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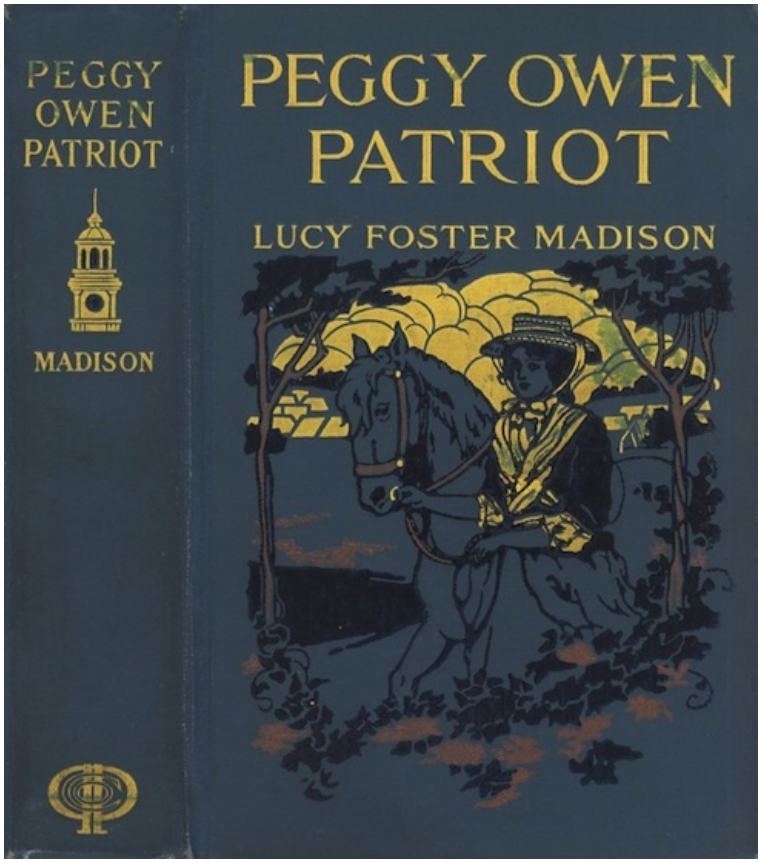

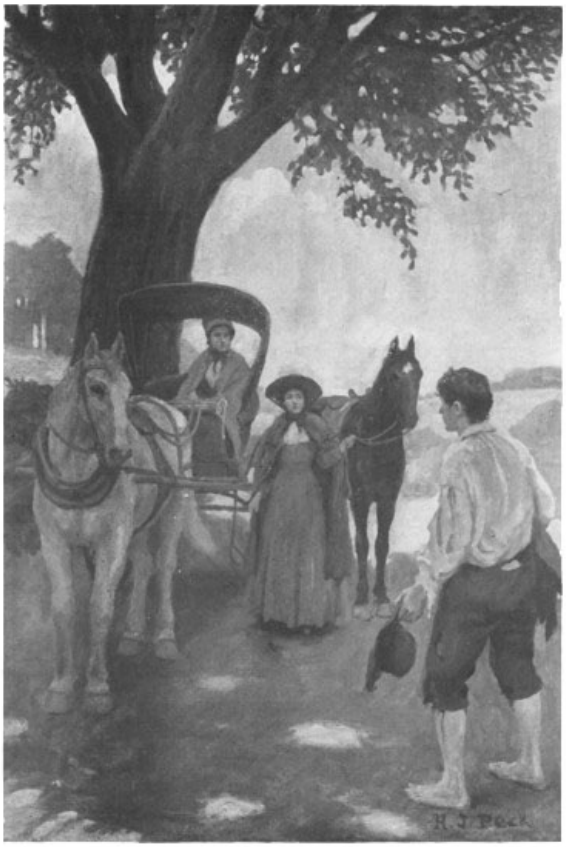

“CAN I BE OF ANY ASSISTANCE?”

Peggy Owen Patriot

A Story for Girls

BY

Lucy Foster Madison

Author of

“Peggy Owen”
“Peggy Owen at Yorktown”
“Peggy Owen and Liberty”

Illustrated by H.J. Peck

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Philadelphia MCMXVII

“I pray you, let us satisfy our eyes
With the memorials and things of fame
That do renown this city.”

Introduction

In “Peggy Owen,” the preceding book of the series, the heroine, a little Quaker maid, lives across from the State House in Philadelphia. By reason of this she becomes much interested in the

movements of the Continental Congress, and when her father, in spite of his religion, takes up arms for the Whigs she too becomes an ardent patriot. While David Owen is with the army before Boston, Peggy and her mother find a kinsman of his—William Owen, a colonel in the English army—a prisoner in the city's new jail.

They succeed in having him released on parole, and take him into their home, where he requites their kindness by selfishness and arrogance, even killing Peggy's pet dog, Pilot. He is exchanged at length, but before leaving he brings one James Molesworth to the house, claiming that he does not like to leave them unprotected. This man Peggy discovers to be a spy.

Upon the advance of the British toward Philadelphia Peggy and her mother go to their farm on the banks of the Wissahickon. Here they are almost denuded of supplies by foragers, one party of which is headed by their own kinsman, Colonel Owen. American troopers arrive, and a sharp skirmish takes place, in which Colonel Owen is wounded. While caring for him word is received that David Owen is a prisoner in Philadelphia, and ill of a fever. General Howe proposes to have him exchanged for one Thomas Shale, and Peggy rides to Valley Forge to secure the consent of General Washington. Owing to the fact that the man is a spy and a deserter the exchange cannot take place, and, in a blaze of anger at finding her cousin so comfortable while her own father lies ill, Peggy denounces him, and forces him to accede to the proposal that he be exchanged for her father. The book closes with the evacuation of Philadelphia by the British.

The present volume shows the Owens at Washington's camp in northern New Jersey. Peggy's further adventures are continued in "Peggy Owen at Yorktown" and "Peggy Owen and Liberty."

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Peggy Owen, Patriot

CHAPTER I—ON THE ROAD TO PHILADELPHIA

“And rising Chestnut Hill around surveyed
Wide woods below in vast extent displayed.”

—“The Forester,” *Alexander Wilson*.

“Oh, gracious!”

The exclamation burst from the lips of a slender girl mounted upon a small black mare, and she drew rein abruptly.

“What is it, Peggy?” asked a sweet-faced matron, leaning from the side of a “one horse chair” drawn up under the shade of a tree by the roadside. “What hath happened? Thee seems dismayed.”

“I am, mother,” answered the girl, springing lightly from the back of the horse. “My saddle girth hath broken, and both Robert and Tom are back with the wagons. There is a breakdown. What shall I do? This will cause another delay, I fear.”

“Thee can do nothing, Peggy, until Robert returns. Try to content thyself until then.”

“I could repair it myself, I believe, if I only had a string,” said the maiden. “I wonder if there isn’t one in the chaise. Let’s look, mother.”

Throwing the bridle over her arm the girl joined her mother, and the two began a hasty search of the vehicle.

It was a golden day in September, 1778, and the afternoon sun was flooding with light the calm and radiant landscape afforded by the wooded slopes of Chestnut Hill, penetrating even the dense branches that overarched the highroad leading to Germantown.

It was one of those soft, balmy days when the fathomless daylight seemed to stand and dream. A cool elixir was in the air. The distant range of hills beyond the river Schuylkill was bound with a faint haze, a frail transparency whose lucid purple barely veiled the valleys. From the motionless trees the long clean shadows swept over tangles of underbrush brightened by the purple coronets of asters, feathery plumes of goldenrod, and the burning glory of the scarlet sumac. Ranks of silken thistles blown to seed disputed possession of the roadside with lowly poke-bushes laden with Tyrian fruit.

The view from the crest of the hill where the chaise had stopped was beautiful. The great forest land spread out beneath seemed boundless in extent, for the farms scattered among the woodland were scarcely visible from the height, but the maiden and her mother were so intent upon the mishap of the broken strap as to be for the nonce insensible to the delights of the scenery. So absorbed were they that they started violently when a voice exclaimed:

“Your servant, ladies! Can I be of any assistance?”

“Why,” gasped Peggy, turning about in amazement as a lad of about eighteen, whose appearance was far from reassuring, stepped from the woods into the road. “Who art thou, and what does thee want?”

“I want to help you mend your saddle,” said the youth coolly, doffing a tattered beaver with some grace. “Didst not say that the girth had broke?”

“Yes, but,” began the girl, when her mother spoke:

“Art sure that thou canst aid us, my lad?” she asked mildly. “Thou wilt not mind if I say that thee looks in need of aid thyself.”

“As to that, madam, it can be discussed later,” he rejoined. “For the present, permit me to say that here is a piece of rawhide, and here a jack-knife. What doth hinder the repairing of the saddle but your permission?”

“And that thou hast,” returned the lady. “We shall be indeed grateful to thee for thy aid.”

At once the youth stepped to the side of the mare, and inspected the broken band critically. Then, removing the saddle to the ground, he set to work upon it with a dexterity that showed him to be no novice. “What is the name of the pony?” he asked, addressing the maiden directly.

“Star,” answered she regarding him with curious eyes.

He was in truth a spectacle to excite both curiosity and pity. He was haggard and unkempt, and his garments hung about him in tatters. His form was thin to emaciation, and, while he boasted the remains of a beaver, his feet were without covering of any sort. 15

“’Tis a pretty beast,” he remarked, seeming not at all concerned as to his rags. “One of the likeliest bits of horse-flesh I’ve seen in many a day. Are you fond of her?”

“I am indeed,” answered the girl, patting the mare gently. “My father gave her to me, and I would not lose her for anything. He is now with the army at White Plains, New York.”

“Are you not Quakers?” he queried, glancing up in surprise.

“We are of the Society of Friends, which the world’s people call Quakers,” interposed the matron from the chaise.

“And they, methought, were neutral,” he observed with a smile.

“Not all, friend. There be some who are called Free Quakers, because they choose to range themselves upon the side of their country. Methinks thou shouldst have heard of them.” 16

“I have,” he rejoined, “but as Fighting or Hickory Quakers.”

“It doesn’t matter what we are called so long as we are of service to the country,” exclaimed Peggy with some warmth. “Is thee not of the army too? Thou art an American.”

The lad hesitated, and then said quickly: “Not now. I have been.” And then, abruptly—“Are you ladies alone?”

“No,” replied the girl, casting an anxious glance down the roadway. The highways of Pennsylvania, once so peaceful and serene, were by this period of the war so infected with outlaws and ruffians as to be scarcely safe for travelers. “We have an escort who are coming up with the wagons. One broke, and it took all hands to repair it. They should be here at any time now.”

“There!” spoke the youth, rising. “I think, mistress, that you will find your saddle in prime order for the rest of your journey.”

“Thank thee,” said Peggy gratefully. “It is well done. And now what shall we do for thee? How can we serve thee for thy kindness?” 17

“Are you bound for Philadelphia, or do you stop in Germantown?” he asked.

“Philadelphia, my lad,” spoke the mother.

“Would thee——” She hesitated a moment and then drew forth some bills. “Would thee accept some of these? ’Tis all I have to offer in the shape of money. Hard coin is seldom met with these days.”

“Nay,” said the boy with a gesture of scorn. “Keep your bills, madam. I have had my fill of Continental money. ’Twould take all that you have to purchase a meal that would be filling, and I doubt whether the farmers hereabouts would take them.”

“There is a law now compelling every one to take them,” cried Peggy. “They will have to take the Continental money whether they wish to or not. And they should. Every good patriot should stand by the country’s currency.”

“You are all for the patriots, I see,” he remarked. “When one has suffered in the cause, and received naught from an ungrateful country one doesn’t feel so warmly toward them.”

“But, my lad,” broke in the lady, “thee will pardon me, I know, if I say again that thee looks in need of assistance. If we cannot aid thee here perchance in the city we could be of service. I am Lowry Owen, David Owen’s wife. Thou mayst have heard of him?” 18

“Perchance then, madam, you would not mind if I accompanied you to the city?” queried the lad. “Wilt let me ride with you?”

“With pleasure,” answered Mrs. Owen. “Thou shalt sit in the chaise with me while Tom may go in the wagons. This chair is not so comfortable as a coach, because it hath no springs or leather bands, but thou wilt not find it unbearable.”

“’Twill be better than walking,” he returned with easy assurance. His assurance deserted him suddenly, and he sank upon the ground abruptly. “I am faint,” he murmured.

“The poor lad is ill,” cried Peggy hastening to his side. “Oh, mother! what does thee think is the matter?”

“’Tis hunger, I fear,” replied Mrs. Owen hastily descending from the chair. “Peggy, fetch me the portmanteau from under the seat. Why did I not ask as to thy needs?” she added with grave self-reproach as the youth reached eagerly for the food. “There! Be not too ravenous, my lad. Thou shalt have thy fill.” 19

“Oh, but——” uttered the boy, clutching the provisions. He said no more, but ate with frantic haste, as though he feared the viands would be taken from him. Mrs. Owen and Peggy regarded him with pitying eyes. Presently he looked at them with something of his former jauntiness. “’Tis the first real food that I have eaten for three days,” he told them. “I have been living on wild grapes, and corn whenever I could find a field. I thank you, madam; and you also, mistress.”

“And hast thou no home, or place to go that thou art reduced to such a pass?” asked the lady.

“There is no place near. Perhaps when I reach Philadelphia I shall find a way to get to mine own home, and then——”

“Ah! there comes Robert with the wagons,” exclaimed Peggy, as four wagons escorted by as many troopers appeared from behind a bend in the highway. “I am so glad, for now we can start again. He will know what to do for thee, thou poor lad!” 20

“Is he—is he a soldier?” asked the boy gazing at the approaching wagon train with evident alarm.

“Why, yes; of course,” answered Peggy. “He is aide for the time being to General Arnold, who hath charge of Philadelphia. Why——”

“I thank you again,” cried the lad, springing to his feet with such a sudden accession of strength that the girl and her mother were astonished. “I thank you, and bid you good-morrow.” Darting across the road, he plunged into the forest, and was soon lost to sight, leaving Peggy and Mrs. Owen staring blankly after him.

“Heigh ho!” gasped Peggy when she had presently recovered herself. “I wonder why he did that? There is naught about Robert to fear.”

“Perhaps Robert can explain,” said her mother with a peculiar smile. “I rather think ’twas because he feared to meet a soldier.” 21

“But why?” persisted the girl. “I see not why he should fear—mother,” she broke off suddenly as a thought came to her, “was the lad a deserter?”

“I fear so, Peggy. There are many such roaming the country, I hear.”

“Oh, Robert,” cried the maiden as a youth of soldierly bearing rode up to them. “We have had such an adventure! My saddle girth broke, and a youth came out of the woods and mended it. Then he was faint for the want of food, and mother fed him. He was to go with us to the city, but when he heard that thee was a soldier, he thanked us and disappeared into the forest. Mother thinks him a deserter.”

“I make no doubt of it,” spoke the young man gravely. “The woods are full of such fellows. Why! Are you alone? Where is Tom? I sent him to stay with you, as we were delayed by a breakage. You should not have been here alone.”

“Tom?” Peggy looked her dismay. “Why, we have not seen him since he went with thee. Was he not at the wagons? Oh! I hope that naught hath befallen him.” 22

“He must be about somewhere,” said the youth comfortingly. Nevertheless he dismounted and began to look among the bushes that overhung the roadside. “Why, you black rascal,” he shouted as he came upon a negro asleep behind some brush. “Get up! I thought I sent you to guard your mistresses?”

“Dere wuzn’t nuffin’ ter guard ’em frum,” yawned Tom, who counted himself a privileged character. “I seed dey wuz all right, so I ‘prooves de shinin’ hour by gittin’ a li’l res’. Yo’ ain’t a gwine ter ‘ject ter dat, is yer, Marster Dale?”

“And your mistress might have been robbed while you were doing so,” began Robert Dale sternly. “I’ve a mind——”

“Don’t scold him, Robert,” pleaded Peggy. “The ride hath been a long one from the farm. I wonder not that he is tired. Why,” closing her bright eyes in a vain attempt to look drowsy, “I could almost go to sleep myself.”

“You spoil that darkey,” remonstrated the youth as Tom, knowing that his case was won, climbed to his place in the chaise. “Let me look at that saddle, Peggy. If it is all right we must start at once, else ’twill be night ere we reach the city. Ah! ’tis well done,” he added with approval, after an inspection of the band. “Our deserter, if such he be, understands such things. Come, Peggy!” 23

He adjusted the saddle, assisted the maiden to it, then mounting his own horse gave the command, and the journey was resumed.

CHAPTER II—THE HOME-COMING 24

“Such is the patriot’s boast, where’er we roam,
His first, best country, ever is at home.”

—*Goldsmith.*

The bells of Christ Church were pealing out the joyous chime

"Market-day to-morrow!"

as the girl and Robert Dale, followed immediately by the chaise and more remotely by the wagons, cantered into Front Street. It was Tuesday evening, or in Quaker parlance, Third Day, and the streets were full of stir and bustle incident to the preparation for next day's market.

"Oh!" cried Peggy drawing a deep breath. "How good it is to be home once more! How musical sounds the rattling of even the carriages!"

"Very harsh music, methinks," smiled the youth.

"But preferable to the croaking frogs and screeching owls of farm life," said the girl quickly. "If thee had been away for a year I make no doubt but that thee would be as glad to return to this dear city as I am." 25

"I make no doubt of it too," he agreed.

"Just think," went on Peggy. "I have not seen either Sally or Betty since the Fourth of July. Had it not been for thee I would know naught of what hath occurred since then. Thou hast been very kind to us, Robert."

"It hath been a pleasure," returned he gravely. "I think you cannot know what a relief it is to get away from the incessant round of gaiety with which the city seems beset. I weary of it, and long to be in the field."

"I hope that thee will not go just as we have returned to town," remarked the maiden. "Mother and I will welcome the chance to return some of thy favors."

"Don't, Peggy," exclaimed the lad coloring. "I like not for you to speak of requiting favors as though you and your mother owed aught to me. It hath been a pleasure, as I have said." 26

"Thee is too modest, Robert. None the less we owe thee much, even though thee does try to deny it. How, sir, could we have come to the city without thy escort? With father away thee knows that 'twould have been impossible for mother and me to have managed the wagons. And——But oh, Robert! Aren't the shops opened yet? So many seemed to be closed."

"Not all are open, Peggy. Everything is fast becoming as 'twas before the coming of the British, but it will take some time to restore matters to a normal condition. 'Tis but September, and they only left in June."

"I know," observed she thoughtfully, "that 'twill be indeed long before we are as we were before their coming. An enemy makes sad havoc, does it not?"

"Yes," he agreed. And then, as the memory of all that the British occupation had brought came to them, they fell into a silence.

In common with many Whig families Lowry Owen and her daughter had deferred their permanent return to the city until it had regained some semblance of its former order. Under the 27 command of Major-General Arnold, Philadelphia, bruised, and sore, and shaken after the occupation for nine long months by the British, was striving to become once more the city of brotherly love, but the throes of reconstruction had not yet settled into the calm of its former serenity. Something of this was discernible even to the lenient eyes of the overjoyed maiden, and cast a momentary shadow over her happiness at being once more within the confines of her native city. But, as they entered Chestnut Street, the tinge of sadness vanished, and her eyes sparkled.

"I cannot wait for thee, Robert," she called, giving her mare a gentle pat. "Perhaps the girls may be waiting."

She smiled a farewell, and set off at speed, drawing rein presently before a large double brick house at the western extremity of the town, just across from the State House.

Before she could dismount the door of the dwelling was thrown wide, and two girls came running down the steps, and flung themselves upon her.

"Oh, Peggy! Peggy!" they cried simultaneously. "We were waiting for thee. Robert told us that we might look for thee to-day. What kept thee so long? And where is thy mother? And Robert? Is not he with thee?" 28

"Oh, girls!" exclaimed Peggy, returning their embraces rapturously. "How good it is to see you. Sally, thee is prettier than ever! And how Betty hath grown!"

"Oh, Peggy, I have a thousand things to tell thee," cried Sally Evans. "I will give thee so droll an account of my adventures that thee will smile."

"I am prepared to hear amazing things," answered Peggy. "And I too have adventures to tell."

"'Tis time for thee to come back, Peggy Owen," exclaimed Betty Williams. "For what with the routs and the tea drinkings the city is monstrously gay. The Tories had it all their way while the British were here, but now 'tis the Whigs' turn."

"I am not so sure about that, Betty," demurred Sally. "If there is any difference made 'tis in favor of the Tories."

"I have heard Robert say they were favored," observed Peggy. "It seems strange. What causes such conduct?" 29

“Has thee not heard?” laughed Sally, a mischievous sparkle in her blue eyes. “Know then, Mistress Peggy Owen, that it originates at headquarters. Cupid hath given our general a more mortal wound than all the hosts of Britons could. In other words, report hath it that General Arnold is to marry our Miss Peggy Shippen. ’Tis union of Whig and Tory, and the Tories are in high favor in consequence.”

“Perhaps,” said Peggy, “that the general wishes not to carry the animosities of the field into the drawing-room. I have heard that gallant soldiers never make war on our sex.”

“Well, he certainly is gallant,” conceded Sally. “There are many tales afloat concerning his prowess. I make no doubt but that thee has hit the heart of the matter. Ah! here is Robert,” as the youth rode up. “Peggy did not need thy assistance to dismount, sir,” she cried. “Betty and I lifted her from Star ourselves.”

“I expected it,” laughed Robert Dale. “Let me take Star, Peggy. I will care for her until Tom comes.” 30

“Oh, but,” began Peggy in expostulation, when Sally interrupted her.

“Let him take her, Peggy. Is he not an aide? ’Tis his duty.”

“Sally, thee is saucy,” laughed Peggy resigning the mare into the lad’s keeping. “Come, girls!” leading the way into the dwelling. “Now tell me everything.”

“First,” began Betty, “thee is to go with us to see a wonderful aloe tree on Fifth Day morn, but more of that anon. Where is thy mother?”

“She is coming in the chaise with Tom, and should be here now. Girls, you should have seen Robert caring for the wagons. He looked like a woodsman. You would have thought that he was about to start for the frontier.”

“She belies me,” said Dale entering at this moment. “I will leave it to Mistress Owen if I looked like one, though I would I had the marksmanship of a backwoodsman. Our companies of sharpshooters are almost the mainstay of the army.” 31

“The army?” spoke Mrs. Owen catching the last word as she came into the room unperceived. “Is there news, Robert? And what about the chances for peace?”

“The conditions have not changed, Mistress Owen, since last we spoke of them,” returned the lad. “And peace seems as far off as ever. Sir Henry Clinton still holds New York City, while General Washington watches him from the highlands of the Hudson. Along the frontier the savage warfare which began with the massacre at Wyoming continues, and these, aside from skirmishes, constitute all of action there hath been since Monmouth. It seems now to be a question of endurance on the part of the patriots, and of artifice and trickery on the British side.”

“But with the French to help us,” spoke the lady returning the greetings of her daughter’s friends warmly. “The alliance which Dr. Franklin hath at last succeeded in effecting. Surely with such aid the war must soon be brought to a close.”

“The allies have not been as effective so far as ’twas hoped they would prove,” announced he. “Many of the people are seriously disaffected toward the French, declaring that ’tis only a question of English or French supremacy. The soldiers, I grieve to say, incline toward this view, and the loyalists are doing all they can to further such belief.” 32

“Well, here is one who is not disaffected toward the French,” broke in Sally. “Oh, Peggy, thee should have been here to attend the entertainment which the French minister gave in honor of the king’s birthday. ’Twas highly spoke of, and everybody attended. And he was so considerate of the Quakers.”

“In what way, Sally?” asked Mrs. Owen.

“Why, he hung a veil between the ballroom and the chamber in which they sat that they might view such worldly pleasures with discretion,” laughed Sally.

“But Sally would not endure it,” spoke Betty. “When General Arnold came in she told him that she did not wish to take the veil, as she had not yet turned papist, and desired to partake of her pleasures more openly.”

“Sally, thee didn’t,” gasped Peggy.

“But I did,” declared Sally with a toss of her head. “He laughed, and immediately took me without. And the dressing, Peggy! There never was so much as there is now. Thee will thank thy stars that thee has been made to embroider and learn fine sewing, for thee will need it.” 33

“But is there naught but tea drinking, and dancing and dressing?” asked Peggy perplexed. “We used to do so much for the army. Is nothing done now?”

“Oh, yes;” Sally blushed a little and then brightened up. “I have set a stocking on the needles,” she said. “True, ’twas some time since, but I am going to finish it. Mrs. Bache, she that was Sally Franklin, talks of a society for making shirts and gathering supplies for the soldiers. I fancy the most of us will belong, and then there will be something beside enjoyment. Does that suit thee, Miss Peggy?”

“Yes,” returned Peggy thoughtfully. “Not that I object to the enjoyment, Sally, but I think we ought to do some of both.”

“Well, here comes the beginning of the enjoyment,” exclaimed Betty from the window. “Here is a

soldier from headquarters, and I know that he bears an invitation from the general for tea. We had ours this morning." 34

It was as Betty said, and an orderly was announced almost immediately.

"I cry you pardon, madam," he said advancing toward Mrs. Owen, "for intruding so soon upon you. But a certain aide hath importuned our general so urgently that you should be waited upon directly upon your return that he dared not delay an instant beyond your arrival to deliver this invitation to you and to your daughter. He bids me welcome you back to the city in his name, and will do himself the honor to wait upon you in person before the day set."

So saying he handed Mistress Owen two cards upon which were written the invitations, and bowed himself out.

"Oh, Robert, thee must be the aide of whom he spoke," cried Peggy receiving her card excitedly. "See, girls! 'tis for tea on Fifth Day week. How delightsome! May we go, mother? How exciting town life is! I had forgot 'twas so gay."

"Too gay, I fear me," said her mother looking at the invitation dubiously. "Yes; we will go, Peggy, because 'tis right that we should pay respect to General Arnold. He hath no small task to restore the city to order, but I do not wish to be drawn into a round of frivolity." 35

"But thee must let Peggy frivol a little," protested Sally. "It hath been long since she hath been with us, Mistress Owen."

Mrs. Owen laughed.

"A little, Sally, I am willing for. But I wish not that nothing else should be thought about. It seems as though the city hath gone wild with merrymaking. I like it not."

"Of a truth there is too much tea drinking and feasting, madam," spoke Robert Dale soberly. "There are many who are dissatisfied with the state of things while the army is ill-fed and ill-clothed. I for one would far rather be yonder in the field, even in misery, than here dancing attendance upon routs, and the whims of females."

"Oh, Robert!" came in a reproachful chorus from the girls. "Thee is unmannerly."

"Your pardon," said the youth sweeping them a profound curtsey to hide his confusion. "I meant no offense to any present, but spoke of the sex in general." 36

"Thee does not deserve forgiveness; does he, Peggy?" pouted Sally.

"If 'twere for aught else than the army, I should say no," answered Peggy laughing. "But because he would rather be in the field for the country we shall have to forgive him, Sally."

"Thank you, Peggy," said the lad gratefully. "I will try to make amends for my untoward speech at another time. Now I must attend my general. Shall I bear your acceptance of his invitation, Mrs. Owen?"

"If thee will, Robert," answered she with a smile.

"Thee is routed, Robert," cried Sally saucily as he left them.

CHAPTER III—AN OLD TIME ADVERTISEMENT 37

"Now goes the nightly thief prowling abroad
For plunder; much solicitous how best
He may compensate for a day of sloth,
By works of darkness and nocturnal wrong."

—"The Task," *Cowper*.

It was Thursday morning, and Mrs. Owen and Peggy had been very busy bringing the house and grounds into something like order. Now, however, both mother and daughter were surveying ruefully a pile of garments that constituted the remains of their depleted wardrobes. Presently the lady laid down a gray gown of tabby silk with a sigh.

"There is no help for it, my daughter. Thee must have a new frock. I see not how thou art to go to General Arnold's tea otherwise."

"Oh!" breathed Peggy a look of pleasure irradiating her face. Then as a thought came to her: "But are not goods very high, mother? How can we afford it?" 38

"We must, my child. Thou hast had no new frocks since Lexington, and 'tis quite time for others."

"But neither hast thou, mother. Does thee not remember that we covenanted together that whatever we had to spend on clothes should be given for garments for the soldiers? Now if I have a new gown, thee must also."

"We will see, Peggy. But a gown thee must have. We will go to the mercer's to-day; but stay! Did not Sally speak of coming for thee to go to see a tree of some sort? That will delay us for another day."

“How thee remembers, mother! She did, and ’tis nine of the clock now. If she is coming ’tis time she were here. Does thee not hear horses, mother? Perhaps that is she now.”

She ran to the window just in time to see a party of youths and maidens draw rein before the door. Sally Evans dismounted and ran quickly into the dwelling.

“Art ready, Peggy?” she cried. “We are going now to see the aloe tree.”

“What aloe tree is it, Sally?” queried Peggy. “I have lived in Philadelphia all my life, yet never before did I ever hear of one.” 39

“’Tis because it hath only of late become remarkable,” answered Sally. “Mr. Dunlap hath an account of it in the last ‘Packet.’ This is the only one in the whole state, and every one is going to see it.”

“But I don’t understand, Sally. Why should every one go? How is it remarkable?”

“Oh, Peggy! Peggy! That comes from staying on a farm and not reading the papers. Know then,” assuming a didactic tone, “that the morning after the arrival of the French Ambassador this tree shot forth its spire, which it never does but once in the course of its existence, and in some climates not less than a hundred years. This one has been planted about forty-five years in the neighborhood of this city, and heretofore has produced every year four leaves, but this spring early it spread forth thirteen. And the spire,” concluded Sally impressively, “is thirteen inches round, and hath grown thirteen feet in thirteen days.”

“But that is marvelous!” exclaimed the amazed Peggy. 40

“Is ’t not? ’Tis regarded as a wonderful omen anent the French alliance and the thirteen states. Now do get ready, Peggy. Have Tom to bring Star around at once. The others are waiting.”

“Shall I wear a loo-mask or a vizard, mother?” questioned Peggy, giving an anxious glance at her reflection in the mirror.

“The loo-mask, Peggy. ’Tis easier held in place. Not thy gray duffle riding frock, child. ’Tis o’er warm for that. Methinks that a safeguard petticoat over the gown that thee has on with a short camlet cloak will do nicely. I will tell Tom to bring Star around for thee.”

“Sally, what does thee think? I am to have a new frock for General Arnold’s tea,” confided Peggy as her mother left the room. “I did not dream that we could spare money for furbelows, but mother insists that I shall have it.”

“Oh, but that is *charmante*!” exclaimed Sally. “Would that my mother thought likewise, but I fear me that I shall have to wear the same muslin frock that I’ve been wearing. Hey day! Thee is a fortunate girl, Peggy.” 41

“Am I not?” said Peggy gaily. “I have had no new one for so long that it quite upsets me. I think of nothing else, and long for the time to come to choose it.”

“Yes; but do hurry now,” cried Sally impatiently. “Thou art sufficiently smart for a country lass.”

“Thee is saucy, Sally,” answered Peggy giving her a playful push. “Don’t call me a country girl. Thou art not so citified.”

“Well, I haven’t spent a whole year on a farm,” retorted Sally. “Peggy, if thee gives another stroke to thy hair thy cap will slip off. ’Tis as smooth as satin now.”

“There! I am ready at last,” declared Peggy adjusting her riding mask. “Oh, Sally, ’tis so good to be home again!”

“And ’tis so good to have thee, Peggy,” returned her friend. “Nothing is the same without thee. Why, when the city was under Sir William Howe——”

“Something hath happened,” interrupted Peggy hastily, bending her head to listen. “Mother is calling, and she seems upset. Come, Sally.”

They hurried out of the room, and went quickly to the eastern piazza where Mrs. Owen and Tom, the groom, stood. 42

“What is it, mother?” asked Peggy noting their disturbed looks.

“Peggy,” said her mother going to her, “thee must be very brave, my child. Star is gone. She hath been stolen from the stable.”

“Star! My pony stolen!” cried the girl as though unable to believe her ears. “My pony! Oh, mother, it can’t be true!”

“I fear that it is only too true,” answered the lady sorrowfully.

“But stolen? Who would steal Star? Tom,”—turning quickly to the negro groom,—“when did thee see her last? Didn’t thee feed her this morning?

“No’m; I ain’t seed her dis mo’nin’,” answered Tom who seemed stupefied by the occurrence. “I fed her las’ night, Miss Peggy, but when I kum out dis mo’nin’ she wuz gone. De back doah wuz open, an’ I know’d she wuz stole, kase I fas’n’d dat doah my own sef las’ night.”

“Oh, but she can’t be,” cried Peggy with a sob. “Maybe she has just strayed away. Has thee looked in the garden, Tom? Or through the orchard?” 43

“I hab looked ebberwhar, Miss Peggy,” declared the black with dignity. “Torm warn’t gwine ter

take any chances ob not seein' dat are mare when she de onlyest piece ob hoss-flesh dat we has dat mounts ter a row ob pins. No'm; she stole. Dat's all dere is to it."

"Peggy, Peggy!" called Robert Dale who, grown tired of waiting, had come in search of the girls. "What keeps you so long?"

"Oh, Robert!" wailed Peggy bursting into tears. "My horse is stolen! My pretty, pretty pony that father gave me!"

"Star stolen?" cried the youth aghast. Tom told his story again.

"And the door was fastened last night, you say? How about the door into the yard, Tom?"

"I lock hit wid a padlock," declared Tom. "Dey wuz both fasten'd, Marster Dale. 'Clare ter goodness dey wuz! I did it my own sef. I fastens de inside doah on de inside, an' de outside one on de outside. De front one wuz locked dis mo'nin', but de back one wuz wide open." 44

"Then some one must have been hiding inside," declared Robert. "I will take a look through the barn."

With Sally's arm about her, Peggy and her friend followed the youth to the stables. The lad mounted the ladder that led to the mow, and presently called down excitedly:

"There hath been some one here of a truth. Here is a place where he hath lain concealed in the straw, and the remnants of food that hath been eaten. 'Tis all as plain as day!"

"But Star?" questioned Peggy with quivering lips as Robert descended the ladder and stood once more beside them.

"We'll do everything we can to find her, Peggy," answered the boy as cheerfully as he could. "Now let us tell the others. They will be wondering what the matter is."

"Oh, Peggy, what will you do for a horse to go with us?" cried Betty Williams as the party of young people heard the news.

"She may take mine," suggested Robert. "I will stay here to see what can be done about Star."

"That is good of thee," said Peggy, wiping her eyes. "Do thou, Sally, and all the others go on as planned. If Robert will stay to do whatever can be done there is no need of any one else. 'Twould be mean to spoil thy pleasuring just for my sake." 45

And so, despite their protests the young people were sent on, and Robert turned to Peggy.

"Weep no more," he entreated, "but give me your aid in writing an advertisement. This we will put in 'The Packet,' as that paper will appear before 'The Gazette,' and that may bring some result. That will be the best thing to do, will it not, Madam Owen?"

"I think so, Robert. And offer a reward also. It may meet the eye of the person who took the mare and induce him to return her. I like not to think of any taking her, though. Philadelphia is changed indeed."

"It is, madam. Naught is safe though General Arnold strives to enforce strict military rule. War doth indeed cause sad havoc with the morals of people. How much shall the reward be?"

"One hundred dollars," answered the lady, after a moment's calculation. "What a help thou art." 46

"'Tis a pleasure," returned he gallantly. "Beside, is not your husband in the field while we who dally here have naught to do? 'Tis good to have something beside pleasuring to divert the mind. And the advertisement? 'Tis highly fashionable to have it writ in verse. I like it not, but anything in the mode commands more attention. If you will help me, Peggy, perhaps I can compass it, though straight prose is more to my liking."

So, drying her eyes, Peggy brought forth inkhorn and quills, and the two evolved the following advertisement, which followed the fashion of the day:

ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD!

Last night was stole away from me
A likely jet-black mare was she
Just four years old this month or nigh,
About fourteen and half hands high;
She's in good order and doth trot,
And paceth some, I'm sure of that;
Is wondrous pretty; a small star
In her forehead there doth appear;
Her tail was waved three days ago
Just like her mane, you'll find it so;
Above her eyes, if you come near,
She's very hollow, that is clear;
She has new fore shoes on, this I know—
I had her shod a week ago.
The above reward it will be sure 47
To any person that secures
Said thief and mare, that I may see
My mare again restor'd to me.
Or Fifty Dollars for the mare,

If the thief should happen to get clear;
All traveling charges if brought home
Upon the nail I will pay down.

"There!" declared Robert Dale when the two had completed their labor. "There will be no more elegant effusion in the paper. 'Tis finely writ and to the point. I'll take it at once to Mr. Dunlap, so that he may put it into Saturday's 'Packet.' If that doesn't fetch your mare back, Peggy, I don't know what will."

CHAPTER IV—A GIRL'S SACRIFICE

"In Being's floods, in Action's storm,
I walk and work, above, beneath,
Work and weave in endless motion!
  Birth and Death,
  An infinite ocean;
  A seizing and giving
  The fire of living:
'Tis thus at the roaring Loom of Time I ply,
And weave for God the Garment thou seest Him by."

—"Faust," *Gœthe*.

"Thee is troubled, mother," observed Peggy as she and Mrs. Owen left the yard of Christ Church where they had been attending morning service.

The meeting-house which was built for the use of those Quakers who had so far departed from the tenets of the Society of Friends as to array themselves on the side of their country had not yet been erected, and the Free Quakers, as they were called, were therefore compelled to attend worship of other churches, or content themselves with "religious retirement," as family service was called.

"I am, Peggy," answered the lady a look of anxiety overcasting her face. "Let us walk for a little before returning home. It may be that the air will soothe my feelings."

Seeing that her mother wished to be left in quiet the girl walked sedately by her side, ever and anon stealing a glance of apprehension at the lady's face. Presently Mrs. Owen spoke:

"Tis naught to make thee look so uneasy, child. I am concerned over the city, and the extravagance that abounds on every side. See the ferment that it is in! Formerly on First Day the streets were orderly and quiet. Now observe what a noisy throng fills the thoroughfares. Let us walk on. Perchance at Wicaco we may find the peace and quiet we seek."

The quiet, sedate city of Penn had in truth lost its air of demure respectability. As the metropolis of the colonies it attracted all those adventurers of the older countries who sought to mend their fortunes at the expense of the new United States. Many also who were sincere in their admiration of the struggle for liberty had come to offer Congress their services, and taverns and inns were filled to overflowing with strangers of distinction and otherwise. Militia drilled; troops marched and countermarched; while many British officers, prisoners on parole, paraded the streets, adding a bright bit of color with their scarlet coats.

Mother and daughter passed slowly below High Street and continued down Second. Past shops they went, and the City Tavern, crowded about with sedan chairs and chaises; past the Loxley House, in which lived that Lydia Darrach who had stolen out of the city the winter before to warn the patriots of a contemplated attack by the British; past the dwelling of the Cadwaladers; past also the great house built and formerly owned by the Shippens; and on past other mansions with their gardens until finally they paused involuntarily as the sound of singing came to them. The sounds were wafted from the old Swedish church of Gloria Dei, and the two stood in silence until the singing ceased.

"Friends believe not in hymns or singing," remarked Mrs. Owen as they turned to retrace their steps. "But there is something about the intoning of the psalms that calms the mind. It has ever brought comfort to me."

"Mother," spoke Peggy shyly.

"Yes, my daughter."

"The one thing that I have always minded about the Friends is that very lack of music. When I see other girls play the spinet I too would like dearly to play upon it. I have always loved music, mother."

"I know thee has, Peggy. That is the reason that I have not chided thee when I heard thee singing the ballads and songs of the world's people. Perhaps some time we may see our way to thy learning the spinet. If it is right thee will be led to it."

"I know," answered Peggy. And then, after a moment—"What troubled thee, mother?"

“Vanities, child. ’Twas the dressing, and the pomade, and the powder discovered in the meeting. I have never seen so much before. And also, I shame to confess it, Peggy, thy garb troubled me.” 52

“Mine, mother?” Peggy looked up in amazement, and then glanced down at her girlish frock of chintz. “Why, mother?”

“In the first enthusiasm of the war,” said Mrs. Owen, “thee remembers how we, thou and I, together with many patriotic women and girls, banded together in an association formed against the use of foreign goods. We pledged ourselves to wear homespun rather than buy any of the foreign calicoes and silks. Before the Declaration every patriotic woman was known by her clothes, and it so continued until we left the city at the coming of the British. Of course, now that the line of separation hath been drawn between Britain and her colonies, there no longer exists the same patriotic reason for such abstinence; but we seem to be the last to come to such knowledge.”

“Mother, I never knew thee to be concerned anent such things before,” said the girl quickly.

“Perchance it hath been because we have not been dressed with singularity before,” observed the lady. “I hold that every gentlewoman should be arrayed becomingly and with such due regard to 53 the mode that her attire will not excite comment. Not that I wish thy thoughts altogether concerned about such matters. Thee knows how we have received warnings from good and wise men on the subject in our own meetings, but we must do credit to David. And,” she added with a slight smile, “while we are still ready to sacrifice our lives even for the cause of liberty, we cannot steer clear of the whirlpool of fashion if we are to remain in the city. Was thee not sensible of the difference between thy garb and that of thy friends?”

“Yes,” admitted the maiden candidly. “But I tried not to think about it. I have been longing for some new frocks, but since Star hath been taken I have not cared so much.”

“The city seems caught in a very vortex of luxury and extravagance,” went on the matron. “I do not mean that we should be of those who care for naught but self-adornment and useless waste. Were it not for thee——” She paused a moment and then continued: “Thou hast been very self-denying, my daughter, concerning this matter, and hast borne the filching of thy pony bravely. So 54 then thou shalt have not only a frock for the general’s tea, but another also. And a cloak, and a hat, together with a quilted petticoat.”

“Mother, mother!” almost screamed Peggy. “Thee overwhelms me. Where will the money come from?”

“We have made a little from the harvests of the past summer, Peggy. Then the farm pays in other ways. Some of David’s ventures have turned out well, despite the war and the fact that he is in the army. We shall have to be careful, my daughter, and not run into extravagance, but there is enough to furnish thee with a simple wardrobe.”

“And thou?” questioned the girl.

“I shall do well as I am, dear child. And now let us turn our thoughts from this too worldly subject to others more befitting First Day. To-morrow we will go to the mercer’s for the things.”

And so, despite the fact that nothing had as yet been heard of the stolen pony, it was a very happy maiden that set forth with her mother the next day for the shops in Second Street. 55

“Friend,” said the lady to a mercer who came forward to wait upon them, “let us look at thy petticoats, calimanico; for,” she said in an aside to Peggy, “’twill be the part of wisdom to purchase the homely articles first, lest we be carried beyond our intention for the frocks. We shall have to be careful, as the prices, no doubt, have become higher. How much is this, friend?”

“Fifteen pounds, fifteen shillings,” answered he.

Mrs. Owen looked up in amazement, while Peggy, with less control, cried out:

“Such a price, and without quilting! Once it could have been bought for fifteen shillings.”

“’Tis very likely,” smiled the shopkeeper. “That must have been before the war. Prices are soaring on everything, and are like to go higher before falling.”

Mrs. Owen laid down the garment gravely.

“A coat and a hat,” she said. “What will be the cost of a very ordinary one of each?”

“They cannot be procured under two hundred pounds, madam.” 56

“And gauze for caps?”

“The common grade is twenty-four dollars a yard. The better quality fifty dollars.”

“Mother,” whispered Peggy, “why need thee buy the petticoat? We can weave cloth for it, and I can quilt it myself.”

“True, Peggy,” assented her mother. “I think we can manage about the petticoat, but a frock thou must have. A frock and some gloves.”

“Cloth for a frock, madam?” questioned the merchant eagerly. “Shall it be lutestring, poplin, brocade, or broadcloth? I have the best of England, madam.”

