchants and tradespeople no longer gave her indifferent service. And in all this she recognized Richard’s work, for he had openly espoused her cause, and had let it be known that those who offended or

ill-used her should later on be answerable to him. From the day of his coming, she felt herself shadowed by an unobtrusive but persistent watchfulness that plucked many a thorn from her path; and after the stormy months that had passed, she could not but be grateful for the calm. Invalid though he was, she intuitively felt his to be the stronger will, and made no fight against what he did in her behalf. The protection for which she had longed had come to her, and she was glad to feel his strength between her and her persecutors. Never in any boastful way did he remind her of the defeat of her cause; and tacitly she acknowledged his generosity. The very perils they had shared drew them together with that subtle bond of sympathy a mutual interest creates; and so seldom was there a return to their former sparring that Mistress Strudwick protested she knew not which had the better manners.

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"I declare, my dear," she said, pinching Joscelyn's cheek, "you are so beautifully behaved of late that I begin to find you a bit tiresome. Methinks I must stir up Amanda Bryce to pay you a visit and talk over the war, or else we'll all be stagnating for lack of excitement."

"Well, after these eight years of fermentation, stagnation is just now the special estate to which I aspire."

"So? Well, Richard here prefers the estate of matrimony. Is it not true, my lad?" And from the sofa Richard's eyes said yes; whereupon the old lady went on, nodding her head with mock solemnity, "And since one of you wants stagnation and one wants matrimony, I am not so sure but that you are of the same mind, for some folk find these things of a piece. And so, miss, you may have come around to Richard's way of thinking after all."

And seeing Joscelyn stiffen, Richard was sorry that the conversation had taken such a personal turn; for the two had come in to pay him a visit. That was one thing that troubled him—she never came by herself; always it was her mother or Betty or Janet Cameron she brought with her as though she feared to trust herself alone with him, wishing, perchance, to hear no more of his love-making. And even with these others she came so seldom. He could not go to her, for the hard rough journey home had racked his arm and set the fever to throbbing again in his blood, and he must remain quiet, or dire consequences were threatened.

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But one February night, when she had stayed away several days, and the longing in his breast grew unbearable, he sent for her. The wind without howled like some hungry creature seeking its prey, and the white-fingered spirit of the snowstorm tapped weirdly at his window. But he gave it no heed; storm or shine, he must see her this night of all others; and so a word of entreaty was sent across the street. She came at once, a brilliant apparition in a scarlet shawl over which the snow lay powdered in shining crystals; on her lips and in her eyes the smile of which he had dreamed in the copper and crimson sunsets on the prison-ship. He gathered her cold hands into his feverish ones.

"You knew I must see you this night?"

"Yes; I felt you would send for me, for I knew we were thinking of the same things."

"A year ago to-night you and I stood in jeopardy of our lives."

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She nodded; all day she had been living over those fearful hours of which this day was the anniversary.

"Yes, a year ago to-night Tarleton held us in his toils."

"We have never talked of that dreadful time; now I want you to tell me everything you can recall of it. Sit down."

As she obeyed, the wide shawl fell away and left in sight the silver brocade of her gown, and her shoulders rising white and beautiful from the lace of the low bodice. He started, and raised himself upon his elbow. Was he dreaming? No; the powder and the rose were in her hair, the saucy patch at the corner of her mouth. She had not forgotten; just so had she looked when she faced Tarleton, and risked her womanhood for his own safety. He could not speak, but his eyes did full homage to her beauty.

"I knew you would send for me, so I was ready," she said, and smiled again. So it was for him she had robed herself thus!—there was a thrill of ecstasy in his veins. And then when he still did not speak, for sheer joy of looking at her, she began to talk of that terrible day; and both of them lived over in a quick rush of memory all its hopes and fears, its uncertainties and dangers. Her fingers were icy cold, and the very tremors that had then possessed her, crept again through her veins as she went from scene to scene, and he learned for the first time all of her deceptions and trials. So absorbed was she that she did not even know he had taken her hands in his, until she felt the hot pressure at the end of her narrative. Then when there seemed nothing left to tell, and he still looked at her in a silence more eloquent than words, she grew restless and rose to go; but he caught her skirt.