But Mrs. Owen’s face grew grave indeed as he mentioned prices. Peggy’s eyes filled with tears. She saw her new frock vanishing into thin air as fabric after fabric was brought forth only to be rejected when the cost was named. She knew that she had nothing to wear to the tea at

headquarters unless a new gown was purchased, and she choked in her disappointment. Her mother saw her tears and turned to the merchant with determination.

“I will——” she opened her lips to say, when some one tapped her lightly on the shoulder, and a clear voice called: 57

“Why, Madam Owen, are you buying gowns? What extravagance! If farm life pays well enough to buy cloth these times I shall get me to a farmery at once. Mr. Bache wishes to go.”

“Sally Franklin, how does thee do?” exclaimed Mrs. Owen, greeting the young matron warmly. “I came down intending to buy a great deal, but——”

“The prices! The prices!” cried Franklin’s daughter, waving her hands. “It takes a fortune to keep a family in a very plain way. And there never was so much dressing and pleasure going on! I wrote to father to send me a number of things from France, among them some long black pins, lace, and some feathers, thinking he could get such things much cheaper there.”

“And did he?” eagerly questioned Peggy, who had now recovered herself.

“No; and I got well scolded for my extravagance,” laughed Mrs. Bache. “He sent the things he thought necessary, omitting the others. He advised me to wear cambric ruffles instead of lace, and to take care not to mend them. In time they would come to lace, he said. As for feathers, why send that which could be had from every cock’s tail in America.” 58

“How like Dr. Franklin that is,” remarked Mrs. Owen much amused. “What did thee answer?”

“That I had to be content with muslin caps in winter, and in summer I went without. As for cambric I had none to make lace of. Oh, we shall all come to linsey-woolsey, I fear. Dr. Shippen talks of moving his family from the city, and the rest of us will have to do the same.”

She moved away. The shopkeeper turned to bring on more goods, hoping to tempt his customers, and Peggy took hold of her mother’s hand gently.

“It will cut into thy resources greatly to get these things, won’t it, mother?”

“Yes,” assented the lady soberly. “For the frock alone I would have to pay as much as I had intended for thy entire outfit.”

“Then thee must not do it,” said Peggy gravely. 59

“There is one way that it can be done, my daughter,” said her mother not looking at her. “If thou wilt consent to forego all charitable gifts this winter; if thou wilt let the soldiers or any other needy ones go without benefit from thee; then thou canst take the money for all thy things: the hat, the coat, the two frocks, the gloves, and all the other necessaries of which we spoke. Now, Peggy, I will not blame thee if thou dost choose according to thy wishes, for thou hast already given up much. It rests with thee.”

Peggy looked at the dazzling array of fabrics spread temptingly upon the counter. She did want a new gown so badly. She needed it, she told herself quickly. She had given up a great deal. Must she give up in this too? For an instant she wavered, and then a vision of some of the soldiers that she had seen flashed across her mind, and she turned from the glittering array with a little sob.

“I could not, I could not,” she cried. “And have nothing for the poor soldiers! It would be a sin! But oh, mother! do let us hurry away from here. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is so weak.” 60

Pausing only for a word of courteous explanation to the mercer the lady followed the maiden from the store.

CHAPTER V—UP IN THE ATTIC 61

“Up in the attic where mother goes
  Is a trunk in a shadowed nook—
A trunk—and its lid she will oft unclose,
  As if ’twere a precious book.
She kneels at its side on the attic boards,
  And tenderly, soft and slow,
She counts all the treasures she fondly hoards—
  The things of long ago.”

—*Anonymous*.

“I fear we have made a mistake in returning to town,” observed Mrs. Owen when at length they reached the dwelling after a silent walk home. “I had no idea things had become so dear. There is hardly such a thing as living in town, but David wished us to be here. In truth, with so many outlaws scouring the country, I feel that we are far safer than we would be on the farm. And yet what shall be done anent the matter of clothes? Thou must have a frock for the tea party.”

“I can wear my blue and white Persian,” said the girl bravely. “Thee must not worry so over my frock, mother.” 62

“Thy Persian was new three years since,” objected her mother. “And thou hast grown, Peggy. Beside, ’tis faded. Stay! I have the very thing. Come with me, child.”

She sprang up with so much animation that Peggy wondered at her. It was not customary with Mrs. Owen to be harassed over such a matter as clothes, but her daughter’s unselfishness when her need was so great had stirred her to unusual tenderness. Up to the garret they went, the lady leading the way with the agility of a girl. The attic extended over the entire main building. There were great recesses under the eaves which pigeons sought, and dark closets where one might hide as in the old legend of the old oak chest.

From one of the shadowed niches Mrs. Owen drew forth a chest. It was battered and old, yet it required all the lady’s strength to force the lock.

“The key is lost,” she explained to Peggy who was following her movements with eagerness. “’Tis a mercy the house was occupied by British in place of Hessians. Had they had it everything would 63
have been taken. The English were more moderate in their plundering, though they did take many of Dr. Franklin’s books, I hear, and his portrait.[1]

“There,” she exclaimed almost gaily, drawing forth a yellowing dress, and holding it up to view with gentle pride. “There, Peggy! There is thy frock.”

A faint sweet perfume emanated from the folds of the garment as Mrs. Owen held it up. Peggy touched it wonderingly.

“Whose was it, mother?” she asked almost in a whisper. “Not thine?”

“Mine, Peggy? Why, ’twas my wedding dress.” The lady smoothed the satin folds tenderly. “’Twas once the sheerest white, but it hath lain so long that it hath mellowed to cream. But that will be the more becoming to thy dark hair and eyes.”

“And I am to wear it?” queried the maiden in awed tones. “Oh, mother, ’tis too much to ask of thee.”

“Thee deserves it, my daughter. I would far rather that thou shouldst have the good of it than it should lie here to rot. Let me see!” Diving down into the chest with a gaiety she did not often 64
exhibit, she brought up some little shoes, silken to match the gown. “Ah! I thought these should be here. And here is a fan with sticks of sandal wood. And a piece of fine lawn that will make thee an apron. Come! we shall do nicely. ’Tis a veritable treasure chest we have come upon. We will not explore it further now. There may come another time of need. Take thou the shoon, Peggy, and the fan. I will carry the gown. We will begin work at once. I was slender when the frock was worn, but thou art a full inch smaller about the waist. ’Twill be easily fixed.”

With reverent hands Peggy took the shoes and fan, and followed her mother down to the living-room.

As Sally had said, Peggy was indeed thankful for the hours of training in fine sewing and embroidery. When finally the day came for the trying on, and the desired frock fulfilled her highest expectation, her ecstasy was unable to contain itself.

“Thee is the best mother that ever lived,” she cried catching Mrs. Owen about the waist and 65
giving her a girlish hug. “What would I do without thee? Oh, mother! what if thee had had no wedding gown? What would we have done?”

Mrs. Owen laughed, well pleased at her enthusiasm.

“We will not consider that part of it, Peggy,” she said. “We have it in truth, and it does indeed look well. A new frock would have looked no better. Ah! here is Sally. Let her give her opinion.”

“Thee comes just in time, Sally,” cried Peggy as Sally Evans was shown into the room. “How does thee like my new frock?”

“’Tis much prettier than mine,” declared Sally eying the gown critically. “And vastly distinctive. Where did thee get the material, Peggy? I never saw quite the shade.”

“Then thee thinks it citified and à la mode?” queried Peggy, ignoring the question.

“’Tis as sweet and modish as can be,” cried Sally generously. “Thee will outshine all us females, 66
Peggy.”

“Thee can’t mean that, Sally,” reproved Peggy flushing at such praise. “I know that thee is partial to thy friend, but that is going too far.”

“But ’tis the truth,” answered Sally. “Would that I had seen that fabric, and I would have chosen it for my new frock. I did get a new one after all. I teased mother into getting it by telling her that thee was to have a new one.”

“Oh! did thee?” cried Peggy. “Why, Sally, this was mother’s wedding gown. We went to get a frock, but found the prices beyond us. Mother was determined that I should have the gown though, so she gave me this.”

“Mother was going to get it anyway, Peggy,” said Sally quickly, seeing her friend’s dismay. “It might not have been until later but I was to have a dress this winter. So thee must not think it thy fault that I got it. Would though that I had not. I wonder if my mother hath a wedding gown. This is vastly pretty.”

“Is ‘t not?” cried Peggy. “And, Sally, I hear there is to be dancing after the tea at the general’s. It 67

is strange for Quakers to attend such affairs. Why, does thee not remember how we used to wish to attend the weekly assemblies, and how it was spoke against in the meeting?”

“It is strange,” assented Sally, “but Quakers go everywhere now with the world’s people. What was it that Master Benezet used to teach us? Something anent the times, was it not?”

“‘O tempora! O mores,’” quoted Peggy. “‘O the times! O the manners!’ How long ago it seems since we went to Master Benezet’s school. Heigh ho! would I were attending it again!”

“Why, Peggy Owen, would thee wish to miss this tea?” demanded her friend. “For my part I am monstrously glad that I am through with books; for now I am going to——” She paused abruptly. “But ’tis to remain secret for a time,” she added.

“Sally! a secret from me?” exclaimed Peggy reproachfully. “I thought thee told me everything.”

“I do; usually,” returned the other with a consequential air. “But this is of great import, and is not to be known for a few days. Oh, Peggy,” she cried, suddenly dropping her important mien, and giving Peggy a hearty squeeze. “I am dying to tell thee all about it, but I cannot until—until—well, until the night of General Arnold’s tea.” 68

And so it came about that Peggy had another incentive for awaiting that event impatiently.

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[1] This, in fact, was not recovered until long afterward in London.

CHAPTER VI—TEA AT HEADQUARTERS 69

“Give Betsy a brush of horse hair and wool,
  Of paste and pomatum a pound,
Ten yards of gay ribbon to deck her sweet skull,
  And gauze to encompass it round.
Her cap flies behind, for a yard at the least,
  And her curls meet just under her chin,
And those curls are supported, to keep up the jest,
  By a hundred, instead of one pin.”

—*A Verse of the Day*.

“Will I do, mother?” asked Peggy, taking up the old fan with the sandal wood sticks, and turning about slowly for the lady’s inspection.

It was the night of General Arnold’s tea, and the maiden had just put the finishing touch to her toilet, and was all aglow with excitement. The creamy folds of the silken gown well became her dark hair and eyes. The bodice, cut square, revealed her white throat so young and girlish. Her white silk mitts, long and without fingers, were held to the sleeve by “tightens.” A gauze cap with wings and streamers perched saucily upon her dark locks which were simply drawn back from her low, broad forehead, braided with a ribbon, and powdered but little. The prim little frock fell just to her ankles, revealing the clocked white stockings and dainty high heeled slippers with pearls glistening upon the buckles. 70

“Didst ever behold a more bewitching damsel than thy daughter, Mistress Peggy Owen?” she cried, sweeping her mother a deep curtsey.

Her eyes were shining. She was for the nonce a happy maiden concerned with naught save the pleasures of girlhood, and possessed of a mood that would have been habitual had not the mighty sweep of public events tinged her girlish gaiety with an untoward gravity.

Some such thought flitted through Mrs. Owen’s mind as she surveyed her daughter with tender eyes, and she sighed. A look of anxiety flitted over Peggy’s face.

“Is thee not well?” she queried. “Or is it wrong, mother, for me to be so happy when father is in the field?”

“Neither, my daughter. I was but wishing that thou couldst be as care free all the time as thou art to-night. But there! we will partake of the fruit that is offered leaving the bitter until the morrow. Thy gown well becomes thee, child. I make no doubt but that thou wilt look as well as any.” 71

“Mother,” exclaimed the girl, a soft flush dyeing her face, “thee will make me vain.”

“I trust not, my daughter. Others will, no doubt, tell thee so, and ’tis as well that thou shouldst hear it first from me. Let it not spoil thee, Peggy. Ah! here is Sukey to tell us that Robert and his uncle have come for us.”

Peggy gave a backward look at her reflection in the mirror, and well pleased with what she saw there followed her mother sedately to the drawing-room where Robert Dale and his uncle, Mr. Jacob Deering, awaited them.

The latter, stately in an olive-colored silk velvet with knee buckles, silk stockings, bright silver shoe-buckles and the usual three looped hat held in his hand, hastened to greet them as they

entered.

“Zounds! Miss Peggy,” he cried. “’Tis well that I am not a young buck, else you should look no further for a gallant. Bless me, but you have grown pretty! Bob, you rascal! why did you not prepare me for what I should see? Upon my word, child, you must not mind a kiss from an old man.” 72

So saying he held her at arm’s length in admiration, and then kissed her on both her cheeks. Whereat Peggy blushed right prettily.

“Thee will make me vain,” she protested. “And mother hath but ceased warning me against such vanity. In truth, Friend Deering, I believe that no girl was ever so happy as I am to-night.”

“‘Gather ye rosebuds while ye may:
Old Time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles to-day,
To-morrow may be dying,’”

he quoted gaily. “Have your fling, child. The morrow may bring grave problems to be solved, so be happy while you can. ’Tis youth’s prerogative. Bob, do you follow with Mrs. Owen. I shall take an old man’s privilege and lead the princess to the coach myself. I’ faith, there will be no opportunity for a word with her once she reaches headquarters.” 73

Peggy gave Robert Dale an arch glance over her shoulder as the old gentleman led her to the coach, where she settled herself to await with what patience she could their arrival at Major-General Arnold’s.

At this time there was no suspicion whispered against the patriotism of Benedict Arnold. Scarcely any soldier had done so much to sustain the liberties of his country, and tales of his prowess, his daring and courage were rife in the city. Upon being placed in charge of Philadelphia by the commander-in-chief, General Washington, he had taken possession of the mansion in High Street, once the home of Richard Penn, and recently occupied by Sir William Howe. It was regarded as one of the finest houses in the city, was built of brick, and stood on the southeast corner of Front and High Streets.

Peggy and her mother knew that the affair was to be more than the ordinary tea, but they were scarcely prepared for the sumptuousness of the occasion.

“Is it a ball, Robert?” whispered the girl as they stood for a moment in the crush about the door. 74

“No,” answered the youth a frown contracting his brow. “’Tis elaborate enough for one, and that is truth, Peggy. But when one is given it seems to be the general’s purpose to outvie all that rumor hath spoken of the Mischianza. All his entertainments are given on a most magnificent scale; as though he were a man of unbounded wealth and high social position. I like it not.”

Peggy opened her lips to reply, but before she could do so the way was cleared for them to approach the general. The girl looked with intense interest at the gallant soldier of whose prowess she had heard so much. He was a dark, well-made man, still young, not having reached the meridian of life; his face, bronzed and darkened by fatigue and exposure, indicated that he had seen the severest hardships of a soldier’s life. Unable to accept a command in the field because of the wounds received at Saratoga the preceding fall he had been made commandant of the city. He was still on crutches, being thin and worn from the effects of his hurt. 75

Some of the stories of his great courage upon that occasion came to Peggy’s mind, and brought a glow of admiration to her eyes. She flushed rosily as he said in greeting:

“I am pleased to welcome you, Mistress Peggy. A certain aide of mine hath talked of naught else but your return for a week past. You are to report him to me if he does not give you an enjoyable time. Ah, Dale! look to’t that you distinguish yourself in the matter.”

“Are there none but Tories?” questioned Peggy, as General Arnold turned to greet other arrivals, and Mrs. Owen paused to converse with some acquaintances.

“Well,” the lad hesitated a moment and then continued, “they seem remarkably fond of him, Peggy, and he of them. I would it were not so, but many of the staff have thought that they flocked to his entertainments in mischievous numbers.”

“But are there no others?” asked the girl again, for on every side were Tories and Neutrals to such an extent that scarce a Whig was to be seen. 76

“Oh, yes, the gentlemen of Congress are here somewhere, for there is Mr. Charles Lee, who is always to be found where they are. He pays court to them upon every occasion in the endeavor to convince them what great merit he showed at the battle of Monmouth.” And the youth laughed.

“And the head-dresses,” exclaimed the girl in astonishment. “How high they are. And the pomade! And the powder! Why, Robert, all the fashion of the city is here!”

“And what did the general say to thee, Peggy?” cried Sally’s voice, and Robert and Peggy turned to find Sally and Betty directly behind them. “Did he compliment thee upon thy name? ’Tis his favorite, thee knows. There comes Miss Margaret Shippen now, and look at thy general, Robert. One could tell that he was paying court to her.”

“They are to be married soon, I hear,” announced Betty, when the laugh that had followed Sally’s remark died away.

“How beautiful she is,” exclaimed Peggy admiringly as she gazed at the stately Miss Shippen. 77

“She is indeed,” assented Robert, “though I would she were not a Tory.”

“Fie, fie, Robert,” laughed Peggy. “Is not thy Cousin Kitty a Tory? I never heard thee object to her.”

“Oh, Kitty! that’s different.” Robert was plainly embarrassed.

“Is it?” The three girls laughed again, enjoying his confusion.

“I but voice the objections of the army,” explained he when their merriment had subsided. “Of the Congress also, who fear the effect upon the people, there is so much feeling anent the Tories.”

“Congress!” exclaimed Sally with a scornful toss of her head. “I should not mind what Congress said if I were General Arnold. They wouldn’t even give him his proper rank until after Saratoga, though His Excellency, General Washington, did his utmost to make them. I wouldn’t ask the old Congress anything anent the matter. So there!”

“Hoity-toity, my young lady! Have a care to your words. Know you not that the gentlemen of that same Congress are present? It seems to me that I have heard that some of those same gentlemen 78
are the very men who are on the board of a certain institution——”

“Oh, hush, hush, Mr. Deering,” cried Sally turning with some excitement to the old gentleman. “’Tis a secret known to but few.”

“Now what did I say?” he demanded as the others looked at the two in surprise. “Miss Peggy, won’t you defend me?”

“Let him say it over, Sally,” said Peggy roguishly. “Perhaps we can tell then.”

“No, no,” uttered Sally with a questioning glance at him. “Thee does know,” she burst forth as she met his twinkling eyes. “How did thee find it out, Mr. Deering?”

“If you will glad an old man by treading this measure with him, I’ll tell you,” he answered. “Or perhaps you prefer a younger squire?”

“Oh, thee! Thee every time,” cried she, linking her arm in his.

“Won’t you follow them, Peggy?” asked Robert.

“Why, no,” she answered in surprise. “Thee knows that I am a Quaker, Robert.”

“But not now, Peggy,” interposed Betty. “Since thee has become a Whig, and have been read out 79
of meeting thee is an apostate. Sally and I both have learned to languish and glide at the new academy in Third Street. They are taught there in the politest manner. Thee must attend.”

Peggy looked troubled.

“I do not think we should give up everything of our religion because we are led to differ from the Society in the matter of politics,” she said. “At least that is the way mother looks at it, though I should like to learn to dance. Oh, dear! I am getting worldly, I fear. Now, Betty, thee and Robert run along while I stand here and watch you. It hath been long since I saw so bright a scene.”

Thus urged, Robert and Betty glided out upon the floor, and Peggy looked about her.

The extravagance of the costumes was beyond anything hitherto seen in the quiet city of Penn, and Peggy’s eyes opened wide at the gorgeous brocades and wide hooped skirts. But most of all did she marvel at the headdresses of the ladies. These, built of feathers, aigrets and ribbands, topped the hair already piled high upon steel frames and powdered excessively. The air was full 80
of powder from wig and head-dress. Happy laughter mingled with the music of the fiddles, and the rustle of brocades. All made up a scene the luxury of which stole over the little maid’s senses and troubled her. Unconsciously she sighed.

“Why not treading a measure, my little maid?” queried General Arnold’s pleasant voice, and Peggy looked up to find him smiling down upon her.

“I am a Quaker,” she told him simply.

“Then mayhap we can console each other; although I do not refrain from religious scruples.”

“No; thee does it because of thy wound,” uttered the girl a glow of such intense admiration coming into her eyes that the general smiled involuntarily. “Does it pain thee much, Friend—I should say—General Arnold?”

“FRIEND—I SHOULD SAY—GENERAL ARNOLD”

“Nay; call me friend, Miss Peggy. I like the name, and no man hath too many. At times I suffer much. At first I was in a very fever of discontent, ’twas so long in healing. I chafed under the confinement, for it kept me from the field. Of late, however, I have come to bear its tardiness in healing with some degree of patience.” 81

“Mother thinks that as much bravery may be shown in endurance as in action,” she observed shyly.

“More, more,” he declared. “Action is putting into execution the resolve of the moment, and may be spurred by excitement or peril to deeds of daring. One forgets everything under its stimulus. But to be compelled to sit supinely when the liberties of the country are in danger——Ah! that is what takes the heart out of a man. It irks me.”

“Thee should not fret,” she said with such sweet gravity that his worn dark face lighted up. “Thou hast already given so much for thy country that ’tis well that thou shouldst take thy ease for a time. Thee has been very brave.”

“Thank you,” he returned, his pleasure at her naive admiration being very apparent. Already there had been detractions whispered against his administration of the city, and the genuine appreciation of this little maid for his military exploits was soothing to him. “I know not how our talk hath become so serious,” he said, “but I am a poor host to permit it. ’Tis not befitting a scene of pleasure. Wilt take tea with me, Miss Peggy?” 82

Peggy looked up quickly, thinking she had not heard aright. What! she, a simple young girl, to be taken to tea by so great a general! Mr. Arnold stood courteously awaiting her assent, and realizing that he had indeed bestowed the honor upon her, she arose, swept a profound curtsey, and murmured an almost inaudible acceptance.

There were little gasps of surprise from Sally and Betty, as she swept by them, but pride had succeeded to Peggy’s confusion, and she did not turn her head. Assured that never again would she be filled with such felicity Peggy held her head high, and walked proudly down the great drawing-room by Benedict Arnold’s side.

’Twas customary in Philadelphia for the mistress of a household to disperse tea to guests, but the general having no wife pressed his military attachés into this duty. So overwhelmed was Peggy with the honor conferred upon her that she did not notice that her cup was filled again and again by the obliging servitor. She was recalled to herself, however, by an audible aside from Sally: 83

“And hath thy general plenty of Bohea in the house, Robert? ’Tis to be hoped so, else there will be none for the rest of us. That is Peggy’s sixth cup, is it not?”

“Oh, dear!” gasped Peggy flushing scarlet, and hastily placing her spoon across the top of her cup, for this was the proper mode of procedure when one had been served sufficiently. “I did not know, I did not think—in fact, the tea was most excellent, and did beguile me. Nay,” she broke off looking at him bravely. “’Twas because I was so beset with pride to think that it was thou who served me that I forgot my manners. In truth, the incident is so notable that I shall never forget it.”

“Now, by my life, you should drink all there is for that speech though no one else were served,” declared he laughing. “What! No more? Then we will see to ’t that your friend hath cause for no further complaint. Do you read, Miss Peggy?”

From a small spindle-legged table that stood near, he selected a book from several which lay on its polished surface, and handed it to her. 84

“Pleasure me by accepting this,” he said. “’Tis Brooke’s ‘Lady Juliet Grenville.’ Most young ladies like it, and it hath more endurance than a cup of tea.”

“Oh, thank thee! Thank thee!” cried she delightedly. “I have heard much of the tale, and have longed to read it. I shall truly treasure it.”

“Would that my name were Margaret,” cried Sally as General Arnold left her with her friends. “And what did thee do to merit all this honor, Miss Peggy?”

“I know not,” answered Peggy regarding the book almost with awe. “Oh, girls! hath he not indeed been kind to me? ’Tis most wonderful how everything hath happened. How vastly delightsome town life is! I hope mother will go to every tea to which we are asked.”

“And has thee had so much excitement that thee does not care for my secret?” asked Sally. “’Twas my purpose to declare it at this time.” 85

“Do tell it, Sally,” pleaded Peggy aroused by Sally’s earnest tone. “Thee promised.”

“Yes, yes, Sally,” urged Betty. “Do tell us.”

“Then come close,” said Sally motioning to Robert and Mr. Deering to draw nearer. “Know then, all of you, that to-morrow I am to begin to prepare for being a nurse in the General Hospital.”

“Oh, Sally!” cried Betty and Peggy in a chorus.

“Yes,” said she, enjoying their surprise. “Mr. Deering seems to have known it, and Robert here, but ’tis known to no others. I have been minded for some time to do something more than make socks and shirts, though they are badly needed, too, I hear.”

“’Tis just splendid, Sally,” declared Peggy. “But Betty and I must do something too. It will never do for thee to be the only one of us girls to do so well. What shall we do, Betty?”

“I fancy that my hands at least will be full,” said Betty. “Mother thinks it advisable for me to take the smallpox as soon as she can spare me.” 86

“La!” giggled Sally. “How will that help the country, Betty?”

“By preventing it from spreading,” answered Betty, at which they all laughed.

The music struck up at this moment, and the talk which had threatened to become serious was interrupted. About eleven a genteel supper was served, and General Arnold’s tea had come to an end.

CHAPTER VII—A SUMMER SOLDIER 87

“What, if ‘mid the cannon’s thunder,
  Whistling shot and bursting bomb,
When my brothers fall around me,
  Should my heart grow cold and numb?”
    But the drum
    Answered “Come!
Better there in death united than in life a recreant—come!”

—“The Reveille,” *Bret Harte*.

“Mother, what did thee think of the tea?” asked Peggy of Mrs. Owen the next morning.

Lowry Owen laid down her sewing and turned toward her daughter gravely:

“’Twas an enjoyable occasion in many respects, my daughter. ’Twas most pleasant to meet with old friends, but——”

“Yes, mother?” questioned the maiden as the lady hesitated.

“There was so much of extravagance and expenditure in the costumes and even in the entertainment that I fear we cannot indulge often in such pleasures. Mr. Arnold”—calling him after the London manner, a fashion much in vogue at this time in the colonies—“must be a man of great wealth to afford such hospitality. I understand that ’tis extended often to his friends, and ’tis expected to some extent from a man in his position. But we are not wealthy now, my child, and I wish not to be drawn into a manner of life beyond our means.” 88

“I know, mother,” answered the girl soberly. “Last night I was carried away by the enjoyment of it all, and methought I would like naught else than teas, and routs and parties all the time. Didst think thy daughter could be so foolish?”

“’Twas very plain to be seen, my child,” said the lady with a smile. “And with thy father and others in the field it seems to me that thou and I may be employed to better purpose, Peggy? What does thee say? Shall we give up assemblies, tea drinkings and finery to patriotism, or wouldst thou rather——”

“Mother, thee knows that when ’tis a choice between such things and the country they must go,” cried Peggy warmly.

“I knew that I could count on thy cooperation,” observed Mrs. Owen quietly. “Thou shalt have thy young friends, Peggy, and shall share their pleasures, but we will have no more of public parade and ostentation. I like it not. ’Tis not befitting the wives and daughters of soldiers to indulge in such pastimes. And we shall be busy, Peggy. We must spin and weave.”

“I do not mind the work, mother. Sally is to be a nurse, and I would not be happy could I not do something too.”

And so the spinning-wheel was brought from the attic, and given a prominent place in the living-room. The loom was set up in the large kitchen, and from early morn until eight at night the girl spent the long hours of the day spinning and weaving. Other Whig women also, dismayed by the spirit of frivolity and extravagance that was rife in the city, followed their example, and the hum of the wheel and burr of the loom were heard in every household.

“Thou hast been spinning since five of the clock this morning, Peggy,” remonstrated Mrs. Owen one afternoon. “Is thee not tired? How many skeins hast thou spun to-day?”

“I have lost count, mother,” laughed Peggy. “It behooves me to be thrifty, else there will be no yarn to knit. And such heaps and heaps of unspun wool as there are! ’Tis no time to be weary.”

“But thee must not overdo in the beginning. There is also much unhatcheled flax to be made into thread for cloth, and if thee is too wearied from the spinning of the wool thou wilt not be able to undertake it. So stop now, and take a run through the garden.”

“Just as soon as I finish this skein, mother.”

Peggy’s light foot on the treadle went swifter and swifter, and for a time no sound was heard in the living-room save the hum of the wheel. Presently the spindle uttered an angry snarl, and the thread snapped short in her fingers.

“There!” she cried merrily, unraveling the knot dexterously. “Had I but heeded thy advice, mother, this mishap would not have occurred. The moral is that a maid should always obey her mother. I tried to outdo my stint of yesterday, and by so doing have come to grief. Now if thee will hold the skeins I will wind the yarn of to-day’s spinning ready for knitting.”

So saying she uprose from the wheel and took a snowy skein from the reel on the table, and adjusted it upon her mother’s outstretched hands.

“Sukey and I could do this after supper, Peggy,” expostulated the matron. “I like not to have thee confined too closely to work, albeit I would not have thee idle.”

“Mother, thee knows that thee likes to have me excel in housewifery, and how can I do so unless I practice the art? I cannot become notable save by doing, can I?” questioned the maiden archly, her slim figure looking very graceful as she stood winding the yarn with nimble fingers. “I shall take the air when I have finished winding this ball, if it will please thee; though”—and a shadow dimmed the brightness of her face—“I like not to go out in the grounds since Star hath gone. How strange it is that something should happen to both the pets that father gave me! Pilot, my dog, was shot, and now my pony is stolen. Dost think I will ever hear of her, mother?”

“It hath been some time since thou didst advertise, Peggy, hath it not?”

“Yes, mother. Three long se’nnights.”

“And in all that time there hath come no word or sign of her.” The lady hesitated a moment, and then continued: “Dear child, I fear that thou wilt see no more of thy pretty horse. But take comfort in the thought that though the gift hath been taken from thee the giver hath not. David is well, and in good spirits. That is much to be thankful for, Peggy.”

“It is, mother. Dear father! would he were home for all time.”

Without further remonstrance Peggy went out under the trees. A slight chill was in the air, for it was drawing toward evening. Summer’s spell was released, and the sere decadence of the year was sweetly and sadly going on. Up and down the neglected alleys of the garden she strolled, pausing ever and anon to admire the scarlet fire of the late poppies. Almost unconsciously her feet turned in the direction of the stable, a place to which she made daily pilgrimages since the loss of her pet. As she drew near the building the unmistakable sound of a low whinny broke upon the air. A startled look swept across the girl’s face, and she stopped short in astonishment.

“That sounded like Star,” she exclaimed. “Mother was right in thinking that I needed the air. I must not sit so long again at the wheel. I——”

But another and louder whinny broke upon her ear, and full of excitement Peggy flung wide the door, and darted within.

“Oh, Star! Star!” she cried throwing her arms about the pony’s neck, for the mare was really standing in her stall. “Where did thee come from? Who brought thee? And where hast thou been?”

But the little mare could only whinny her delight, and rub her soft nose against her mistress's sleeve.

"Thou dear thing!" cried the girl rapturously. "Is thee glad to get back? Does thee want some sugar? Oh, how did thee get here? Thee doesn't look as though thee had had much to eat. Poor thing! Couldn't they even groom thee?" 94

"Mistress!"

Peggy turned around abruptly, and there stood the same young fellow who had mended her saddle when she and her mother were waiting on the Germantown road. He was more ragged than ever, and thinner too, if that were possible. He still wore his air of jaunty assurance, however, and returned her astonished gaze with a glance of amusement.

"Thou?" breathed Peggy. "And what does thee want?"

"Naught, but to return thy horse," he answered.

"Oh! did thee find her?" cried the girl in pleased tones. "How good of thee to bring her to me! Where did thee find her? And the thief? What did thee do with him?"

"The thief? Oh, I brought him too," he said coolly.

"But where is he?" she demanded looking around. "I do not see him."

"Here," he said sweeping her an elaborate bow.

"Thee?" Peggy recoiled involuntarily as the lad spoke. "Oh, how could thee do it? How could thee?" she burst forth. 95

"I couldn't. That's why I brought her back. I don't steal from a girl."

"But why did thee keep her so long?" she asked, mollified somewhat by this speech.

"I wanted to see my people," he answered.

"And did thee?" she queried, her tender heart stirred by this.

"No; they had moved, or something had happened. They weren't there any more." He spoke wearily and with some bitterness. "I'd have sold that horse if I hadn't kept thinking how fond you were of her."

"And did thee know that I had offered a reward for her, friend?"

"Why, of course I knew," he replied. "Now as I am entitled to the money for both the horse and thief, suppose you bring it out to me."

"But my pony," objected Peggy. "How do I know that thee will not take her again?"

"Your horse?" he questioned angrily. "Don't fear! Don't you suppose that if I had wanted to keep her I'd have done it? Now if you are going to give me the money, do it. Then feed your mare. She hasn't had much more than I have. Don't be afraid of me, but hurry. I can't stay around here any longer." 96

"I am not afraid, friend," responded Peggy her hesitation vanishing. "I was just thinking that thee looked hungry. Come to the house, and eat something. Then thou shalt have thy money, though I know not what my mother will say to that part of it. But thee should eat anyway. Come!"

"I will not," he cried. "I will not. Someone might see me and arrest me."

"But if mother and I do not wish to prosecute 'tis not the concern of any," she told him mildly. "Now that I have Star, I would not wish to be severe, and thou didst bring her back. Mother will feel the same way."

"'Tis not that," he cried sharply. "Don't you understand? I have run away from the army, and I don't want to be caught. I have been advertised, as well as your horse."

"And so thee could not steal from a girl, but thee can desert thy country in her fight for liberty," said Peggy, her eyes blazing with scorn. "I had rather a thousand times that thou hadst taken Star; that thou couldst find it in thy heart to steal, though that were monstrous sinful, than that thou should stand there, and declare thyself a deserter. Why, thou art worse than a thief! Thou hast committed robbery twice over; for thou hast robbed thyself of honor, and despoiled thy country of a man." 97

"But"—he began, amazed at her feeling—"you do not know. You do not understand. I——"

"No," blazed the girl. "I do not know. I do not want to know how a man can be a summer soldier, as Mr. Thomas Paine calls them. A sunshine patriot who rallies to his country's side in fair weather, but who deserts her when she needs men. A deserter! Oh!" her voice thrilling, "how can thee be such a thing?"

"It's—it's all up," he said leaning against the door white and shaken. "I'm done for!" And he fell limply to the floor.

CHAPTER VIII—PEGGY'S RESOLVE 98

“Stand! the ground’s your own, my braves!
Will ye give it up to slaves?
Will ye to your homes retire?
Look behind you! They’re afire!
  And, before you, see
Who have done it!—From the vale
On they come!—And will ye quail?”

—John Pierpont.

In an instant Peggy was out of the stable and running to the house.

“Mother,” she cried bursting in upon Mrs. Owen so suddenly that the lady started up in alarm, “the lad that mended my saddle is in the stable. He hath brought Star back, and I fear he hath fainted. Come quickly!”

“Fainted?” exclaimed the lady rising hastily. “And Star back? Tell Sukey to follow with Tom, Peggy.”

Seizing a bottle of cologne and a vinaigrette she went quickly to the barn followed by Peggy and the two curious servants. 99

“’Tis lack of nourishing food more than aught else that ails him,” was Mrs. Owen’s comment as she laved the youth’s forehead with vinegar, and bade Sukey burn some feathers under his nose. “Peggy, get the guest-chamber in readiness. We will carry him in as soon as he hath regained his consciousness.”

The girl hastened to do her bidding, and presently the lad, by this time recovered from his swoon, was put to bed, and the household all a bustle with preparing gruel and delicacies. Shortly after partaking of food, he gave a sigh of content and fell into a deep sleep. And then Peggy turned to her mother.

“Are we to keep him?” she queried.

“Surely, my daughter. Why dost thou ask? The lad is not strong enough to depart now. There is naught else to be done.”

“But he is in truth a deserter, mother.”

“I surmised as much, as thee remembers,” observed Mrs. Owen quietly.

“And a thief,” continued the maiden with some warmth. “Mother, he acknowledged that ’twas he who stole Star.” 100

“And it was also he who brought her back,” reminded her mother.

“But to desert,” exclaimed Peggy a fine scorn leaping into her eyes. “To leave when his country hath such need of him!”

“True, Peggy; but the flesh is weak, and when subjected to the pangs of hunger ’tis prone to revolt. Our soldiers are so illy cared for that the wonder is that more do not forsake the army.”

“Mother, thee does not excuse it, does thee?” cried Peggy in so much consternation that Mrs. Owen smiled.

“Nay, Peggy. I only suspend judgment until I know all the circumstances. Did he tell thee aught of his reasons for deserting?”

“I fear,” answered Peggy shamefacedly, “that I gave him no opportunity. In fact, mother, I discovered some warmth in speaking anent the matter.”

Mrs. Owen smiled. Well she knew that in her zeal for the country Peggy was apt to “discover warmth.” 101

“Then,” she said, “we will bring naught into question until he hath his strength. Yon lad is in no condition for fighting or aught else at the present time.”

“But once he hath his strength,” broke in the girl eagerly, “would it be amiss to reason with him?”

“Once he hath his strength I will say nothing,” answered the lady, her mouth twitching. “Thou mayst reason with him then to thy heart’s content.”

And so it came about that the young deserter was attended with great care, and none was so assiduous in attention to his comfort as Peggy. For several days he did little but receive food and sleep. This soon passed, however, and he was up and about, though he still kept to his chamber both as a matter of precaution and as though enjoying to the full the creature comforts by which he was surrounded.

“Friend,” remarked Peggy one day after she had arranged his dinner daintily upon a table drawn up by the settle upon which he was lying, “thee has not told thy name yet.”

“’Tis Drayton. John Drayton,” he returned an apprehensive look flashing across his face. “You would not—would you?—betray me?” 102

“I did not ask for that purpose,” she replied indignantly. “Had we wished to denounce thee we would have done so long since. Why shouldst thou think such a thing?”

“I cry you pardon,” he said with something of his old jauntiness. “I have heard that a guilty conscience doth make cowards of us all. ’Tis so in my case. In truth I should not tarry here, but ——”

“Thee is welcome to stay until thy strength is fully restored, friend,” she said. “My mother and I are agreed as to that. And then——”

“Well? And then?” he questioned sharply turning upon her.

“Friend, why did thee desert?” asked she abruptly.

“Why? Because the thought of another winter took all the spirit out of me. Because I am tired of being hungry and cold; because I am tired of being ragged and dirty. I am tired of it all: the long hard marches with insufficient clothing to cover me by day, and no blanket but the snow at night. 103
I made the march to Quebec through all the perils of the wilderness. Through sleet and driving snow it hath always been my fortune to serve. Last winter I spent among the dreary hills of Valley Forge, enduring all the miseries of that awful time. And then, after all that, for three such years of service what does an ungrateful country bestow upon me? The rank of ensign.” And he laughed bitterly. “But every foreign adventurer that comes whining to Congress may have the highest commission that is in their power to bestow. And what do they care for us who have borne the burden? Why, nothing but to let us starve.”

“True,” said Peggy troubled. “True, Friend Drayton, and yet——”

“And yet when we have given so much to an ungrateful country if we desert we are hounded like dogs, or runaway slaves,” he continued passionately. “And you, Mistress Peggy, who have known neither hunger nor cold, nor what it is to be in battle, stand there accusingly because I, forsooth, who have known all these things have tired of them. A summer soldier, you called me. A winter 104
soldier would have been the better term.”

Peggy’s face flushed.

“Now,” he continued, “I am seeking to follow the precepts of the great Declaration which doth teach that every man hath the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness after his own fashion.”

“Still,” remarked the girl, who was plainly puzzled by his reasoning, “if the British should succeed in defeating us what would become of the Declaration? Methinks that ’twould be the part of wisdom not to accord thy life by such precepts until they were definitely established.”

“You are pleased to be sharp, mistress,” he said pushing back from the table. “I—I am in no condition to argue with you. I am weak,” he added reclining once more upon the settle.

Peggy made no reply, and silently removed the dishes. A sparkle came into her eye as she noted their empty condition.

“Mother,” she said as she entered the kitchen where that lady was, “does thee not think that our 105
friend is able now to stand being reasoned with? He said but now that he was still weak.”

Mrs. Owen laughed quietly as she saw that nothing had been left of the meal.

“’Tis but natural that he should feel so, Peggy,” she said. “When one hath been without food and a proper place to sleep the senses become sharpened to the enjoyment of such things, and he but seeks to prolong his delight in them. Be not too hard on the lad, my child.”

“But would it harm him, mother, to reason with him?” persisted Peggy. “If he can eat so, can he not be brought to see the error of his ways? I would not injure him for the world.”

“Set thy mind at rest upon that point, Peggy. Naught that thou canst say to him can work him injury. Hath our friend told thee why he deserted?”

“He feared another winter,” answered Peggy. “And perhaps he hath cause to; for he hath been through the march to Quebec under General Arnold, and last winter he spent at Valley Forge. And so he ran away to keep from passing another such season in the army.” 106

“Poor lad!” sighed the lady. “’Tis no wonder that he deserted. Yet those who endure such hardships for so long rarely desert. ’Tis but a passing weakness. Let us hope that he will return when he is well enough. He is of too good a mettle to be lost.”

“I mean him to go back,” announced Peggy resolutely.

“Peggy, what is worrying thy brain?” exclaimed her mother. “Child, let me look at thee.”

“Leave him to me, mother,” cried the girl, her eyes shining like stars. “He shall yet be something other than a summer soldier.”

CHAPTER IX—THE TALE OF A HERO 107

“Paradise is under the shadow of swords.”

—*Mahomet*.

“Thee must excuse me, Friend John. I am late with thy dinner because General Arnold dined with us, and we sat long at table,” explained Peggy the next day as she entered the room where Drayton sat.

“Arnold?” cried the young fellow, starting up. “Was General Arnold here? Here? Under this very roof? Could I get a glimpse of him?”

He ran to the front window as he spoke and threw it open. Now this window faced upon Chestnut Street, and there was danger of being seen, so Peggy ran to him in great perturbation.

“Come back,” she cried in alarm. “Some one might see thee. He hath gone. Thou canst not see him. Dost forget that if any see thee thou mayst be taken?” 108

“I had forgot,” said Drayton, drawing back into the room. “You did not speak of me?” he asked quickly, with some excitement.

“Nay; calm thyself. We spoke naught of thee to him, nor to any. Have I not said we would not? Was thee not under the general during the march into Canada?”

“Yes; but he was a colonel then. Hath his wound healed yet? Last spring at Valley Forge he was still on crutches. Is he still crippled?”

“Yes, he is still lame. He uses the crutches when he hath not one of his soldier’s arms to lean upon.”

“Would that he had mine to lean upon,” cried Drayton, with such feeling that Peggy was surprised.

“Why? Does thee think so much of him?” she asked.

“I’d die for him,” uttered the lad earnestly. “There isn’t one of us that was on that march to Quebec under him who wouldn’t.”

“Suppose thee tells me about it,” suggested Peggy. “I have heard something of the happenings of that time, but not fully. The city rings with his prowess and gallant deeds. ’Tis said that he is 109 generous and kind as well as brave.”

“’Tis said rightly, Mistress Peggy. Doth he not care for the orphans of Joseph Warren who fell at Bunker Hill? In that awful march was there ever a kinder or more humane leader? No tongue can tell the sufferings and privations we endured on that march through the wilderness, but there was no murmuring. We knew that he was doing the best that could be done, and that if ever man could take us through that man was Benedict Arnold. I cannot describe what hardships we endured, but as we approached the St. Lawrence River I became so ill that I could no longer march. Utterly exhausted, I sank down on a log, and watched the troops pass by me. In the rear came Colonel Arnold on horseback. Seeing me sitting there, pale and dejected, he dismounted and came over to me.

“‘And what is it, my boy?’ he asked. ’I—I’m sick,’ I blubbered, and burst out crying.

“He didn’t say a word for a minute, and then he turned and ran down to the river bank, and halloed to a house which stood near. The owner came quickly, and Colonel Arnold gave him silver 110 money to look after me until I should get well. Then with his own hands he helped me into the boat, gave me some money also, and said that I must not think of joining them until I was quite strong. Oh!” cried Drayton huskily, “he was always like that. Always doing something for us to make it easier.”

“And did thee join him again?” questioned Peggy, her voice not quite steady. She had heard of the love that soldiers often have for their leaders, but she had not come in touch with it before.

“Ay! who could forsake a commander like that? As soon as I was able I followed after them with all speed. In November we stood at last on the Plains of Abraham before Quebec. We were eager to attack the city at once, but Sir Guy Carleton arrived with reinforcements, and we could not hope to take the city until we too were reinforced. Finally we were joined by General Montgomery and three hundred men, and the two leaders made ready to assault the town.

“On the last day of the year, in the midst of a driving snow-storm we started. It was so dark and 111 stormy that in order that we might recognize each other each soldier wore a white band of paper on his cap on which was written—Liberty or Death!

“General Montgomery was to attack the lower town by way of Cape Diamond on the river, while Colonel Arnold was to assault the northern part. The storm raged furiously, but we reached the Palace Gate in spite of it. The alarm was ringing from all the bells in the city, drums were beating, and the artillery opened upon us. With Colonel Arnold at our front we ran along in single file, bending our heads to avoid the storm, and holding our guns under cover of our coats to keep our powder dry.

“The first barrier was at Sault au Matelot, and here we found ourselves in a narrow way, swept by a battery, with soldiers firing upon us from the houses on each side of the passage. But Arnold was not daunted. He called out, ‘Come on, boys!’ and we rushed on. ’Twas always that. He never said, ‘Go, boys!’ like some of the officers. ’Twas always ‘Come on, boys!’ and there he’d be at our 112 head. I tell you a braver man never lived.

“Well, as he rushed on cheering us to the assault, he was struck by a musket ball just at the moment of the capture of the barrier. His leg was broken, and he fell upon the snow. Then, can you believe it, he got up somehow, though he could only use one leg, and endeavored to press

forward. Two of us dropped our muskets, and ran to him, but he refused to leave the field until the main body of the troops came up. He stood there leaning on us for support, and calling to the troops in a cheering voice as they passed, urging them onward. When at last he consented to be taken from the field his steps could be traced by the blood which flowed from the wound."

"Was it the same one that was hurt at Saratoga?" queried Peggy.

"The very same. And no sooner was he recovered than he was in action again. Although the attack on the city was a failure he would not give up the idea of its capture. I believe that had not General Montgomery fallen it would have succeeded." 113

"'Twas at Quebec that William McPherson fell," mused Peggy. "He was the first one of our soldiers to fall. Philadelphia is proud of his renown. But oh, he was so young, and so full of patriotic zeal and devotion to the cause of liberty!"

"Every one was full of it then," observed Drayton sadly. "When we were on the Plains of Abraham before the battlements of the lofty town, think you that no thought came to us of how Wolfe, the victorious Wolfe, scaled those rocks and forced the barred gates of the city? I tell you that there was not one of us whose heart did not feel kinship with that hero. His memory inspired us. His very presence seemed to pervade the field, and we knew that our leaders were animated by the memory of his victory."

"Thou hast felt like that, and yet thou hast deserted?" exclaimed the girl involuntarily.

A deep flush dyed the young fellow's face. He sat very still for a moment and then answered with passion:

"Have I not given all that is necessary? And I have suffered, Mistress Peggy. I have suffered that which is worse than death. Why, death upon the battle-field is glorious! I do not fear it. But 'tis the long winters; the cold, sleepless nights, huddling in scanty wisps of straw, or over a low fire for warmth; the going without food, or having but enough to merely keep life within one. This it is that takes the heart out of a man. I'll bear it no more." 114

Two great tears forced themselves from Peggy's eyes, and coursed down her cheeks. "Thee has borne so much," she uttered chokingly. "So much, Friend John, that I wonder thee has lived to tell it. And having borne so much 'tis dreadful to ask more of thee, and yet to have thee fail—fail just at the very last! To dim such an honorable record! To blot out all that thou hast endured by desertion! Oh, how could thee? How could thee? Could thee not endure a little more?"

Drayton stirred restlessly.

"They haven't treated me well," he blurted out. "I wanted to be in the Select Corps, and they wouldn't put me there. And I merited it, Mistress Peggy. I tell you I merited it." 115

"What is the Select Corps, John?" asked the girl curiously.

"'Tis a body of soldiers made up of picked men from the whole army," he returned. "They are always in advance, and lead every charge in an active campaign. I wanted to be there, and they wouldn't put me in."

"But," persisted Peggy speaking in a low tone, "does thee think that thy general would desert as thee has done just because he was not treated well? Thee knows that 'tis only of late that Congress would give him his proper rank."

"He desert!" The boy's sullen eyes lighted up again at the mere mention of his hero, and he laughed. "Why, I verily believe that General Arnold would fight if everybody else in America stopped fighting. Why, at Saratoga when General Gates deprived him of his command, and ordered him to stay in his tent, he would not. When we boys heard what had been done, we were afraid he would leave us, and so we got up a petition asking him to wait until after the battle. 116 And, though he was smarting from humiliation, he promised that he'd stay with us. But Gates told him not to leave the tent, and ordered us forward. We went, but our hearts were heavy to be without him.

"At the first sound of battle, however, he rushed from the tent, threw himself on his horse, and dashed to where we were, crying, 'No man shall keep me in my tent this day. If I am without command, I will fight in the ranks; but the soldiers, God bless them, will follow my lead.'

"How we cheered when we saw him coming! Brandishing his broad-sword above his head, he dashed into the thickest of the fight, calling the old, 'Come on, boys! Victory or death!' and the regiments followed him like a whirlwind. The conflict was terrible, but in the midst of flame and smoke, and metal hail, he was everywhere. His voice rang out like a trumpet, animating and inspiring us to valor. He led us to victory, but just as the Hessians, terrified by his approach, turned to flee, they delivered a volley in their retreat that shot his horse from under him. At the same instant a wounded German private fired a shot which struck him in that same leg that had 117 been so badly lacerated at Quebec, two years before.

"As he fell he cried out to us, 'Rush on, my brave boys, rush on!' But one, in fury at seeing the general wounded, dashed at the wounded German, and would have run him through with his bayonet had not the general cried: 'Don't hurt him, he but did his duty. He is a fine fellow.'"

"I don't wonder that thee loves him," cried Peggy, her eyes sparkling at the recital. "I believe with thee that though all others should fail he would fight the enemy even though he would fight alone. Oh, I must get thee to tell mother this! I knew not that he was so brave!"

"Yes," reiterated Master Drayton positively. "He would fight even though he fought alone. But I

am not made of such stuff. I am no hero, Mistress Peggy. Beside, have not the Parley-voos come over to fight for us? They have all the honors given them; let them have the miseries too."

"But why should the French fight our battles for us?" demanded the girl bluntly. "They are only to help us. Why should they exert themselves to save that which we do not value enough to fight for?"

"'Tis expected by the army, anyway," said Drayton. "I know that I'll do no more."

"Thee is a poor tired lad," said the girl gently. "And thy dinner. See how little thou hast eaten. I have talked too long with thee to-day. Later we will renew the subject."

"Renew it an you will," retorted the boy assuming again his jaunty manner, half defiance, half swagger. "'Twill make no difference. I have served my last. Unless the recruiting officer finds me you won't catch me in the army again."

Peggy smiled a knowing little smile, but made no answer.

"We shall see," she thought as she left the room. "Methinks thee has some martial spirit left, Friend John."

CHAPTER X—PEGGY TEACHES A LESSON

"Rise then, my countrymen! for fight prepare,
Gird on your swords, and fearless rush to war!
For your grieved country nobly dare to die,
And empty all your veins for liberty."

—*Jonathan Mitchell Sewall*.

It was several days before Peggy could have another talk with Master Drayton, but meantime she set up the needles and began to knit vigorously on stockings, spun into thread more of the flax, and put Sukey to work weaving it into cloth.

"Peggy, what is thee so busy about?" asked Mrs. Owen, coming into the kitchen where the girl had been at work since the dawn.

Peggy looked up from the dye kettle with a puzzled look on her face, and gave an extra poke at the cloth reposing therein by way of emphasis.

"I am trying to dye some cloth, mother, but it doesn't seem to come right. What shall be done to indigo to get a pretty blue? I had no trouble with the yellow dye. See how beautifully this piece came out. Such a soft fine buff! I am pleased with it—but this——"

She paused and turned inquiringly toward her mother. Mrs. Owen took the stick from her hand, and held up a piece of cloth from the steaming kettle, examining it critically.

"Fix another kettle of water, Peggy," she said, "and let it be near to boiling. Into it put some salts of tin, alum and cream of tartar. It needs brightening, and will come a pretty blue when washed in the solution. There! Punch each part of the cloth down into the water, child, so that it may be thoroughly wetted. So! Now rinse well, and hang it out to dry. That done thou shalt tell me for what purpose thou hast dyed the cloth such especial colors. Thy father hath no need of a new uniform."

"'Tis for Friend John," said Peggy dabbling the cloth vigorously up and down in the rinsing water.

"Why! hath he expressed a wish to return?" exclaimed Mrs. Owen in amazement. "I had heard naught of it."

Peggy laughed.

"Not yet, mother," she cried, her eyes dancing with mirth. "But I see signs. Oh, I see signs. This must be ready anent the time he does wish to go. This, with socks, and weapons, and aught else he may need."

"Hast thou been reasoning with him, Peggy, that thee feels so sure?"

"A little," admitted the girl. "This afternoon, if none comes to interrupt, I shall do more. Mother, what would I do without thee? Thee did just the right thing to bring this cloth to the proper color. Is it not beautiful? Would I could do so well."

"'Twill come in time, my daughter. Skill in dyeing as in aught else comes only from practice. But here is Sukey to tell us of visitors. Wash thy hands and join us, Peggy. If 'tis Sally Bache I make no doubt but that there is news from Dr. Franklin."

'Twas customary at this time to pay morning visits in Philadelphia, and several came, one after another, so that by the time she had finished her interrupted tasks Peggy found the afternoon well on toward its close before she could pay her usual visit to Master Drayton. She found him awaiting her coming with eagerness.

"'Tis good to be sheltered and fed," he said as the maiden entered the room, "but none the less

’tis monstrous tiresome to be cooped up. What shall be done to amuse me, Mistress Peggy?”

“Would thee like to have me read to thee?” she asked, a gleam of mischief coming into her eyes.

“The very thing,” he cried, seating himself comfortably on the settle. “Is it a tale? Or perchance you have brought a verse book?”

“Neither,” she answered. “Art sure that thou art comfortable, Friend John? Does thee need anything at all?”

“Nothing at all,” he replied pleased at her solicitude. “And now for the reading. I am curious to see what you have chosen, for I see that you have brought something with you.”

“Yes,” she responded, producing a pamphlet. “’Tis just a little something from a writer who calls himself, ‘Common Sense.’” Before he had time to expostulate she began hurriedly: 123

“‘These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of men and women. We have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.’”

“Now see here,” broke in the youth in an injured tone sitting bolt upright. “That’s mean! Downright mean, I say, to take advantage of a fellow like that. If you want to begin again on that summer soldier business, why say so right out.”

“Does thee object very seriously, John, to listening?” queried the maiden mildly. “I would like to read thee the article.”

“Oh, go ahead! I guess I can stand it.” Drayton set his lips together grimly, and half turned from her.

Peggy waited for no further permission. The pamphlet was one of the most powerful written by Thomas Paine, and, as he passed from paragraph to paragraph of the tremendous harangue, he touched with unfailing skill, with matchless power, the springs of anxiety, contempt, love of home, love of country, fortitude, cool deliberation and passionate resolve. Drayton listened for a time in silence, with a sullen and injured air. Slowly he turned toward the reader as though compelled against his will, and presently he sprang to his feet with something like a sob. 124

“In pity, cease,” he cried. “Hast no compassion for a man?”

SLOWLY HE TURNED TOWARD THE READER

But Peggy knew that now was the time to drive the lesson home, so steeling her heart to pity, she continued the pamphlet, closing with the peroration which was such a battle call as might almost startle slain patriots from their graves:

“‘Up and help us; lay your shoulders to the wheel; better have too much force than too little, when so great an object is at stake. Let it be told to the future world, that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive, the country and city, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to meet and repulse it.... It matters not where you live, or what rank of life you hold, the evil or the blessing will reach you all.... The heart that feels not now is dead. The 125

blood of his children will curse his cowardice who shrinks back at a time when a little might have saved the whole, and made them happy. I love the man that can smile in trouble, that can gather strength from distress, and grow brave by reflection. 'Tis the business of little minds to shrink; but he whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves his conduct, will pursue his principles until death.... By perseverance and fortitude, we have the prospect of a glorious issue; by cowardice and submission the sad choice of a variety of evils,—a ravaged country, a depopulated city, habitations without safety, and slavery without hope. Look on this picture and weep over it; and if there yet remains one thoughtless wretch who believes it not, let him suffer it unlamented.'"

"No more," cried the youth in great agitation. "I can bear no more. ''Tis the business of little minds to shrink; but he whose heart is firm, and whose conscience approves his conduct, will pursue his principles until death.' 'Tis true. Do not I know it. Until death! Until death! Wretch that I am, I know it. There have been times when I would have given my life to be back in the army. Do you think it is pleasant to skulk, to hide from honest men? To know always and always that one is a poltroon and a coward? I tell you no. Do you think that I have not heard the inward pleading of my conscience to go back? That I have not seen the accusing look in your eyes? You called me a summer soldier! I am worse than that, and I have lost my chance." 126

"Thee has just found it, John," cried she quickly. "Before thee served for thine own advancement; now thee will begin again, and fight for thy country alone. If preferment comes to thee, it will have been earned by unselfish devotion. But thy country, John, thy country! Let it be always in thy thoughts until its liberties are secured beyond recall."

"Would you have me go back?" he cried, stopping before her in amazement.

"Why, of course thee is going back," answered Peggy simply. "There is naught else for a man to do." 127

Drayton noted the slight emphasis the girl laid upon the word man, and made an involuntary motion of assent.

"Did you know that deserters are ofttimes shot?" he asked suddenly.

Peggy clutched at the back of a chair, and turned very pale. "No," she said faintly. "I did not know."

"I thought not," he said. "None the less what you have said is true. 'There is naught else for a man to do.' I am going back, Mistress Peggy. I shall try for another chance, but if it does not come, still I am going back."

"And be shot?" she cried. "Oh, what have I done?"

"Shown me my duty," he answered quietly. "Blame not yourself, for there hath been an inward cry toward that very thing ever since I ran away from my duty. I have stifled its calling, and tried to palliate my wrong-doing by excuses, but neither winter's cold, nor the ingratitude of an unappreciative country will excuse a man's not sticking by his convictions. Never again will you have it in your power to call me a summer soldier." 128

"Thee is right," faltered the girl. "I—I am glad that thee has so resolved, and yet——Oh! I hope that thee will not be shot."

She burst into tears and ran out of the room. Girl-like, now that the end was accomplished, Peggy was rather aghast at the result.

CHAPTER XI—PEGGY PLEADS FOR DRAYTON 129

"'Me from fair Freedom's sacred cause
Let nothing e'er divide;
Grandeur, nor gold, nor vain applause,
Nor friendship false, misguide.'"

—*The American Patriot's Prayer.*
(Ascribed to Thomas Paine.)

It was Mrs. Owen who found a way out of the situation.

"Nay, lad," she said in her gentle way after Peggy had poured forth her fear that the boy might be shot, and Drayton had expressed himself as eager to go back at once. "Be not too hasty. Youth is ever impulsive, and prone to act on the resolve of the moment. Thee would prefer another chance, would thee not?"

"Yes," answered the lad quickly. "If I could have it, I would show myself worthy of it. But if I cannot, Madam Owen, I am still resolved to go back, and face death like a man." 130

"Thee is right, John," she answered. "But if we could reach the proper authorities something might be done to give thee an opportunity to redeem thyself. Stay! I have it! Was not Mr. Arnold thy general?"

“Yes,” he said. “But oh, madam! is it necessary that he should know? Think, think what it would be should he learn that John Drayton, one of his soldiers, deserted. I could not bear to see him.”

“But would he not take more interest in thee than any other officer might? He alone would know all that thou didst endure in that march through the Maine wilderness. He would have a more complete understanding of thy privations, and how thou hast borne thyself under them. It is to him we must look to get thee thy chance.”

Drayton buried his face in his hands for a time, and sat in thought. Presently he looked up.

“You speak truly, madam,” he said. “’Tis the only way. He is the one to whom we must go. I am ashamed to face him, but I will. I’ll ask for another chance, but oh! this is a thing that he cannot 131
understand: he who would give his life rather than fail in his duty. ’Tis a part of my punishment. I’d rather die than face him, but I will.”

“Once more, lad, let us not be too hasty,” said the lady again, laying a detaining hand upon his arm as he rose to his feet. “We must approach him with some little diplomacy. So much have I learned in this long war. He hath discovered a liking for Peggy here, and hath bestowed marked notice upon her upon several occasions. Therefore, while I like not to seem to take advantage of such favor, in this instance it might be well to send her as an advocate to him for thee. What does thee say, Peggy?”

“That ’tis the very thing,” cried Peggy, starting up. “Oh, I will gladly go to him. And I will plead, and plead, John, until he cannot help but give thee another chance.”

“It seems like shirking,” remonstrated Drayton, his restored manliness eager to begin an expiation.

“Thee has been advertised as a deserter, lad, and should thee attempt to go to him thee might be apprehended. Also, if the general were to see thee without first preparing him, he might not 132
listen to thy explanation, and turn thee over to the recruiting officer. It will be the part of wisdom for Peggy to see him first.”

And so it was arranged. September had given place to the crisp bracing air of October, and on the uplands the trees were beginning to wear the glory of scarlet and yellow and opal green. Sunshine and shadow flecked the streets of the city, and as Peggy wended her way toward the headquarters of General Arnold, she was conscious of a feeling of melancholy.

“Is it because of the dying year, I wonder?” she asked herself as a dead leaf fell at her feet. “I know not why it is, but my spirits are very low. Is it because I fear the general will not give the lad his chance? Come, Peggy!” Addressing herself sternly, a way she had. “Put thy heart in attune with the weather, lest thee infects the general with thy megrims.”

So chiding herself she quickened her steps and assumed an aggressively cheerful manner. Just as she turned from Fifth Street into High she heard a great clamor. She stopped in alarm as a 133
rabble of men and boys suddenly swept around a corner and flooded the street toward her. The girl stood for but a moment, and then ran back into Fifth Street, where she stopped so frightened that she did not notice a coach drawn by four horses driving rapidly down the street.

“Careful, my little maid! careful!” called a voice, and Peggy looked up to find General Arnold himself leaning out of the coach regarding her anxiously. “Why, ’tis Miss Peggy Owen,” he exclaimed. “Know you not that you but escaped being run down by my horses?”

“I—I—’tis plain to be seen,” stammered the maiden trembling.

“Sam, assist the young lady into the coach,” he commanded the coachman. Then, as Peggy was seated by his side: “I cry you pardon, Miss Peggy, for not getting out myself. I am not so nimble as I was. What is it? What hath frightened you?”

“Does thee not hear the noise?” cried Peggy.

Before he could reply the mob swept by. In the midst of it was a cart in which lay a rude pine 134
coffin which the crowd was showering with stones.

“’Tis the body of James Molesworth, the spy,” he told her. “When he was executed ’twas first interred in the Potter’s Field; then when the British held possession of the city ’twas exhumed and buried with honors. Since the Whigs have the town again ’tis thought fitting to restore it to its old resting place in the Potter’s Field.”

“’Tis a shame not to let the poor man be,” she exclaimed, every drop of blood leaving her face. “Why do they not let him rest? He paid the debt of his guilt. It were sin to maltreat his bones.”

“’Tis best not to give utterance to those sentiments, Miss Peggy,” he cautioned. “They do honor to your heart, but the public temper is such that no mercy is shown toward those miscreants who serve as spies.”

“But it hath been so long since he was executed,” she said with quivering lips. “And is it not strange? When I came into the city to seek my father ’twas the very day that they had exhumed his body and were burying it with honors. Oh, doth it portend some dire disaster to us?” 135

“Come, come, Miss Peggy,” he said soothingly. “Calm yourself. I knew not that Quakers were superstitious, and had regard for omens. Why, I verily believe that you would look for a stranger should the points of the scissors stick into the floor if they fell accidentally.”

“I would,” she confessed. “I fancy all of us girls do. But this—this is different.”

“Not a whit,” he declared. “’Tis a mere coincidence that you should happen to be present on both occasions.” And then seeing that her color had not returned even though the last of the mob had gone by, he gave a word to the coachman. “I am going to take you for a short drive,” he announced, “and to your destination.”

“Why! I was coming to see thee,” cried Peggy with a sudden remembrance of her mission. “I wish to chat with thee anent something and—someone.”

“Robert Dale?” he questioned with a laugh. “He is a fine fellow, and well worthy of a chat.” 136

“Oh, no! Not about Robert, though he is indeed well worthy of it, as thee says. ’Tis about one John Drayton.”

“What? Another?” He laughed again, and settled himself back on the cushions with an amused air. Then as he met the innocent surprise of her clear eyes he became serious. “And what about him, Miss Peggy?”

“Does thee not remember him, Friend Arnold?” she queried in surprise. “He was with thee on thy march through the wilderness to Quebec.”

“Is that the Drayton you mean?” he asked amazed in turn. “I do indeed remember him. What of him? He is well, I hope. A lad of parts, I recall. And brave. Very brave!”

“He hath not been well, but is so now,” she said.

“You have something to ask of me,” he said keenly. “Speak out, Miss Peggy. I knew not that he was a friend of yours.”

“He hath not been until of late,” she answered troubled as to how she should broach the subject. “Sir,” she said presently, plunging boldly into the matter, “suppose that after serving three long years a soldier should weaken? Suppose that such an one grew faint hearted at the prospect of 137 another winter such as the one just passed at Valley Forge; would thee find it in thy heart to blame him, if, for a time, he should”—she paused searching for a word that would express her meaning without using the dreadful one, desert—“he should, well—retire without leave until he could recover his strength? Would thee blame him?”

“Do you mean that Drayton hath deserted?” he asked sternly.

“He did; but he repents,” she told him quickly. “Oh, judge him not until I tell anent it. He wants to go back. His courage failed only because of sickness. Now he is ready and willing, nay, even eager to go back even though he meets death by so doing. As he says himself ’twas naught but the cold, and hunger, and scanty clothing that drove him to it.” Peggy’s eyes grew eloquent with feeling as she thought of the forlorn condition of the lad when she first saw him.

“And if he goes back, will he not have hunger, and cold, and scanty clothing to endure again?” he asked harshly. 138

“Yes; but now he hath rested and grown strong,” she answered. “He will have the strength to endure for perchance another three years should the war last so long. He wants to go back. He wants a chance to redeem himself.”

“And had he not the courage to come to me himself without asking you to intercede for him?” he demanded. “He was in my command, and he knows me as only the soldiers do know me. Since when hath Benedict Arnold ceased to give ear to the distress of one of his soldiers? I like it not that he did not appeal to me of himself.”

“He wished to,” interposed the girl eagerly. “Indeed, ’twas mother’s and my thought for me to come to you. We thought, we thought”—Peggy faltered, but went on bravely—“we thought that thee should be approached diplomatically. We wished the lad to have every chance to redeem himself, and we feared that if thee saw him without preparation thee might be inclined to give him to the recruiting officer. He is so sincere, he wishes so truly to have another chance that mother and I could not bear that he should not have it. I have made a poor advocate, I fear,” she 139 added with a wistful little smile, “though he did say that he would rather die than face thee.”

“Unravel the matter from the beginning,” he commanded, with a slight smile at her confession of diplomacy.

And Peggy did so, beginning with the time that the lad mended the saddle on the road, the loss of her pony, and everything leading to Drayton’s stay with them, even to the making of the uniform of blue and buff and the reading of “The Crisis.”

“Upon my life,” he cried laughing heartily at this. “I shall advise General Washington to appoint you to take charge of our fainthearted ones. So he did not relish being called a summer soldier, eh? Miss Peggy, I believe that I should like to see the lad, and have a talk with him.”

“Thee will not be harsh with him, will thee?” she pleaded. “He hath indeed been in a woeful plight, and he could not bear it from thee. And he doth consider the country ungrateful toward him.”

“He is right,” commented Arnold, a frown contracting his brow. “Ungrateful indeed! Not only he 140 but others have suffered from her injustice. Have no fear, Miss Peggy, but take me to him at once.”

Nevertheless Peggy felt some uneasiness as the coach turned in the direction of her home.

“Thy spirit, Independence, let me share,
  Lord of the lion-heart and eagle eye;
Thy steps I follow, with my bosom bare,
  Nor heed the storm that howls along the sky.
Immortal Liberty, whose look sublime
Hath bleached the tyrant’s cheek in every varying clime.”

—*Smollett.*

Drayton was lying on the settle when Peggy announced General Arnold. He sprang to his feet with an exclamation as the latter entered, and then shrank back and hung his head.

“You, you,” he murmured brokenly. “Oh, how can you bear to see me?”

“And is it thus we meet again, Drayton?” said the general, all the reserve and hauteur of his manner vanishing before the distress of his former soldier.

“’Twas cold,” muttered Drayton too ashamed to raise his head. “I—I feared it sir. You cannot understand,” he broke out. “How can a man of your courage know how such things eat the very heart out of a fellow?”

“I do know, boy,” exclaimed Arnold seating himself on the settle. “What would you say if I were to tell you that once I deserted?”

“You?” cried the youth flinging up his head to stare at him. “I’d never believe it, sir. You desert! Impossible!”

“Nevertheless, I did, my lad. Listen, and I will tell you of it. I was fifteen at the time, and my imagination had been fired by tales of the atrocities committed on the frontier by the French and Indians. I resolved to enlist and relieve the dire state of my countrymen as far as lay in my power. So I ran away from home to Lake George, where the main part of the army was at the time. The wilderness of that northern country was dense, and I passed through hardships similar to those we sustained in our march to Quebec. You know, Drayton, what an army may have to endure in such circumstances?”

Drayton nodded, his eyes fixed on his beloved leader with fascinated interest.

“Well,” continued the general, “the privations proved too much for a lad of my age, so I deserted, and made my way home. I shall never forget the fright my good mother would be in if she but caught a glimpse of the recruiting officer. I was under the required age for the army, to be sure, but none the less I skulked and hid until the French and Indian war had ceased, and there was no longer need for hiding.”

“You,” breathed the youth in so low a tone as scarce to be heard, “you did that, and then made that charge at Saratoga? You, sir?”

“Even I,” the general told him briefly. “’Tis a portion of my life that I don’t often speak of, Drayton, but I thought that it might help you to know that I could understand—that others before you have been faint hearted, and then retrieved themselves.”

“You?” spoke the lad again in a maze. “You! and then after that, the march through that awful wilderness! Why, sir, ’twas you that held us together. ’Twas you, that when the three hundred turned back and left us to our fate, ’twas you who cried: ‘Never mind, boys! There’ll be more glory for the rest of us.’ ’Twas you that cheered us when our courage flagged. ’Twas you that carried us through. And then Valcour! Why, sir, look at the British ships you fought. And Ticonderoga! And Crown Point! And Ridgefield, where six horses were shot from under you!”

“And do you remember all those?” asked Arnold, touched. “Would that Congress had a like appreciation of my services; but it took a Saratoga to gain even my proper rank.”

“I know,” cried the boy hotly. “Haven’t we men talked it over by the camp-fires? Were it left to the soldiers you should be next to the commander-in-chief himself.”

“I know that, my lad,” spoke the general, markedly pleased by this devotion. “But now a truce to that, and let us consider your case. Miss Peggy here tells me that you wish to return to the army?”

“I do,” said the youth earnestly. “Indeed, General Arnold, no one could help it about her. She gave me no peace until I so declared myself.”

“I understand that she read ‘The Crisis’ to you,” said Arnold, a smile playing about his lips. “But you, Drayton. Aside from that, is it your wish to return to the army? It hath ofttimes been in my thoughts of late to obtain a grant of land and retire thereto with such of my men as were sick and weary of the war. I have in truth had some correspondence anent the subject with the state of New York. Would you like to be one of my household there?”

“Beyond anything,” spoke Drayton eagerly. “But not until I have redeemed myself, general. Were I to go before you would always be wondering if I would not fail you at some crucial moment. You have won your laurels, sir, and deserve retirement. But I have mine to gain. Give me another chance. That is all I ask.”

“You shall have it, Drayton. Come with me, and I will send you with a note to General Washington. He hath so much of friendship for me that because I ask it he will give you the chance you wish.”

“But the uniform,” interposed Peggy who had been a pleased listener to the foregoing conversation. “I made him a uniform, Friend Arnold. Should he not wear it?” 146

“’Twould be most ungallant not to, Miss Peggy,” returned the commander laughing.

“I knew not that you had made it,” exclaimed Drayton as Peggy disappeared, and returned with the uniform in question. “Why, ’tis but a short time since I said that I would go back. How could you get it done so soon?”

Peggy laughed.

“It hath been making a long time,” she confessed. “Mother helped me with dyeing the cloth, but all the rest I did myself. I knew that thee would go back from the first.”

“’Twas more than I did then,” declared Drayton as the girl left the room once more in search of her mother. “Sir, could a man do aught else than return to his allegiance when urged to it by such a girl?”

“No,” agreed his general with a smile. “Drayton, your friend hath clothed you with a uniform of her own manufacture. You have shown an appreciation of Benedict Arnold such as I knew not that any held of my services to the country. Take therefore this sword,” unbuckling it from his waist as he spoke. “’Tis the one I used in that dash at Saratoga that you followed. Take it, Ensign Drayton, and wear it in memory of him who was once your commanding officer.” 147

“Your sword?” breathed Drayton with a gasp of amazement. “Your sword, General Arnold? I am not worthy! I am not worthy!”

“Tut, tut, boy! I make no doubt but that you will wield it with more honor than it hath derived from the present owner,” said the other pressing it upon the lad.

“Then, sir, I take it,” said Drayton clasping it with a reverent gesture. “And may God requite me with my just deserts if ever I bring disgrace upon it. Sir, I swear to you that never shall it be used, save as you have used it, in the defense of my country. Should ever I grow faint hearted again, I will have but to look at this sword, and think of the courage and patriotism of him who gave it to renew my courage. Pray heaven that I may ever prove as loyal to my country as Benedict Arnold hath shown himself.”

“You, you overwhelm me, boy,” gasped Arnold who had grown strangely pale as the lad was speaking. “I make no doubt but that you will grace the weapon as well as the original owner. Ah!” with evident relief, “here are Mrs. Owen and the fair Peggy. Doth not our soldier lad make a brave showing, Miss Peggy?” 148

“He doth indeed,” cried Peggy in delight. “And thee has given him thy sword, Friend Arnold! How monstrously good of thee!”

“Is it not?” asked Drayton in an awed tone. “And I am only a subaltern. Oh, Mistress Peggy, you will never have the opportunity to call me a summer soldier again. I have that which will keep me from ever being faint hearted again.” He touched the weapon proudly as he ended. “This will inspire me with courage.”

“Of course it will,” cried Peggy with answering enthusiasm. “Mother said all along that naught ailed thee but an empty stomach.”

“’Tis what ails the most of our soldiers,” said the boy as the laugh died away which this speech provoked. “’Tis marvelous how a little food doth raise the patriotism.” 149

“And thee will be sure to write?” questioned Peggy when they descended to the lower floor. “I shall be anxious to hear of thy well-being, and thee must remember, John, that ’tis my intention to keep thee in socks, and mittens, and to renew that uniform when ’tis needed. Thee shall be cold no more if I can help it. And how shall it be done unless thee will let me know thy whereabouts?”

“Have no fear. I shall be glad to write,” answered Drayton who, now that the time had come for departure, seemed loath to leave them. “Madam Owen, and Miss Peggy, you have made a new man of me. How shall I ever thank you for your care?”

“Speak not of it, dear lad,” said the lady gently. “If we have done thee good it hath not been without benefit to us also. And if thou dost need anything fail not to let us know. ’Tis sweet to minister to those who take the field in our defense. It makes thee very near and dear to us to know personally all that thee and thy fellows are undergoing for our sakes.”

“Dear lady, the man who will not fight for such as you deserves the fate of a deserter indeed,” exclaimed the youth, much moved. “I thank you again. You shall hear from me, but not as a summer soldier.” 150

He bent in a deep obeisance before both mother and daughter, and then with one last long look about him John Drayton followed General Arnold to the coach.

CHAPTER XIII—GOOD NEWS 151

“To them was life a simple art
  Of duties to be done,
A game where each one took his part,
  A race where all must run.”

—“The Men of Old,” *Lord Houghton*.

Life flowed along in its customary channels with little of incident for Peggy and her mother after the departure of Drayton. But if it was not eventful there was no lack of occupation.

The house and grounds were brought into order; the stores of unspun wool and unhatcheled flax were at length all spun into yarn and thread which in turn were woven into cloth from which the two replenished their depleted wardrobes. But, though all patriotic women strove to supply their every need by domestic industry, the prices of the commonest necessities of life advanced to such an extent that only the strictest frugality enabled them to live. 152

“There is one thing, mother,” said Peggy one morning in November as she found Mrs. Owen studying accounts with a grave face. “There is one thing sure: if the war lasts much longer we shall all be ruined as to our estates, whatever may be the state of our liberties.”

“True, Peggy,” answered her mother with a sigh. “Philadelphia hath become a place of ‘crucifying expenses,’ as Mr. James Lovell says. And how to be more frugal I know not.”

“And yet there was never so much dressing and entertaining going on,” remarked Peggy.

“Times are strangely altered indeed,” observed the lady with another sigh. “The city is no longer the town that William Penn desired, but hath gone wild with luxury and dissipation.”

“Many are leaving the city, mother. ’Tis not we alone who find it expensive.”

“I know, Peggy. ’Tis affecting every one. Would that a better example were set the citizens at headquarters. Mr. Arnold is a good soldier. He hath shown himself to be a man of rare courage, 153 but I fear ’twas a mistake to put him in charge of our city. Would that he had less money, or else more prudence. I fear the effect on the country. But there! I have uttered more than was wise, but I trust to thy discretion.”

“The city is rife with rumors of his extravagance, mother,” Peggy made answer. “Thee is not alone in commenting upon it. Here was Robert yesterday looking exceedingly grave anent the reports. He says that there is much talk concerning the number and magnificence of the entertainments given at headquarters, and that many deem it but mere ostentation.”

“I feared there would be comment,” was Mrs. Owen’s reply. “’Tis pity that it should happen so when he hath such a fine record as a soldier. Such things cause discontent. There is so much use for the money among the suffering soldiers that I wonder he does not choose to spend it so. I like not to see waste. ’Tis sinful. Ah! here is Betty, who looks full of importance. Belike she hath news.”

“I am come to say good-bye, Peggy,” announced Betty Williams bustling in upon them. “Mother 154 and family are going to Lancaster. Father hath advised us to leave the city owing to the high price of commodities, and while they go there, I, with a party of friends, am going to Dr. Simpson’s to take the smallpox. It hath been so prevalent that mother feared for me to delay longer in taking it.”

“Does thee not dread it, Betty?” questioned Peggy, regarding Betty’s fair skin with some anxiety.

“I like not the pittings,” confessed Betty candidly. “But Dr. Simpson advertises that he hath acquired special skill in the Orient in distributing the marks so as to minister to feminine looks instead of detracting from them, and he promises to limit them to but few. Can thee not come with me, Peggy? Thee has not had it, and we shall be a merry party.”

“I fear that it would not be altogether to my liking, Betty. I know that I should be inoculated, but I shrink from the process. I will say so frankly.”

“Thee is just like Sally,” cried Betty. “She hath courage to become a nurse, yet cannot pluck up 155 heart to join a smallpox party. And thee, Peggy Owen! I am disappointed in thee. I have not half thy pluck, nor Sally’s; yet I mind not the ordeal. It may save me from a greater calamity. Just think how relieved the mind would be not to dread the disease all the rest of one’s life. And then to emerge fairer than before, for so the doctor promises. Oh, *charmante*!” ended Betty.

“Thee is brave to feel so about it, Betty,” said Peggy. “I hope that all will result as thee wishes. I shall miss thee.”

“I wish thee would come too,” said Betty wistfully. “The other girls are nice, but there are none like thee and Sally. It used to be that we three were together in everything, but since the war began all that hath changed. What sort of times have come upon us when the only fun left to a damsel is to take the smallpox? And what does thee think, Peggy? I wove some linen, and sent it to the ladies to make into sheets for the prisoners. They said that it was the toughest linen they had ever worked with. It made their fingers bleed.” 156

“Oh, Betty, Betty! was it thou who wove that linen?” laughed Peggy holding up her hands for inspection. “I’ve had to bind my fingers up in mutton tallow every night since I sewed on it. Never mind! thee meant well, anyhow. Come now! Shall we have a cup of tea, and a chat anent things other than smallpox, or tough linen?”

The two girls left the room, and Mrs. Owen turned once more to her accounts. But as the days passed by and the complexion of the times became no better her perplexity deepened.

The ferment of the city grew. Personal and political disputes of all kinds were rife at this time. Men began to refer to the capital city as an attractive scene of debauch and amusement. In compliment to the alliance French fashions and customs crept in, and the extravagance of the country at large in the midst of its distresses became amazing. It was a period of transition. The war itself was dull. The two armies lay watching each other—Clinton in New York City, with Washington's forces extending from White Plains to Elizabeth, New Jersey. The Congress was no longer the dignified body of seventy-six, and often sat with fewer than a dozen members. Even 157
the best men wearied of the war, and their dissatisfaction communicated itself to the masses. The conditions favored excesses, and Philadelphia, as the chief city, was caught in a vortex of extravagances.

So it was much to Mrs. Owen's relief when she received a letter from her husband bidding her to come to him with Peggy.

"There will be no luxuries, and few conveniences," he wrote from Middlebrook, which was the headquarters for the winter of seventy-eight. "None the less there is time for enjoyment as well as duty. Many of the officers have their wives and families with them so that there is no reason why we should not be together also.

"Tell Peggy that she will live in the midst of military equipment, but will not find it unpleasant. General Greene told me that he dined at a table in Philadelphia last week where one hundred and sixty dishes were served. Would that our soldiers had some of it! What a change hath come over the hearts of the people! I shall be glad to have thee and my little Peggy out of it. 158

"Come as soon as thou canst make arrangements, and we will be a reunited family once more, for the winter at least. God alone knows what the spring will bring forth. 'Tis now thought that Sir Henry Clinton intends for the South at that time. 'Twould change the complexion of affairs very materially."

Here followed some instructions as to financial and other matters. Mrs. Owen called Peggy hastily.

"Oh, mother, mother! isn't thee glad?" cried the girl dancing about excitedly. "And we will not only be with father, but with the army too. Just think! The very same soldiers that we have been making socks and shirts for so long."

"The very same, Peggy," answered her mother, her face reflecting Peggy's delight. "I am in truth pleased to go. I was much worried as to the outcome of the winter here."

CHAPTER XIV—THE CAMP AT MIDDLEBROOK 159

"We are those whose trained battalions,
  Trained to bleed, not to fly,
Make our agonies a triumph—
  Conquer, while we die."

—"A Battle Song," *Edwin Arnold*.

"Well, if this be a foot-warmer I wonder what a foot-freezer would be called," exclaimed Peggy in tones of disgust, slipping from her seat in the coach to feel the covered iron at her mother's feet. "I don't believe that the innkeeper at the last tavern where we baited our horses filled it with live coals, as I told him to. He was none too civil."

"Belike 'twas because we paid our reckoning in Continental money," remarked Mrs. Owen. "Never mind the iron, Peggy. I shall do very well without it; and if thou art not careful thou wilt drop that box which thee has been so choice of through the journey." 160

Peggy laughed as she resumed her seat by her mother's side.

"Is thee curious anent that box, mother?" she questioned drawing a small oblong box of ebony wood closer to her.

"I should be," observed the lady with a smile, "had I not heard Friend Deering tell thee that 'twas a secret betwixt thee and him."

"I should think that being a secret would make thee wonder all the more concerning it," remarked the girl. "It would me, mother."

"Is thee trying to awake my inquisitiveness, daughter?"

"I am to tell thee about it should thee ask," said Peggy suggestively. "But in all these four days thou hast not once evinced the slightest desire to know aught anent the matter. How can thee be so indifferent, mother? I am eager to tell thee."

"So I judged," replied Mrs. Owen laughing outright. "Know then, Peggy, that I am as desirous of hearing as thou art of telling. 'Tis something for General Washington; is 't not?" 161

“Why, mother, thee knows already,” cried Peggy.

“No, no, child; I am only guessing. ’Twould be like Friend Deering to send something to the general. That is all I know of the matter.”

“Well, then, ’tis five hundred English guineas,” explained the girl, enjoying the look of amazement on her mother’s face.

“Peggy, no!” exclaimed the lady. “I thought belike ’twas money, but I knew not that it was so much. How pleased the general will be. Hard money is getting scarcer and scarcer, and the people murmur against the currency of Congress.”

“And shall I tell thee all that I am to say to Friend Washington?” asked Peggy with an important air. “Mother, thee did not guess that while thee was gathering supplies I too had business of like nature?”

“No, I did not know,” replied Mrs. Owen. “Unravel the matter, I beg, Peggy. ’Twill serve well to pass the time, and I am curious also concerning the affair.”

It was three weeks after the receipt of David Owen’s letter, and December was upon them ere 162
mother and daughter had completed their arrangements for the journey. Knowing the great need of supplies at the encampment, Mrs. Owen determined not to go empty handed, and so made a personal canvas among the citizens, who responded to her appeal for the soldiers with their usual liberality. In consequence, when at length everything was in readiness, it was quite a little caravan that left the city headed for Middlebrook, New Jersey. First came the coach with Peggy and her mother inside; then followed two farm wagons loaded with stores of various kinds; behind these came Tom with Star, for Peggy was hoping for rides with her father; the whole traveling under the escort of four of the Pennsylvania Light Horse who had been in Philadelphia on furloughs.

The roads were bad, the traveling rough and slow, the weather cold and damp, but to Peggy, who had never before been away from Philadelphia and its vicinity, the journey was full of interest and excitement. It was now the afternoon of the fourth day since they had started, and both the maiden and the lady were conscious of a growing feeling of excitement as they neared the 163
journey’s end, so the matter of the box, about which the matron had in truth been wondering, was a welcome diversion.

“At first,” said Peggy pulling the fur robe closer about her and nestling confidentially up to her mother, “he said ’twas so small an amount that he wished me to say naught concerning the donor. But I persuaded him to let me tell who gave it, saying to him that ’twas not the amount that counted so much as the spirit in which ’twas given.”

Mrs. Owen nodded approval, and the girl continued:

“And so I am to say that since Jacob Deering is esteemed too old to take up arms for his country ’tis the only thing he can do to show his sympathy with the cause.”

“Would that there were more like him,” ejaculated the lady. “The cause would soon languish were it not for just such support. Is thee tired, Peggy?”

“Not very, mother. Still, I shall be glad when we reach the camp.”

At length, just as the sun was sinking behind the Watchung Mountains, the cumbersome coach swung round a bend in the road, and the encampment came into view. They had left Philadelphia 164
by the old York road, crossing the Delaware at Coryell’s Ferry, and swinging across Hunterdon County into Somerset, where the army was stationed, so that their first sight of the Continental cantonment glimpsed nearly all of the seven brigades stationed there.

All along the Raritan River, and on the heights of Middlebrook the fields were dotted with tents and parks of artillery. Suddenly, as they drew nearer, the highways between the different posts seemed alive with soldiers going and coming. There was the crunch on the frozen ground of many feet. The country quiet was broken by the rattle of arms, the snort of horses, and the stir and bustle of camp. There was something inspiriting in the spectacle. Fatigue was forgotten, and Peggy straightened up with a little cry of delight.