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"Not yet, not yet! Betty is happy with her lover in the parlour, and mother is somewhere down there acting propriety or else fast asleep. For this one evening, at least, you shall belong to me."

And then when those hot, trembling fingers had drawn her again to her seat, he went on:—

"There is one question I have wanted to ask you all these months—" And then, for very fear of her answer, he hesitated and substituted another. "Why did you not come back to me that last night?"

You knew I was waiting for you, longing for you with every heart-throb."

"It was so late."

"Late? What mattered an hour on the dial when I wanted you so much?"

And she flushed and hesitated, remembering she had not gone back at that unseemingly hour lest he should misunderstand her; men were so cold in their judgments. Looking at him now she was ashamed of that doubt of him.

"Was it in truth the lateness of the hour, or—or because of what Barry said to you on the stair? I opened the attic door and saw you, and I knew he was talking of his love. My God, how I envied him! Was it for that you stayed away from me?" [Pg 325]

She turned her head aside with a gesture that hurt him like a knife-thrust. Then the question that had burnt in his thoughts, and filled his heart with cankering jealousy all these weeks, came out:—

"Joscelyn, did you love him? Tell me the truth in mercy."

Slowly her eyes came back to him, soft and blue, and kindled with a flame he had never seen before. He rose on his elbow to meet the answer, eager yet fearful; but before she could speak, Betty opened the door.

"Eustace and I are coming to sit with you awhile, Richard, for you two must be better acquainted," she said to him; and with the blindness that is a part of love, neither she nor Eustace saw that their coming was unwelcome. Before they left, Joscelyn had slipped away, carrying his question and its answer in her heart. But before she went to bed, she opened the box where she kept her treasures, and kneeling in front of her fire, laid upon the glowing embers the scarlet sash of an officer in the king's service.

"I have no right to keep you any longer," she whispered, as the silk cracked and crinkled, and passed away in a smoke-fringed flame; "no right, for now I know, I know!" [Pg 326]

The quiet of the town was now frequently broken; for as February drew to a close, some of the soldiers began to straggle home, some on furlough, some on dismissal. Billy Bryce, hungry for the toothsome things in his mother's pantry and impatient for a sight of the yellow curls that sunned themselves on Janet's head, came first. But ten minutes spent in that young woman's company so dampened his spirits, that for days his mother's utmost efforts in culinary arts failed to tempt him. Janet knew the very hour of his arrival, and she also knew that it was two hours before he came to seek her. She could not know that his stay with his mother had been as unwilling as it was dutiful; so to complicate matters a little more she had gone out to pay some calls that might have waited a month. But he found her at last on Joscelyn's porch, her hands in her muff, her curls bobbing from under her hood to the fur-trimmed tippet below, where the winter sunshine seemed to gather itself into a focus. He waved to her from halfway down the square, but she only squinted up her eyes as in a vain effort at recognition.

"Well, I declare," she exclaimed patronizingly, as he sprang eagerly up the steps, "if it isn't Mistress Bryce's little Billy! Why, Billy, child, you must have grown quite an inch since you went away. How is your dear mother to-day?"

Her tone and manner were indescribably superior, as though she were talking to a child of six, so that the amazed and abashed boy, instead of hugging her in his long arms as he wanted to, took the tips of the little fingers she put out to him, and stammeringly and solicitously asked if she had been quite well since he saw her last. She said it was a long time to remember, but she would do the best she could, and immediately began to count off on her fingers the number of headaches and toothaches she had had in the past two years; until Joscelyn, sorry for the boy's unprovoked misery, stopped her abruptly, and finally sent Billy across the street to pour out his disappointment to Richard. [Pg 327]

"Janet, you little barbarian, you have no heart!"

"Oh, yes I have," replied that imperturbable young woman; "I have a great big heart for a grown man, but you see I do not particularly care for children who are still dangling at their mother's apron string."

Even a lecture from Richard, to whom she was much attached, did her no good; for all the while he was speaking she sat studying the effect of her high-heeled shoe on Betty's blue footstool, and answered his peroration about Billy's broken heart with the utterly irrelevant assertion that Frederick Wyley said she had the prettiest foot in the colonies. Did Richard agree with him? So Billy's cause was not advanced any, and Richard began to advise him to think no more of this yellow-haired tormentor. [Pg 328]

"I declare, Billy Bryce looks like a child with perpetual cramps," Mistress Strudwick exclaimed to Joscelyn one day, when the lad passed the window where the two sat; and then she glanced down the room to her medicine-box.