“Look at the tents, mother,” she cried. “Didst ever see so many before?”

“We must be at Middlebrook,” exclaimed Mrs. Owen, almost as excited as Peggy. “Just see how 165
the prospect of rest hath reanimated the driver and his horses.”

The maiden laughed as the driver sat up, cracked his whip and urged his horses to greater dispatch. The tired animals responded nobly, but their spurt of speed was checked suddenly by a peremptory command from the patrol. The examination over, they were allowed to proceed, but were again halted when they had gone but a short distance.

“What can it be now?” wondered Peggy peering out of the coach. Catching sight of the tall figure that came alongside, she called gaily:

“The countersign, father! The countersign!”

“’Tis welcome! Thrice welcome!” answered David Owen flinging wide the door of the vehicle and taking her into a tender embrace. “Art tired, Peggy?”

“No, father; but I fear that mother is. She hath been cold too.”

“But I am so no longer,” spoke Mrs. Owen cheerily. “Thee is well, David?”

“Never better, my wife. I have forgot that I was ever ill. But come! let us proceed to our quarters.” 166

“And who are in our mess?” asked Peggy as, after a word to the driver, her father stepped into the coach.

“Thou hast become militaryish already, I see,” he said smiling. “I have found accommodations for us at a farmhouse very near Bound Brook. ’Tis just beyond General Greene’s brigade, and close enough to the Pennsylvania line not to interfere with active duty. There will be but five in our mess, as thee calls it, Peggy—Friend Decker and wife, thy mother, thyself and I. ’Tis Friend Decker’s house. Dutch they are, but patriots staunch and true. See, my wife! We are coming to General Washington’s headquarters. ’Tis a much better dwelling than he occupied last year at Valley Forge. To thy right, Peggy. ’Tis the farmhouse in the midst of the orchard.”

“Friend Deering hath sent some gold to the general by Peggy,” observed Mrs. Owen bending forward that she might the better see the building. “And there are supplies behind in the wagons for the soldiers. Two loads there are.” 167

“Now that is good news indeed,” exclaimed Mr. Owen. “The chief should know of it immediately. We will stop there now. ’Twill ensure the general a better night’s rest to receive such tidings. He hath been greatly worried lately over the apathy of the people toward the war.”

“Then if ’twill be of any comfort to him to learn of this small aid let us go to him at once, David,” said his wife.

The last bit of sunlight disappeared behind the hills as they turned from the road into the meadow in the centre of which stood the large two-story wooden dwelling where General Washington had established his quarters for the winter. But lately finished, it was considered a model of elegance for that section of the country, and was in truth most roomy and comfortable.

As the light faded, from the meadows and the hills sounded the drums, fifes and bugles in the retreat, or sunset drum beat. Scarcely had the music died away than all along the top of the mountain range the watch-fires of the sentinels blazed out suddenly.

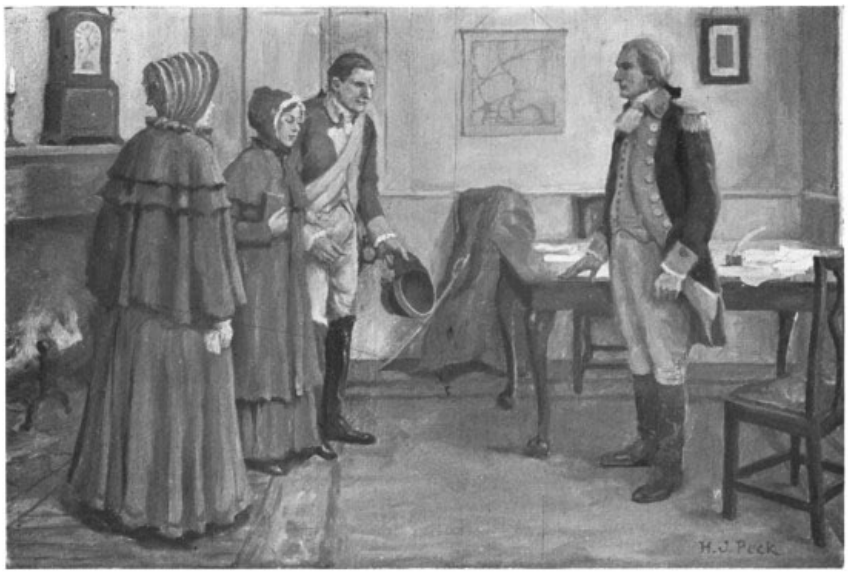
“Oh!” gasped Peggy, her eyes glowing, “if I live long ’mid such surroundings methinks I shall feel equal to fighting the whole British army.” 168

“’Tis so with all new recruits, Peggy,” laughed her father. “Thee will not be so affected when the novelty wears off. And here is the dwelling. ’Twill not take us long to present our news to the general, and then for quarters.”

A few rods to the east of the mansion were about fifty tents erected for the use of the life-guard. Fires flamed before every tent, around which men were gathered, laughing, talking or singing. Peggy looked about with much curiosity, but her father hastened at once to the door of the dwelling, where stood an orderly.

“Will thee tell His Excellency that David Owen is without, and wishes to see him?” he asked. “’Tis important.”

The orderly was absent but a moment. “His Excellency will see you, Mr. Owen,” he said. “You are to go right in.”



“MY WIFE AND DAUGHTER, YOUR EXCELLENCY”

Peggy’s heart began to flutter painfully as she found herself once more in the presence of General Washington, and her mind went back involuntarily to the last time when she had taken that long ride to Valley Forge to beg for her father’s exchange. So perturbed was she that she did not notice that the room was large, low ceiled, and cozily warmed by a huge fire of logs which glowed in the great fireplace. Instead of being interested in the furnishings of the apartment, as she would have been at another time, she clung close to her father overcome by the remembrance of how very near they had been to losing him, and could not raise her eyes when 169

he said:

“I beg to present my wife and daughter, Your Excellency. They tell me that they have brought some money and supplies, and it seemed best to let thee know of it at once.”

“You have acted with discretion, Mr. Owen,” said General Washington rising from the table before which he had been sitting. “Madam Owen, I have long known of you through your good works, but have hitherto not had the pleasure of meeting with you personally. You would be welcome at any time, but doubly so since you bring us aid.”

“Thy thanks are not due me, but to the citizens of Philadelphia, sir,” said Mrs. Owen with her finest curtsey. “There are two wagon loads of stores of various kinds, among which are several casks of cider vinegar. We heard that thee was in need of that article.” 170

“We are indeed,” replied General Washington. “The country hereabouts hath been scoured for it until the farmers tell us that there is no more. ’Tis sorely needed for our fever-stricken men. ’Tis very timely, Mistress Owen.”

“And for thyself, sir,” continued the lady, “a few of us learned of thy fondness for eggs, and there are several dozens of those. But, sir, on pain of displeasure from those who sent them, thou art not to divide them with any. They are for thine own table.”

“I will incur no displeasure on that account, I assure you,” said the general laughing. “I fear that you have been in communication with the housekeeper, who hath been much concerned because of the scarcity of eggs. I thank you, Mrs. Owen, for having so favored me, and also for the other stores. They are much needed. Mr. Owen, will you see to ‘t that the quartermaster heeds your wife’s injunction about those eggs?” 171

David Owen bowed, and his wife went on:

“And Peggy hath also something for thee in that box, Your Excellency. She hath made so much of a mystery of it that I knew not the nature of its contents until this afternoon.”

General Washington had not been unaware of Peggy’s agitation. Perhaps he too was thinking of the time when she had been so severely tried, for his voice was very gentle as he took the girl’s hand and said:

“Miss Peggy and I are old friends. She promised me once to tell me what became of that wonderful dog of hers. I shall claim the fulfilment of that promise, my child, since we shall see much of each other this winter.”

The ready smile came to Peggy’s lips, chasing away the tears that had threatened to flow.

“Does thee remember Pilot?” she cried. “Oh, Friend Washington, I did not think a man so concerned with affairs of state would remember a dog.”

“He wished me well, and I always remember my friends and well wishers,” he said, pleased that she had recovered her composure. 172

“And ’tis one of them who hath sent thee this box of five hundred English guineas,” she said quickly, pointing to the box. “’Tis from Mr. Jacob Deering, sir. He said to tell thee that since he was esteemed too old to take up arms ’twas the only way left him to serve the cause. He regretted the smallness of the amount, but he said that English money was hard to come by.”

“It is indeed hard to come by,” replied the general, receiving the box with gratification. “This is most welcome, Miss Peggy, because just at this time our own money is depreciating rapidly owing to the fact that the British are counterfeiting it by the wagon load, and distributing it among the people. I trust that I may soon have an opportunity to thank Mr. Deering in person. I shall be in Philadelphia next week, and shall do myself the honor of calling upon him. In the meantime, Miss Peggy, receive my thanks for this timely relief. Will you not——”

At this moment the door opened to admit an orderly. General Washington turned to him. “What is it, sir?” he said. “Did you not know that I was occupied?” 173

“Pardon me, sir,” replied the orderly, saluting. “One of the videttes hath brought in a young girl who declares she hath a permit to pass the lines. He knows not what to do with her. She is English, sir, and comes from New York.”

“Bring her in,” commanded the chief. “Nay,” as the Owens made a movement to depart, “stay a little, I beg of you. This matter will take but a moment.”

As he finished speaking the door opened once more to admit the form of a young girl. She could not have been more than Peggy’s age, but she carried herself with so much dignity that she appeared older. Her eyes were of darkest gray, shaded by intense black lashes, and starry in their radiance. At present they held a look of scorn, and her well set head was tilted in disdain. A wealth of chestnut hair but slightly powdered clustered about her face in ringlets, and her complexion was of such exquisite fairness as to be dazzling. She was clad in a velvet riding frock of green, her beaver hat, from which depended a long plume, matching the gown in color. Her whole manner and appearance were stamped by a general air of distinction. 174

She advanced at once into the room, apparently unconscious of the effect that her beauty was producing.

“By what right, sir,” she cried in a clear musical voice, “do your men stop me in my journey? I have a pass.”

“Let me see it, madam,” said General Washington quietly. He glanced at the paper she gave him, and remarked, “This is from General Maxwell at Elizabethtown. He refers the matter to me for consideration. May I ask why so young a female wishes to pass through our lines?”

“I wish to join relatives in Philadelphia,” she answered. “I travel alone because I was told that Americans did not make war on women and girls. It seems that I was mistaken.”

“You are an English girl,” said the general, ignoring her last remark. “Why do you not stay with your people in New York?”

“Because, sir, I was left in England with my brother while my father came over with General Gage to fight the rebels. My brother ran away, so I came to join father. He had gone to the Southern colonies, and when he learned that I was here, he wrote me to go to my relatives. I left New York under a flag of truce, and came to Elizabethtown. There I went at once to the general in charge. Sir, I have complied with every requirement necessary to pass the lines, and I ask that I be permitted to resume my journey.”

“And what is the name of these relatives?” asked Washington imperturbably.

“Owen, sir. David Owen is my father’s cousin.”

“Why!” exclaimed Peggy, who had been an amazed listener to the conversation. “Thee must be my Cousin Harriet!”

CHAPTER XV—HARRIET

> “Whose beauty did astonish the survey
> Of richest eyes; whose words all ears took captive;
> Whose dear perfection hearts that scorn’d to serve
> Humbly call mistress.”
>
> —“*All’s Well that Ends Well.*”

As if she had just become aware of the presence of others the girl turned a startled look upon Peggy.

“If you are David Owen’s daughter, then I am indeed your cousin,” she said slowly intense surprise in her accents. “And if you are his daughter, where is your father, and what do you here? I thought you were in Philadelphia.”

“Father is here,” answered Peggy, starting forward eagerly. “And thy father is——” But David Owen laid a restraining hand upon her arm.

“A moment, lass,” he said, a quick glance flashing between him and General Washington. “Let me speak to the maiden. My child,” turning to the girl who was regarding him intently, “thou wilt pardon me, I know, if I ask thee a few questions. It behooves us to be careful in times like these, and we but take precautions that thine own people would use under like circumstances. Therefore, tell me thy father’s name, and his regiment.”

“By what right do you question me?” she demanded haughtily.

“I am David Owen,” he answered briefly. “If thou art in truth my kinsman’s daughter there is no reason why thee should not answer my questions.”

“Ask what you will, if you are Mr. David Owen, and I will answer,” she said, her manner changing to one of extreme courtesy. “My father is William Owen, a colonel of the Welsh Fusileers. My brother’s name is Clifford, and I am Harriet. Do you believe me now, my cousin? Or is there aught else to be asked?”

“Nay,” replied he mildly. “I believe that thou art truly William’s daughter.”

“Then may I place myself under your protection, cousin?” she queried so appealingly that Peggy’s tender heart could not bear it, and she went to her quickly. “My father wished it, and I am a stranger in a strange land.”

“Surely thee may,” exclaimed Mr. Owen, touched, as his daughter had been, by the pathetic quiver that had come into her voice. “That is”—he hastened to add, “if His Excellency hath no objection?”

“I have none, Mr. Owen,” declared General Washington. “As the young lady hath proved herself a relative I give her into your keeping. There could be no better sponsor for her, sir.”

“I thank thee,” said David Owen gravely. “I will see that thy trust is not misplaced. And now, sir, we have troubled thee o’er long, I fear, and will therefore say good-night.”

“But not until Mistress Owen tells me when she and Miss Peggy, together with this newly found kinswoman, will honor me by their presence to dinner. Will you have recovered from the fatigue of your journey by Monday, Madam Owen?”

“Yes, Your Excellency. It will afford us great pleasure to dine with thee at that time,” replied the

matron bowing.

The courtesies of leave-taking over, David Owen led the way to the coach.

“Take thy seat with us in the vehicle, my child,” he said to Harriet Owen. “I will have thy horse sent after us.”

“And has thee a horse too?” asked Peggy as the girl took her place beside her. “Then we shall have some famous rides, Cousin Harriet. And what is thy horse’s name?”

“Fleetwood. I brought him from England. He hath been mine from a colt. I have never had any other, and he will suffer none to ride him but me.”

“Thee thinks of him as I do of Star,” cried Peggy in delight.

“Didst say, my child,” interposed David Owen after the two maidens had chatted a while, “that thy brother left thee alone in England?”

“Yes, Cousin David. Clifford hath always been wild for the army, but father would not hear of his joining it. ’Twas lonesome after father left us, so I did not blame Clifford for leaving. A lad of mettle should not stop at home when His Majesty hath need of him to help put down this 180
rebellion. Your pardon, cousin. Being English I am all for the king, you know.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Owen, pleased at her frankness. “I like thy manner of speaking of it, Harriet.”

“But still, that need be no reason why we should not be friends,” she said quickly. “There be those at home who think with the colonies, and blame them not for rebelling. It may be that I too shall be of like opinion after my sojourn with you.”

“It may be, Harriet. Have no uneasiness, my child. If thou art led to our way of thinking it must be of thine own conviction, and not from any effort that we shall bring to bear upon thee. Thou art welcome despite thy opinions. And didst thou cross the ocean alone?”

“Yes; that is,” she added hastily, “there was an officer’s wife who was coming to join her husband. I was with her. When father learned that I had come, he desired that I should go to you. He was sure that you would welcome me despite the difference in politics. And why are you not 181
in Philadelphia?”

“I, of course, am with the army,” he replied. “The custom of campaigning only in the summer hath the advantage of permitting our wives and daughters to join us in camp during the winter; so my wife and Peggy have come for that time. Thou wilt like it, Harriet; for there are amusements such as delight the hearts of maidens. I doubt not but both thee and my little Peggy will sorrow when ’tis time to leave it.”

“Harriet must be tired, David,” suggested Mrs. Owen kindly. “Should not further explanation be deferred until the morrow?”

“I mind not the talk, madam, my cousin,” spoke Harriet, and Mrs. Owen noted instantly that she used Colonel Owen’s term of addressing her. “It warms my heart for my cousin to talk to me.” Again the little tremor came into her voice as she added: “It makes me feel more at home.”

“Then talk on, my child,” said the lady gently.

So the girl chatted of her father and brother, her home in England, her voyage across the ocean, 182
and other subjects with so much charm that when at length the coach drew up before a farmhouse whose sloping roof and low eaves were but dimly distinguishable in the darkness Peggy found herself very much taken with this new cousin.

“I could listen to thee all night, Cousin Harriet,” she exclaimed as her father assisted them from the coach.

“And so could we all,” said David Owen laughing, plainly as much pleased with the maiden as was Peggy. “But we are at quarters, and the rules are that every one must be in bed at tattoo. That will give us just time for supper.”

And so in spite of the protests of both girls they were sent to bed in short order.

The rides began the very next day, and as Harriet seemed to be as much interested in the encampment as Peggy, Mr. Owen took them through part of it.

“’Tis a strong cantonment,” he said. “There are seven brigades here in the vicinity of Middlebrook. The main army lies in the hills back of Bound Brook, near enough to be called into service instantly if necessary. The artillery under General Knox lies a few miles away at 183
Pluckemin. The entire force of the army is scattered from here to Danbury, Connecticut.”

“But why is it so scattered, my cousin?” inquired Harriet. “Methinks that ’twould be the part of wisdom to keep the army together?”

David Owen laughed.

“Would that thou wert Sir Henry Clinton,” he said. “Then all thy soldiers would stay in New York instead of being transferred to the Southern colonies. ’Tis done for two reasons: the easy subsistence of the army and the safety of the country.”

“But doth it not hem Sir Henry in?” she demanded. “How can he get through these lines without fighting?”

“That is just it,” said Mr. Owen laughing again. “Thee will soon be quite a soldier, Harriet. Here

we are at Van Vegthen's bridge, which is one of three that crosses the Raritan. General Greene, who is acting as quartermaster at present, is encamped here. He hath his quarters in yon dwelling which lies to our left. 'Tis Derrick Van Vegthen's house, and ye will both meet with him and the general. Mrs. Greene is here, and Mrs. Knox. Ye will like them. Let us ride closer. As ye are unaccustomed to camp life 'twill be a novelty to ye to see the men engaged in their various duties. How busy they are!"

From side to side the maidens turned, eager to see all that Mr. Owen pointed out. Quite a village of blacksmith shops, storehouses and other buildings connected with the quartermaster's department had grown up around the house where General Greene made his headquarters. On the near-by elevation, even then called Mt. Pleasant, his brigade was encamped.

As Mr. Owen had said, the scene was a busy one. A company of soldiers was drilling on the open parade ground, while of those who were not on duty some chopped wood which had been brought from the near-by hills, or tended fires over which hung large chunks of meat spitted upon bayonets, while still others could be seen through the open flaps of the tents cleaning their accoutrements.

"I should think those tents would be cold," remarked Peggy with a slight shiver, for although the winter's day was sunlit, the air was chill.

"They are not o'er comfortable, Peggy," returned her father. "But does thee not see the huts that are in process of construction? General Washington taught the men how to build them, and they will be comfortably housed ere long. Note that they are built without nails, and almost the only tools used are the axe and saw. 'Tis most marvelous that such comfortable and convenient quarters can be made with such little expense to the people."

"The marvel to me," remarked Harriet Owen thoughtfully, "is that such ill-clad, ill-fed looking troops can stand against our soldiers. Why hath not the British swept them down like chaff before the wind? 'Tis past understanding."

"Because their cause is a righteous one," said David Owen solemnly. "And because, also, what thou art in the way of forgetting, my little cousin: they are of thine own blood, and therefore fight with the spirit of Englishmen."

"English?" she exclaimed. "English! I had not thought of that, my cousin."

"Consider our case," he said. "Thou art of the same blood as ourselves. Doth it make a difference in the stock because thou dost happen to live in England, while Peggy there lives in America?"

"I had not thought of it in that way," she said again. "I think the English have not considered it either. I would talk more of the matter, Cousin David, but not now. I have much to think of now. But do you not fear that I shall tell the British about this camp?" added Harriet smiling.

"No, my child. Thou wilt not have opportunity," observed Mr. Owen. "Does thee not know that once being with us there can be no returning to New York? There can be no passing and repassing to the city."

"Oh," she cried in dismay. "I did not know. Can I not return if I should wish to?"

"Not unless thou hadst been away from the army for a long time," he answered.

"But suppose, suppose father should come?"

"Even then thee would have to stay with us until such time that it was deemed advisable for thee to return. So thee sees, Harriet, that the rebels, as thee calls them, will have the pleasure of thy company for some time to come."

"I see," she said. Presently she threw her head back and gave way to a peal of musical laughter. "There is but one thing to do, Cousin David," she cried. "And that is to become a patriot myself."

CHAPTER XVI—THE TWO WARNINGS

"Though your prognostics run too fast,
They must be verified at last."

—*Swift.*

"And here is some one to see thee, Peggy," said Mrs. Owen a week later, coming into the little chamber under the eaves which the two maidens occupied in common. "Bring thy cousin and come down."

"Is it John, mother?" asked Peggy, letting her tambour frame fall to the floor. "I wondered why we did not see him."

"Yes, 'tis John, Peggy, though he is called Ensign Drayton here. Perhaps 'twould be as well for us to term him so, too."

"Come, Harriet," called Peggy rising. "Let us run down. 'Tis our first caller."

“And being a soldier let us prepare for him,” said the English girl, reaching for a box. “What would we females be without powder? ’Tis as necessary to us as to a soldier, for ’tis as priming to our looks as ’tis to a gun. There! will I do, Peggy?” 189

“Thee is beautiful, my cousin,” replied Peggy with warm admiration. “Thee does not need powder nor anything else to set off thy looks.”

“Oh, well,” laughed the maiden, plainly gratified by her cousin’s remark, “’tis as well to be in the mode when one can. And I wish to do you honor, my cousin.”

“Oh, John,” cried Peggy as she entered the parlor, where young Drayton stood twirling his cocked beaver airily. “That I should live to see thee wearing the white cockade of the Parley-voos on thy hat. What hath happened?”

“The most wonderful thing in the world, Mistress Peggy,” answered Drayton reddening slightly at her raillery. “General Washington hath said that if my behavior warranted it he would put me with the Marquis de La Fayette’s brigade upon his return from France. As ’tis to be a picked corps of men ’tis most gratifying to one’s vanity to be so chosen. And in compliment to my prospective commander I am wearing the white cockade with our own black.” 190

“I am so glad,” exclaimed Peggy. “Thee is making us proud of thee. Father said that there was no soldier more faithful to duty than thou. This is my cousin from England, John. Mistress Harriet Owen, Ensign Drayton.”

“Your servant, madam,” said Ensign Drayton with a sweeping bow, which Harriet returned with a deep curtsey.

“Ah, Drayton,” said David Owen, entering at this juncture. “The lassies are wild to see the camp. Canst thou ride, ensign?”

“That is how I made Miss Peggy’s acquaintance, sir,” said young Drayton frankly.

“Ah, yes; I had forgot, my boy. I was thinking that perhaps thou couldst join us in our rides, and when it would not be possible for me to be with the girls thou couldst escort them.”

“I should be pleased, sir,” answered Ensign Drayton. “The country hereabouts is well adapted to riding as ’tis much diversified. The roads, though narrow, are through woods and dales, and are most beautiful. I have been over the most of them, and know them well.” 191

“Then thou art the very one to go with us,” said Mr. Owen. “Now, my lad, answer any questions those camp wild maidens may ask and I will improve my well-earned repose by perusing the ‘Pennsylvania Packet.’ A new one hath just reached me.”

“Wilt pardon me if I say something, Mistress Peggy?” inquired young Drayton an hour later as Harriet left the room for a moment.

“Why yes, John,” answered Peggy. “What is it?”

“It is to be careful of your cousin,” said the boy earnestly. “I like not the fact that she is English and here in camp. She means harm, I fear.”

“Why, John Drayton,” exclaimed the girl indignantly. “Just because she is English doth not make her intend any hurt toward us. I am ashamed of thee, John, that thee should imagine any such thing of one so sweet and good as my cousin, Harriet. And is she not beautiful?”

“She is indeed very beautiful,” he answered. “Pardon me, mistress, if I have wounded you, but still do I say, be careful. If she intends no hurt to any, either the camp or you, there still can be no harm in being careful.” 192

“John, almost could I be vexed with thee,” cried Peggy.

“Don’t be that, Miss Peggy. I may be wrong. Of course I am all wrong if you say otherwise,” he said pleadingly. “I spoke only out of kindness for you.”

“There, there, John! we will say no more about it; but thee must not hint such things,” said Peggy. And Drayton took his departure.

“Mother,” cried Peggy several days after this incident when she had returned from the ride which had become a daily institution, “mother, John is becoming rude. I don’t believe that I like him any more.”

“Why, what hath occurred, Peggy?” asked Mrs. Owen, glancing at her daughter’s flushed face anxiously. “Thy father and I are both much pleased with the lad. What hath he done?”

“’Tis about Harriet,” answered Peggy, sinking into a chair by her mothers side. “The first time he came he cautioned me to be careful because of her being here. I forgave him on condition that he should never mention anything of like nature again. And but now, while we were riding, Harriet stopped to speak for a moment to a soldier, and he said: ’I don’t like that, Mistress Peggy. Why should she speak to that man? This must be looked into.’ And, mother, he wished to question Harriet then and there, but I would not let him. He is monstrously provoking!” 193

“Well, does thee know why she spoke to the soldier?” asked her mother quietly.

“Mother!” Peggy sat bolt upright in the chair, and turned a reproachful glance upon the lady. “Thee too? Why, Harriet told me but yesterday that she was becoming more and more of the opinion that the colonists were right in rebelling against the king. And is she not beautiful, mother?”

“Thou art quite carried away with her, Peggy,” observed Mrs. Owen thoughtfully. “Thou and thy father likewise. As thee says, Harriet’s manner to us is quite different to that which her father used. But William, whatever his faults, was an open enemy for the most part, and I like open enemies best. I cannot believe that an English girl would so soon change her convictions regarding us.”

“Mother,” cried Peggy in open-eyed amaze, “I never knew thee to be suspicious of any one before. Thou hast been talking with John. What hath come to thee?”

“I have said no word concerning the matter to John; nor will I, Peggy. ’Tis not so much suspicion as caution. But now I heard her ask thy father if there were but the three bridges across the Raritan, and if ’twere not fordable. Why should she wish to know such things?”

“Did thee ask father about it, mother?”

“Yes.”

“And what said he?”

“He feared that because of William’s actions I might be prejudiced against her. He thought it quite natural for her to take an interest in military affairs, and said that she asked no more questions concerning them than thou didst. Beside, he said, she was such a child that no possible harm could come of it.”

“Belike it is because of Cousin William that thee does not feel easy, mother,” said Peggy much relieved.

“It may be,” admitted the lady. “Yet I would that she had not come. I would not have thee less sweet and kind to her, my daughter, but I agree with John that it can do no harm to be careful. Watch, my child, that thou art not led into something that may work harm to thee.”

“I will be careful,” promised Peggy, adding with playfulness: “As careful as though I did not have thee and father to watch over me, or the army with General Washington right here. Let me see! Seven brigades, are there not? To say nothing of the artillery and four regiments of cavalry variously stationed, and I know not how many brigades along the Hudson and the Sound. There! thou seest that I am as well versed in the disposition of the army as Harriet is.”

“Is thee trying to flout thy mother, Peggy?” asked Mrs. Owen laughing in spite of herself. “I may in truth be over-anxious and fearful, but ’tis strange that John feels so too. As thee says, it does seem as though naught could happen with the whole army lying so near. Still I have the feeling that harm threatens through the English girl.”

But the days passed, and the time brought no change to Harriet’s manner. She remained affectionately deferent to Mr. Owen, full of respectful courtesy toward Mrs. Owen, and had adopted a playful comradeship toward Peggy that was charming. The good lady’s reserve was quite melted at length, and she became as devoted to the girl as her husband and daughter.

With girlish enthusiasm the maidens regulated their own days by that of the camp. They rose with the beating of the reveille, reported to Mrs. Owen as officer of the day for assignments of duty, and, much to her amusement, saluted her respectfully when given tasks of knitting or sewing. When the retreat sounded at sunset they announced their whereabouts by a loud, “Here,” as the soldiers answered to roll call, and, unless there was some merrymaking at one of the various headquarters, went to bed at the beating of tattoo.

Lady Washington joined her husband in February, and there was an added dignity to the kettledrums and merrymakings in consequence. Better conditions prevailed throughout the camp than had obtained at Valley Forge the preceding winter. The army was at last comfortably hutted. The winter was mild, no snow falling after the tenth of January. Supplies were coming in with some degree of plenitude, and the outlook favored rejoicing and entertainment.

But life was not all given up to amusement. The women met together, and mended the soldiers’ clothes, made them shirts and socks whenever cloth and yarn were to be had, visited the cabins, carrying delicacies from their own tables for the sick, and did everything they could to ameliorate the lot of the soldier.

After a few such visits to the huts Harriet made a protest.

“I like not common soldiers,” she explained to Peggy. “I mind not the sewing, though I do not understand why Americans deem it necessary to always be so industrious. ’Tis as though they felt that they must earn their pleasures before taking them.”

“Are not ladies in England industrious too?” inquired Peggy.

“They look after their households, of course, my cousin. And they paint flowers, or landscapes, and the tambour frame is seldom out of the hand when one is not practicing on the spinet, but they do not concern themselves with the welfare of the common soldiers as your women do.”

“Oh, Harriet,” laughed Peggy. “Thee has said that before, but thee does not practice what thee preaches.”

“What mean you?” demanded Harriet with a startled look.

“I have seen thee several times give something to a common soldier, as thee calls him. Yesterday when we were leaving General Greene’s I saw thee slip something to one when he came forward to tighten Fleetwood’s girth. John saw it too.”

“I had forgot,” remarked the girl carelessly. “Yes; I did give him a bit of money. Methinks he hath rendered us several services of like nature, Peggy, when something hath gone amiss. Yet it may not have been the same soldier. I scarce can tell one from another, there are so many.”

“Thee has a good heart,” commended Peggy warmly. “Mother says that ’tis the only way to do a kindness. Perform the deed, and then forget it. But I always remember.” 199

“Does Cousin David ride with us to-day, or doth the ensign?” asked Harriet.

“’Tis John, my cousin. Father is on duty.”

“I am sorry,” said Harriet. “I do not like Ensign Drayton. He reminds me of a song they sing at home:

“‘With little hat and hair dressed high,
And whip to ride a pony;
If you but take a right survey
Denotes a macaroni,’”

she trilled musically. “Now don’t say anything, Peggy. I know he is considered a lad of parts. I heard two officers say that he would no doubt distinguish himself ere the war was over. ’Twas at Mrs. Knox’s kettledrum.”

“Now I must tell mother that,” cried Peggy, her momentary vexation at Harriet’s song vanishing. “He is our especial soldier.”

“Is he? And why?” asked Harriet. “Nay,” she added as Peggy hesitated. “’Tis no matter. I knew not that it was a secret. I care not. I like him not, anyway. Peggy, do you like me very much?” 200

“I do indeed, Harriet,” answered Peggy earnestly. “Why?”

“I am just heart-sick to hear from my father,” said Harriet, the tears welling up into her beautiful eyes. “It hath been so long since I heard. Not at all since I came, so long ago.”

“’Tis hard to get letters through the lines,” said Peggy soberly.

“I know it is, for I have tried,” answered Harriet. “The officers won’t send them. If you were away from Cousin David wouldn’t you make every effort to hear from him?”

“Indeed I would,” responded Peggy. “Harriet, has thee asked father to help thee? He would take the matter to General Washington.”

“General Washington does not wish to do it because I am British,” answered Harriet after a moment. “I know that they must be careful, but oh! I am so anxious anent my father, Cousin Peggy.”

“That is just as mother and I were about father last winter,” observed Peggy. “At last Robert Dale wrote us that he was a prisoner in Philadelphia, and I rode into the city to see him.” 201

“Was that when father was exchanged for him?” questioned the girl eagerly.

“Y-yes,” hesitated Peggy. She did not like to tell Harriet what effort had to be made to get the exchange.

“Peggy, he helped you anent Cousin David then; will you help me about my father?”

“How could I, Harriet?” asked Peggy.

“If you will just hand this note to that soldier that you saw me give the money to yesterday he will get it through the lines. Nay,” as Peggy opened her lips to speak. “You shall read it first. I would do nothing unless you should see that ’twas all right. Read, my cousin.”

She thrust a note into Peggy’s hand as she spoke.

“Miss Harriet Owen presents compliments to Sir Henry Clinton, and would esteem it a favor if he would tell her how Colonel William Owen is. A word that he is well is all that is desired. I have the honor, sir, to be,

“Your humble and obliged servant,
“Harriet Owen.

“*Middlebrook, New Jersey,*
Headquarters American Army.”

“Why, there ought to be no objection to getting that through,” exclaimed Peggy. “Harriet, let me ask father——” 202

“I have asked him,” said Harriet mournfully. “He would if he could, Peggy. He wishes me not to speak of it again, and I promised I would try to content myself without hearing from father. You must not speak of it either; else Cousin David will be angry with me for not trying to be content.”

“Don’t cry, Harriet,” pleaded Peggy, as the girl commenced to sob, and her own tears began to flow. “Something can be done, I know. Thee ought to hear from Cousin William.”

“Cousin David said I must be content,” sobbed Harriet. “And he hath been so good to me that I must; though ’tis very hard not to hear. I see that you do not wish to do it, Peggy. I meant no wrong to any, but——”

“How does thee know that the soldier could get the note through the lines, Harriet?” asked Peggy thoughtfully.

“He said that he was to have leave to go to Elizabethtown for a few days, and while there he could do it,” said Harriet, looking up through her tears.

“Why does thee not give it to him, then?” inquired Peggy.

“It must be given to him to-day,” answered the other, “because he goes to-morrow. If Cousin David were to ride with us I would, but Ensign Drayton always watches me as though I were in communication with the enemy, and about to bring the whole British force right down upon us. You know he does, Peggy.”

Peggy flushed guiltily.

“Yes,” she admitted, “he doth, Harriet. I knew not that thee was aware of it, though.”

“Give me the note,” said Harriet, rising suddenly. “As my father helped you to your father I thought you would aid me, but I see——”

“Nay,” said Peggy, her gentle heart not proof against the insinuation of ingratitude. “Give me the note, Harriet. I will give it to the man. I see not how it can bring harm to any, and thee ought to hear from thy father.”

“How good you are, Peggy,” cried Harriet, kissing her. “Here is the note. If I can only hear this once I will be content until such time as Cousin David deems best. You are very sweet, my cousin.”

And under the influence of this effusiveness Peggy saw not that the note her cousin handed to her was not the one which she had read.

CHAPTER XVII—A LETTER AND A SURPRISE

“Oh, never shall we know again
A heart so stout and true—
The olden times have passed away,
And weary are the new.”

—*Aytoun.*

“Governor Livingston will dine with us to-day, Peggy,” remarked Mrs. Owen as Peggy and Harriet came down the stairs equipped for their ride. “Be not too long away, for thy father will wish you both here.”

“Is he the rebel governor of the Jerseys?” asked Harriet abruptly. “The one for whom two thousand guineas are offered—for his capture?”

“He is the patriot governor of the state, Harriet,” answered Mrs. Owen mildly. “We do not call such rebels. As to the reward I know not. I had not heard of such amount being offered, although ’tis well known that he is held in particular abhorrence by both the Tories and thy people. Perhaps David can inform thee concerning the affair.”

“’Tis no matter,” spoke Harriet hastily. “I dare say that I have confused him with another. Peggy, hath my beaver the proper tilt to show the feather? It should sweep to the right shoulder.”

“’Tis most becoming,” answered Peggy, after a critical survey. “Thee looks as charming as ever, Harriet.”

“Vanity, vanity,” laughed her cousin. “Shall we go for the ride now?”

Ensign Drayton rode into the yard just as their horses were brought to the block for the girls to mount. To Peggy’s surprise the same private soldier to whom she was to give the note had them in charge. As Harriet vaulted lightly into her saddle he left Fleetwood’s head and went round to the horse’s side.

“That will do, sirrah,” spoke young Drayton sharply. “I will attend to the strap.”

Peggy glanced at him quickly. “John grows unmannerly,” she thought to herself. “Now what did the poor man do amiss? Friend,” she called as the soldier saluted and turned to leave, her voice showing her indignation, “friend, thee shall fix Star’s girth if it needs it.”

“Thank you, miss,” he said, saluting again. He tightened the strap deftly, and the girl put her hand in her purse for a small coin. As she did so her fingers touched the note that Harriet had given her, and she bent toward him suddenly.

“Thee was to take a letter, was thee not?” she asked.

“Yes,” he replied, a look of astonishment flashing across his face.

“It is here, friend,” said she, giving him the missive. “I hope thee can get it through, for my cousin is sore beset with grief for news of her father. And there is money for thee. Thou art a good man, and hast a kind heart.”

“Thank you,” he said saluting, and Peggy could not have told how he concealed the note, it was done so adroitly.

“Why did thee speak so sharply to him, John?” she queried when at length they had started.

“Those girths should be attended to before bringing the horses round,” he answered. “’Tis done to get money from you girls. He never sees us but that he comes forward under some pretense of doing a service. I like not his actions. How doth it come that he is attending the horses? He is not your father’s man.” 208

“I know not,” answered Peggy. “Doth it really matter? Fie, fie, John! thee is cross. I never saw thee so before.”

“Your pardon,” said the lad contritely. “I meant not to be so, but men require sharp treatment, and perchance I have brought my parade manner with me.”

The girls laughed, but a constraint seemed to be over all three. Harriet was unusually silent, and Peggy, though conscious of no wrong-doing, was ill at ease.

The feeling was intensified as, when they had gone some distance, young Drayton wheeled his horse suddenly.

“Let us go back,” he said abruptly.

“Why?” exclaimed both girls simultaneously, but even as they spoke they saw the reason. A few rods in front of them, suspended from the limb of a tree, hung the limp body of a man. 209

“Is it a spy?” whispered Peggy shudderingly.

“Yes, Mistress Peggy. I knew not that the execution would take place on this road, else I would have chosen another for the ride. ’Tis not a pleasing sight.”

“Is thee ill, Harriet?” cried Peggy, all at once happening to glance at her cousin who had no color in her face.

“Ill? No,” answered Harriet with an attempt at carelessness. “I am chilled; that is all. Then, too, as the ensign says, yon sight is not a pretty one. Methinks such service must be extremely hazardous.”

“It is, mistress,” said Drayton sternly. “So perilous is it that the man, woman, or girl even who enters upon it does so at the risk of life. No mercy is shown a spy. Nor should there be.”

“And yet,” she said growing paler still, “spies are used by your own general, sir. It is a parlous mission, but he who enters upon it serves his country as truly as though”—she laughed, flung up her head and looked him straight in the face—“as though he were an ensign,” she finished mockingly. 210

“She has thee, John,” cried Peggy gaily. “But a truce to such talk. ’Tis gruesome, is it not? Let us converse upon more pleasing subjects.”

“Methinks,” said Drayton briefly, “’twould be as well to return, Mistress Peggy. The ride hath been spoiled for the day.”

But a shadow seemed over them, and neither girl recovered her accustomed spirits until some hours later when they went into dinner.

“Now by my life, David,” cried William Livingston, the great war governor of New Jersey, as the maidens were presented. “Now by my life, these girls take not after you, else they would not be such beauties. They must meet with my daughters. I had three,” he said turning to Peggy. “The Livingston Graces, some called them, but one grew tired of being a nymph and so became a bird. Nay; be not alarmed,” he added as a puzzled look flashed across Peggy’s face, “she but married John Jay. ’Tis a joke of mine. And this is the cousin from across the sea who bids fair to become our more than sympathizer? Wilt pardon me if I say that were I British I’d never relinquished to the rebels so fair a compatriot?” 211

“Perchance, sir,” replied Harriet, sweeping him an elaborate curtsey, and assuming the gracious manner which was one of her charms, “perchance if you were on the other side I would not wish to be relinquished.”

“That is apt,” he responded with a hearty laugh. “What think you, David? Are not the honors evenly divided betwixt this young lady and myself? I must be wary in my speech.”

“And are you at Liberty Hall this winter?” she asked him presently.

“Yes; thanks to Maxwell’s brigade, I am permitted this enjoyment. Were he not stationed at Elizabethtown, however, I could not be with my dear ones. ’Tis the first time in three years that I have had the privilege. Hath General Washington returned from Philadelphia, David?”

“He hath been back for some time,” answered Mr. Owen. “Since the first of the month, in fact. ’Twas dull here without him.”

“I like him better than any other one of your people whom I have met, my cousin,” declared Harriet after the governor had taken his departure. “I have heard much of Liberty Hall, Cousin David. I am curious anent it. Where is it?” 212

“’Tis a mile northwest of Elizabethtown, Harriet,” answered he. “A wonderful place it is. The governor hath sent abroad and obtained hundreds of trees to adorn the grounds. ’Tis his lament, however, that he will not live to see them grown. He is a wonderful man also. ’Tis no marvel that thee is pleased with him. His daughters are most charming, and will be agreeable acquaintances for thee and Peggy. We will go there soon.”

“But tell me how to get to the Hall, please,” she teased. “I want to know exactly.”

“Exactly,” he laughed. “Well, well, Harriet, I will do my best; though why thee should want to know exactly is beyond me.”

“’Tis fancy,” she said laughing also. “And thee always indulges my fancies, Cousin David. Doesn’t thee now?”

“Whenever thee uses that speech, my child, I cannot resist thee,” he answered. And forthwith sat 213
down by the table and drew for her a map showing just where the road to Liberty Hall turned from the Morris turnpike.

“Drayton and I are both on duty to-day,” announced Mr. Owen the next morning. “If you ride, lassies, it must be without escort, unless I can find some one to go with you.”

“Oh, do let us go alone, Cousin David,” pleaded Harriet. “Peggy and I have gone so a few times. There is nothing to harm us.”

“I see not how harm could befall you so long as you stay within the lines,” said Mr. Owen indulgently. “But it shall be as Lowry says.”

“And what say you, madam my cousin?” The girl turned toward the lady with pretty deference.

“Could not the ride go over for one day?” asked she. “I like not for you to ride alone.”

“’Twill be good for Peggy,” spoke Harriet with an air of concern. “She is not well to-day.”

“Is thee not, my daughter?” asked Mrs. Owen. “Thee is pale.”

“’Tis nothing to wherrit over, mother,” spoke Peggy cheerfully. “I did not sleep well, that is all. 214
Almost do I believe with Doctor Franklin that the windows should be raised in a sleeping-room, though none but he advocates such a thing.”

“Doctor Franklin advocates naught but what he hath proved by experience to be good,” declared Mr. Owen, rising. “He is a philosopher who profits by his own teaching. I think ’twould be best for the girls to go, wife.”

“Then, by all means, go,” decided Mrs. Owen. “But start earlier than usual, so as to be back long before the retreat sounds; else I shall be uneasy.”

“We will do that, mother,” promised Peggy. And as soon as the morning tasks were finished the maidens set forth.

“Are you not glad that we are alone to-day?” asked Harriet, when they had ridden a while. “I tire of even Cousin David. Do you not?”

“Why, no!” exclaimed Peggy in surprise. “I would rather have father with us. I do not see how any one could tire of him.”

Harriet made no reply to this speech, and the two rode for some distance in silence. The 215
February day was chill and gray, the roads slushy, but the outdoor life they had led rendered the maidens hardy, and they did not mind the dampness.

“Why!” ejaculated Harriet suddenly. “Aren’t we on the Elizabethtown turnpike?”

“Yes,” said Peggy glancing about. “I knew not that we had come so far. We must turn back, Harriet. Mother said that she would be uneasy if we were not there before the sounding of the retreat, and the afternoons are so short. ’Twill be time for it before we know it.”

“I’ll tell you what, Peggy,” cried her cousin. “Let’s go by Liberty Hall.”

“It is too late,” answered Peggy. “Thee must know that it is all of twenty miles to Elizabethtown, and though we have ridden a goodly part of the distance ’twould be more than we could do to-day. There and back, Harriet, is not to be thought of.”

“Well, I am going, anyway,” exclaimed Harriet with more petulance than Peggy had ever seen her exhibit. “So there!”

She struck Fleetwood a sharp blow with her riding crop as she spoke, and set off at speed down 216
the road. Too much surprised to do more than call after her, Peggy drew rein, undecided what course to pursue. As she did so her eye was caught by a folded paper lying in the roadway. Now this had fallen from Harriet’s person as her horse started off unnoticed by either girl.

“That’s a letter!” exclaimed Peggy as she saw it. “Some one must have dropped it. Could it have been Harriet? I’ll get it and tease her anent the matter.”

Smiling roguishly she dismounted and picked up the missive. Somewhat to her amazement there was no address, and opening the epistle she found neither address nor signature.

“How monstrously queer!” she cried, turning it about. “Why, why,” as her glance rested almost unconsciously upon the writing, “what does it mean?” For with deepening amazement this is what she read:

“Your information opportune. An attempt will be made on the night of the twenty-fourth to 217
surprise brigade at Elizabethtown, and to take the old rebel at L—— H——. Reward will be yours if successful. Can you be near at hand so as to be taken yourself?”

“The brigade at Elizabethtown is General Maxwell’s,” mused Peggy thoughtfully. “Then the old rebel must be Governor Livingston of Liberty Hall. The twenty-fourth? Why, ’tis to-day!” she cried

in consternation. “Oh! what must I do? ’Tis past four of the clock now.”

She looked about dazedly as though seeking guidance. But with Peggy a need of decision usually brought quick result, and it was so in this instance. It was but a moment before her resolve was taken.

“I must just ride there and tell him, and then warn the garrison,” she said aloud. “’Tis the only thing to do.”

Mounting Star, she shook the reins and started. Before she had gone a dozen rods, however, here came Harriet riding back full tilt.

“Where are you going?” she called. “That is not the way to Bound Brook.”

“I know, Harriet,” replied Peggy without stopping. “I am going to Liberty Hall. An attempt will be made to-night to capture the governor. He must be warned.” 218

“How know you that such attempt will be made?” asked her cousin, riding up beside her. “Are you daft, Peggy?”

“Nay; I found a letter in the road saying so,” explained Peggy. “Will thee come too, Harriet? And there is no time for chat. We must hasten. Perhaps though thee would better ride back to tell mother.”

“’Tis indelicate for females to meddle in such matters,” cried Harriet excitedly. “Think how froward your father will think you, Peggy. Wait! we will go back to camp, and send relief from there, as doth become maidens.”

“It could not reach the garrison in time, as thee knows,” returned Peggy, keeping steadily on her way. “Do not talk, Harriet. We must ride fast.” The letter was still in her hand.

“Let me see the letter,” said Harriet. “Where did you get it? It could not have been long in the road, for ’tis not muddy. Who could have dropped it?”

“Harriet, thee is detaining me with thy clatter,” spoke Peggy with some sharpness. “Thee has seen the letter, and know now the need for action. Either come with me or ride back to camp. We must act.” 219

“You shall not go,” exclaimed Harriet reaching over, and catching hold of Star’s bridle. “’Tis some joke, and beside, your mother will be waiting for us. Come back!”

Peggy drew rein and faced her cousin with sudden suspicion. “Harriet,” she said, “is that letter thine?”

“Mine?” Harriet laughed shrilly. “How could it be mine? I was not anywhere near when you found it. Besides, I never saw the governor until yesterday. How could I be concerned in his capture then?”

“True,” said Peggy with brightening face. “Thy pardon, my cousin. Thy actions were so queer that for a moment I could but wonder.”

“And now we are going right back to the camp,” cried Harriet gaily. “That will show that you are sorry for such thoughts. Why, Peggy, you are getting as bad as John Drayton.”

“Nay,” said Peggy drawing her rein from her cousin’s clasp. “I am sorry that I wronged thee, Harriet, but neither thee nor any one shall detain me from going to Governor Livingston and the garrison. Do as thou wilt in the matter. I am going.” 220

For the second time in her life she struck her pony sharply. The little mare reared, and then settling, dashed off in a gallop. She did not look to see whether her cousin was following her or not. On she rode. The February slush spattered from Star’s flying hoofs, and covered her from head to foot, but she did not notice. The daily rides had familiarized her with the road to Elizabethtown, and the minute description given by her father to Harriet the night before now enabled her to head unerringly for the governor’s mansion. The short winter day was drawing to a close when all at once she became aware that there was the sound of hoofs behind her.

The sound increased. Presently she felt the hot breath of a horse upon her face, and just as she turned from the Morris turnpike into Livingston Lane, at the end of which stood the governor’s country seat, Fleetwood, running as a deer runs in leaps and bounds, dashed past her, with Harriet urging him to greater endeavor. 221

Before Peggy was half-way down the lane Harriet had reached the great house, sprung from her saddle and was pounding vigorously upon its portals.

“Fly, fly,” she cried, as the governor himself came to the door. “The British are coming to take you. Peggy will tell you all. I must warn the garrison.”

She was on Fleetwood’s back again by the time she had finished speaking, and was off before either the astonished governor or the dumbfounded Peggy could utter a word.

CHAPTER XVIII—STOLEN THUNDER 222

“When breach of faith joined hearts does disengage,
The calmest temper turns to wildest rage.”

—Lee.

“And what is it all about, my child?” inquired the governor as Harriet disappeared down the lane.

“She spoke the truth, sir,” said Peggy, trying to recover from the intense amazement into which Harriet’s conduct had thrown her. “Here is a letter—nay, my cousin must have kept it,” she ended after a hasty search.

“She wished to show it to General Maxwell, I make no doubt,” he said. “Canst remember the contents?”

“I think so, sir,” answered Peggy, who was herself again. The thing to do was to explain the warning to the governor. The affair with Harriet could be adjusted afterward. “It said that an attempt would be made to surprise the brigade at Elizabethtown on the twenty-fourth, sir, which is to-night. Also that an effort would be made to captivate the old rebel at L—— H——, which must have meant thee, sir.” 223

“Doubtless! Doubtless!” he agreed. “I learned to-day that there was a large reward offered for me, dead or alive.”

“Why, it spoke of the reward,” cried she. “Thee won’t stay here, will thee?”

“Oh, as to that——” he began, when his wife and two daughters appeared in the doorway.

“What is it, William?” asked gentle Mrs. Livingston.

“The British plan to attempt my capture to-night,” he explained grimly. “Zounds! do they think to find me in bed, as they did Charles Lee?”

“Oh, father,” cried one of the girls fearfully, “you must leave at once for a place of safety.”

“Here I stay,” declared the doughty governor. “Is ‘t not enough that I should be hounded from pillar to post for two years, that I should leave now with a brigade less than a mile away? I’ll barricade the house.” 224

“Why, how could the house be barricaded when there is not a lock left on a door, nor even a hinge on the windows,” cried Miss Susannah. “Papa, aren’t you going to tell us who your informant is.”

“Bless my soul,” ejaculated the governor hastily. “My dears, this is Miss Peggy Owen, David’s daughter. ’Twas her cousin, however, who was the informant. She hath ridden on, like the brave girl she is, to warn Maxwell. Miss Peggy, will you not stop with the family until morning, or do you wish to return to camp?”

“The camp, sir,” replied Peggy promptly. “My mother will be uneasy.”

“Then I will ride with you, my little maid,” cried he, swinging himself into the saddle. “This information proves beyond doubt that there is a spy somewhere among us, and steps should be taken at once for his apprehension. My dears, if I thought for one moment that harm would be offered you——”

“Go, go,” cried one of the daughters imploringly. “No greater harm will befall us than an attack of scarlet fever.” 225

“That is Susy’s favorite jest,” chuckled William Livingston. “She will have it that our belles are in more danger from the red coats of the British officers than from all the bullets the English possess.”

They had reached the end of the lane by this time, and turned into the turnpike just as a trooper rode up to them coming from Elizabethtown.

“Sir,” he said, saluting, “General Maxwell hath sent to ask concerning this matter of attack. Have you any further knowledge regarding it, and do you consider the information correct? A young girl, English she was, came in great haste to tell us of it and hath set forth at speed for Middlebrook to ask General Washington to send reinforcements, as the number of the attacking party is unknown.”

“’Tis marvelous,” ejaculated the governor. “That is just what should be done. That is a wonderful cousin of yours, Miss Peggy. Yes,” to the trooper, “I have no doubt but that the information is correct, though I know no further concerning the affair than that an attack is contemplated. Tell your general to be prepared. I am myself bound for the camp and will hasten the sending of reinforcements.” 226

The trooper saluted, wheeled, and left them. The ride to Middlebrook was a silent one. The governor seemed absorbed in thought, and Peggy was full of wonderment at the perplexity of Harriet’s actions. She had not wished her (Peggy) to warn the governor. She had tried to keep her from coming. And then—when she had thought her cousin well on toward the camp she had come after her and had given the warning herself. Why, why, why? Peggy asked herself over and over. Had she thought it a hoax at first, as she had said, and then upon reflection concluded that it was not?

She was glad that Harriet had changed about it, Peggy told herself, but how strangely it was happening! Just as though ’twas Harriet and not herself to whom the credit belonged. It was so

different, she reflected, from the time when she had gone to General Putman with news of the spy, James Molesworth. Then she had been made much of by every one, and now——

As she reached this point in her musings she chided herself sharply.

“Peggy,” she exclaimed in stern self-admonition, unconscious that she spoke aloud, “Peggy, what doth it matter who did it—so that ’twas done? That is the main thing.”

“Did you speak, Mistress Peggy?” queried Governor Livingston, rousing himself from reverie in turn.

“I was thinking, sir,” she told him, “and knew not that I spoke aloud. ’Tis fashion of mine so to do sometimes.”

“’Tis one that most of us indulge in, I fancy,” he responded. “We are almost at camp now. Art tired, my child? ’Tis a goodly distance you have traveled.”

“A little,” she made answer, and again there was silence.

It was ten o’clock when at last they rode into camp. Lights flashed as men hurried to and fro, and there was a general appearance of excitement quite different from the usual quiet of that hour. David Owen came out of the farmhouse as they drew rein before it.

“I hoped thee would come to the camp, William,” he exclaimed. “Harriet hath thrown us all into a fever of apprehension concerning thee. His Excellency hath sent twice to know if aught was heard from thee.”

“His Excellency is most kind,” returned the governor. “And you also, David, to be so solicitous anent me. And Harriet? How is she? Zounds, David! there is a lass to be proud of! She not only warned me, but Maxwell also, and now hath come back to the camp and roused it too! Wonderful! wonderful! She hath beaten us well, Mistress Peggy.”

“Yes,” said Peggy quietly. “She hath. Finely!”

There was that in her voice that made her father come to her quickly.

“Thee is tired, Peggy,” he cried lifting her from Star’s back. “Thy mother hath been full of worriment anent thy absence, but Harriet said that she had left thee at the governor’s, so I knew that thou wert safe. Wilt light, William? We will be honored to have thy company for the night, and as much longer as ’twill please thee to remain.”

“Thank you, David.” Mr. Livingston swung himself lightly down to the ground. “I accept your hospitality with pleasure. Methought I was safe for this winter at home. Odds life! but the British grow reckless to make sallies so near the main army.”

“The more glory should the attempt have been successful,” laughed Mr. Owen. “Come in, William.”

“And this is the young lady who would give me no opportunity to thank her for her information,” said the governor, going directly to Harriet who, looking superbly beautiful, despite a certain languor, reclined in a large chair surrounded by a group of officers.

“You must thank Peggy,” declared Harriet laughing. “’Twas she who found the note. Peggy and Fleetwood, my horse, deserve all the credit, if there be any.”

“And Harriet not a bit?” he quizzed, quite charmed by her modesty. “I fancy that there are those of us who think that Harriet deserves some little herself. And now that we are at ease, let us hear all about it.”

“Hath not Peggy told you?” asked Harriet.

“Only given me the outline of it,” he answered. “Now that the need for action is past, let’s hear the story.”

“Why, we were riding along when all at once I took a dash ahead of Peggy, just for sport. When I returned she had the letter, which she had found while I was gone,” Harriet told him. “I was miles away then, was I not, Peggy?” Without waiting for an answer she continued hastily: “At first we hardly understood what it meant, and then suddenly it flashed over us that to-day was the twenty-fourth, and if there was an attack to be made ’twould be to-night. Of course when we realized that, there was but one thing to do, which was to let you know about it as quickly as possible, and to warn the brigade at Elizabethtown. Really,” she ended, laughing softly, “there is naught to make such a fuss about. Twas a simple thing to do.”

“Mother,” spoke Peggy, rising abruptly, “if thee does not mind I think I’ll go to my room. I—I am tired.”

Her voice quivered as she finished speaking and a wild inclination to sob came suddenly over her. Mrs. Owen glanced at her daughter’s pale face anxiously as she gave her permission to withdraw. Something was amiss, she saw. The two girls had not spoken, and had avoided each other’s glances. Wondering much, she turned again to the guests while Peggy, safe at last in her own little chamber, gave vent to a flood of tears.

CHAPTER XIX—A PROMISE AND AN ACCUSATION

Under each flower of radiant hue
A serpent lies unbidden;
And chance ofttimes doth bring to view
That which hath been hidden.

—*The Valley of Tayef*.

The camp was thrown into a turmoil of excitement the next day when it was learned that two regiments of British had indeed endeavored to take General Maxwell's brigade by surprise. A detachment in search of the governor had reached Liberty Hall shortly after three o'clock that morning, but not finding him at home a quest was made for his private papers, which were saved by the quick wit of his daughter, Susannah. Baffled in this attempt they rejoined their comrades who had surrounded Elizabethtown, expecting to capture the brigade at least.

General Maxwell, however, by reason of Harriet's warning had marched out before their arrival, 233
and surprised the enemy by falling upon them at daybreak.

The lively skirmish that ensued, resulted in the loss of several men on each side, while the academy, where were kept stores of various kinds, the Presbyterian Hospital, and a few other buildings were burned by the British in their retreat.

When this news was received Harriet and Peggy became the heroines of the hour. A constant stream of visitors besieged the Owens' quarters until Mr. Owen laughingly declared that he should have to entreat protection from General Washington.

In all the demonstration, however, Peggy was a secondary luminary.

"'Tis the more remarkable because thee is an English girl," was David Owen's comment when Harriet protested against so much attention being shown her. "And thee deserves it, my child. 'Twas a great thing for thee to do."

"But Peggy found the note," spoke Harriet with insistence. "I must have been miles away when she found it. Wasn't I, Peggy?"

Peggy gave her a puzzled look. Why did she make such a point of not being present when the 234
note was found, she asked herself.

"My daughter," chided her father, "did thee not hear thy cousin's question? Thou hast not answered her."

"Oh!" exclaimed Peggy rousing herself. "What was it, Harriet? I was wondering about something."

"'Twas naught," spoke Harriet. "I only said I was not with you when the note was found."

"No, thee was not with me," answered Peggy, and something of her perplexity was visible in her manner.

On Friday morning, the day following the sortie by the enemy, Mrs. Owen entered the parlor where the two girls were for the moment sitting alone with Mr. Owen.

"Girls," she said, "an aide hath just come from His Excellency with his compliments. He desires the pleasure of Misses Margaret and Harriet Owen's company to dinner. You are to accompany the aide, who will wait for you to get ready, and will see that you are safely returned before night falls." 235

"Oh, must we go?" cried Harriet. "Please, Cousin David, may I not stay with you?"

"Tut, tut, lass!" returned he. "Refuse His Excellency's invitation to dine? 'Twould be monstrous unmannerly, and that thee is not, Harriet."

"But I would rather stay with you," she pleaded, and her dismay was very apparent.

"And deprive the general of the pleasure of thanking thee for thy heroism?" he asked. "He wishes to interview you both about the note, I dare say. He said the matter would need attention."

"I don't know anything about it, my cousin," she objected almost in tears. "'Twas Peggy who found it."

"Nay; thee must go, Harriet," he said in such a tone that she knew that 'twas useless to object further.

The two girls went up-stairs to dress. It was the first time that they had been alone together since they had found the note on Wednesday. To Peggy's surprise, Harriet's hands were shaking so that she could not unfasten her frock. A feeling of vague alarm thrilled Peggy at the sight. She 236
went to her cousin quickly.

"Harriet," she cried, "what is it? Why do you tremble so?"

"Peggy," answered Harriet, sinking into a chair with a little sob, "I am afraid. I am so afraid!"

"Afraid?" repeated the amazed Peggy. "Of what, Harriet?"

"Of your Mr. Washington," answered the girl. "He is so stern, and, and——Oh, I am afraid!" she cried wringing her hands.

"True, he is a stern man," said the perplexed Peggy, "but still he hath a kind heart. We have dined there often, Harriet, and thee did not mind. I see not why thee should fear him now. He will

but ask us about the note, and thank thee for thy timely warning to the governor and the brigade."

"You will not tell him that at first I did not wish to go, or to have you go, will you, Peggy?" pleaded Harriet. "I thought better of it, Peggy. I—I felt sorry about it afterward."

"Thee made up for thy hesitancy nobly, Harriet," spoke Peggy warmly, all her bewilderment 237
vanishing at her cousin's acknowledgment of sorrow for what she had tried to do. "I will do as thee wishes in the matter."

"And will you tell him that I was not near when the note was found?" asked the girl eagerly.

"Yes; for thee was not. But why? I cannot see what difference 'twould make whether thee was there or not."

"You are a good little thing, Peggy," said Harriet kissing her without replying to the question. "'Twas mean of me to ride ahead and give the warning. 'Tis you who should have the credit, but I had to. I had to. Some day you will know. Oh!" she cried checking herself suddenly, "what am I saying?"

"Harriet, thee is all undone anent something. Is thee not well? Let me call mother, and she will give thee some 'Jesuit's bark.' Thee is all unstrung," spoke Peggy with solicitude.

"No, no; I am all right now," said Harriet with something of her accustomed gaiety of manner. "And, Peggy, whatever happens remember that I am your cousin, leal and true. I am only a girl, 238
Peggy, and alone in a strange land."

"Harriet, what is the matter? Thee speaks in riddles," ejaculated Peggy, wonderingly.

"Peggy, I am unstrung," answered Harriet. "And I am afraid that I have done wrong about—about many things. I wish, oh, Peggy, I wish I had not had you give that note to that soldier. I'm afraid that 'twill be found."

"Well? And what if it is, Harriet? There is nought of harm in it?" Peggy spoke calmly hoping to soothe her cousin by her manner.

"Peggy!" Harriet clasped her arms about her convulsively. "Promise me that you will not tell that I asked you to give it to him!"

"But," began Peggy.

"Promise, promise," cried Harriet feverishly.

"I promise, Harriet," said Peggy, hoping to quiet her.

"Peggy" called Mrs. Owen's voice at this moment, "thee must make haste. The aide is waiting."

"Yes, mother," answered Peggy and there was no further opportunity for conversation. To her surprise Harriet recovered her spirits at once and when they reached headquarters was quite 239
herself.

"'Twas most kind of you, Lady Washington, to have us again so soon," she cried gaily as Mrs. Washington received them in the wide hall of the dwelling.

"It is we who are honored," said the lady graciously. "I am quite cross with Mr. Washington because he insists that he must see you first. He wishes to have some talk with you before the dinner is served. No, Billy," as William Lee, General Washington's body-servant, came forward to show the maidens up-stairs. "It will give me great pleasure to help the young ladies myself with their wraps. We are all very proud of our English co-patriot. 'Twas a great thing for you to do, my dear," she added leading the way up the winding staircase. "It must have taken an effort on your part to go against your own people, and shows very plainly that your sympathy with the cause is sincere."

"Thank you, madam," murmured Harriet in some confusion. "But, but Peggy here——"

"'Tis no more than we expect from Peggy," said the matron, giving Peggy such a gentle pat on 240
the shoulder that Peggy's heart grew warm and tender. "Her views are so well known that nothing she could do for us would surprise us. That is why we say so little of her share in the matter." And she gave Peggy another caressing touch.

Why, of course that was it, Peggy told herself with a flash of understanding. How foolish she had been to care, or to have any feeling on the subject at all. It was a great thing for Harriet to do. And so thinking she felt her heart grow very tender toward her cousin who had suddenly lost her animation and was pale and silent as they came down the stairs, and were ushered into the commander-in-chief's office.

General Washington was sitting before a large mahogany table whose well polished top was almost covered by papers. He rose as the girls entered.

"Mrs. Washington has hardly forgiven me for taking you away from her," he remarked smilingly. "I have promised that I will detain you but a few moments. Miss Harriet, your head will be quite turned before you will have finished with the toasting and feasting. But 'twas bravely done! You 241
both showed rare judgment and courage in acting as you did. It saved a valiant man from capture and perhaps the slaughter of an entire brigade."

"Your Excellency is very kind," stammered Harriet while Peggy murmured a "Thank thee, sir."

"Mr. Hamilton, will you kindly place chairs for the ladies?" spoke the general to a slight young

man who came forward from the fireplace near which he had been standing. “Nay,” in response to an inquiring glance, “you are not to stay, sir. Mrs. Washington will gladden you later by an introduction.” Then as the young man left the room he added with a slight smile, “I have to be stern with the blades when there are ladies about, else they would have time for no other engagements. And now tell me, I beg, all about this affair. How came it that ye were riding upon that road?”

“I asked Peggy to go there,” spoke Harriet quickly; “you see, sir,” with charming candor, “Governor Livingston is a great friend of Cousin David’s, and came to see him but the other day. 242
He told us a great deal of Liberty Hall, and how he had planted hundreds of trees which he had imported from France and England, until I was curious anent the place. Cousin David, or Ensign Drayton, usually rides with us, but Wednesday both were on duty; so, as Cousin David said that there was no danger so long as we kept within the lines, Peggy and I went for our ride alone. I know not how it came about; but perhaps ’twas because the governor had talked about his home, but we found ourselves all at once upon the turnpike going toward Elizabethtown. Presently Fleetwood, being a swifter nag than Star, became restive at our slow pace and to take the edge off him I dashed ahead for a little canter. While I was gone Peggy found the letter and when I came back there she was reading it. It did not take us long to decide what to do, and—but the rest you know, sir,” she ended abruptly.

“Yes; I know the rest,” he said musingly. “And so you were not there when Miss Peggy found the note?”

“No,” she answered him. “I must have been a mile away. Don’t you think so, Peggy?” 243

“I do not know how far it was,” replied Peggy thoughtfully, “but thee was not with me, Harriet.”

“Where did you find it, Miss Peggy?” asked the general turning to her. “You must see that it proves that there is a spy amongst us, and the place where ’twas found may aid somewhat to his capture. Tell me as nearly as possible where you found it.”

“Does thee remember where three pines stand together at a bend in the pike about ten miles from Elizabethtown?” she asked. Then as he nodded assent she continued: “It was just in front of those pines, Friend Washington, that it was lying. I caught sight of it and thought some one had lost a letter, and so dismounted and picked it up. Then Harriet returned and—and we had some talk.” Peggy was so candid that she found it hard to gloss over the conversation with her cousin, but she went on after a pause so slight as not to be noticeable. “’Twas deemed best to ride direct to the governor’s house, and Harriet’s Fleetwood being swifter than my Star, reached the Hall 244
first.”

“It could not have lain long,” he said, selecting the missive from among a pile of papers. “The road was muddy and the paper is scarcely soiled. Then, too, there was a wind blowing, and ’twould have been taken up from the road had it been there long. According to this the person who dropped it must have been so short a distance ahead of you that you could not have failed to see him.”

“There were but we two on the road, sir,” spoke Harriet, although the question was directed to Peggy. “We neither met any one, Your Excellency, nor did we see any one until we reached Liberty Hall.”

“That being the case,” he said rising, “I will no longer risk Mrs. Washington’s disfavor by keeping you from her. Permit me to thank you both and particularly Miss Harriet for the judgment you showed. You did the only thing that could be done, and ’tis rare indeed that maidens so young show such thought. I hope that you will both pleasure us frequently with your presence.” 245

He opened the door for them with stately courtliness. Curtseying deeply the maidens reached the threshold just as a group of soldiers bustled unceremoniously into the hall, and blocked the exit.

“A spy, Your Excellency,” cried an orderly, excitedly saluting.

The soldiers drew apart as the orderly spoke and from their midst came John Drayton leading the very private soldier to whom Peggy had given Harriet’s note.

“Your Excellency,” said the ensign saluting, “I caught this fellow just as he was stealing from the lines. He had a most incriminating note upon his person. His actions for some time have been most suspicious, and——”

“Sir,” spoke General Washington gravely, “do you not see that there are ladies present? Let them pass, I beg of you. Such things are not of a nature for gentle ears to hear.”

As he spoke the eyes of the prisoner rested upon the maidens. He gave a short cry as he saw them, and sprang forward.

“If I did have a note, Your Excellency,” he cried, “there stands the girl who gave it to me.” 246

“Where?” asked the general sternly.

“There!” said the man pointing to Peggy. “That girl gave me the letter Tuesday afternoon.”

CHAPTER XX—A REGRETTED PROMISE 247

“Not for counsel are we met,
But to secure our arms from treachery,
O’erthrow and stifle base conspiracies,
Involve in his own toils our false ally——”

—“Count Julian,” *Walter Savage Landor*.

For one long moment there was a silence so tense that the breathing of those present was plainly audible. Peggy had become very pale, but she met the searching glance which General Washington bent upon her steadily.

“Did you ever give him a note, letter, or communication of any kind?” he asked at length.

“Yes,” she answered. “I gave him a letter to send through the lines a few days since. It was Third Day afternoon, as he hath said.”

“You?” cried John Drayton springing toward her, and there was anguish and incredulity in his voice. “You? Oh, Peggy!”

“Yes,” she said again clearly. “Has thee the letter, John? Give it to the general. He will see that 248
there was naught of harm intended.”

But Drayton shrank back and covered his face with his hands.

“Have you the missive, ensign?” demanded the commander gravely. “If so let me see it.”

“She, she doth not know—— It cannot be. Oh, sir, do not look at the letter, I beseech you,” uttered young Drayton brokenly.

“The letter, Drayton.” There was no mistaking the command in the tone. The boy drew the letter from his sword belt, and handed it to the general.

“There is some mistake,” he said, and Peggy was surprised to see that his eyes were wet. “Sir, I entreat——”

“Take your prisoner to the outer room, ensign,” ordered the chief after reading the note. “Meantime, may I ask that all of you will leave me with the exception of this girl?” He indicated Peggy as he finished speaking.

Silently the men filed out, but Harriet lingered, her eyes fixed upon Peggy with so much of appeal 249
that the latter tried to smile reassuringly.

“You must go too, Miss Harriet,” he said, and Harriet was forced to leave the room.

In all of Peggy’s life never had she felt the fear that now came upon her. At all times reserved in his manner and his bearing full of dignity, never before had she realized the majesty of General Washington’s august presence. In the past when others had called him cold and austere she had denied such qualities warmly, but now as she found him regarding her with a stern expression she began to tremble violently.

“And to whom was your letter sent?” he asked after a painful pause.

“To Sir Henry Clinton, sir.”

“And what would you have to say to Sir Henry Clinton?” he demanded, plainly astonished.

“I?” Peggy looked at him quickly. “Why, I did not write it, Friend Washington.”

“You did not?” It seemed to Peggy that his glance would pierce her very soul, so keen was his scrutiny. “If you did not, who did?” 250

“Read the letter,” implored she. “Read it, sir. ’Twill explain everything.”

“I have read it,” he made answer. “Do you wish me to do so again?”

“Yes,” she said, a vague apprehension stirring her heart at his manner.

Slowly and impressively he read aloud without further comment: “A certain personage spends a portion of every clear afternoon upon the summit of Chimney Rock, which I have told you stands nigh to Bound Brook. Fording the Raritan at the spot already designated could be done without fear of the sentry, and the personage captured with but little risk. Without him the army would go to pieces, and the rebellion ended. Further particulars contained in other letters forwarded by S.”

“Oh!” gasped Peggy her eyes widening with consternation. “That is not the note I sent, Friend Washington. Does not that mean thee and thy capture?”

“Yes,” he said. “There seem to be plots and counterplots for the leaders. What is behind all this? I am loth to believe that you would wilfully connive at either my capture, or anything that would 251
bring harm to the cause.”

“I would not, I would not,” she told him earnestly, amazed and bewildered at the thing that had befallen her. “I would do naught that would injure the cause. And thee—— Why, sir, I would rather die than act of mine should bring thee harm.”

“I believe you,” he said. “Your past actions show you have the best interests of your country at heart. But you are shielding some one,” he said leaning toward her suddenly. “Who is it? Were it not for the fact that your cousin discovered so much zeal in warning Governor Livingston and the

garrison at Elizabethtown I should say that 'twas she. But were she guilty she would not have warned the governor, and would have tried to prevent you from doing so." He looked straight into her eyes as the girl with difficulty repressed an exclamation. "Who is it?" he asked again.

But Peggy could only stare at him unable to speak. In that moment the truth had come to her, and she saw the explanation of everything. Harriet had deceived her and all of them, from the beginning. A blaze of anger swept her from head to foot. Was the daughter, like the father, only seeking to work them harm? 252

"Who is it?" repeated General Washington, watching her intently, and seeing that she was shaken by some emotion.

"It was——" she began, and paused. She had promised only that morning that she would not tell that Harriet had given her the note. Could she break her word? Had she not been taught once a word was passed 'twas a sacred thing, and not to be lightly broken? She looked at him in anguish. "I want to tell thee," she burst forth, "but I have promised. I have promised."

"But you thought the contents of this note were different, did you not? You did not know that it contained a hint of a plan for my capture?"

"No," she answered. "I did not know."

"Then you were tricked," he declared. "By shielding this person, or persons, you expose the entire camp to other plots which may prove more successful than these last have been. Do you still consider your word binding under the circumstances?" 253

"I have been taught," she said, her eyes full of trouble, "that having once passed my word it must be kept. Friends do not take oath as others do, but affirm only. Therefore, we are taught, that once given one's word must be abided by so that it will be as stable and as much to be relied upon as an oath."

"But do you not see, Mistress Peggy, that your refusal to disclose the name of the person places you under suspicion?"

"I am a patriot," she asserted, pleadingly, "loyal and true to my country. I have ever striven to do what I could."

"Yes; but by your own confession you have given a note to this man, who says that 'tis this very one. We have only your word that 'tis not so. Then, too, you were alone when the warning note was found. It was not soiled nor trampled upon as it would have been had it lain there long. Child, you place yourself under suspicion."

"I see," she said miserably.

"'Tis a cruel necessity of war to use spies," he went on, "but all armies show them small mercy when they are caught. And it should be so. The man, woman, or girl even, acting as one does so at the risk of life." 254

Peggy started. He had used almost the same words that John Drayton had used the day they had seen the swinging body of the spy. A shudder shook her. Again she saw the swaying form dangling from the tree. Small mercy was shown a spy. Could she condemn Harriet to such a fate? Beautiful Harriet with her wonderful eyes!

"Friend Washington," she cried brokenly, "thee does not believe that I would injure thee, or my country, does thee?"

"What am I to think, Miss Peggy?" he asked, ignoring her outstretched hands.

"Give me a little time," she cried. "Only a little time. Oh, I am sore beset. I know not what to do."

"Child," he said with compassion, "I am thinking of a time when a young girl came to me through winter's snow and cold to plead for the life of her father. Do you remember what she said when I told her that I could not exchange a spy for him, valiant though the deeds of that father had been? She said, 'I know that thee must refuse me. Thee would be false to thy trust were thee to do otherwise.' Hath my little maiden whose answer so warmed my heart with its patriotism that I have never forgotten it, changed so that now she shields a spy? I cannot believe it." 255

"Thee presses me so hard," she cried wringing her hands. "Let me have a little time, I entreat thee. It could not matter to let me have until to-morrow. Just until to-morrow, Friend Washington."

He gazed at her thoughtfully. Her anguish was so apparent that none could help being touched. That there was much behind it all was very evident, and so presently he said:

"You shall have until to-morrow, Mistress Peggy. 'Tis against all precedent, but for what you have done before I will grant your request. But there will be no further delay."

"Thank thee, sir," said she weeping. "I will ask none." She spoke timidly after a moment. "What am I to do, sir? Thee will not wish me to stay for dinner if I am under suspicion."

"Yes," he said. "Let all go on as before until the matter is unraveled. Can you compose yourself sufficiently to wait upon Mrs. Washington? The dinner hour hath come." 256

As Peggy replied in the affirmative, he called an orderly, and gave him some directions, then escorted the maiden into the dining-room. The Quaker habit of self-control enabled the girl to bear the curious glances cast at her pale face, but the dinner was a trying ordeal. She had grown to love the gay circle that gathered at the table, and to count a day spent with the brilliant men

and women as one to be remembered; to-day she was glad when the time came for her to go home.

Harriet had been very vivacious all through the afternoon, but as they set forth accompanied by the same aide who had escorted them to the mansion she relapsed into silence. It had been Peggy's intention to tell the whole story to her father and mother in Harriet's presence as soon as she reached home, but there was company in the drawing-room, and as she stood hesitating what to do her mother hastened to them.

"How tired you both look," she cried in alarm. "To bed ye go at once. Nay, David," as Mr. Owen 257
entreated a delay. "'Tis early, I know, but too much excitement is not to be endured. And both girls will be the better for a long sleep. So to bed! To bed!"

And with some reluctance on the part of both maidens they went slowly up to the little chamber under the eaves.

CHAPTER XXI—THE RECKONING 258

"He flees
From his own treachery; all his pride, his hopes,
Are scattered at a breath; even courage fails
Now falsehood sinks from under him."

—*Walter Savage Landor.*

As Peggy placed the candle she had carried to light them up the stairs in the socket of a candlestick on the chest of drawers, Harriet closed the door, and shot the bolt. Then slowly the two turned and stood face to face. Not a word was spoken for a full moment. They gazed at each other as though seeking to pierce the mask of flesh and bones that hid their souls.

It was a tense moment. The attitude of the Quakeress was accusing; that of the English girl defiant, changing to one of supplication as the dark eyes of her cousin held her own orbs in that intent look. For a time she bore the gaze unflinchingly, but soon her glance wavered, her eyelids 259
drooped, and she sank into a chair whispering:

"You know, Peggy. You know!"

"Yes," said Peggy. "I know, Harriet."

"Will—will they hang me, Peggy? What did Mr. Washington say? Oh, I have been so miserable this afternoon! I thought they were coming to take me every time the door opened. And you were so long with him. What did he say?"

"He does not know that it was thee who writ the letter yet, Harriet," Peggy informed her calmly.

"Not know?" ejaculated Harriet, springing up in amazement. "Did you not tell him, Peggy?"

"No, Harriet. I promised thee this morning that I would not, and I could not break my word," explained Peggy simply.

"You did not tell him?" cried Harriet, as though she could not believe her ears. "Why, Peggy Owen, how could you get out of it? He would believe that you were the guilty one if you did not."

"So he told me, Harriet. But I had promised thee; and then, and then, though thee does not 260
deserve it, I could not help but think of that spy we saw—— But, Harriet, I asked him to give me a little time, and I thought that I would ask thee to return my promise, because I cannot submit to rest under the implication of having tried to injure General Washington. Thee must give me back my word, my cousin."

"And if I do not?" asked Harriet anxiously.

"I am going to father with the whole matter. I shall do that anyway. The general claims that I was tricked, and I was, most shamefully. That letter was not the one that thee let me read. And the letter telling of the attack was thine. I see it all—why thee rode ahead to warn the governor and the garrison, and everything. The time has come, Harriet, when thou shalt tell me why thou hast come here to act as a spy. Why hast thou used us, thy kinspeople, to mask such plots as thou hast been in against our own friends? Have we used thee unkindly? Or discourteously? Why should thee treat us so, my cousin?"

"WHY SHOULD THEE PLAY THE SPY?"

"I did not mean to, Peggy," returned Harriet with her old manner of affection. "Do you not remember that I said this morning that I was sorry that I let you send it? And I am. I am. But John Drayton was to be with us, and he watched me so that I feared that he would see me. Truly, I am sorry, Peggy."

She spoke with evident sincerity so that Peggy believed her.

"Harriet," she said, "tell me why thou hast done this? Why should thee play the spy?"

Harriet shivered at the word. "I am cold," she said. "Let us get into bed, Peggy. I am cold."

Without a word of protest Peggy helped her to undress, but she herself climbed into the four-poster without disrobing. Harriet pulled the many colored counterpanes about her and snuggled down into the thick feather bed.

"Peggy," she said presently, "I know 'tis thought most indelicate for a female to engage in such enterprise as spying, but would you not take any risk for your country if you thought it would benefit her?"

"Yes," assented her cousin. "I would."

"That and one other thing is the reason that I have become one," said Harriet. "We English believe that you Americans are wrong about the war. We are loyal to our king, and fight to keep the colonies which rightfully belong to him. I came with my brother, Clifford, over here, and both of us were full of enthusiasm for His Majesty. We determined to do anything that would help him to put down the rebellion, and so believing offered our services to Sir Henry Clinton.

"There was but this one thing that I could do, and when we learned that you and your mother were to join Cousin David we knew that it was the opportunity we sought. Sir Henry welcomed the chance to have an informant who would be right in the midst of things without being suspected. And I have learned much, Peggy. I have done good work."

"Harriet," interrupted Peggy amazed at the recital, "does thee mean to tell me thee knew when mother and I were coming?"

"To the very day," answered Harriet with a laugh. "Oh, we keep well informed in New York. You little know the people who are around you. And your general hath spies among us, too. 'Tis fortune of war, Peggy."

"So General Washington said," mused Peggy. "But I would thee were not one. 'Tis a life full of trickery and deceit. I like it not for a girl."

"And the other reason," continued Harriet, "is more personal. Peggy, my father hath lost all his fortune. We are very poor, my cousin."

"But—but thy frocks?" cried Peggy. "Thee has been well dressed, Harriet, and frocks are frocks these days."

"It seems so to you because you know not the mode, cousin. Were you in London you would soon

see the difference betwixt my gowns and those of fashion. But I was to have the reward for Governor Livingston should the plan for his capture succeed, and that would have helped father a great deal."

"Oh, Harriet, Harriet!" moaned Peggy bewildered by this maze of reasoning. "I would that thee had not done this, or that thou hadst returned to thy people long ago. Why did thee not go back the other day? 'Twas in the letter that thee should be near so as to be taken also." 264

"I intended to," answered Harriet. "That was why I wished to ride near to Liberty Hall, but when I found that I had lost the note, I came back for it, hoping that you had not seen it. You were determined to warn both the garrison and the governor, and that would render it impossible for me to get to our forces. I tried to slip away yesterday, but there was no chance. And now you will tell on me to-morrow, and I will be hanged."

"Don't, Harriet," pleaded Peggy. "I am going right down to father, and see if he can tell us some way out of this. It may be that he can persuade General Washington to let thee go back to thy people."

"Peggy," cried Harriet laying a detaining hand upon the girl as she slipped from the bed. "You must not bring Cousin David into this. He is a soldier who stands high with the general. If he intercedes for me he will himself be under suspicion. You would not wish to get your father into trouble, would you? Beside, 'tis his duty, as a patriot, to give me up to punishment. Do you not see it? If I were not your cousin you would not hesitate in the matter." 265

"True," said Peggy pausing. Well she knew that her father was so loyal that the matter might appear to him in just that very way. "He loves thee well though, Harriet."

"And for that reason he shall not be tempted," cried Harriet. "No, Peggy; there is no help. I must pay the penalty. I knew the risk."

She buried her face in the pillow, and, despite her brave words, sobs shook her form.

"Is there no way? No way?" cried Peggy frantically. "I cannot bear to think of thee being hang ——" She paused, unable to finish the dreadful word.

"There is one way," said Harriet suddenly sitting up. "If you would help me, Peggy, to get to Amboy I could get to New York from there."

"Could thee, Harriet? How?"

"There are always sloops that ply betwixt the two places," said Harriet. "If I could but reach there I know that I could get one of them to take me to the city." 266

"But how could thee reach Amboy?" asked Peggy.

"Peggy, go with me now," pleaded Harriet, clasping her arms about her cousin. "Let us slip down, and get our horses. Then we can get to Amboy, and you could be back to-morrow morning. Your father, ay! and your mother, too, would be glad to know that I had got away before they came to arrest me."

"But why should I go?" inquired Peggy. "Can thee not go alone? Thee knows the way."

"They would not let me pass the lines," said Harriet. "They would know by my voice that I was English, and would detain me. Whatever we try to do in the matter must be done to-night, because to-morrow will be too late. Will you come with me, Peggy? I shall never ask aught else of you."

"I will come," said Peggy, after a moment's thought. "I do believe that father and mother will approve. And, Harriet, will thee give me back my promise, if I do come?"

"Yes, Peggy. And further, my cousin, if you will but help me to get to New York I will never act the spy again. I promise you that of my own accord. 'Tis too much risk for a girl, and I have had my lesson." 267

"Oh, Harriet," cried Peggy. "If thee will only do that then I can tell General Washington all the matter with light heart. I like not to think of thee as a spy."

The tattoo had long since sounded. The house was still. The girls dressed themselves warmly, and stole silently out of the dwelling down to the stables where their horses were kept. Deftly they bridled and saddled the animals, and then led them quietly to the lane which would take them to the road.

In the distance the flames of the dying camp-fires flickered palely, illumining the shadowy forms of the few soldiers grouped about them, and accentuating the gloom of the encircling wood. A brooding stillness hung over the encampment, broken only by the sough of the wind as it wandered about the huts, or stirred the branches of the pines on the hills. The army slept. Slept as only those sleep who have earned repose. They were soldiers whose hardships and sufferings have scarcely a parallel in the annals of history, yet they could sleep even though they had but hard boards for a couch, and but a blanket or a little straw for covering. 268

Peggy started suddenly as the deep bay of a hound came to them from the village of Bound Brook.

"Harriet," she whispered, "I am afraid. Let us wait until to-morrow."

"To-morrow will be too late," answered Harriet, and Peggy wondered to hear how hard her voice sounded. "Do you want me hung, Peggy? Beside, you promised that you would come. 'Tis the last

time that I'll ever ask favor of you."

"Yes, I know," answered Peggy, in a low tone. "I will go, Harriet; but I wish now that I had not said that I would."

"Come," was Harriet's brief answer. And Peggy followed her into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXII—A HIGH-HANDED PROCEEDING

269

"Had your watch been good,
This sudden mischief never could have fallen."

—First Part Henry VI.

Had Peggy been in the lead she would have headed at once for the "Great Raritan Road," a highway which ran down the valley of the river directly to the town of New Brunswick, which lay but a few miles west of Amboy. Harriet, on the contrary, turned toward Bound Brook, and entered the dense wood which stood between that village and the hills.

"This is not the way to Amboy, Harriet," remonstrated Peggy.

"No," answered her cousin briefly. Then, after a moment: "'Tis the only way to get through the lines without the countersign. We must not talk."

"Hasn't thee the countersign?" asked Peggy, dismayed.

270

"No; don't talk, Peggy."

And Peggy, wondering much how with two horses they could pass the pickets unchallenged, relapsed into silence. But the lack of the password did not seem to daunt Harriet. She pushed ahead as rapidly as was consistent with rough ground, thickly growing trees and underbrush, and the gloom of the forest. At length as they entered a shallow ravine Harriet drew rein, and, as Peggy came up beside her, she spoke:

"Are you afraid, Peggy?"

"No," replied Peggy, "but the stillness is monstrously wearing. And 'tis so dark, Harriet."