"But it is a course of sweets, not bitters, that he needs," laughed Joscelyn. "It's his heart and not his stomach that ails Billy."

"Half the lovesickness in the world is nothing but dyspepsia; mighty few cases of disappointed

affection outlast a torpid liver."

"I never heard you make such an unsentimental remark."

"You never heard me tell such a truth. Bone-set and senna is the thing for Billy, and I'll see that he gets a bottle; if it does not cure his disappointment, it will at least kill off that particular brand of long face he is wearing. No wonder Janet turns up her nose at him."

"Yes, I begin to think she is permanently at outs with him."

Then other soldiers began to arrive. Thomas Nash got sick-leave from Washington's staff; and from the south came Master Strudwick, more anxious for a sight of home and wife than for the gold which the dissatisfied army was awaiting; and out of the north came Peter Ruffin, a weird wraith of his former self, to tell anew the horrible story of the prison-ships. The other Hillsboro' man, who had been with him had succumbed to the plague, and gone to swell the number of those at whose shallow graves the hungry sea was forever calling.

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"And Dame Grant?" asked Richard, when Peter came to see him.

"She, too, fell a victim to the disease of the hulks, and sorely did we miss her. I knew you had escaped in safety, because one day she came to the ship wearing a new woollen hood, and when we twitted her about it over the rail, asking her if it was a lover's gift, she said that Dick Clevering's sweetheart had sent it to her out of gratitude from the south."

"I helped to knit it," Betty cried, while Joscelyn's eyes were not lifted from the floor. In the semi-twilight of the room, Richard reached out and touched her hand gently.

"It was like your generous heart."

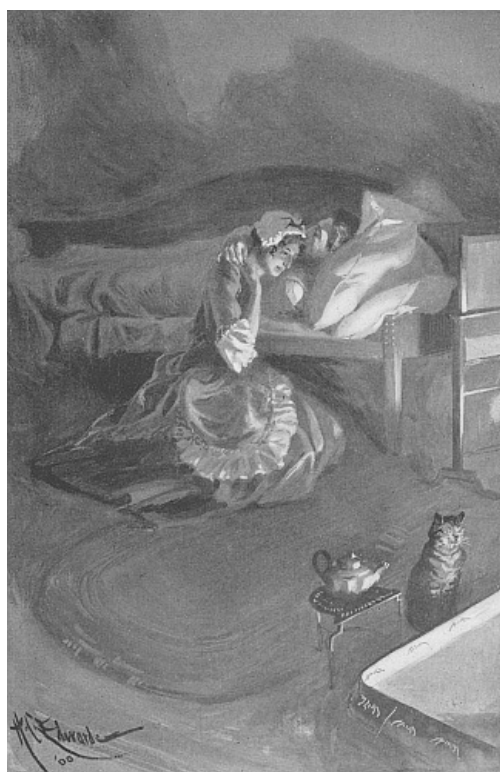
"But I made it out of the reddest wool I could find, with never a touch of blue or buff," she answered, laughing; but Richard was content.

Nor did these home-coming men bring the only tidings from the outside world. Now and then letters came that set the tongues to wagging; now with news of Washington's refusal of a crown, now with a description of Mary Singleton's marriage to Edward Moore. Janet refused persistently to show her letters which came in the Halifax post, but one day Richard had one from Colborn that made him laugh with delight:—

"The miniature is set in a narrow gold frame, without jewels; for although I won my promotion, it was only a lieutenantancy. However, I am content. It was at Guilford Court-house, in your own Carolina country, the day Tarleton was wounded. Soon I am going home, with my pockets full of American pebbles, to claim the original, and bring her back here to this great country to enjoy the freedom I am glad you won."

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And when Joscelyn went home, after hearing the letter read, she again opened her box of treasures and took from it a shining gold piece, and looked at it with a startled sweetness in her eyes.



**"MY HEART'S PRISONER FOR TIME
AND ETERNITY."**

THE END OF THE THREAD.