"Which is to our benefit," returned Harriet. "As for the quiet, once we are clear of the lines we can chat, and so will not mind it. But come!"

Again she took the lead, and Peggy, following after, could not but marvel at the unerring precision with which her cousin chose her way. Not once did she falter or hesitate, though to Peggy the darkness and gloom of the forest seemed impenetrable.

The melancholy of the forest encompassed them, infolding them like a mantle. It so wrought upon their senses that they reached out and touched each other frequently, seeking to find solace from its brooding sadness. It seemed as though hours elapsed before Harriet spoke in the merest whisper:

271

"I think we are without the lines, Peggy. 'Tis about time, and now we can seek the turnpike."

She had scarcely finished speaking when out of the darkness came the peremptory command:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Friends," answered Harriet, as the two obediently brought their horses to a standstill.

In the darkness the shadowy form of the sentinel was but dimly visible, but a feeble ray of the pale moonlight caught the gleam of his musket, and Peggy saw with a thrill of fear that it was pointed directly toward Harriet.

"Advance, and give the countersign," came the order.

How it came about Peggy could not tell, but as he gave the command, Fleetwood reared suddenly upon his hind feet, and, pawing the air with his forelegs and snorting viciously, advanced toward the guard threateningly. An ominous click of the firelock sounded. Wild with terror at the sight, and fearful of what might happen, Peggy cried shrilly:

272

"Look sharp!"

"Why didn't you say so before?" growled the sentry lowering his gun. "What's the matter with that horse?"

"I think he must have stepped among some thorn bushes," replied Harriet sweetly. "I will soon quiet him, friend. The underbrush is thick hereabouts."

"Too thick to be straying around in at night," he answered with some roughness. "That horse is enough to scare the British. What are you doing in the woods? You are bound to lose your way."

"We have done that already," she told him with apparent frankness. She had succeeded by this time in quieting Fleetwood, who now resumed his normal position. By the merest chance they had stumbled upon the password, and she purposed making the most of it. "You see we were at a

party in the camp, and coming back my cousin and I thought to make a short cut through the woods so as to get home quickly. We ought to have been there long ago, but 'twas a pretty little frisk, and we just couldn't make up our minds to leave. You know how it is."

"Yes," he rejoined laughing good naturedly. "I know how 'tis. I've gals of my own. Well, you just get over to that road as fast as you can. 'Tis a half mile straight to your right. And say! if another sentinel asks for the countersign speak right up. You're liable to get a ball if you don't."

"Thank you," she said. "We will remember. Come, my cousin."

"You blessed Peggy!" she exclaimed as they passed beyond the hearing of the guard. "How did you chance upon that watchword?"

"I don't know," answered Peggy, who had not yet recovered her equanimity. "I meant to say, 'Look out!' I don't know how I came to say sharp. But what was the matter with Fleetwood? Was he among thorns?"

"Dear me, no! 'Tis a trick that I taught him. You do not know all his accomplishments. 'Twas well for that sentinel that he let us through. Wasn't it, old fellow?" And her laugh as she patted the animal was not a pleasant one to hear.

Peggy shuddered. She would not like Star to be taught such tricks, she thought, giving the little mare a loving caress. She was beginning to doubt the wisdom of coming with Harriet. The girl appeared to know her way so well, to be so able to care for herself that there seemed no need for Peggy to be along. But let her see her safely to a place where she could reach her own people, and then Peggy resolved, with a quick tightening of the lips, nothing should ever induce her to put herself into such a plight again.

By this time the moon had gone down, and while the sky was not clouded there was a dim haze that rendered the light of the stars ineffectual in dispelling the darkness. On they rode. The time seemed interminable to Peggy; the blackness of the night unbearable. The sudden snapping of a dried twig under Star's feet caused her to start violently.

"Harriet," she cried, "naught is to be gained by keeping to the woods. The lines are passed. Let us get to the highway. We must make better progress if I am to get back before the reveille."

"That you will never do, Peggy," replied Harriet pointing to the sky. "'Tis almost time for it now."

Peggy looked up in dismay. The gray twilight that precedes the dawn was stealing over the darkness. The soldier's day began when the sentry could see a thousand yards about him. Another hour would bring about just that condition. It was clearly impossible for her to return before the sounding of the reveille.

"Does thee know where we are?" she asked. "And where is the road?"

"There is just a narrow strip of the woods betwixt us and the turnpike, Peggy," Harriet assured her. "It hath been so since we left the guard. We will get to it at once if it please you. As for where we are, we should be getting to Perth Amboy soon."

"But why hath it taken so long?" queried Peggy.

"Because the brigades of Baron Steuben and General Wayne lay south of the Raritan, and we had to go around them. I did not tell you, Peggy, that 'twould take so long because I feared that you would not come. It doth not matter, doth it, what way I took to safety?"

"No," answered Peggy, touched by this allusion to her cousin's peril. "It would have been fearful for thee to have come through the darkness alone, but oh, Harriet! I do wish thee had told me. Then I would have left a letter for mother, anyway. She will be so uneasy."

"Never mind!" consoled Harriet. "And then you may never see me again. Shall you care, Peggy?"

"Yes," answered Peggy soberly. "I will, but——" She paused and drew rein abruptly. "There are forms flitting about in the wood," she whispered. "Does thee think they mean us harm?"

Harriet made no reply, but gazed intently into the forest. In the indistinct light the figures of mounted men could be seen moving like shadows among the trees. That they were gradually approaching the maidens was evident. The girl watched them for a few seconds, and then leaning forward gave a low, birdlike call. It was answered in kind on the instant, and a half dozen horsemen dashed from the wood into the narrow highway.

"Now am I safe," cried Harriet joyfully, reaching out her hand to the foremost of the men who gathered about them. "Captain Greyling, your arrival is timely."

"We have waited many nights for you, Mistress Owen," said that officer. "We began to think that you might in very truth have become one of the rebels. You are most welcome."

"Thank you," she cried gaily. "You are not more pleased to see me than I am to be here. In truth, had I not succeeded in coming, I should not have had another opportunity. 'Twas becoming very uncomfortable in camp. I have barely escaped I know not what fate. But more of that anon. Peggy, let me present Captain Greyling of De Lancy's Loyal Legion. My cousin, Mistress Peggy Owen, Captain Greyling."

De Lancy's Loyal Legion! Peggy's cheek blanched at the name. This was a body of Tory cavalry, half freebooters and half in the regular service. Between New York and Philadelphia and the country surrounding both places the name stood for all that was terrible and malignant in human nature. So stricken with terror was she that she could not return the officer's salutation.

“Where lies the boat?” asked Harriet.

“Close to the bank of the river. The trees hide it. ’Tis but a shallop which will take us to the sloop which is in the bay outside Amboy. The men will bring the horses by ferry.”

“Very well,” answered Harriet, preparing to dismount. “We are at the end of our long ride, Peggy. Are you not glad?”

“I am for thee,” said Peggy, speaking quietly but filled with a vague alarm. “As for me, I will bid thee farewell, and return to the camp.”

She wheeled as she spoke, but instantly the mare’s bridle was seized, and she was brought to a standstill.

“What is the meaning of this?” cried Peggy, her eyes flashing. “Thee is safe, Harriet. Call off thy friends. Thee knows that I must return.” 279

“Dost think that I will part with you so soon, my cousin?” laughed Harriet mockingly. “Nay, nay; I have promised to bring you to New York. Best go peaceably, Peggy; for go you must.”

“Never!” exclaimed Peggy, striking Star a sharp blow. The little mare reared, plunged, pranced and wheeled in the effort to rid herself of the hold on her bridle, but vainly. Peggy uttered a piercing shriek as she was torn from the saddle, and half dragged, half carried through the trees down the bank to the boat which was drawn up close to the shore. Two of the men followed after the captain and Harriet. The latter seated herself by Peggy’s side, and placed her arm about her.

“’Twould have been better to come quietly,” she said. “I meant you should go back with me all the while. I could not bear to lose you, Peggy. I thought——”

But Peggy, her spirit up in arms, turned such a look of scorn upon her cousin that Harriet paused in her speech abruptly.

“Speak not to me of affection, Harriet Owen,” she cried. “Thou art incapable of feeling it. Is there 280 no truth to be found in any of thy family? Are ye all treacherous and dishonorable? Would that thou wert no kin of mine! Would that I had never seen thee, nor any of thy——”

Unable to continue, she burst into a passion of tears.

CHAPTER XXIII—IN THE LINES OF THE ENEMY 281

“There is but one philosophy,
though there are a thousand schools—
  Its name is fortitude.”

—Bulwer.

The morning broke gloriously, and held forth the promise of a beautiful day. So mild was the weather that it seemed more like a spring day than the last of February. Out in the bay of the Raritan rode a sloop at anchor, and toward this the shallop made its way. They were taken aboard, and Harriet, who had left Peggy to her grief, now approached her.

“We have been long without either rest or food, my cousin. Come with me to breakfast. Then we will sleep until New York is reached.”

Peggy vouchsafed her never a word, but taking a position by the taffrail stood looking over the dazzling water toward the now receding shores of New Jersey. Into the lower bay sailed the 282 sloop, heading at once for the narrows. Few sails were to be seen on the wide expanse of water save to the left where, under the heights of Staten Island, a part of the British fleet lay at anchor. Brilliant shafts of sunlight wavered and played over the face of the water. Astern, as far as the eye could see, lay the ocean, blank of all sail, the waves glinting back the strong light of the east. Sky, water and shore all united in one sublime harmony of pearls and grays of which the grandeur was none the less for lack of vivid coloring.

The discordant note lay in Peggy’s heart. She was full of the humiliation and bitterness of trust betrayed. Humiliation because she had been tricked so easily, and bitterness as the full realization of her cousin’s treachery came to her. And General Washington! What would he think when she did not come to him as she had promised? He would deem her a spy. And she was Peggy Owen! Peggy Owen—who had prided herself on her love for her country. Oh, it was bitter! Bitter! And so she stood with unseeing eyes for the grand panorama of bay and shore that was 283 unfolding before her.

The wind was favorable, yet it was past one of the clock before the vessel made the narrows, glided past Nutten’s[2] Island, and finally came to anchor alongside the Whitehall Slip. Harriet, who had remained below the entire journey, now came on deck looking much refreshed.

“You foolish Peggy!” she cried. “Of what use is it to grieve o’er what cannot be helped? Think you that I did not wish to be with my people when I was in the rebel camp?”

“Thee came there of thine own free will,” answered Peggy coldly, “while I am here through no

wish of mine. Why did thee bring me?”

“Out of affection, of course,” laughed Harriet. “Ah! there is father on the shore waiting for us.”

“I thought thee said that he was in the South,” Peggy reminded her.

“One says so many things in war time,” answered Harriet with a shrug of her shoulders. “Perchance I intended to say Clifford.”

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“And so you are come to return some of our visits, my little cousin,” cried Colonel Owen, coming forward from the side of a coach as they came ashore. “’Twas well thought. ’Twill be delightsome to return some of your hospitality.”

“Oh, Cousin William,” cried she, the tears beginning to flow, “do send me back to my mother! Oh, I do want my mother!”

“Tut, tut!” he rejoined. “Homesick already? You should have considered that when you planned to come with Harriet.”

“When I what?” exclaimed Peggy, looking up through her tears.

“Planned to come with Harriet,” he repeated impatiently. “She wrote some time since that she would bring you. Come! The dinner waits. We have prepared for you every day for a week past. I am glad the waiting is over. Come, my cousin.”

And Peggy, seeing that further pleading was of no avail, entered the coach, silently determined to make no other appeal. A short drive brought them to a spacious dwelling standing in the midst of large grounds in the Richmond Hill district, which was situated on the western side of Manhattan 285
Island, a little removed from the city proper. The building stood on an eminence commanding a view of the Hudson River and the bay, for at that time there were no houses or other buildings to obstruct the vision, and was surrounded by noble trees. A carefully cultivated lawn even then, so mild had been the winter, showing a little green stretched on one side as far as the road which ran past the house. On the other was the plot for the gardens, while in the rear of the mansion the orchard extended to the river bank. On every hand was evidence of wealth and luxury, and Peggy’s heart grew heavy indeed as she came to know that Colonel Owen’s poverty had been but another of Harriet’s fabrications.

She sat silent and miserable at the table while Harriet, who was in high spirits, related the incidents of the past few days: the finding of the note in the roadway, the warning of the governor and the brigade, and how she had been petted and praised for her heroism. Her father and Captain Greyling, who had accompanied them home, laughed uproariously at this. 286

“Upon my life, my cousin,” cried William Owen, “I wonder not that you are in the dumps. Fie, fie, Harriet! ’twas most unmannerly to steal such a march upon your cousin. For shame! And did our little cousin weep out her pretty eyes in pique that you were so fêted?”

But Peggy was in no mood for banter. There was a sparkle in her eyes, and an accent in her voice that showed that she was not to be trifled with as she said clearly:

“No, Cousin William, I did not weep. It mattered not who gave the warning so long as the governor and the brigade received it. It was most fitting that Harriet should have the praise, as that was all she got out of it. ’Twas planned, as thee must know, for her to receive a more substantial reward.”

“You have not lost your gift of a sharp tongue, I perceive,” he answered a flush mantling his brow. “Have a care to your words, my little cousin. You are no longer in your home, but in mine.”

“I am aware of that, sir. But that I am here is by no will of mine. If I am used despitefully ’tis no 287
more than is to be expected from those who know naught but guile and artifice.”

“Have done,” he cried, rising from the table. “Am I to be railed at in mine own house? Harriet, show this girl to her chamber.”

Nothing loth Peggy followed her cousin to a little room on the second floor, whose one window looked out upon the noble Hudson and the distant Jersey shore.

“Aren’t you going to be friends, Peggy?” questioned Harriet pausing at the door. “I could not do other than I did. Father wished me to bring you here.”

“But why?” asked Peggy turning upon her. “Why should he want me here? Is it to flout me?”

“I know not, Peggy. But be friends, won’t you? There is much more sport to be had here in the city than in yon camp. You shall share with me in the fun.”

“I care not for it,” rejoined Peggy coldly. “And I will never forgive thee, Harriet Owen. Never! I see not how thee could act so.”

And so saying she turned from her cousin with unmistakable aversion, and walking to the window 288
gazed with aching heart at the Jersey shore line. Harriet stood for a moment, and then went out, closing the door behind her. Presently Peggy flung herself on the bed and gave way to her bitter woe in a flood of tears. For what lay at the bottom of her bitterness? It was the sharp knowledge that, with just a little forethought, a little heeding of her mother’s and John Drayton’s warnings, all this might have been avoided.

Human nature is very weak, and any grief that comes from our own carelessness, or lack of thought is harder to bear than that woe which is caused by untoward circumstances. But at last tired nature asserted itself, and Peggy fell asleep.

Long hours after she awoke. It was quite dark in the room, and she was stiff with cold. For a moment she fancied herself in her own little room under the eaves at the camp, but soon a realization of where she was came to her. She rose and groped her way to the window. The moon shone upon the river and the Jersey shore. She looked toward the latter yearningly. 289

“Mother,” she whispered with quivering lips, “mother, what would thee have me to do?” And suddenly it seemed to her that she could hear the sweet voice of her mother saying:

“My daughter, thou must bear with meekness the afflictions that are sent upon thee. Hast thou not been taught to do good to them that despitefully use thee?” Peggy uttered a cry of protest.

“I cannot forgive them! They have behaved treacherously toward me. And my country! ’Tis not to be endured that I should be placed in such position toward it. ’Tis not to be endured, I say.”

“Thou hast been close to sacred things all thy life, my child,” sounded that gentle voice. “Of what avail hath it been if thy actions are no different from those of the world? And thou art not without blame in the matter.”

Long Peggy stood at the window. It seemed to her that her mother was very near to her. And so communing with that loved mother the bitterness died out of her heart, and she wept. No longer virulently, but softly, the gentle tears of resignation. 290

“I will try to bear it,” she murmured, as she crept between the covers of the bed. “I will be brave, and as good as thee would have me be, mother. And I will be so truthful in act and word that it may shame them out of deceit. And maybe, maybe if I am good a way will be opened for me to get back to thee.”

And so she fell into a restful sleep.

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[2] Now Governor’s Island.

CHAPTER XXIV—THE REASON WHY 291

“Yet remember this:
God and our good cause fight upon one side.”

—“Richard III,” Act 5.

It was seven o’clock before Peggy awakened the next morning. With an exclamation at her tardiness in rising she dressed hastily, and went down-stairs. Colonel Owen and Harriet were already in the dining-room at breakfast. They brightened visibly as the maiden returned their greetings serenely, and took her place at the table.

“So you have determined to accept the situation,” observed Colonel Owen, giving her a keen glance.

“Until a way is opened for me to leave, sir,” replied Peggy.

“Which will be at my pleasure,” he rejoined. But to this she made no reply. “I am assisting Colonel Montressor, who is in charge of the defenses of the city,” he remarked presently. “When your horses are well rested you girls shall ride about with me.” 292

“We have been riding almost every day the past winter with father,” said Peggy, trying not to choke over the word. “The weather hath been so pleasant that it hath been most agreeable for riding. There are pretty rides over the hills and dales near the camp.”

“You will find them no less beautiful here,” he assured her. “And now I must go. Sir Henry will wish to see you during the day, Harriet.”

“Very well,” she answered. “And I must see about some new frocks, father. I misdoubt that my boxes will be sent after me from the rebel camp. Mr. Washington will not be so thoughtful anent the matter as Sir Henry was. I shall need a number of new ones.”

“More gowns, Harriet!” he exclaimed. “You will ruin me by your extravagance. Haven’t you anything that will do?”

“I dare say that I can make shift for a time,” she replied. “But la! what’s the use of being in His Majesty’s service unless one profits by it?” 293

“That seems to be the opinion of every one connected with it,” he observed grimly.

“Harriet,” spoke Peggy timidly, uncertain as to the manner her proposition would be received, “I can sew very well indeed. Let me bring some of thy old frocks up to the mode. ’Twill save thy father money, and in truth things are monstrously high. That was one reason mother and I joined father in camp. Thee admired that cream brocade of mine that was made from mother’s wedding gown. Let me see if I cannot do as well with some of thy finery.”

“That’s all very well for you rebels,” spoke Harriet with some scorn, “but when one is with English nobility ’tis another matter. Father, what do you think? They sometimes wore homespun at camp even to the dinners. They were always busy at something, and now here Peggy wants to

get right into sewing. Americans have queer ideas of amusement."

"If there is one thing that I admire about the Americans 'tis the manner in which they bring up their daughters," remarked her father with emphasis. "I have yet to see a girl of these colonies who was not proficient in housewifely arts. If Peggy can help you fix over some of your things let her. And do try to pattern after her thrifty ways, Harriet." 294

"Peggy is quite welcome to fix them for herself," said Harriet with a curl of her lips, and a slight shrug of her shoulders. "I shall get some new ones."

Colonel Owen sighed, but left the room without further protest. The conversation set Peggy to thinking, and observing. There was indeed luxury on every hand, but there was also great waste. Wherever the British army settled they gave themselves up to such amusements as the city afforded or they could create. Fear, fraud and incompetence reigned in every branch of the service, and between vandalism and the necessities of war New York suffered all the woes of a besieged city. In the endeavor to keep pace with his spendthrift superiors her cousin's household expenditures had run into useless excess.

Harriet plunged at once into the gaiety of the city with all the abandon of her nature, and Peggy, much against her inclination, was of necessity compelled to enter into it also. There were rides every clear day which revealed the strong defenses of the city. New York was in truth but a fortified camp. A first line of defense extended from the heights of Corlear's Hook across the island to the Hudson. There was still another line further up near the narrow neck of land below Fort Washington, while a strong garrison guarded the outlying post of Kingsbridge. Peggy soon realized that unless she was given wings she could never hope to pass the sentinels. Every afternoon in the Grand Battery along the bay a German band of hautboys played for the amusement of the officers and townspeople, and here Peggy met many of the young "macaroni" officers or feminine "toasts" of the city. She grew weary of the incessant round of entertainments. There had been much social intercourse at the camp, but it had been tempered by sobriety, and life was not wholly given up to it. Peggy resolved that she would have to occupy herself in other ways. 295

"Cousin William," she said one morning, seeking Colonel Owen in his study, where he sat looking over some papers with a frowning brow, "may I talk with thee a little?" 296

"Is it anent the matter of home?" he queried. "I can do nothing, Peggy. You will have to stay here. We can't have a rebel come into our lines and then leave, you know."

"I know," she answered sorrowfully. "I want to go home, but 'twas not of that I came to speak."

"Of what then?" he asked.

"Thee lives so well," she said with a blush at her temerity, "and yet, sir, there is so much waste. Thee could live just as well yet there need be no excess. I wish, Cousin William, that thee would let me look after the household while I am here. I care naught for the pleasurings, and 'twould occupy me until such time as thee would let me go home," she added a trifle wistfully. "I could not do so well as mother, but yet I do feel that I could manage more thriftily than thy servants."

"Peggy," he cried springing to his feet, "I hoped for this. You owe me a great deal, and 'tis as well to begin to pay some of your debt. That is why I brought you here." 297

"I owe thee anything?" she asked amazed. "How can that be?"

"Think you that I have forgotten the time spent in your house, my little cousin? Think you that I, an officer in His Majesty's service, do not resent that I was given in exchange for a dragoon?"

"If thee thinks that I owe thee anything, my cousin, I will be glad to pay it," said Peggy regarding him with wondering, innocent eyes. "I am sorry thee holds aught against me."

Colonel Owen had the grace to blush.

"Harriet hath no housewifely tastes," he said hastily, "and my son shares her extravagant habits. Between them and the necessity of maintaining a position befitting an officer, I am like to come to grief. You are a good little thing, after all, Peggy. And now let me take you about and put you in charge."

And thus it came that Peggy found herself installed at the head of her cousin's household. The position was no sinecure. She made mistakes, for never before had she been thrown so entirely upon her own resources, but she had been well trained, and the result was soon apparent in the lessened expenditures. The experience was of great benefit to her, and she grew womanly and self-reliant under the charge. Her cousin's manner too underwent a most pleasing transformation. He was kindly, and but seldom made cutting and sarcastic speeches at her expense. Upon the other hand, she was subjected to a petty tyranny from Harriet quite at variance with her former deportment. 298

And the spring passed into summer; summer waxed and waned, and in all that time there had come no word from her father or mother, nor had there been opportunity for her to send them any. That the war was going disastrously against the patriots in the South she could not but gather from the rejoicings of the British. Of the capture of Stony Point on the Hudson by the Americans she was kept in ignorance. The influx of a large body of troops and militia into the city, the surrounding of the island by forty men-of-war, told that Sir Henry Clinton feared attack. And so the summer passed.

In December the troops from Rhode Island were hastily withdrawn, the city strongly fortified, and 299

everything indicated a movement of some kind. Peggy tried to ascertain what it was, but for some time could not do so. The snow which had begun falling in November now increased in the frequency of the storms, scarcely a day passed without its fall. The cold became severe, and ice formed in rivers and bay until at length both the Hudson and Sound rivers were frozen solidly. The bay also became as terra firma, and horses, wagons and artillery passed over the ice to Staten Island.

“Is our stock of fire-wood getting low, Peggy?” inquired Colonel Owen one morning, laying down the “Rivington Gazette” which he was reading. “The paper speaks of the growing scarcity of wood, and says that if the severe weather continues we will be obliged to cut down the trees in the city for fuel.”

“I ordered some yesterday from the woodyards,” Peggy told him. She was standing by one of the long windows overlooking the frozen Hudson. How near New Jersey seemed. Men and teams were at that moment passing over the ice on their way to and from the city. How easy it looked to 300
go across. She turned to him suddenly. “How much longer am I to stay, Cousin William?” she asked.

“Till the war closes,” he said laughing. As a shadow passed over her face he added: “And that won’t be much longer, my little cousin. There is a movement on foot that is going to bring it to a close before you realize what hath happened. We have at last got your Mr. Washington in a cul de sac from which he cannot escape.”

“Where is General Washington, my cousin?” asked she quickly.

“On the heights of Morristown, in New Jersey. Nay,” he laughed as a sudden eager light flashed into her eyes, “you cannot reach him, Peggy. If you could get through the lines, which you cannot, for the guards have been increased to prevent surprise, you could not go through the forest. The snow lies four feet on the level. You could not get through the woods. But cheer up! I promise you a glimpse of your hero soon. The war is on its last legs.”

Peggy gazed after him with troubled eyes as he left the room. What was the new movement on 301
foot? Pondering the matter much she went about the duties of the day. About the middle of the forenoon an ox cart with the wood she had ordered drove into the stable yard. She uttered an exclamation of vexation as she saw the ragged heap which the driver was piling. Throwing a wrap about her she hurried into the yard where the team was.

“Friend,” she called severely, for Peggy looked well to the ways of the household, “that is not the way to unload the wood. It must be corded so that it can be measured.”

“Yes, mistress,” answered the driver, touching his hat.

Peggy started. He had given the military salute instead of the usual curtsey of the countryman. She looked at him intently. There was something strangely familiar about him, she thought, but he was so bundled up that she could only see his eyes. Whistling cheerfully the driver began to cord the wood as she directed.

“Thou art not o’erstrong for the work,” she commented as he struggled valiantly with a great 302
stick. “I will send one of the stablemen to help thee.”

“Wait, Peggy,” he said in a low tone.

“John!” almost screamed the girl. “John Drayton!”

CHAPTER XXV—THE ALERT THAT FAILED 303

“What gain we by our toils if he escape
Whom we came hither solely to subdue?”

—“Count Julian,” *Landor*.

“Be careful,” warned Drayton, letting the stick fall with a crash. “Can you come to Rachel Fenton’s house in little Queen Street this morning? We can talk there.”

“Yes, yes,” cried Peggy eagerly. “I know where it is. I will go there from market. John, my mother ——”

“Is well,” he answered quickly. “Don’t ask anything more now, but go in. ’Tis cold out here.”

“But thee?” she questioned loth to leave him.

“Oh, I’m used to it,” he responded airily. “Just send along that stableman though, Peggy. These sticks are heavy. And say! Is’t permitted to feed drivers of carts? There are not many rations just 304
now in Morristown, and I’d really like to eat once more.”

“Thee shall have all thee wants,” she assured him. “But oh, John! if they should find out who thee is! Thou art mad to venture into the city.”

“If they will wait until I’ve eaten they may do their worst,” he replied with a touch of his old jauntiness. “No; I don’t mean that, for I’ve come to take you back with me. That is, if you want to

go?”

“I do, I do,” she told him almost in tears.

“Then go right in,” he commanded. “Won’t your cousins suspect something if they see you talking like this to a countryman?”

“They will think I am scolding thee,” she said with a tremulous little laugh. “And truly thee needs it, John. I never saw a cord of wood piled so crookedly before in my life.”

“They’ll be glad to get wood in any shape if this weather keeps on, I’m thinking,” he made answer. “Now do go right in, Peggy. And don’t forget that stableman.”

Peggy hastened within doors, sent the man to help with the wood, and then tried to regain her 305
usual composure by preparing a meal for Drayton.

“The poor lad,” was her mental comment a little later as she watched the young fellow stow away the food that was placed before him. “He eats as though he had had nothing all winter.”

This was nearer truth than she dreamed. Had she but known the condition of the army at Morristown she would not have wondered at the boy’s voraciousness. She hovered about him, attending to his needs carefully, longing but not daring to ask the many questions that crowded to her lips. It would not do to risk conversation of any sort in the house. There were too many coming and going. As it was the servants gazed at her in surprise, curious as to her interest in a teamster. The meal finished, Drayton rose with a word of thanks, and crossed to the fire which blazed upon the kitchen hearth.

Peggy felt a sudden apprehension as she heard Harriet’s step in the hall. What if she should enter the kitchen? Would Drayton be safe from the keen scrutiny of her sharp eyes? The lad himself seemed to feel no uneasiness, but hung over the roaring fire of hickory logs as though reluctant 306
to leave its warmth. Making a pretense of replenishing the fire Peggy whispered:

“Go, go! Harriet is coming.” Drayton roused himself with a start, drew his wrappings close about him, and, giving her a significant look, passed through the outside door just as Harriet entered the room from the passage.

“Who was that, Peggy?” she asked sharply.

“The man with the wood,” answered Peggy busied about the fire. “I gave him something to eat.”

“Mercy, Peggy! Is it necessary to feed such riffraff? They are all a pack of rebels. No wonder father complains of expense.”

Peggy’s cheeks flamed with indignation. “Would thee send any one away in such weather without first giving him food?” she demanded. “’Twould be inhuman!”

“And I suppose thee wouldn’t treat a Britisher so,” mimicked Harriet who was plainly in a bad humor. “Did father tell you that Sir Henry Clinton was to dine here to-day?” 307

“Yes,” returned Peggy gravely. “’Tis fortunate that ’tis market day, for there are some things needed. I shall have to use the sleigh. Thee won’t mind? I cannot get into the city otherwise.”

“Oh, take it, by all means,” replied Harriet. “I wouldn’t go out in this weather for a dozen Sir Henrys. La, la! ’tis cold!” She shivered in spite of the great fire. “What doth father wish to see Sir Henry alone for?” she asked abruptly. “He told me but now that he did not desire my company after dinner. And I had learned a new piece on the harpsichord, too,” she ended pettishly.

“I know not, Harriet,” said Peggy instantly troubled. She did not doubt but that it had something to do with the movement against General Washington, but she did not utter her suspicion. “Mayhap ’tis business of moment.”

“Oh, yes; I dare say,” retorted Harriet. She yawned, and left the room.

Peggy gave the necessary orders for the dinner and then quietly arrayed herself for the marketing. She was allowed a certain freedom of movement, and went into the city about 308
business of the household without question. With scrupulous conscientiousness she attended to the marketing first, and then bidding the coachman wait for her, went rapidly to Little Queen Street on foot.

She had met with but few Quakers. They were regarded as neutrals, but Colonel Owen disliked them as a sect and had forbidden her to hold communication with them. Still Peggy knew where many of them lived, and among these was Rachel Kenton. It was a quaint Dutch house, easily found. New York was not so large as Philadelphia at this time, and Peggy hastened up the stoop with eagerness, her heart beating with delight at the prospect of at last hearing from her dear ones.

A pleasant-faced, sweet-mannered woman responded to her knock, and ushered her at once into a room just off the sitting-room, where Drayton sat awaiting her. She ran to him with outstretched hands.

“Now I can tell thee how glad I am to see thee,” she cried. “And oh, John, do tell me of my mother! And father! How are they?”

“Both are well,” he answered, “but they have grieved over your going away. Why did you leave 309
camp, Peggy?”

“’Twas because of Harriet,” she told him. “She was a spy, John. They would have hanged her had

they found out that it was she who wrote that note. And oh, what did General Washington say when he found me gone? It hath been so long since then, and never a word could I hear."

"Well, he was pretty much cut up over it, and so were we all. Your mother thought that Harriet must be at the bottom of the matter, and so did I. Her boxes were searched, and some notes found that proved she was a spy. Then, too, we made that fellow confess to everything he knew. You remember him, Peggy? He accused you."

"Yes," answered Peggy. "I remember, John. I can never forget how I felt when he accused me of being the girl who gave him that letter. And it wasn't the same one at all."

"We got at the whole affair right well," continued Drayton. "What we could not understand was the fact that you came on to New York with your cousin. Why did you?" 310

"I couldn't help it," she said. "They brought me by force. I begged to go back, but they wouldn't let me." Hereupon she told him the whole story, ending with: "And Cousin William says that he had a score to settle with me—and that was the reason he wanted me to come. John, thee will tell the general that I could not help coming?"

"Yes," he said, with difficulty restraining his indignation. "Peggy, Harriet would not have been hanged. They might have sent her out of the lines, or even made her a prisoner, but they would not have hanged her. Not but what she would have deserved it just as much as that poor fellow who was hanged agreeable to his sentence, but being a girl would have saved her."

"But thee said that it went hard with spies, whether they were men, women, or girls even," objected she. "And General Washington used almost the same words."

"And so it does," he replied, "but there are other punishments than hanging. Never mind that now, Peggy. Let us plan to get away. I must take the ox cart back into Jersey this afternoon. I have a pass for one only, but I am to take back salt, coffee and flour. There is an empty sack, and if you will hide within it we may be able to pass you as merchandise. Will you try it, Peggy?" 311

"I will do anything," she declared excitedly. "It hath been so long! So long, John, since I have seen mother that I am willing to attempt anything."

"Wrap up well," he advised her. "'Tis terrible weather, and be somewhere among the trees as I come past the house. It will be about half-past four, as it grows dark then, and the bags will not be so sharply scrutinized. Once the cart is home we will have to run our chances of getting to Morristown."

"John," she cried as a sudden thought came to her, "there is some movement on foot against the general. I did not think to tell thee before. I know not what it is."

Drayton looked up quickly.

"I wish we knew what it was," he said. "There have been signs of an action on the part of the British, but we have been unable to obtain an inkling of what it could be. I would like right well to know."

"And so would I," said she. 312

"Go now," he said rising. "You must not let them suspect there is anything afoot, Peggy. I will move about in the city and see what I can find out. Be sure to wrap up."

"I will," she told him. "I hate to let thee go."

"'Tis only for a little while," he answered. "'Twill be a hard journey for you, Peggy, but your mother is at the end of it."

"Yes, yes," she cried. "Mother is at the end."

Unable to speak further she turned and left him. The day was extremely cold, and as she entered the house after the drive, and felt the warmth of the fire, she became aware of a delicious drowsiness that was stealing over her.

"This will never do," she exclaimed, trying to shake off the feeling. "I must keep awake." But try as she would her eyelids grew heavier until finally she sought Harriet in the drawingroom.

"Harriet," she said, "will thee serve the dinner? I am so sleepy from the drive that I must lie down a few moments. I know right well that I should not give up, but——"

"Nonsense," cried Harriet crossly; "go lie down an you will, Peggy. One would think to hear you talk that dinner could not be served without you. 'Tis provoking the airs you give yourself! I dare say you will not be missed." 313

"Thank thee, Harriet," answered Peggy. "Thee will not find it irksome. 'Tis about ready." The tired girl slipped down to the now empty drawing-room.

"I fear me I must hide if I want a minute to myself," she thought, gazing about the large room in search of a safe retreat. "And I must have my wits about me to help John. If I can but close my eyes for a moment, just a moment, I will be in proper trim." Presently she spied the large easy chair much affected by Colonel Owen, and she ran toward it with an exclamation of delight.

"'Tis the very thing!" she cried, drawing it to the most remote corner of the room, and turning it about so that it faced the wall. "Now let them find me if they can." And so saying she ensconced herself in its capacious recesses, and almost instantly fell asleep.

"And you think the plan will not miscarry?" came the voice of the commander-in-chief of the 314

British forces in America.

Peggy awoke with a start. Was she dreaming or did she in truth hear her cousin say:

“There is not the least chance of it, Sir Henry. The rebel general hath his quarters full two miles from his main army, and owing to the cold and the snow no danger is apprehended; so his guards are trifling. We can easily slip upon him and be away with him before mishap can befall us. Once we have possession of his person the whole rebellion falls to the ground. It all depends upon him.”

“True,” was the reply in musing tones. “Well, colonel, I have placed the flower of the army at your disposal. But let this alert[3] succeed and it shall be brought to His Majesty’s notice that ’tis you alone to whom honor is due. ’Tis my hope that ’twill not fail.”

“It cannot,” replied Colonel Owen in eager tones. “We leave at nightfall by way of Newark. Just beyond Newark on the Morris turnpike lives one Amos Henderson, who is favorable to us, and much laments this broil against the king. He it is who will have a guide ready to take us to the 315
heights of Morristown. In twenty-four hours, sir, I will bring the rebel general in person to your quarters.“

“I see not how it can fail,” remarked Sir Henry. “The utmost secrecy hath been maintained concerning the matter. But did you not say that dinner was served? That, sir, is a function with which nothing short of a rebel attack should interfere. The plan of the new works, which Montressor says you have, can be discussed afterward.”

“Come, then,” said the colonel.

Peggy slipped from the chair and running up-stairs quickly to her own room, sat down to think.

“I must not go with John,” was her decision. “He must get to the general without delay. They said ’twould end the war if he were taken. And it would. It would! I wonder what the time is?”

It was but half-past two, and it seemed to the anxious girl as though four o’clock, which was the time for Drayton’s appearance, would never come. But at last she heard the clock in the hall 316
chime out the hour, and Peggy arose, wrapped herself warmly, and left the house quietly. The snow was still falling. The numerous trees on the wide-spreading lawn, as well as the huge snow-drifts, effectually hid the road from view of the mansion.

Peggy had scarcely taken her position near a bare thicket when she heard the crunch of wheels over the snow, and soon the ox cart appeared down the road. Drayton was whistling, and to all appearance was the countryman he seemed. Peggy awaited him with impatience.

“John,” she cried as the lad drew up opposite her, “John, there is an alert planned to take General Washington. Cousin William starts at nightfall for Morristown with a force to accomplish it.”

“What?” exclaimed he. Peggy repeated her statement, and then quickly told him the entire affair.

“And thee must lose no time,” she said. “Go right on, John, quickly.”

“And you, Peggy?” he cried. “Jump in and let us take the risk of getting through together.” 317

“No,” she said. “Thee must stop for nothing. ’Twould hinder thee in getting to the general. Now go, John. ’Twill not be long ere the troops gather here.”

“But to leave you, Peggy,” he exclaimed. “I like it not. Were it not for the chief I would not. It may be best. As you say there is need for haste, but I will come again for you.”

“No, no; ’tis too full of risk,” she said. “Go, John, go! I fear for thee every moment that thee stays.”

“I am going,” he said sorrowfully. “Tell me by which road this alert goes?”

“To Newark, and then by the Morris turnpike. They get a guide at Amos Henderson’s,” she told him.

“Good-bye,” he said. “I will come again for you, Peggy.”

“Good-bye, John,” answered Peggy hardly able to speak. “And tell my mother—my mother, John ——”

“Yes,” he said. They clasped hands. “Don’t worry, Peggy. This will be the alert that failed.”

Peggy waited until she could no longer hear his cheery whistle down the road and then stole back 318
into the house.

Drayton was right. Four and twenty hours later the most disgruntled lot of Britishers that the city ever beheld returned, fatigued and half frozen from their fruitless quest. The famous alert from which so much was hoped had failed.

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[3] “Alert,” an old word meaning an attack.

CHAPTER XXVI—THE BATTLE WITH THE ELEMENTS 319

“Southward with fleet of ice
Sailed the corsair Death;
Wild and fast blew the blast
And the east wind was his breath.”

—Longfellow.

“There is but one explanation to the whole thing,” growled Colonel Owen the next morning. With the two girls for an audience he was voicing his disappointment at the failure of the alert, and incidentally nursing a frost-bitten foot. “And that is that the guide purposely led us astray.”

“But why a guide at all, father?” questioned Harriet. “The highway is easily followed.”

“’Tis the snow,” he explained irritably. “All roads are buried under four or more feet of it. Landmarks are obliterated and the forest but a trackless waste. ’Tis no wonder the fellow lost his way, though, methinks. ’Twas as though he knew our errand, and kept us floundering among the drifts purposely.” 320

“Belike he did,” observed Harriet. “What with Peggy feeding all the rabble that comes along ’tis small wonder that your plots and plans become known to the rebels. I bethought me the other day when she had that teamster in the kitchen that he was a spy. Now I make no doubt of it.”

“What’s all this?” demanded her father sharply. “What teamster are you talking about, Harriet?”

“’Twas the man who brought the wood, Cousin William,” explained Peggy, trying to speak quietly. “Harriet objected at the time to his being fed, but ’twould have been unkind not to give him cheer when ’twas so cold.”

“But that is no reason why you should talk with him,” sneered Harriet. “I saw that parley you held when he was throwing off the wood.”

“Did you talk to him, Peggy?” Colonel Owen regarded her keenly.

“Why, yes,” she answered. “I went out to scold him because he was piling the wood in such a way that it could not be measured.” 321

“There was naught amiss about that,” he remarked with a relieved expression. “Nor about the food either, if that was all there was to it.”

“But was it all?” queried Harriet. “The servants said that Peggy was over-solicitous anent the fellow.”

“Peggy!” Colonel Owen faced the maiden abruptly. “Let us have this matter settled at once. You usually speak truth. Do so in this instance, I beg of you. Was the wood and feeding the man all there was to the affair?”

Peggy did not reply.

“There is more then,” he said. “Your silence speaks for you. I demand now to know if this fellow was responsible for the failure of our plan to captivate the rebel general?”

But Peggy was not going to betray Drayton’s disguise if she could help it, and neither would she speak an untruth. So she met her kinsman’s glance with one as direct as his own as she answered, “I am to blame for thy plan going amiss, Cousin William.”

“You?” he exclaimed incredulously. “Why, you knew naught of it. I was careful that even Harriet should not know it.” 322

“I was in the drawing-room,” she told him boldly, “when thee and thy commander were discussing the plan. I heard the whole plot. While the dinner was being served I slipped out and sent word to the general.”

“By whom?” he asked controlling his anger with difficulty. “By whom did you send word?”

“That, sir, I will not tell,” responded she resolutely.

“And do you know what this action hath cost me?” he thundered, livid with rage. “A knighthood and fortune. Was not the account long enough betwixt us that you must add this to it? To come here and play the spy in mine own house. ’Tis monstrous!”

“I did not come here of my own accord,” she reminded him becoming very pale. “If I have played the spy ’tis no more than thy daughter did for many months in our house. I will gladly relieve thee of my presence at any time that thee will let me go.”

“You shall not go—now or at any time,” he stormed, his voice shaking in its fury. “Moreover I shall put it out of your power to work any further harm here. Sir Henry Clinton leaves for the South in a few days. I shall go with him, and take you both with me.” 323

“Oh, father!” wailed Harriet. “Not me?”

“You too,” he answered. “You and this marplot of a girl, who hath spoiled a most feasible plan of ending the rebellion.” He glared at Peggy for a moment with a look that made her tremble and then stalked out of the room.

“Just see what you have done, Peggy Owen,” cried Harriet, her eyes ablaze with wrath. “Now we’ll have to go I know not how far away, to some old place where there is no fun. Just mind your own affairs after this, will you?”

“No,” replied Peggy stoutly, though her heart swelled at the thought of going upon a journey that would take her further away from home. Like most girls of the period she was hazy about the geography of the country, and the South seemed an indefinite somewhere a long way off. “No, Harriet, my affairs are those of the rebels, as thee calls them. If at any time I hear aught planned either against them or the general, and ’tis in my power to warn them, I tell thee frankly that I shall do so.” 324

“I shall go right to father with that,” cried Harriet, and in turn she flounced out of the room.

In spite of her brave words, however, Peggy’s tears fell like rain as she slipped down to the stable and flung her arms about Star’s neck.

“Oh, Star, Star!” she sobbed. “I’ll never see mother again, I fear me. Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?”

Sir Henry Clinton was to set sail for Savannah, Georgia, which had fallen into the hands of the British in December of the preceding year. The province, after being overrun by the army in an incursion of savage warfare, appeared to be restored to the crown, and now Charleston was to be taken and South Carolina restored to its allegiance by the same method. North Carolina and Virginia were to follow in turn, and the campaign in the South concluded by a triumphal march back through Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, until Washington would be between the two British armies. Then, with an attack from New York simultaneous with one from the rear, the Continentals would be swept out of existence. This, in brief, was the British plan of campaign for the ensuing year, and the English commander-in-chief was setting forth for its accomplishment. 325

Colonel Owen’s determination to go with his chief seemed to grow firmer the more Harriet pleaded with him to stay, and the day after Christmas they set sail in the schooner “Falcon.” Reinforced by Admiral Arbuthnot with new supplies of men and stores from England the British were jubilantly sure of success, and set forth with their transports under convoy of five ships of the line.

“We shall have our horses with us, anyway,” declared Harriet, who brightened up wonderfully once they were under way, and addressing Peggy with the first gleam of good humor that she had shown since it had been decided that they should accompany her father. “I saw to it that they were sent aboard with the cavalry horses, on one of the transports. I dare say there will be a chance for rides. At any rate ’twill not be so cold as it hath been in New York.” 326

“I suppose not,” agreed Peggy sadly. She was calling all her resolution to aid her to bear this new trial.

The early part of the voyage was extremely fortunate. The sea was smooth, the sky clear, the air sharp but kindly. To Peggy’s surprise she was not at all sick, and her spirits rose in spite of her sorrow at her separation from her mother. With the closing in of the night of the fourth day out, however, they fell in with foul winds and heavy weather. The wind began to whirl, and the sea to lift itself and dash spray over the schooner until the decks were as glassy as a skating pond. The temperature fell rapidly. All day Sunday the ships went on under this sort of weather which was not at all unusual for the time of year, but the next day the weather began to quiet, and the waves sank gradually to a long swell through which the vessels went with ease.

The whole surface of the sea was like a great expanse of molten silver which shimmered and sparkled under the rays of the wintry sun. The prospect was now for a smooth voyage, and the sailormen scraped the ice from rail and deck, and the passengers who had been confined to the cabin now came on deck and raced about like children under the influence of the pure air. The sky was very clear above, but all around the horizon a low haze lay upon the water. 327

“Isn’t this glorious, Peggy?” cried Harriet dancing about the deck like a wind sprite. “After all, there is nothing like the sea.”

“’Tis wonderful,” answered Peggy with awe in her tone. The vast spread of the waters, the immensity of the sky, the intense silence through which the creaking of the boats as they swung at the davits, and the straining of the shrouds as the ship rolled sounded loud and clear, all appealed to her sense of the sublime.

“I hope ’twill be as fine as this all the way to Georgia,” said Harriet. “And that seems to be the prospect.”

The captain of the vessel, a bluff Englishman, was passing at the moment and caught the last remark. He paused beside the maidens.

“It won’t be fine long,” he declared gruffly. “With a ground swell and a sinking temperature always look for squalls. Look there at the north!” The haze on the horizon to the north was rather thicker than elsewhere, and a few thin streaky clouds straggled across the clear, cold heavens. It told nothing to the girls, but the skipper’s face grew grave, and he hurried forward to give some commands. 328

“Furl topsails!” he shouted to the mate, “and have the mainsails reefed down!”

“Ay, ay, sir,” came the response, and instantly the men began hauling at the halliards, or sprang to the yards above to tuck away the great sails making all snug for the coming storm.

Even Peggy, unused to the sea as she was, could see that a storm was about to burst upon them. The north was now one great rolling black cloud with an angry ragged fringe which bespoke the violence of the wind that drove it. The whole great mass was sweeping onward with majestic rapidity, darkening the ocean beneath it.

“Get below there,” shouted the captain as he suddenly caught sight of the two girls still standing on deck watching the approach of the storm with fascinated eyes. “Get below, I say! D’ye want to be blowed away? Here she comes!” 329

As he spoke the wind broke in all its fury. The schooner heeled over until her lee rail touched the water, and lay so for a moment in a smother of foam. Gradually she rose a little, staggered and trembled like a living thing, and then plunged away through the storm.

It was a wild and dreary night that followed. Shut in the dark of the cabin Peggy and Harriet clung to each other, or to lockers, to keep from being dashed across the floor of the tossing vessel. All night long there was no chance for sleep. Every moment it seemed as though the ship must go down at the next onslaught of the waves.

“I like not to be mewed up like this,” objected Harriet when there came a chance for speech. “I like the feel of the wind and the hail and the spray.”

“Is thee not afraid, Harriet?” questioned Peggy.

“I am, down here,” answered her cousin. “I can stand any danger best that I can face. But they will not let us up. We might be swept away even if we could stand. And listen to the shouts, Peggy. There must be something amiss.” 330

And so on all through the long night. The dawn broke at last and brought with it a slight abatement of the tempest, but with the lessening gale came a new form of assault. The air was colder. A heavy fog rolled up and through it came a blinding snow-storm, fairly choking the deck of the ship.

For three days the girls were confined to the cabin, with but biscuits to nibble on. The fourth the wind fell at last, leaving the vessel rudderless and dismasted, and heaving on vast billows.

“There is but one hope for us,” said Colonel Owen as he explained the damage to the girls, “and that is to be picked up by another vessel.”

“Is it so bad as that, father?” questioned his daughter.

“Yes,” he answered gloomily.

But over the inky shroud of the ocean white capped and furious there shone no sign of a sail. The snow had ceased falling, but it was bitterly cold. The fifth and sixth days they tossed helplessly, but on the seventh day Peggy turned to her cousin with a startled query. 331

“Harriet,” she cried, “does thee hear that throbbing sound? What is it?”

Harriet Owen paled as she listened. “That, Peggy,” she said after a moment, “is the noise of the pumps. The ship hath sprung a leak.”

At this moment Colonel Owen came from the deck. He was visibly pale, and much troubled in manner. “Wrap yourselves as warmly as possible,” he advised them. “’Tis but a question of time now ere we must take to the boats, and there is no telling to what ye may be subjected before reaching land, if in truth we ever tread foot on solid ground again. Hasten!”

His warning was well timed; for, as he ceased speaking, there came hoarse shouts from above, a rush of hurrying feet, and the chugging of the pumps stopped. He ran up the hatchway, and was back almost instantly. “The boats are being lowered,” he informed them. “Throw what you can about you and come. If we dally we may be left behind. Men become beasts in a time like this.” 332

The girls obeyed him with the utmost haste. They were both colorless, but composed. On deck a wild scene was being enacted. The ship no longer rose to the waves, and even to an inexperienced eye was settling. That it was time to lower the boats was plain to be seen. The captain was trying to preserve something like order among the crew, but the hour for discipline had gone by.

“Women first,” he was crying in trumpet tones. “Men, remember your wives and daughters. Would ye have them left as ye are leaving these?”

But over the side of the vessel the men scrambled with fierce cries and imprecations, paying no heed either to his commands or pleadings. They swarmed into the boats, fighting for places like wild animals. The frail barks went down to the water loaded until the gunwales were lapped by the smallest waves. The skipper turned to Colonel Owen.

“The dingey is left, sir,” he said. “If you will help me to defend it from the rest of these brutes, we may be able to get these girls into it.” 333

“I will do my utmost,” rejoined the colonel. “Harriet, do you and Peggy stand behind me. When the boat is lowered be ready to get into it as soon as the captain speaks.”

Colonel Owen faced the few remaining men with drawn pistols as the boat was let down. The first mate took his place, and stood ready to receive the maidens.

“Go, Harriet,” said her father. But to Peggy’s amazement her cousin turned to her, crying, “You first, Peggy! You first!”

“But,” cried Peggy her heart flooded with sudden warmth at this unlooked-for solicitude, “I cannot leave thee, Harriet. I——”

“Stop that nonsense!” exclaimed Colonel Owen gruffly. “We have no time for it. Get into the boat at once.”

Without further comment Peggy permitted herself to be handed down into the boat, and as she reached it in safety she looked expectantly up for Harriet to follow. At that moment came a hoarse cry from the skipper.

"Cast off, Mr. Davy! Cast off! You'll be swamped."

The mate pulled away just as half a dozen frantic seamen leaped from the deck toward the boat. The swirl of the waters caught it, turning it round and round by the force. With a great effort he succeeded in sending it out of the eddy just in time to avoid being drawn under by the drowning seamen. Again making a strenuous effort to get beyond their reach he sent the dingey scudding to westward, was caught by a current, and carried further away from the vessel.

"What is it?" asked Peggy as she caught a glimpse of his whitening face.

"God help them," broke from him. "We are caught in the current and can't get back to the 'Falcon.'"

THE DINGEY WAS CAUGHT BY A CURRENT

CHAPTER XXVII—A HAVEN AFTER THE STORM

"Safe through the war her course the vessel steers,
The haven gained, the pilot drops his fears."

—*Shirley.*

"We must," burst from Peggy, springing up wildly. "Oh, friend, can't thee do something? We must not leave them."

"Sit still," commanded the mate sharply. "Why, look you! We can't even see the 'Falcon' for the fog."

It was true. Already the hapless "Falcon" had been swallowed up by the dense veil of vapor. It was as if the doomed vessel had been cut off from all the open sea, and its fate hidden in the clinging curtain of black obscurity.

The girl uttered a low cry, and sank back to her place in the sheets covering her face with her hands. Colonel Owen and Harriet had been unkind. They had been selfish almost to cruelty in their treatment of her, but in this hour of what she believed to be certain death to them she forgot everything but that they were kinspeople.

The sea was running very high. Now that they were so near its surface they felt its full power. It had appeared stupendous when they were on the deck of the schooner, but now the great billows hurled them up and down, and tossed and buffeted them as though the boat was a plaything. Vainly the mate tried to steady it with the oars.

A long time Peggy sat so absorbed in grief for her cousins that she was oblivious to the peril of the situation. At length, however, she looked up, and the dreadful isolation and danger of the position appalled her. Only that little boat between them and the great Atlantic.

“I am cold,” she exclaimed, when she could bear it no longer. “Sir,” to the mate, who was making tremendous effort with the oars, “is there naught that will keep me from freezing?”

“No,” answered he shortly, turning his set face toward her for a moment. Its tense lines relaxed at sight of the girlish figure. “Stay! I have it. Come, and row a while. You will be wetter than ever, but ’twill warm you a bit.” 338

Without a question Peggy gladly took the place by his side, and began to scull as vigorously as her numbed fingers would permit with the oar he gave her. She was not of much assistance, but the exercise served to warm her chilled frame, and to divert her attention from their peril.

In this manner the day went on, the wind died down, and the sea fell to a low, glassy, foam-flecked roll, while overhead brooded the inky sky, and round them was the leaden mist of the enveloping fog. Suddenly the mate stopped rowing, and raised his head as though listening.

“It’s land,” he shouted. “Land, to the westward!” He listened again intently, and added solemnly: “And it’s breakers too, God help us!”

Peggy listened breathlessly. The air was full of sound, a low, deep roar, like the roll of a thousand wheels, the tramp of endless armies, or—what it was—the thunder of a mighty surge upon a pebbly ridge. Louder and nearer grew the sound. The mate’s face whitened, and Peggy sat erect, full of terror at the unknown danger that confronted them. 339

“I must pull,” he cried, sweeping her back to her place in the sheets. “I must pull,” he cried again as the fog lifted and the dim outline of a shore line became visible. “It’s a race with death, little girl, but we may be the victors.”

With mighty strokes he sent the dingey ahead into the boiling surf. A great wave caught the little shallop upon its broad bosom and flung it upon the reef which lay concealed in the foam. There was a horrible rending crash as the stout keel snapped asunder, while a second wave swept over it, sweeping out the struggling occupants, and bearing them onward.

Peggy knew naught of swimming, and so made no attempt to strike out. She felt the water surging into her ears like a torrent of ice. She felt that she was sinking down, down as if a great weight held her remorselessly. This was death, she thought, and as the pain in her lungs increased, visions passed swiftly through her brain. Where was the mate, she wondered. A race with death, he had said. And death was the victor after all. Her mother’s face flashed before her. She was dying and she would never know. And Sally! And Betty! And Robert! What times they had had! Would they grieve, when they knew? But they would never know. 340

There was no hope. She must be resigned, came the thought, and so she ceased to struggle just as a huge roller came surging over the outlying reef. It caught her and bore her onward on its crest. Peggy closed her eyes.

“The pore child! She’s coming to at last,” sounded a kindly voice, and Peggy opened her eyes and gazed into the anxious orbs of an elderly woman who was bending over her. “There now, you pore dear! Don’t stir. Just drink this, and go to sleep.”

A cup of something hot was held to her lips. She drank it obediently and sank back too utterly exhausted to even wonder where she was. She was in a warm, dry bed. There was a caress in the touch of the hands that ministered to her which penetrated through the stupor which was stealing over her, and with a sigh of content, she turned over and slept. 341

The recollections of the next few days were always thereafter dim to her mind. She knew that an elderly woman, somewhat rough-looking, was in the room frequently, but to speak or to move her limbs was quite impossible. But on the fourth day she was better. The fifth she could speak, move, rise in bed and turn, and when the woman brought some gruel in the middle of the day Peggy ate it with a relish. She felt strong and revived, and a desire for action stirred her. She wished to rise, and sat up suddenly.

“I believe if thee will help me I will get up,” she said.

“Sakes alive, child! air you able?” cried the woman in alarm.

“Yes,” said Peggy stoutly. “And I have troubled thee greatly, I fear.”

“Why, you little storm-tossed bird,” exclaimed the woman, “don’t you go for to call it trouble. Me and Henry just feel as though you was sent to us. Well, if you will get up, here are your clothes.” She brought Peggy her own things, clean and dry, and proceeded to help her dress. “There, you do look better now you are dressed. Let me help you to the kitchen.” 342

She put her arm about the maiden, and drew her gently across the room to the one beyond which was kitchen and living-room as well. It was a large room with a sanded floor clean scoured, a high backed settle, a deal table, a dresser with pewter plates ranged in rows, reflecting the redness and radiance of a glowing fire in a huge fireplace. The woman bustled about hospitably.

“You must have something to eat,” she declared. “You’ve had naught but gruel for so long that you must be hungry.”

“I am,” replied Peggy, watching her in a maze of content. Presently she sat up as a thought came to her. “Friend,” she cried, “how came I here?”

“Why, Henry brought you,” responded the woman. “It was after the big storm. We ain’t seen such a storm in years. Henry’s my husband. He’s a fisherman, as mayhap you’ve surmised. That is, he fishes for food, but I reckon you might call him a wrecker too,” she added with a smile. “Well, as I was saying, he was down on the beach when you was washed up by the waves. He thought you was dead at first, but when you got up, and tried to walk he just ran over to you as you fell and brought you right up to the house. Land! but we thought you was never coming to! But you did, and now you’ll be all right in a day or two.” 343

“How good thee has been,” said Peggy gratefully. “Why, thou and thy husband have saved my life. I was so cold in the water and I—I was drowning. Then that terrible wave threw me——” She paused shuddering at the remembrance.

“Dear heart, don’t think about it,” exclaimed the good dame hastening to her. “Here, child, eat this piece of chicken. It will hearten you up more than anything. After a bit mayhap you can tell me about yourself. But not a word until every bite of chicken is gone.”

Peggy smiled at the good woman’s insistence, but did not refuse the chicken. Her appetite was awakened and keen, and she ate the piece with such a relish that her hostess was well pleased. “There now! you look better already,” she declared. “Henry will be glad to see it. He takes a heap of interest in the folks he saves. I reckon he’s saved more lives than any man on the coast of North Carolina.” 344

“Is this North Carolina?” asked Peggy.

“Yes; and this is Fisherman’s Inlet, near the Cape Fear River. What ship did you say you was on?”

“’Twas the schooner ‘Falcon,’ from New York,” Peggy told her. “It was one of the vessels with Sir Henry Clinton, who set forth to attack Charleston.”

The woman’s face darkened ominously. “And you air a Tory, of course, being as you air a Quaker and with a British ship?” she said questioningly.

“I? Oh, no, no!” cried Peggy quickly. “Why, my father is David Owen of the Pennsylvania Light Horse. He is with the Continental army. I am a patriot, but I was captured and taken to New York City, where I have been since the last day of February of last year. It’s nearly a year,” she ended, her lips quivering. 345

“You don’t say!” ejaculated the woman. “Then you must be a prisoner of war?”

“I know not that I would be truly a prisoner of war,” answered Peggy, “for ’twas my father’s cousin who captured me. I will tell thee all about it.”

“You pore child,” exclaimed the woman, who ceased her work as Peggy unfolded her story, and listened with wide-eyed attention. “What a lot you’ve been through! I’m glad that you’re not one of them English.”

“And is thee a Whig?” asked Peggy.

“As I said, we air fisher folks, and don’t mingle in politics. We don’t wish harm to nobody, English or any other. Why, even though we air wreckers we always pray for the poor sailors in a storm, but we pray too that if there air any wrecks they will be washed up on Fisherman’s Inlet.”

A ripple of laughter rose to Peggy’s lips, but she checked it instantly. “How can I laugh,” she reproached herself, “when ’tis but a few days since I was on the ship? And the others have all perished, I doubt not.”

“Don’t think about it,” advised the dame. “Laugh if you can. A light heart is the only way to bear trouble. ’Tis a just punishment that they should be drowned.” 346

“But if Harriet had not made me go first I would not have been here,” said Peggy her voice growing tender at the mention of her cousin. All the old love and admiration for Harriet had returned with that act.

“I wonder,” she added presently, “if ’twould be possible for me to get to Philadelphia from here?”

“Philadelphia! I am afraid not, child. You don’t know the way, and I doubt if ’twould be safe to try it. Get strong first, and mayhap something will turn up that will help you to get there.”

“Yes,” said Peggy. “I must get strong first.”

CHAPTER XXVIII—A TASTE OF PARTISAN WARFARE 347

> “It was too late to check the wasting brand,
> And Desolation reap’d the famish’d land;
> The torch was lighted, and the flame was spread,
> And Carnage smiled upon her daily dead.”
>
> —“Count Lara,” *Byron*.

While they were conversing the fisherman himself entered. He was a man of middle age, much

bronzed by exposure to weather, but with a kindly gleam in his keen gray eyes. Peggy rose as he entered, and started forward to meet him.

“Thy wife tells me that I owe thee my life, sir,” she said, extending her hand. “I don’t know how to tell thee how much I thank thee.”

“Then don’t try,” he replied, taking her little hand awkwardly. “Now don’t stand up, my girl. You’re like a ghost. Ain’t she, Mandy?”

“Yes,” responded his wife. “And what do you think, Henry? She was on one of the ships that 348
started from New York with Sir Henry Clinton for Georgia. They intend making another attempt to take Charleston.”

The fisherman’s brow contracted in a frown. “So they air a-going to bring the war down here?” he remarked thoughtfully. “That’s bad news. Was there many ships?”

“Five of the line, and I don’t know how many transports with men, ordnance and horses,” answered Peggy.

“Mayhap they’re all foundered by that storm,” exclaimed the dame. “’Twould be a mercy if they was.”

“Mandy,” spoke her husband, in a warning tone.

“She’s a Whig, Henry Egan, and her father’s in the Continental army,” explained the good woman. “And what’s more, she’s a prisoner of war, too. Jest you tell him about it.”

And Peggy told again all her little story. When she spoke of the time spent in the camp of the main army, the fisherman became intensely interested.

“And so you know General Washington?” he remarked smiling. “How does he look? We all air 349
mighty proud of him down here. You see he comes from this part of the country. Jest over here in Virginny. A next door neighbor, you might call him.”

And Peggy told all she could about General Washington, about such of his generals as she had met, the movements of the army, and everything connected with her stay in New York. Nor was this the last telling.

North Carolina, while intensely patriotic as a whole and responding liberally to the country’s demand for troops and supplies, had heretofore had but one slight incursion from the British. For this reason they were eager to hear from one who had been in the midst of the main armies, and who seemed to come as a direct messenger from that far-off Congress whose efforts to sustain a central government were becoming so woefully weak.

So Peggy found herself the centre of a little circle, composed of true and tried Whigs whose leaning toward the cause had more than once brought them into conflict with neighboring Tories.

The cottage was situated on a small inlet of the ocean a few miles east of the Cape Fear River. A 350
little distance from the main shore a low yellow ridge of sand hills stretched like a serpent, extending nearly the full length of the state on the ocean side, and making the coast the dread of mariners. These reefs were called “the banks.” The cottage was an unpretentious structure, consisting of but three rooms: the living-room or kitchen, a little chamber for Peggy, and a larger one occupied by the fisherman and his wife. But the fisherman had grown rich from wreckage. He had a number of beef cattle, and herded “banker ponies” by the hundred.

Peggy grew fond of him and of the wife, and assisted in all the duties of the simple household. And so the time went by, and then there came to them rumors of the British fleet which had at last landed its forces for the besieging of Charleston.

Anxiously the result was awaited. North Carolina rushed men to the city to help in its defense, for if that fell it was but a question of time until their own state would suffer invasion. At last, Henry Egan betook himself to Wilmington, thirty miles distant, for news. On his return his brow was 351
overcast with melancholy.

“Charleston is taken,” he announced in gloomy tones. “The whole of General Lincoln’s army air prisoners. The British air overrunning all South Carolina, plundering and burning the house of every Whig, and trying to force every man in the state to join their army. The Tories in both states air rising, and I tell you, wife, it won’t be long until our time comes.”

“I am afraid so,” answered Mistress Egan, turning pale. “Oh, Henry, I wish we was up to mother’s at Charlotte. We would be safe up there.”

“I don’t know, Mandy. It seems as though there was no place safe from the British. It might be best to go up there, but I’d never reach there with the ponies. The people air a-hoping that Congress will send us some help from the main army. The state hasn’t anything now but milish. ’Tis said in Wilmington that Sir Henry returns soon to New York, leaving Lord Cornwallis to complete the subjugation of the South. He publicly boasts that North Carolina will receive him 352
with open arms.”

“Belike the Tories will,” remarked the good dame sarcastically. “I reckon he’ll find a few that won’t be so overjoyed. Mayhap too they’ll give him a welcome of powder and ball.”

But the reports that came to them from time to time of the atrocities committed by the British in the sister state were far from reassuring. Events followed each other in rapid succession. Georgetown, Charleston, Beaufort and Savannah were the British posts on the sea; while Augusta, Ninety-six, and Camden were those of the interior. From these points parties went

forth, gathering about them profligate ruffians, and roamed the state indulging in rapine, and ready to put patriots to death as outlaws. The Tories in both the Carolinas rose with their masters, and followed their lead in plundering and arson.

"I do wish, Henry," said his wife, "that you would sell off all the beef cattle and marsh ponies that you have. We'll be getting a visit along with the rest of the folks. I reckon, if you don't." 353

"Everything is all right," cried Henry who had just returned from Wilmington. "Tidings jest come that Congress has sent General Gates to take command of the Southern army, and they say he's advancing as fast as he can."

"Well, it wouldn't do no hurt to get rid of the critters anyway," persisted his wife. "A lot of harm can be done before Gates gets here."

"I tell you everything is all right now," said Henry exultingly. "Just let Horatio Gates get a whack at Cornwallis, and he'll Burgoyne him jest as he did the army at Saratoga."

"I wish it was General Arnold who was coming," said Peggy. She had never felt confidence in General Gates since John Drayton had related his version of that battle. The exposure of the "Conway Cabal" had lessened her faith in him also, as it had that of many people. "General Arnold was the real hero of Saratoga. He and Daniel Morgan; so I've heard."

"Well, I ain't saying nothing against Arnold," was the fisherman's answer. "He's a brave man, dashing and brilliant; but if Congress hadn't thought that Gates was the man for us they wouldn't have sent him down." 354

Peggy said no more. The climax came in August when, utterly routed at Camden, Gates fled alone from his army into Charlotte. A few days later, Sumter, who now commanded the largest force that remained in the Carolinas, was surprised by Colonel Tarleton as he bivouacked on the Wateree, and put to rout by that officer. Elated by his success Cornwallis prepared for his northward march, and in furtherance of his plans inaugurated a reign of terror.

One night in the latter part of August Peggy could not sleep. It was very warm, and she rose and went out on the little porch where she stood trying to get a breath of air. The sea moved with a low murmur, the surf being very light.

"How warm it is," she mused. "Even the sea is quiet to-night. How different it is down here from my own Philadelphia. Is mother there now, I wonder? Or would she be at Strawberry Hill? I wish ——"

She bent her head abruptly in a listening attitude. The tramp of a horse approaching in a gallop was plainly heard. But a few moments elapsed before a man, who in the starlight she could see was armed, dashed up and drew rein before the cottage calling loudly: 355

"Awake! Awake, Henry Egan! The British and Tories are coming. Awake, man, awake!"

"Friend," called the girl excitedly, "who is thee?"

"A friend. Jack Simpson," he answered. "Is Egan dead, that he does not answer? He must awake."

Peggy ran to the door of the bedchamber, calling wildly:

"Friend Henry, Friend Mandy, awake, awake!"

"Who calls?" cried Egan, sitting up suddenly.

"'Tis Peggy," answered she quickly. "A friend is here who says the Tories are coming."

"The Lord have mercy on us," ejaculated Mistress Egan springing out of bed. "Henry, Henry, get up! The British and Tories are upon us."

At last awake, the fisherman sprang from his bed, and rushed to the door. 356

"Get your wife and whatever you want to save," shouted the man outside. "The British are out with Fanning's Tories burning every suspected house in the district. No time to lose, Henry. They're coming now."

Egan hurried back into the house, and caught up a portmanteau which he kept lying by his bed at night. Mistress Egan and Peggy were dressed by this time, and the three hurried into the swamp which lay to the north of the cottage. The man who had given the warning passed on to perform the same office for other menaced families.

Unused to swamps, the British seldom followed the inhabitants into their recesses, and this proved the safety of many a family in the Carolinas. They were scarcely within the confines of the marsh when they heard the tramp of many hoofs, the neighing of horses, and the enemy was at the cottage.

"By my hilt, the birds have flown," shouted an English voice, and the words were distinctly heard through the stillness of the night. "Search the house, boys. Egan must have some rich pickings. Bring out whatever there is of value, and then burn the hut. The horses and cattle must be hereabouts somewhere." 357

There followed hoarse cries and a rush for the building. It seemed to Peggy that a moment had hardly passed before a red glare lit up the spot where the cottage stood.

"Back into the swamp," whispered Egan in a whisper. "They may see us here."

Back into thicknesses of morass such as Peggy had never seen before they went, speaking only

when necessary and then in the lowest of tones. And thus the rest of the night was spent, while the fiends ravaged the herding pens, and beat up the bushes for the ponies. The fugitives remained in hiding until morning dawned. Then they made their way back to the blackened ruins of the cottage. Tears coursed down Peggy's cheeks at the sight.

"What shall thee do?" she cried putting her arms about Mistress Egan. "Oh, what shall thee do?"

For a moment the fisherman's wife could not speak. She shed no tears, but her face was worn, and drawn, and haggard. She had aged in the night. 358

"Henry," she cried, "there is but one thing for us to do, and that is to get to mother's."

"And how shall we do that, Mandy? We have neither horse nor wagon left us."

"Henry Egan, I'm ashamed of you! Ain't we in North Carolina? When did her people ever refuse to aid each other?"

"You're right," he acknowledged humbly. "North Carolina is all right—but the Tories. I don't take no stock in that part of her population."

"And neither do I," she rejoined grimly. "From this time on I am a Whig out and aboveboard. They have done us all the harm they can, I reckon. What you got in that bag, Henry?"

Egan smiled.

"It's gold, Mandy. I reckon they didn't find all the pickings."

"For mercy sake, Henry Egan, we can't get through the country with that," exclaimed the good woman. "Bury it, or do something with it."

"Yes," he said. "That will be the safest. Wait for me while I do it." He was with them again in a short time. "We will go to Hampton's and get something to eat," he said. "I kept a little money, and maybe Mis' Hampton will let us have some horses." He turned as he spoke and his wife started after him, but Peggy lingered. 359

"Come, child," said Mistress Egan. "It's a right smart way over to Hampton's. We must get along."

"But," hesitated Peggy, "won't I be a burden now? I ought not to add to thy trouble."

"Why, honey, you have nowhere to go. What would you do? Now don't worry about trouble, but just come right along. We will all keep together. What's ourn is yours too." And gratefully Peggy went with them. It was indeed a "right smart way" to Hampton's, which proved to be a large plantation lying some ten miles from the cottage. It was a cloudless day in August, and excessively warm. When they at length reached the place they were footsore and weary.

"Why, Mandy Egan," exclaimed a motherly looking woman, coming to the door of the dwelling as she caught sight of them. "Whatever has happened? Come right in. You all look ready to drop." 360

Mistress Egan, who had borne up wonderfully all through the long night and the wearing walk, now broke down at this kindly greeting.

"The Tories, under some British, burnt us out last night," explained her husband. "They sacked the house first, of course, and ran off all the ponies and cattle. We have come to you for help, Martha. Will you let us have the horses to get up to Charlotte to her mother's?"

"Of course I will, Henry. All sorts of reports are flying about. Will says that down at Wilmington 'tis thought that nothing can save the old north state. Cornwallis hath already begun his march toward us."

"Heaven save us if 'tis true," ejaculated the fisherman, sinking into a chair. "First Lincoln and his whole army at Charleston; then Gates and his forces at Camden! Two armies in three months swept out of existence. The cause is doomed."

"Oh, if they had only sent General Arnold," cried Peggy. "He is so brave, so daring, I just know he could have saved us."

Gravely, oppressed by vague fears for the future, they gathered about the table. American freedom trembled in the balance. Disaster had followed fast upon disaster. Georgia, South Carolina restored to the British—North Carolina's turn to be subjugated was at hand. 361

It was with sad forebodings that the three began their journey toward the north early the next morning.

CHAPTER XXIX—PEGGY FINDS AN OLD FRIEND 362

"One hope survives, the frontier is not far,
And thence they may escape from native war,
And bear within them to the neighboring state
An exile's sorrows, or an outlaw's hate:
Hard is the task their fatherland to quit,
But harder still to perish or submit."

—Byron.

The travel northward was by slow stages, on account of the intense heat of the lowlands. The settlements along the Cape Fear River were composed principally of Scotch Highlanders, who were favorable to the side of the king, and these the fisherman's little party avoided by leaving the road and making a wide détour through the woods. But often in the gloaming of the summer evenings the weird notes of the bagpipes sounding old Highland tunes would mingle with the mournful calls of the whip-poor-wills, producing such an effect of sadness that Peggy was oft-times moved to tears. 363

Still, these regions were not deserted. They sometimes came across numerous groups of women and children—desolated families, victims of Tory ravages, who were fleeing like hunted game through the woods to the more friendly provinces northward. It was a great relief when they finally reached the undulating country of the uplands, and, after a week of hard riding, the town of Charlotte, to the left of which, on the road leading to Beattie's Ford on the Catawba River, lay the plantation and mill of William and Sarah Sevier, parents of Mistress Egan.

They were unpolished people in many ways, but so kindly and hospitable that Peggy felt at home at once. The community was famed for its love of liberty, and was later denounced by Cornwallis as "a hornet's nest." It was here, five years previous to this time, that the spirit of resistance to tyranny found expression in the famous "Mecklenburg resolutions." In this congenial environment Peggy was as near to happiness as it was possible for her to be so far from her kindred. One thing that added to her felicity was the fact that Charlotte was directly on the route running through Virginia and thence north to Philadelphia, which before the Revolution had been used as a stage line. 364

"If only I had Star," she would cry wistfully, "I would try to get home. If only I had Star!"

One morning in the early autumn Mistress Egan called Peggy, and said to her, in much the same manner that her mother would have used:

"I want you to put on your prettiest frock, Peggy. Ma's going to have a company here for the day. The men are to help pa gather the corn while the women take off a quilt. The young folks will come to-night for the corn-husking, but I reckon there won't be a girl that can hold a candle to my little Quakeress. The boys will all want you to find the red ear."

Peggy laughed.

"Is that the reason there hath been so much cooking going on, Friend Mandy? Methought there was a deal of preparation just for the family."

"There's a powerful sight to be done yet," observed Mistress Egan. 365

"Then do let me help," pleaded Peggy. "Thee spoils me. Truly thee does. Why, at home I helped mother in everything."

The guests came early, as was the custom when there was work to be done. The men rode horseback with their wives behind them on pillions, and with rifles held in the hollow of their left arms; for it was the practice in those trying times to bear arms even upon visits of business or friendship. Soon a company of two score or more had gathered at the farmhouse. Greetings exchanged, the men hastened to the cornfields to gather the new corn, while the women clustered about the quilting frames, and fingers plied the needles busily, while tongues clacked a merry accompaniment.

The morning passed quickly, and at noon the gay party had just seated themselves around the table where a bountiful dinner steamed, when they were startled by a shout from the yard.

"Fly for your lives, men! The British are coming to forage."

Instantly the men sprang for their rifles and accoutrements. Inured to danger and alarms, the women were as quick to act as their husbands. Some of them ran to the stables and led forth the horses, which they saddled hastily, ready for service; while others gathered up whatever objects of value they could carry. With marvelous celerity the men placed the women and servants on the horses by twos and threes, bidding them to betake themselves to neighbors who were more remote from the main road. They themselves had scarcely time for concealment in a deep thicket and swamp which bordered one extremity of the farm before the British videttes were in sight. These halted upon the brow of a hill for the approach of the main body, and then in complete order advanced to the plantation. 366

After reconnoitering the premises, and finding no one present, but all appearances of the hasty flight of the occupants, the dragoons dismounted, tethered their horses and detailed a guard. Some sumpter-horses were harnessed to farm wagons, and some of the troopers began to load them with various products of the fields; while military baggage wagons under charge of a rear guard gradually arrived, and were employed in the gathering of the new corn, carrying off stacks of oats and the freshly pulled corn fodder. 367

Enjoying the prospect of free living the soldiers shouted joyously among their plunder. Separate parties, regularly detailed, shot down and butchered the hogs and calves, while others hunted and caught the poultry of different descriptions. In full view of this scene stood the commander of the British forces, a portly, florid Englishman, one hand on each side the doorway of the farmhouse, where the officers were partaking of the abundant provisions provided for the guests of Mistress Sevier.

Meanwhile Peggy, who had been mounted behind Grandma Sevier, for so she had learned to call Mistress Egan's mother, discovered that lady in tears.

"Grandma," she cried with concern, "what is it? Is thee frightened?"

"It's my Bible," wailed the old lady. "The Scottish translation of the Psalms is bound in with it, and they say the British burn every Bible they find like that. Oh, I'll never have another! My mother gave it to me when William and me was married. The births and deaths of my children 368
are in it—oh, I'd rather everything on the place was took than that."

"Stop just a minute, please," spoke Peggy. Then, as the surprised woman brought the horse to a standstill, the maiden slipped to the ground. "I'm going back for the Bible," she cried, and darted away before any of them guessed her intention.

"Peggy, Peggy," called several voices after her, but the girl laughed at them and disappeared among the bushes.

"The British won't hurt me," she reassured herself as she came in sight of the dwelling. "I am just a girl, and can do them no harm. I'm just going to have that Bible for grandma. 'Tis a small thing to do for her when she hath been so good to me."

And so saying, she stepped out from the bushes where she had paused for a moment, and marched boldly up to the commander in the doorway.

"Sir," she said, sweeping him a fine curtsey, "I wish thee good-day."

"Well, upon my life, what have we here?" exclaimed he, astounded at this sudden apparition. 369

"If thee pleases, good sir, I live here," returned Peggy.

"And I do please," he cried. "Come in, mistress. Your pardon, but we have made somewhat free with the premises, but if it so be that you are a loyal subject of King George, you shall have ample recompense for whatever we take."

"I thank thee," she said, ignoring the question of loyalty. "I will enter, if I may. Grandma wishes her Bible, and that, sir, can surely be given her?"

"Of a truth," he cried, stepping aside for her to pass. "'Tis a small request to refuse such beauty. Take the Bible and welcome, my fair Quakeress."

"I thank thee," spoke the girl, with quaint dignity. Sedately she passed into the dwelling and went directly to Mistress Sevier's chamber, where the Bible lay on a small table. Clasping it close, Peggy again went through the living-room, where the astonished officers awaited her coming curiously.

"You are not going to be so unmannerly as to leave us, are you?" asked the captain.

"Sir," spoke the girl, facing him bravely, "I pray thee, permit me to pass unmolested. We have left 370
thee and thy soldiers at liberty to possess yourselves of our belongings. Show at least this courtesy."

"Methinks," he began, tugging at his moustache thoughtfully, "that such leniency deserves something at your hands. I doubt not 'tis a Presbyterian Bible, and we have orders to destroy all such. Methinks——"

But Peggy was out and past him before he had finished speaking. There was a shorter way into the swamp if she would go through the orchard where the horses were tethered, and she sped across the lawn in that direction. As she darted among the animals the book slipped from her clasp and she stooped to recover it. As she rose from her stooping position she felt the soft nose of a horse touch her cheek gently, and a low whinny broke upon her ear. The girl gave one upward glance, and then sprang forward, screaming:

"Star!" In an ecstasy of joy she threw her arms about the little mare's neck, for it was in reality her own pony. "Oh, Star! Star! have I found thee again?"

Caress after caress she lavished on the pony, which whinnied its delight and seemed as glad of 371
the meeting as the girl herself. A number of soldiers, drawn by curiosity, meanwhile gathered about the maiden and the horse, and among them was the commanding officer. Peggy had forgotten everything but the fact that she had found Star again, and paid no heed to their presence.

"It seems to be a reunion," remarked the officer at length dryly. "May I ask, my little Quakeress, what claim you have on that animal?"

Peggy lifted her tear-stained face.

"Why, it's my pony that my dear father gave me," she answered. "It's Star!"

"That cannot be," he told her. "I happen to know that this especial horse came down from New York City on one of the transports with Sir Henry Clinton. So you see that it cannot be yours."

"But it is, sir," cried she. "I came down at the same time with my cousin Colonel Owen and his daughter Harriet on the 'Falcon.' Our horses, Harriet's and mine, were put on one of the transports." 372

"Then why are you not in Charleston with the others?" he demanded.

"Why, they were lost at sea," she replied, turning upon him a startled look. "We took to the boats,

but ours was caught by the current and swept away from the schooner. It must have gone down afterward."

"I see," he said. "Then if all this is true, and you came down with Sir Henry and his company, you must be a loyalist? In that case, of course, you may have the horse."

"It is indeed truth that I came here in that manner," reiterated Peggy. "And the horse is truly mine."

"But are you loyal?" he persisted. "If you will say so you may take the beast, and aught else you wish on the premises."

Peggy leaned her head against Star's silky mane and was silent. It would be so easy to say. She could not part with Star now that she had found her. Would it be so very wrong? Just a tiny fib! The girl gave a little sob as the temptation assailed her and tightened her clasp of the pony convulsively. It was but a moment and then, stricken with horror at the thought which had come to her, Peggy raised her head. 373

"Sir," she said, "I am not loyal to the king. I am a strong patriot. In sooth," speaking more warmly than she would have done had it not been for that same temptation, "in sooth, I don't believe there is a worse rebel to His Majesty anywhere in these parts; but for all that thee shan't have Star. Thee shall kill me first."

And so saying she picked up the Bible from the ground where it had fallen, and sprang lightly into the saddle.

The captain had smiled in spite of himself as she flung him her defiance. Peggy aroused was Peggy adorable. With eyes flashing, color mantling cheek and brow, the crushed creamy blossom nestling caressingly in her dark hair, the maiden made a picture that would bring a smile from either friend or foe. But as she sprang to the saddle the officer seized the rein which she had unknotted from the tree, exclaiming:

"You have spirit, it seems, despite your Quaker speech. The horse is yours for one——" 374

At this instant there came a shout from the soldiers who had resumed the chase of the poultry during the colloquy between their officer and the maiden. Some of their number had struck down some beehives formed of hollow gum logs ranged near the garden fence. The irritated insects dashed after the men, and at once the scene became one of uproar, confusion and lively excitement.

The officer loosed his clasp on the bridle, and turned to see the cause of the clamor. The attention of the guard was relaxed for the moment, and taking advantage of the diversion Peggy struck her pony quickly. The mare bounded forward; the captain uttered an exclamation and sprang after her just as the sharp crack of a dozen rifles sounded.

When the smoke lifted the captain and nine men lay stretched upon the ground, and Peggy was flying toward cover as fast as Star could carry her. Immediately the trumpets sounded a recall, but by the time the scattered dragoons had collected, mounted and formed, a straggling fire from a different direction into which the concealed farmers had extended showed the unerring aim of each American marksman, and increased the confusion of the surprise. 375

Perfectly acquainted with every foot of the ground, the farmer and his friends constantly changed their position, giving in their fire as they loaded so that it appeared to the British that they were surrounded by a large force. The alternate hilly and swampy grounds and thickets, with woods on both sides the road, did not allow efficient action to the horses of the dragoons, and after a number of the troopers had been shot down they turned and fled. The leading horses in the wagons were killed before they could ascend the hill and the road became blocked up. The soldiers in charge, frantic at the idea of being left behind, cut loose some of the surviving animals, and galloped after their retreating comrades.

"They didn't find it so easy to get pickings up here as they did down at my house," chuckled Henry Egan as the hidden farmers came forth after the skirmish, without the loss of a man. "I reckon, pa, you'd better get the women back here. Some of these men need attention. I wonder where Peggy went? The daring little witch! I was scared clean out of my senses when she sassed that captain. Find where she is, pa." 376

It was not long before the women were back, and with them came Peggy, tearful but joyous, leading Star by the bridle.

CHAPTER XXX—AN INTERRUPTED JOURNEY 377

"I still had hoped ...
Around my fire an evening group to draw,
And tell of all I heard, of all I saw."

—*Goldsmith.*

A few days later the country was electrified by the news that the Whigs west of the Alleghanies

had marched to the relief of their oppressed brethren of the Carolinas, and defeated the British at King's Mountain. The victory fired the patriots with new zeal, checked the rising of the loyalists in North Carolina, and was fatal to the intended expedition of Cornwallis. He had hoped to step with ease from one Carolina to the other, and then proceed to the conquest of Virginia; he was left with no choice but to retreat.

The men about Charlotte had disputed his advance; they now harassed his foraging parties, intercepted his despatches and cut off his communications. Declaring that every bush hid a rebel, Lord Cornwallis fell back across the Catawba into South Carolina. 378

At the plantation the news of the victory was received with joy, causing Peggy to unfold the plan that had been maturing ever since she had regained possession of Star.

"What doth hinder my going home now?" she asked the assembled family one evening. "The British have gone, and I have but to keep to the road to arrive in time at Philadelphia."

"But the Tories?" questioned Mistress Egan. "They are everywhere."

"I have waited so long for a way to open," continued Peggy, stoutly. "It is wonderful how it hath all come about. First, the sea brought me to thy door, Friend Mandy. Then we came up here where the road is the selfsame one used by the delegates to go to the Congress. Then my own pony is brought to this very house. Does thee not see that 'tis the way opened at last?"

"I see that we must let you go," said the good woman sadly, "though I shall never know a minute's peace until I hear of you being safe with your mother." 379

"I will write as soon as I reach her," promised the girl. "And I shall get through, never fear. Did thee not say to thy husband when the cottage was burned that the people would help? Well, they will help me too."

"You cannot go alone, my girl," interposed Henry Egan decidedly. "'Twould never do in the world. Things air upset still, even though the British air gone. If I hadn't joined the milish I'd take you home myself. As things air there can't a man be spared from the state jest now. North Carolina needs every man she can get."

"I know it, Friend Henry," answered Peggy. "And I would not wish any one to leave his duty for me. The cause of liberty must come before everything."

"That is true," he said. "Be content to bide a little longer, and mayhap a way will be opened, as you say."

So, yielding to his judgment with the sweet deference that was her greatest charm, Peggy bore her disappointment as best she could. It was but a few days, however, until the matter was brought up again by the fisherman.

"Peggy," he said, "I heard as how Joe Hart was going to take his wife and baby to her folks in Virginny, so that he can join the Continentals with Gates. If you're bound to go this might be your chance. Things don't seem to be so bad over there as they air in this state, and it may be easier for you to get some one to take you on to Philadelphia." 380

"When do they start?" asked Peggy joyfully.

"To-morrow morning. That won't give you much time, but——"

"'Tis all I need," she answered excitedly. "Oh, Friend Henry, how good thee is to find a chance for me."

"There, my girl! say no more. Of course you want them even as they must want you. You'll write sometimes, and when this awful war is over, if there air any of us left, mayhap you'll come down to see us again."