“Does not all the blood
within me
Leap to meet thee, leap to
meet thee,
As the spring to meet the
sunshine!”

—“Hiawatha.”

After a few weeks Richard was able to leave his couch and move about a little, still hampered, however, by splints and bandages; for in his fevered tossings he had hurt his arm anew, and the setting had to be gone over again. The doctor's face was very grave as he warned him against another accident.

One afternoon, being lonely and having no better way to pass the time, he went with Betty to her sewing society. There he protested he wished to make himself useful, and was quite willing to snip threads and tie knots. But his offer was received with scoffs, and instead he was forthwith enthroned in the best chair, served with coffee by one girl, and with cake by another, and petted and praised like a prince.

“And now,” said Janet Cameron, taking the stool at his feet and preparing to look very busy, “while we sew, you shall tell us a story of your camp life,—something that will make our blood curdle and tingle like it used to do when the war messengers rode into town, and we knew not what tidings they brought.”

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“Yes, tell us a story, Master Clevering,” they all cried, and settled themselves to listen.

“Let it be about a real hero, Richard; and make him as tall as Goliath and as strong as Samson. We'll credit anything you say,” laughed Janet, biting off a length of thread.

“And if you wish to keep Janet's attention to the end, give him jet black hair and call him Frederick,” cried Dorothy Graham. Whereat there was a general laugh, and for which personality the speaker got a prick from Janet's needle.

“One need not draw on his imagination for heroes in these stirring times, Janet. The land is full of them,” Richard answered, catching one of her shining curls and twisting it about his finger, “though of course jet black hair and the name of Frederick is a combination to inspire any story-teller.”

And then he told them of Monmouth day,—of its exultant beginning, its strange changes and chances, its palsyng despair, its victory snatched from defeat. And while the story was nearing its climax and the needles were idlest, who should pass along the opposite sidewalk but Mistress Joscelyn Cheshire, her skirts held daintily out of the slush and snow, while a riotous March wind set her throat ribbons in a flutter, and kissed her cheeks to a glow a lover might have envied. A more charming vision it was hard to conjure up, and the story-teller's narrative faltered, and his words trailed off into silence as he gazed. But immediately the slumbering ill-will of the sempsters began to show itself in sundry nods and head tossings.

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“There goes the Tory beauty,” said one sneering voice, “parading herself before us out of very defiance, no doubt.”

“She has been but to old Polly Little's to carry her some soup,” Betty said hotly.

“And there was no other afternoon for her to go, and no other path to take but the one by this door where we might see her! You and Richard are foolish to be always defending her; she showed you small gratitude last winter, telling the secrets of your house.”

“Yes; and we know she sent and received spying letters about us to the British commander. I never speak to her, Tory ingrate that she is!”

And then while Betty fell to crying and Janet scolded back, declaring Joscelyn was better than all of them, the criticisms grew so harsh, and so incisive were the shrugs and lifted brows, that Richard forgot his wound, forgot the pledge of secrecy upon him, forgot everything but his anger, and rising up, cried out:—

“Listen; I will tell you another story, not of a hero, but of a heroine, a slip of a girl whose courage equalled anything I ever saw upon the bloodiest battle-field, in whose presence the bravest of the brave must uncover in reverence.”

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And then he told them the whole story of his hiding and escape while Cornwallis held the town the winter gone. Told it forcibly, graphically as he knew how, putting Joscelyn in such a heroic light that her maligners held down their heads in shame and confusion, feeling themselves to be

all unworthy in comparison; and Dorothy was crying upon her sewing, and Janet's arm was about his neck in an unconscious, breathless gratitude for Joscelyn.

And those letters which had excited their wrath?—there was nothing of treason or espionage in them; they were but love notes from a British officer whose chivalric homage had been an honour to any woman. He knew, for he had put her answers into the breast-pocket of the young officer the day they buried him from the battle-field on the banks of the river that flows forever to the sea.

So he finished; and thus did Joscelyn stand before them at last in her true colours.

Then with the heat of his anger still upon him, and not waiting for Betty, Richard got his hat and quitted the house. After that scene, the air of the room stifled him. He could not be sorry for what he had done, but he must go straight to Joscelyn and tell her himself, and make what peace with her he might. He could better afford to bear her anger than to hear her maligned by those who would be utterly incapable of her courage or her sacrifice. He had always known he must tell his story if he heard her slandered.

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He was very weak from his long stay indoors, and the excitement of the scene through which he had just passed had left his brain dizzy, so that he was all unfit to take the homeward journey alone. He did not notice the ice on the crossing until suddenly he felt himself slipping—faster, faster. He made one frantic effort to regain his balance, missed his footing, and came down with a crash and a groan upon the jagged cobblestones. He heard a woman's voice scream out in terror, saw Joscelyn kneel beside him, and then he fainted.

It destroyed his last chance,—that terrible fall,—the doctors said; for the arm had again been fractured and lacerated beyond cure, and to lose it was the one hope of life; and even that hope was but a slender one. When Joscelyn heard this, she stayed all the afternoon in her room, holding the gold piece very hard and tight and weeping bitterly.

But the operation was successful; and for long days the patient lay quiet, getting back his hold on the world. His recovery was slower even than had been expected, but it was sure, and that was enough for thankfulness. His mother was telling him this one gusty April twilight, when Joscelyn came into the room on one of her rare visits. The door was open, so they had not known she was there; and stopping to remove her wrap, for the day was cool and showery, she heard the end of their talk.

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"Fretting is wrong, Richard. You should be thankful for so sure a recovery."

"Perchance I should; but what avails health when a man may not have that which is dearer than the strength of giants?"

"And what may that be, my son?"

"Joscelyn. I love her—love her beyond all words, all thoughts; and now I shall never possess her."

"I had long ago guessed your love for her," his mother said slowly; then added, after a pause, "but I see not why you should not possess her; you have a true heart, a goodly property, and a shapely figure which this accident will scarcely mar; a man like that has but to ask—"

"Nay, that is just it; a man maimed like me has no right to hamper a woman's life—to ask her love. She is grateful for the protection I have brought her, but she has no thought for me beside. I lie here and watch that clock every hour of every day, longing to see her come, hoping for some sign of awakened love, but there is none. That she comes so seldom is evidence that she means me to understand this. I shall never dare ask her again to marry me, but I shall love her always—always."

There was an infinite pathos in the last words that silenced his mother, and drew something like a sob from the girl in the shadow of the curtained door. How generous he was; how brave and true he had always been! Never once, even in their days of quarrel and make-up, had she known him lacking in courage and generosity. What would her life be now without him, for had he not made all the crooked ways straight before her; had he not given her back the love and esteem of her neighbours, her old place in the community? Was it not to him she owed all this, and her mother's happiness besides? Gratitude, did he say? Surely that was not all there was in her heart, for gratitude did not make a girl shy and sensitive and dreamy. It was not gratitude that had made her weep so passionately over his suffering and his loss, and kiss a senseless coin in the dark of her chamber. From that hour she had worn it in a silken bag about her neck; she drew it out now and held it in her trembling fingers.

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Presently Mistress Clevering rose and quitted the room by another door, unwilling that Richard should see her emotion. Joscelyn hesitated upon the threshold, held back by a palpitant timidity, until across the firelit silence there came her name in a sigh that was half a sob:—

"Joscelyn—lost—lost!"

Then with a sudden resolve she came out of the shadow into the dim light of the room, and kneeling by his couch, drew his one arm over her shoulder and laid her head on his breast.

"I am here—Richard."

"You? Dear love, dear love, what does this mean?"

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"Can you not guess?" she whispered, slipping the gold piece into his hand, her own tremulous with emotion.

"I dare not."

"What was the gold piece to be?" Her voice was scarcely more than a thread of sound.

"Our wedding ring—at least, I hoped so once."

She pressed his fingers together over it, her face still hidden on his breast. "Give it back to me sometime—in that shape."

"You mean you will marry me? Speak quick, beloved!"

"I mean that—that the war is over, and I surrender myself—your prisoner, and you will take me."

"My heart's prisoner for time and eternity; thank God!"

A burned-out log snapped and fell to either side of the andirons, sending a shower of golden sparks up the wide chimney. She raised her head and looked at him, and by the fleeting gleam of the fire he found at last the love-light for which he had so long waited shining in the depths of her sea-blue eyes.

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