"I will," she promised in tears.

"Another thing," he said, bringing forth a few gold pieces, "you must take these with you. They will help you in your journey, but use 'em only when you can't get what you want any other way. 'Tis better to trust to kindness of heart than to cupidity." 381

In spite of her protests he made her accept them, and she sewed them in the hem of her frock, promising to use them with discretion. With many tears Peggy took leave of these kindly people the next morning, and set forth with Joe Hart and his wife and baby for Virginia. The road was mountainous, and the riding hard, but Peggy's heart danced with gladness and she heeded not the fatigue, for at last she was going home. Home! The opaline splendor of the morning thrilled her with an appreciation that she had never felt before. What a wonderful light threaded the woods and glorified the treetops! Home!

At night they stopped at some woodman's hut, or at a plantation, if they were near the more pretentious establishment; for inns were few, and the habitations so far removed from each other that the people gladly gave entertainment to travelers in return for the news they brought.

Often they encountered bodies of irregular troops upon the road directing their wearied march toward the headquarters of the patriot army. The victory at King's Mountain had thrilled the people even as Concord and Lexington had done, and roused them to renewed exertions. 382

Peggy's companions were not very cheerful. The man was a rough, kindly, goodhearted fellow, but his wife was a delicate woman, peevish and complaining, whose strength was scarcely equal to the hardships of the journey and the care of the sickly infant who fretted incessantly.

Four days of such companionship wore upon even Peggy's joyousness. They were by this time some fifteen miles east of Hillsborough, where the remnant of the patriot army lay. The road was lonely, the quiet broken only by the whimpering of the baby and the querulous soothing of the mother. Peggy felt depressed and mentally reproached herself for it.

"Thee is foolish, Peggy," she chided sternly, "to heed such things. If the poor woman can bear it thee should not let it wherrit thee. Now be brave, Peggy Owen! just think how soon thee will see mother. Can thee not bear a little discomfort for that? And how exciting 'twill be to tell them—— What was that?" she cried aloud, turning a startled look upon the mountaineer, who rode a short 383
distance ahead of Peggy and his wife.

"It sounded like a groan," exclaimed he.

They drew rein and listened. The road ran through a forest so densely studded with undergrowth that it was impossible to see any distance on either side. For a few seconds there was no sound but the whispering of the pines. They were about to pass on when there came a low cry:

"You, whoever you are! Come to me, for the love of God!"

For a moment they looked at each other with startled faces, and then the mountaineer made a motion to swing himself from his horse.

"Joe," cried his wife, "what air you going to do? Don't go! How'd you know but what it's an ambush?"

"Nay; some one is hurt," protested Peggy.

While Hart still hesitated, Peggy dismounted, and leading Star by the bridle walked in the direction from which the cry came.

"Where is thee, friend?" she called, her voice sounding clearly through the stillness of the forest. 384

"Here! Here!" came the feeble reply.

Dropping the pony's bridle Peggy pushed aside the undergrowth, and advanced fearlessly, pausing ever and anon to call for guidance. Shamed by this display of courage Joe Hart followed her, despite the protests of his wife. Presently just ahead of them appeared a man's form lying outstretched under a clump of bushes, and wearing the uniform of the Continentals. One arm, the right one, was broken, and lay disabled upon the grass, while the hand of the other lifted itself occasionally to stroke the legs of a powerful horse which stood guard over the prostrate form of his master.

The animal snapped at them viciously as they approached, but the soldier spoke to him sharply, so that they could draw near in safety. The girl bent over the wounded man pityingly, for a gaping hole in his side through which the blood was flowing told that he had not long to live.

"What can I do for thee, friend?" she asked gently, sinking down beside him and raising his head to her lap. 385

"Are you Whig or Tory?" he gasped, gazing up at her eagerly.

"A patriot, friend," she answered wiping the moisture from his brow with tender hands.

"Thank God," he cried making a great effort to talk for the end was fast approaching. "I bear letters to General Gates from the Congress. In my shoe; will you see that they are taken to him?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Promise me," he insisted. "You look true. Promise that you yourself will take them to him."

"I promise," she said solemnly. "And now, friend, thyself. Hast thou no messages for thy dear ones?"

"Mary," he whispered a spasm of pain contracting his face. "My wife! Tell her that I died doing my duty. She must not grieve. 'Tis for the country. Water!" he gasped.

But Joe Hart, foreseeing the need for this, had already gone in search of it, and opportunely returned at this moment with his drinking-horn full. The vidette drank eagerly, and revived a little. 386

"Thy name?" asked Peggy softly, for she saw that his time was short.

"William Trumbull, of Fairfield, Connecticut," he responded. The words came slowly with great effort. "'Twas Tories," he said, "that shot me, but Duke outran them. Then I fell and crawled in here. My horse——" A smile of pride and affection lighted up his face as he turned toward the animal. "We've taken our last ride, old fellow!"

"Would thee like for me to speak to the general about thy horse?" asked Peggy.

"If you would," he cried eagerly. And then after a moment—"Take off my boots."

The mountaineer complied with the request, and the dying patriot gave the papers which Hart took from them to Peggy.

"Guard these with your life," he continued. "And get to General Gates without delay. They have news of Arnold's treason——"

"Of what, did thee say?" cried Peggy.

"Of the treason of Benedict Arnold," he said feebly. "He is a traitor."

“Not General Arnold!” exclaimed Peggy in anguish. “Not the Arnold that was at Philadelphia! Oh, friend! thee can’t mean that Arnold?”

“The very same,” he responded. “And further, he is seeking to induce the soldiers to desert their country’s colors.”

“Merciful heavens! it can’t be true!” she cried. “Friend, friend, thee must be wandering. It couldn’t happen.”

“But it hath,” he gasped. “They told me to make speed. I—I must go!”

With a superhuman effort he struggled to his feet, stood for a brief second, and fell back—dead.

CHAPTER XXXI—HOW THE NEWS WAS RECEIVED AT CAMP

“Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a riband to stick in his coat—

* * * * *

Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,
One task more declined, one more foot-path untrod,
One more devil’s-triumph and sorrow for angels,
One more wrong to man, one more insult to God.”

—“The Lost Leader,” *Browning*.

White and shaken Peggy leaned weakly against a tree, and covered her face with her hands.

“We must be getting on, miss,” spoke the mountaineer, after a few moments of silence.

“And leave him like that?” cried the girl aghast.

“There is naught else to be done,” he replied gravely. “We have nothing to bury him with.”

“But ’tis wrong,” remonstrated she, kneeling beside the dead vidette, and touching his brow reverently. “He died for his country, friend.”

“Tell them at the camp,” suggested he. “Mayhap they will send out and get him.”

“Yes; that is what we must do,” she said. “I could not bear to think of him lying here without Christian burial.”

“And what is it now, miss?” questioned Hart, as she still lingered.

“Could we cut a lock from his hair, friend? For his wife! I know that mother and I would wish if father—if father——” Peggy faltered and choked.

Silently Hart drew out his hunting-knife and severed a lock of hair from the vidette’s head, which the maiden placed with the despatches in the bosom of her gown. Then taking the kerchief from about her throat she spread it over his face, and followed the mountaineer back to the road. As they left the spot the horse resumed his former position, and a last glance from Peggy showed the faithful creature standing guard over the dead form of his master.

“Whatever made you so long, Joe?” cried his wife petulantly. “The baby’s that fretful that I don’t know what to do with her. She’s jest wore out, and we must get where something can be done for her.”

“Tilly,” he answered gravely, “there was a pore soger in there who died. He wanted us to take his despatches to Gates. I reckon we’ll have to go back to Hillsboro’town.”

“Back fifteen miles, with the baby sick,” exclaimed the woman in dismay. “Joe Hart, you must be crazy. We shan’t do no such thing. It will lose us a whole day, and we ain’t got any too much time as ’tis. Your own flesh and blood comes before anything else, I reckon. Jest see how the child looks.”

The baby did look ill. The father regarded it anxiously, and then glanced about him with an uncertain manner.

“The general ought to have them despatches,” he said, “but the child is sick, sure enuff. Mayhap we can find somebody to take the letters back at the next cabin.”

“Nay,” objected Peggy. “I promised the soldier that I would see that the papers were given into the general’s own hands; therefore I will ride back with them. We cannot trust to uncertainties.”

“Yes,” spoke the wife eagerly. “That is just the thing, Joe. The girl can take them. It’s daylight, and nothing won’t hurt her. We’d best push on to where the baby can be ’tended to. She can catch up with us to-morrow!”

“Very well,” replied Peggy quietly. “And, friend, where shall I tell the general to come for the body? Does thee know the place?”

The mountaineer glanced about him. “Jest tell him about two mile above the cross-tree crossing,”

he said. “On the north side the road. Anybody that knows the country will know where ’tis. I don’t like——” But Peggy bade them good-bye and was gone before he could voice any further regrets.

“’Twas useless to parley over the matter,” she thought as a turn in the road hid them from view. “In truth the little one did look ill. I would as soon be alone, and I can return the faster. This awful thing about General Arnold! How could it have happened? Why, oh, why did he do it?”

Her thoughts flew back to the night of the tea at General Arnold’s headquarters. How kind he had seemed then. The dark handsome face came before her as she remembered how he had walked down the room by her side, and how proud she had felt of his attention. And how good he had been to John Drayton! Drayton! Peggy started as the thought of the lad came to her. How had he taken it? The boy had loved him so.

It is never pleasant to be the bearer of ill tidings, and Peggy found herself lagging more than once in her journey. The afternoon was drawing to a close when she came in sight of the town on the Eno near which the army was encamped. They had passed around it in the morning. Mrs. Hart had feared that her husband might be tempted into staying with the army, and so had insisted upon the détour.

The little town, nestled among beautiful eminences, seemed deserted as the maiden rode down the long unpaved street to the upland beyond, where the camp lay. In reality the inhabitants were at supper, and sundry fragrant odors were wafted from the various dwellings to the passing girl. Peggy, however, was too heavy of heart for an appeal to the senses, though she had not tasted food since the morning meal.

Passing at length through a defile the encampment came to view. It was surrounded with woods, and guarded in its rear by the smooth and gentle river. A farmhouse in the immediate neighborhood served as headquarters for the officers.

Numerous horses were tethered in rows about the upland plain. There were no tents or huts, but rude accommodations for the men had been made by branches and underwood set against ridge-poles that were sustained by stakes, and topped by sheaves of Indian corn.

Groups of men were scattered over the plain, some wagons were to be seen in one direction, and not far off, a line of fires around which parties were engaged cooking food. Here and there a sentinel was pacing his short limits, and occasionally the roll of the drum, or the flourish of a fife told of some ceremony of the camp.

Peggy had but time to observe these details when she was stopped by the picket who demanded the countersign.

“I know it not, friend,” was her response. “Lead me at once to thy general, I beg thee; for I bear despatches for him.”

At this moment the officer in charge of the relief guard, for the beautiful and inspiring music of the sunset retreat was just sounding, came up.

“What is it, Johnson?” he asked. Peggy gave a little cry at the sound of his voice.

“John!” she cried. “John Drayton!”

“Peggy,” he gasped. “In the name of all that’s wonderful, what are you doing here?”

“I might ask thee the same thing,” she returned. “I was thinking of thee but now, John.”

“Were you?” he cried gladly. “I am a lieutenant now, Peggy.” He squared his shoulders with the jaunty air which the girl remembered so well, and which had always caused Harriet so much amusement. “What think you of that?”

“Oh, I am glad, glad,” she returned.

“There is so much to tell you,” continued he. “Just wait until I place this other sentinel, and then we can have a nice long talk.”

“I can’t, John,” exclaimed she, remembering her mission. “I bear despatches for the general.”

“You with despatches,” he ejaculated laughing. “Have you ’listed, Peggy?”

“Nay,” returned she gravely, his lightness of heart striking her like a blow. How could she tell him? “John, let me give the letters first.”

“Come,” said he. “I will take you there at once. I am curious as to why you are the bearer of such missives.”

“’Tis ill tidings,” spoke Peggy.

“Another disaster, eh?” He laid his arm over the pony’s glossy neck and walked thus over toward the farmhouse. “Well, we are used to them. A victory would upset us more than anything just at present. The day we heard of King’s Mountain I thought the men would go wild. We didn’t try to maintain discipline on that day. Oh, well; if we are whipped, we just fight ’em again. We’ll win out in time.”

The color fled from Peggy’s face. He did not know, and it was she who must tell him. How would he bear it? They had reached the farmhouse by the time, and Drayton assisted Peggy from the horse, and turned to an orderly.

“Will you say to the general that Ensign—I mean Lieutenant Drayton is without with a young lady who bears despatches? ’Tis important. I have hardly got used to my new dignity yet,” he

explained turning to Peggy with a boyish laugh. “It’s good to see you, Peggy.”

“John,” said the girl, laying her hand on his arm and speaking with intense earnestness. “Will thee try to be brave? The news I bring——”

“What mean you?” he asked in surprise. “Why should a disaster effect me more than any one else? Peggy, I never knew you to act and to speak so strangely before. What is it?”

“The general waits, lieutenant,” interrupted the orderly. “He has but a few moments, as he is going to Hillsboro’ for the night.”

“Come, Peggy,” said Drayton. “I will take you in.” They passed into the dwelling, and Drayton opened a door on the right of the hall which led to General Gates’ office. There were several men in the room, among them Colonel Daniel Morgan who had but recently arrived, and Colonel William Washington.

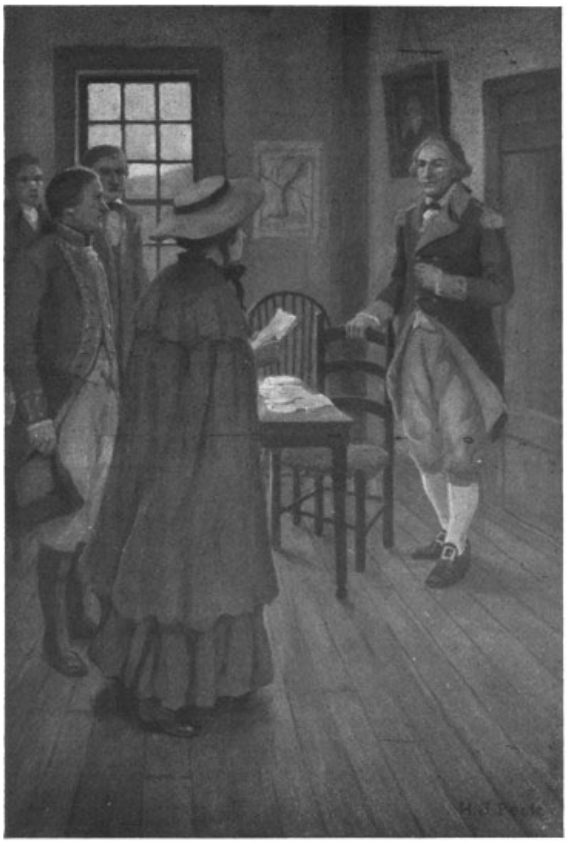
“General Gates,” said Drayton saluting, “allow me to present Mistress Peggy Owen, who is the bearer of despatches. She is the daughter of David Owen, of the Pennsylvania Light Horse.”

“You are welcome, Mistress Owen,” said General Gates rising courteously. “Stay, lieutenant,” as the lad made a movement to depart. “If the young lady is friend of yours you may be her escort back to Hillsboro’ when the mission is ended.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Drayton, saluting again.

“Sir,” said Peggy with a certain wistfulness in her voice caused by the knowledge of the news she bore, “before thee takes the letters I should like to tell thee how I came by them.”

“Certainly you may,” he said regarding her with a new deference, for the girl’s manner and accents bespoke her gentle breeding.



“YOU ARE WELCOME,” SAID GENERAL GATES

And standing there Peggy told simply the story of how she had become possessed of the despatches. A stillness came upon them as she related the death of the vidette, her tones vibrating with tenderness and feeling.

“He died for his country,” she said, “and, sir, he wished that told to his wife. She was not to grieve; for ’twas for his country. And his horse, General Gates. I promised that I would speak to thee concerning him. We left him guarding the body. Thee will see that he is cared for, will thee not?”

“Yes,” he said, much moved. “So noble an animal should be looked well to. Did you learn the man’s name, mistress?”

“’Twas Trumbull, sir. William Trumbull, of Fairfield, Connecticut.”

“I will inform his wife myself,” said he, making a note of the matter. “He died a hero performing his duty. And now may I have the despatches?”

He extended his hand with a smile, saying as he did so: “A man would have given them first, and the story afterward; but this little maid feared we would forget the vidette if she delayed until

afterward."

"Yes," acknowledged the girl, looking at him earnestly, for she had feared that very thing. "Sir," 398
giving him the despatches, "I pray thee to pardon me for being the bearer of such awful tidings."

There was a slight smile on General Gates' face at her manner of speaking, but it died quickly as he ran his eye down the written page. He uttered an exclamation as he mastered the contents, and then stood staring at the paper. At length, however, he turned to the men at the table, and said in a hollow voice:

"Gentlemen, it becomes my painful duty to inform you that Major-General Arnold is a traitor to his country."

An awful pause followed the announcement—a pause that throbbed with the despair of brave men. Disaster had followed fast upon disaster. The South was all but lost. Two armies had been wiped out of existence in three months, and what was left was but a pitiful remnant. Washington's force in the North was so weakened by detaching troops for the defense of the South that he was unable to strike a blow. And now this calamity was the culmination. A murmur broke out in the room. Then, as though galvanized into action by that murmur, John Drayton, who 399
had stood as though petrified, bounded forward with a roar.

"'Tis false," he cried, whipping out his sword. "I'll run any man through who says that my general is a traitor!"

He advanced threateningly toward General Gates as he spoke. He had drawn upon his superior officer, but there was no anger in the glance that Horatio Gates cast upon him.

"Would God it were false," he said solemnly. "But here are proofs. This is a letter from Congress; this one from General Washington himself, and this——"

"I tell you it is not true," reiterated the boy fiercely. "Look how they've always treated him! It's another one of their vile charges trumped up against him. Daniel Morgan, you were with him at Quebec and Saratoga! Are you going to stand there and hear such calumny?"

Morgan hid his face in his hands and a sob broke from his lips. The sound seemed to pierce Drayton like a sword thrust. His arm dropped to his side, and he turned from one to another searching their faces eagerly, but their sorrowful countenances only spoke confirmation of the 400
news.

"In mercy, speak," he cried with a catch in his voice. "Peggy, tell me truth! Speak to me!"

"John, John, I'm afraid 'tis true," cried Peggy going to him with outstretched hands. "Don't take it like this! Thee must be brave."

But with a cry, so full of anguish, of heartbreak, that they paled as they heard it, Drayton sank to the floor.

"Boy, I loved him too," spoke Colonel Morgan brokenly. "We were both with him on that march to Quebec. And at Saratoga in that mad charge he made. I loved him——"

He could not proceed. Bending over the prostrate lad he lifted him, and with his arm about him drew him from the room. Peggy broke into a passion of tears as Drayton's wailing cry came back to her:

"My general! My general! My general!"

CHAPTER XXXII—ON THE ALTAR OF HIS COUNTRY 401

"If you fail Honor here,
Never presume to serve her any more;
Bid farewell to the integrity of armes;
And the honorable name of soldier
Fall from you, like a shivered wreath of laurel
By thunder struck from a desertlesse forehead."

—*Faire Quarrell.*

For a time no sound was heard in the room but the sobs of the maiden and the broken utterances of the men. The tears of the latter were no shame to their manhood, for they were wrung from their hearts by the defection of a great soldier.

The friend of Washington and of Schuyler! The brilliant, dashing soldier with whose exploits the country had rung but a short time since; if this man was traitor whom could they trust?

Presently Peggy felt a light touch on her head, and looked up to find General Gates regarding her with solicitude.

"My child," he said, "I am about to ride into Hillsboro' to confer with Governor Nash. Will you 402
permit me to be your escort? We must find a resting place for you. You must be weary after this trying day."

“I am,” she replied sadly. “Wearied and heart-sick. Thee is very kind, and I thank thee.” She rose instantly, and followed him to the door where the orderly had her horse in charge.

What a change had come over the encampment. From lip to lip the tidings had flown, and white-faced men huddled about the camp-fires talking in whispers. No longer song, or story, or merry jest enlivened the evening rest time, but a hush was over the encampment such as follows a great battle when many have fallen.

Seeing that she was so depressed General Gates exerted himself to cheer her despondency, leaving her when Hillsborough was reached in the care of a motherly woman.

“I shall send Lieutenant Drayton to you in the morning,” he said as he was taking his departure. “He will need comfort, child; as we all do, but the boy was wrapped up in Arnold.” 403

It was noon the next day before Drayton appeared, and Peggy was shocked at the change in him. There was no longer a trace of jauntiness in his manner. There were deep circles under his eyes, and he was pale and haggard as though he had not slept.

“John,” she cried, her heart going out to him for his sorrow, “thee must not take this matter so. General Washington is left us.”

“Yes,” he replied, “but I loved him so. Oh, Peggy! Peggy! why did he do it?”

“I know not,” she answered soberly. “After thee left Philadelphia there were rumors concerning General Arnold’s extravagance. Mother was much exercised anent the matter. But as to whether that had anything to do with this, I know not.”

“How shall I bear it?” he cried suddenly. “Who shall take his place? Had he been with us there would have been another tale to tell of Camden.”

“That may be, John.” And then, seeking to beguile his thoughts from the matter, she added with sweet craftiness: “Thee has not told me how thee came to be down here? Nor yet if thee ever returned to New York City after that trip with the wood? Thee should have seen Cousin William after the failure of the alert. That was why he brought me down here.” 404

“Tell me about it, Peggy,” he replied with kindling interest. And the girl, pleased with her artifice, related all that had befallen her.

“And now?” he questioned. “What are you going to do now?”

“There is but one thing to do, John,” she answered, surprised by the query. “That is, to get home as quickly as possible.”

“I like not for you to undertake such a journey, Peggy. There are more loyalists in the South than elsewhere, which was the reason the war was transferred to these states. ’Tis a dangerous journey even for a man. ’Tis hard to get despatches to and from Congress, as you know by the death of that poor fellow whose letters you carried. I don’t believe that your mother would like for you to undertake it.”

“But there is danger in staying, John. No part of the Carolinas is safe from an incursion of the enemy. ’Tis as far back to the plantation at Charlotte as ’twould be to go on to Virginia, and I want my mother. Friend Hart said that he and his wife would travel slowly so that I could o’ertake them.” 405

“Yes; you ought to be out of this,” agreed Drayton. “Every part of this country down here is being ravaged by Tories, who seem determined to destroy whatever the British leave. Would that I could take you to your mother, Peggy, but I cannot leave without deserting, and that I——”

“Thee must not think of it,” she interrupted, looking at him fearfully.

“And that,” he went on steadily without noticing the interruption, “I would not do, even for you.”

“That forever settles my last doubt of thee,” declared Peggy with an attempt at sprightliness. “I know that thee is willing to do almost anything for me.”

“Yes,” he replied. “And now I must go.”

“Shall I see thee again before I leave, John?”

“When do you start?”

“In the morning. I waited to-day to see thee.” 406

“Then it must be good-bye now,” he said. “I am to carry some despatches to General Marion on the morrow, and that will take us far apart, Peggy. I asked for the mission; for I must have action at the present time. I like not to think.”

“Don’t be too venturesome,” pleaded the girl. “We who know thee have no need of valiant deeds to prove thy merit.”

“I want a chance to distinguish myself,” declared the lad. “That, and to prove my loyalty too. All of General Arnold’s old men will be regarded with suspicion until they show that they are true. And now good-bye, Peggy.”

“Good-bye, John,” spoke the maiden sorrowfully. “Thee carries my sympathy and prayers with thee.”

He bade her good-bye again, and left. Early next morning Peggy set forth at speed hoping to overtake Mr. and Mistress Hart before the day’s end. Her thoughts were busied with Drayton and

his grief, and she now acknowledged to herself the fear that had filled her lest he too should prove disloyal.

“But it hath not even occurred to him to be other than true,” she told herself with rejoicing. 407

And so thinking she rode along briskly, and was not long in reaching the spot where they had been stopped by the dying vidette. She gazed at the place with melancholy, noting that the bushes were trampled as though a number of men had passed over them. Doubting not but that this appearance had been caused by the soldiers who had been sent for the body, which was indeed the fact, the girl sped on rapidly, trying not to think of all that had occurred in the past few days.

Peggy had been sure of her bearings up to this time, for she had traversed the highway twice to this point, but from this on she was confronted by an unfamiliar road. So it happened that when directly she came to a place where the road diverged into two forks, she drew rein in bewilderment.

“Why,” she exclaimed, “I don’t know which one to take. What shall I do? How shall I decide, Star?” appealing to the only living thing near.

Hearing her name the little mare neighed, tossed her head, and turned into the branch of the roadway running toward the South, just as though she had taken matters in hand for herself. Peggy laughed. 408

“So thee is going to decide for me, is thee?” she asked patting the pony’s neck. “Well, we might as well go in this direction as the other. I know not which is the right one. I hope that we will come to a house soon where I may ask.”

But no dwelling of any kind came in sight. The afternoon wore away, and the girl became anxious. She did not wish to pass the night in the woods. The memory of that night so long ago when she and Harriet had ridden to Amboy was not so pleasant that she wished to repeat the experience. But Star sped ahead as though familiar with her surroundings. At nightfall there was still no sign of either Joe Hart and his wife, or sight of habitation.

“I fear me we have lost our way, Star,” she mused aloud. “I wonder what we’d best do? Keep moving, methinks. ’Tis the only way to reach anywhere.”

Peggy tried to smile at her little sally, but with poor success. The pony trotted ahead as if she at least was not bewildered, and presently, to the girl’s amazement, of her own accord turned into a lane that would have escaped Peggy’s notice. To her further astonishment at a short distance from the highway stood a woodman’s hut, and the mare paused before the door. 409

“Why, thou dear creature!” cried Peggy in delight. “It seems just as though thee knew the way.”

She dismounted, and with the bridle over her arm approached the cabin almost gaily, so greatly relieved was she at finding a shelter. A woman came to the door in answer to her knock, and opened it part way.

“What do you want?” she asked harshly.

“A lodging for the night, friend,” answered the maiden, surprised by this reception, for the people were usually hospitable and friendly.

“How many air you?” was the next question.

“Myself alone, friend,” replied Peggy, more and more amazed. “I wish food and a stable for my pony also. I will pay thee for it,” she added with a sudden remembrance of the money that Henry Egan had given her.

“Well, come in.” The door was opened, and the woman regarded her curiously as she entered. It was but a one-room hut, and a boy of twelve appeared to be its only occupant aside from the woman. He rose as the girl entered, and went out to attend the horse. 410

“Do you want something to eat?” asked the woman ungraciously.

“If thee pleases,” answered Peggy, ill at ease at so much surliness. The woman placed food before her, and watched her while she ate.

“Where air you all going?” she asked presently.

“To Philadelphia, in the state of Pennsylvania,” explained Peggy, who had found that many of the women in the Carolinas were but ill-informed as to locations of places.

“Is that off toward Virginia?”

“I must go through Virginia to reach there,” said the girl.

“You’re going wrong, then,” the woman informed her. “You air headed now for South Carolina.”

The girl uttered a cry of dismay.

At this moment the urchin reëntered the hut, and whispered a moment to his mother. Instantly a change came over her. She turned to Peggy with a glimmer of a smile. 411

“Air you a friend?” she asked.

“Why, yes,” answered Peggy, thinking naturally that she meant the sect of Quakers. “I should think thee would know that.”

“You can’t always tell down here. Sam says that you air riding Cap’n Hazy’s horse. It used to stop here often last summer.”

“Then that was why the pony brought me here,” cried the girl in surprise. “I was lost. How strange!”

“Why, no. Horses always go where they are used to going,” said the woman, in a matter-of-fact tone. “That is, if you give ’em their head. When is the cap’n coming?”

“How should I know?” asked Peggy, staring at her. “I don’t——”

“We air friends, miss. You needn’t be afraid to say anything you like. But you air right. Keep a still tongue in these times. ’Tis safest. And now, I reckon you’d like to go to bed?”

“Yes, if you please,” answered the maiden, so amazed by the conversation that she welcomed the 412
change for reflection. Was Captain Hazy the British commander of the foraging party who had come to the plantation, she wondered. It occurred to her that it might be wise to accept her hostess’s advice to keep a still tongue.

There was but one bed in the room, and this was given Peggy, while the mother and son simply lay down upon the floor before the fire, which was the custom among mountaineers. Without disrobing the girl lay down, but not to sleep. She was uneasy, and the more she reflected upon her position the more it came to her that she had been rash to start out alone as she had done.

“But I won’t turn back now,” she decided. “I will take some of the money which Friend Henry gave me, and hire some one to take me home. ’Tis what I should have done at first.”

At the first sign of dawn she was astir. The woman rose at the same time, and prepared her a hot breakfast.

“Now you just go right down that way,” she told Peggy, as the maiden mounted her pony, indicating the direction as she spoke. “That’ll take you down to the Cross Creek road. Ford the 413
river at Cross Creek, and you will be right on the lower road to Virginia.”

Peggy thanked her, gave her a half guinea, and departed. Could she have followed the direction given she would, as the woman said, have been on the lower road to Virginia, but alas, such general directions took no account of numerous crossroads and forkings, and the maiden was soon in a maze. That night she found a resting-place at a farmhouse where the accommodations were of a better nature, but when she tried to hire a man for guidance not one seemed willing to go.

“They were needed at home,” they said. “There were so many raiding parties that men could not be spared.” Which was true, but disheartening to Peggy.

In this manner three days went by. At long distances apart were houses of some description, and many ruins, some of them smoldering.

On the afternoon of the third day Peggy was riding along slowly, thoroughly discouraged, when all at once from the dense woods that lined the roadway there emerged the form of a horseman. 414

He was hatless and disheveled in appearance, and he surveyed the road as though fearful of meeting a foe. As his glance fell upon the maiden he uttered an ejaculation, and dashed toward her.

“Peggy,” he cried staring at her in amaze, “what in the world are you doing down here in South Carolina? I thought you in Virginia by this time.”

“I would not be surprised if thee told me that I was in Africa,” answered poor Peggy half laughing, half crying. “I started for Virginia, but took a wrong turning, and seem to have kept on taking them ever since. I don’t want to be down here, but no one will come with me to guide me, and I always go wrong on the crossroads.”

In spite of the gravity of the situation Drayton, for it was he, laughed.

“Nay,” he said, “let me believe that you came down here to help me deliver my despatches to Marion. I will have to take you in charge. Let me think what to do. I have it! There is a farmhouse where Whigs are welcomed near here. You shall stay there until these papers are delivered, and 415
then we shall see if something can’t be arranged.”

“Oh, thank thee, John,” cried she, mightily relieved. “’Tis so nice to have some one to plan. I shall do just as thee says, for I begin to believe that I am not so capable as I thought.”

“These winding roads are enough to confuse any one,” he told her. “You are not alone in getting lost, Peggy. Some of the soldiers do too, if they are not familiar with localities.”

Cheered by this meeting, Peggy’s spirits rose, and she chatted gaily, not noticing that Drayton kept looking behind them, and that he frequently rode a little ahead, as though he were on the lookout.

“What is it?” she asked at length becoming aware that something was amiss. “Is there danger, John?”

“Yes, Peggy. South Carolina is full of British, you know. I must watch for an ambush. I would not fail to deliver these despatches for anything. They are important, and as I told you the other day, all of us who were under Arnold will be suspected until tried.” 416

Peggy grew pale. “I did not know there was danger, John. Doth my presence increase your

anxiety?”

“’Tis pleasure to have you, Peggy, but I would rather you were in Virginia for your own safety. However, we shall soon turn into a side road which will lead to that farmhouse I spoke about. I could no longer get through the woods, or I should not have left them for the highway. But had I not done so I would not have met you. ’Tis marvelous, Peggy, that you have met with no harm.”

“Why should I meet with any?” she queried. “I am but a girl, and can bring hurt to none.”

Drayton drew rein suddenly, and listened.

“We must make a run for it, Peggy,” he cried. “The British are coming. I gave them the slip a while ago, but I hear them down the road. If we can reach the lane we may escape them.”

Peggy called to Star, and the boy and girl struck into a gallop. It was soon evident, however, that Drayton was holding back his horse for Peggy to keep pace with him. As Peggy realized this a whoop from the pursuers told that they had caught sight of them, and the clattering hoofs that they were gaining upon them.

“John,” she cried, “go on! Thee can get away then.”

“And leave you, Peggy? Never,” he answered.

“But thy despatches? Thee just told me they must be delivered. Thee must go on.”

“No,” he replied with set lips.

“’Tis thy duty,” she said imploringly.

“I know, but I’m not going to leave you to the mercy of those fiends,” he cried.

“John, thee must not fail. See! they are gaining. Go, go! Does thee remember that thee will be suspected until thee is tried?”

“I know,” he said doggedly, “but I won’t leave you.”

“For thy country’s sake,” she entreated. “Oh, John, I can’t have thee fail because of me. Think of that poor vidette. Is thee going to do less than he? ’Tis thy duty.”

“Peggy, don’t ask it,” he pleaded.

“Thee is less than soldier if thee doesn’t do thy duty,” she cried, quick to see her advantage. “John Drayton, I will never trust thee again if thee fails in thy duty now.”

The two young people gazed at each other through the dust of the road, the girl with earnest entreaty, determined to keep the lad to his duty in spite of himself, and the youth torn by his fear for her and his loyalty.

“Go,” she cried again. “I am a soldier’s daughter. Would I be worthy the name if thee failed because of me? Go at once, or ’twill be too late.”

“I’m going, Peggy,” he said with a sob. “I’m going to do my duty even if you are the sacrifice. Take this pistol, and defend yourself. Good-bye.” He bent and kissed her hand, and then without one backward glance went flying down the road and disappeared around a bend. For duty to country must come before everything, and father, mother, brother, sister, wife or sweetheart, must be sacrificed upon its altar, if need arises.

There was a smile on Peggy’s lips, for Drayton had kept to his duty in spite of as great a temptation as ever assailed a man to do otherwise, and so smiling she turned to meet the pursuers.

CHAPTER XXXIII—A GREAT SURPRISE

> “A man’s country is not a certain area of land, of mountains, rivers and woods—but it is a principle, and patriotism is loyalty to that principle.”
>
> *—George William Curtis.*

There came hoarse shouts from the pursuing troopers as Drayton disappeared from view, and they galloped toward the girl at increased speed. There was something so fierce, so martial in their aspect that it struck terror to the maiden’s heart, and she found herself all at once shaking and quaking with fear.

Dear as freedom is to every pulse, standing up for the first time before an advancing foe one is apt to find one’s courage oozing out at the fingers’ ends. And so with Peggy.

The smile died from her lips, and a sort of panic took possession of her as the sunshine caught the sheen of their scabbards and lighted into glowing color the scarlet of their uniforms. Nearer they came. The girl trembled like a leaf.

“I am a soldier’s daughter,” she told herself in an effort to regain self-control. “I will die like one.”

Almost unconsciously her little hand clutched the pistol that Drayton had thrust into it, and, as the enemy were nearly upon her, in an agony of fear Peggy raised the weapon and fired. The foremost dragoon reeled slightly, recovered his balance immediately, and drew rein with his right arm hanging limply by his side. The others also checked their horses as a scream of horror burst from Peggy's lips.

"God forgive me," she cried. "Blood-guiltiness is upon me! I knew not what I did."

And with this cry she threw the pistol from her, and dashed at once to the dragoon's side.

"Thee is hurt," she exclaimed looking up at him wildly. "Forgive me, friend. I meant not to harm thee. Oh, I meant it not!"

"Then why did you fire?" he demanded, regarding her with astonishment.

Peggy wrung her hands in anguish.

"I was afraid. Thee and thy troopers looked so terrible that I was in panic. I knew not what I did, 421
friend. And thy arm! See how it bleeds! Sir, let me bandage it, I pray thee. I have some skill in such matters."

Her distress was so evident, her contrition so sincere that the scowl on his face relaxed. Without further word he removed his coat, and let her examine the injured member while the dragoons gathered about them, eyeing the girl curiously. Her face grew deadly pale at sight of the blood that gushed forth from a wound near the elbow, but controlling her emotion she deftly applied a ligature, using her own kerchief for it.

"You're a fine rebel," was his comment as she completed the self-imposed task. "Shoot a man so that you can patch him up! 'Tis small wonder that you have skill in such matters. Gordon, bring me that pistol. 'Tis the first time that Banastre Tarleton hath been wounded in this war, and I am minded to keep the weapon that did it."

"Is thee Colonel Tarleton?" asked she, her heart sinking.

"Yes," he made answer, a peculiar light coming into his eyes at her involuntary shrinking. "And 422
now, my fair rebel with the Quaker speech, will you tell me why one of your sect fires upon an officer of His Majesty? But perchance you are not a Quakeress?"

"Methought I was in all but politics," she replied. "I have been trained all my life to believe that courage is displayed, and honor attained by doing and suffering; but I have sadly departed from the ways of peace," she added humbly. "I knew not before that my nature had been so corrupted by the war that my fortitude had become ferocity. Yet it must be so since I have resorted to violence and the shedding of blood. And how shall I tell my mother!"

"Have you despatches?" he asked sternly. "Where were you going when we captured you? I suppose that you realize that you are my prisoner?"

"Yes; I know, sir. I bear no despatches," she told him meeting his eyes so frankly that he could not but believe her. "I was trying to get to my home in Philadelphia. I started three days since, but lost my way. Every one I asked for guidance gave it, correctly, I doubt not, but what with the 423
crossroads and swamps, and being unfamiliar with the country I have gone far astray. Now I suppose that I shall never see my mother again!"

"Well, you know that you deserve some punishment for that hurt. And now what about that fellow that was with you? Why did the dastard leave you? Zounds! how can a maiden prefer any of these uncouth rascals when they exhibit such craven spirit!"

"He was doing his duty, sir," answered Peggy, and her eyes flashed with such fire that he laughed, well pleased that he could rouse her.

"His duty, eh? And did duty call him so strongly that he could leave a girl alone to face what might be certain death? We English would call it another name."

"Then you English would know nothing of true courage," she retorted. "He is a patriot, and his duty must come before everything else. Thee will find, if thee has not already found, Colonel Tarleton, that these uncouth rascals, as thee terms them, are not so wanting in spirit as thy words imply."

"No; 'fore George, they are not," he exclaimed. "And now unravel your story to me. Your whole 424
history, while we go on to Camden. 'Tis a goodly distance, and 'twill serve to make me forget this hurt."

"Doth it pain thee so much?" she asked tremulously, the soft light of pity and sorrow springing again to her eyes.

"Oh, yes," he answered grimly. "But now your story, mistress. And leave out no part of it. I wish to know of all your treasonable doings so as to make your punishment commensurable with your merits."

And Peggy, suppressing that part of her narrative that related to the army, told him how she had been taken to New York, of the shipwreck, and about her efforts to reach her home.

"And so Colonel Owen of the Welsh Fusileers is your cousin," he mused. "Methought that I had seen you somewhere, and now I know that it must have been at his house. Would you like to stay with your cousin and his daughter until I decide upon your punishment?"

"Thee did not understand, I fear me," she exclaimed with a startled glance. "I could not stay with 425

them because they were lost at sea. Does thee not remember that I said they were on the 'Falcon'?"

"True; but you could not see for the fog what happened after you left in the small boat. They were rescued by another schooner, the 'Rose,' which I was on myself. We escaped serious injury in the storm, and came across the 'Falcon' just in time to rescue the crew and skipper, and those officers and others who happened to be aboard."

For a short time Peggy was so overcome that she could not speak, but at last she murmured faintly:

"Oh, I am glad, glad!"

"What sort of girl are you," he asked abruptly, "that you rejoice over their rescue? They were unkind to you, by your own telling. Why should you feel joy that they are living?"

"They are my kinspeople," she said. "And sometimes they were kind. Had it not been for Harriet I would not have been in the little boat. She made me enter it when to remain on the 'Falcon' seemed certain death. She knew not that they would be rescued." 426

"Perhaps not," he remarked dryly. "Although I have never known Mistress Harriet Owen to do one act that had not an underlying motive. But I should not speak so to one who sees no wrong in others."

"Don't," she uttered the tears springing to her eyes at the sneer. "I do see wrong; and thee doesn't know how hard I am trying not to feel bitter toward them. I dare not think that 'tis to them I owe not seeing my mother for so long. I—I am not very good," she faltered, "and thee knows by that wound how I am failing in living up to my teaching."

"I see," he said; and was silent.

Camden, a strong post held by the British in the central northern part of South Carolina, was reached at length. It was at this place that General Gates met his overwhelming defeat in the August before, and as Peggy viewed its defenses she could not but wonder that he had ventured to attack it. Colonel Tarleton proceeded at once to a large two-story dwelling, the wide verandah of which opened directly upon the main street.

"I will leave you," he began, but Peggy uttered a cry of surprise as a girl's figure came slowly through the open door of the house. 427

"Harriet! Harriet!" she cried. "Oh, thee didn't tell me that Harriet was here!"

She sprang lightly from the pony's back, and ran joyfully up the steps, with arms outstretched.

"I thought thee dead," she cried with a little sob. "I knew not until now that thou wert alive. Oh, Harriet, Harriet! I am so glad thee lives. And where is Cousin William? And oh!——" she broke off in dismay. "What hath happened to thee? What is the matter, Harriet?"

For Harriet's wonderful eyes no longer flashed with brilliancy but met her own with a dreary, lustreless gaze. Her marvelous complexion had lost its transparency, and was dull and sallow. She leaned weakly upon Peggy's shoulder, and as the latter, shocked at the change in the once spirited Harriet, asked again, "Oh, what is the matter? What hath happened?" she burst into tears without replying.

"'Tis the Southern fever," spoke Colonel Owen, coming to the door at this moment. "So you escaped a briny grave, my little cousin? How came you here? Was it to seek us that you came? You at least seem to have suffered no inconvenience from this climate. It hath carried off many of our soldiers, and Harriet hath pulled through by a miracle. It will take time, however, to restore her fully to strength. Did you say you came to seek us?" 428

"Nay," interposed Colonel Tarleton. "The girl is my prisoner, Colonel Owen. I will leave her with you for the present, but will hold you answerable for her safety. You are to send her to me each day so that she may give attention to this wound which I owe to her marksmanship. So soon as it shall heal I will decide upon her punishment."

"Well, upon my word, my cousin," exclaimed William Owen as Colonel Tarleton, scowling fiercely, went away. "You are improving. I knew not that Quakers believed in bloodshed. Tell us about it."

And Peggy, drawing Harriet close to her in her strong young arms, told of her rescue and how she came to be once more with them.

CHAPTER XXXIV—HOME 429

"The bugles sound the swift recall;
Cling, clang! backward all!
Home, and good-night!"

—E. C. Stedman.

Each day Peggy was taken to Colonel Tarleton to attend his wound. It was in truth painful, and

often her tears fell fast upon the inflamed surface when she saw the suffering he endured, and knew that it had been caused by her hand. But it was healed at last, and when she told him joyfully that he had no further need of bandages or treatment, he looked at her with some amusement.

“And now for the punishment,” he observed. “What do you deserve, mistress?”

“I don’t know,” said Peggy, growing pale.

“I leave for the southern part of the state to-morrow,” he said. “The matter must be decided to-day. What say you to a parole?”

“Nay,” and the girl shook her head. “My father doth not believe in them, and neither do I. I want 430
to be free to help the cause in any way that I can.”

“Well, upon my word!” he cried. “You are pleased to be frank.”

“Would you not rather have me so, sir?” she asked.

“Yes,” he answered. “I would. Then what are we to do? Ah! I have it. I shall banish you.”

“Banish me?” repeated she with quivering lips. “To—to what place, sir?”

“A distant place called Philadelphia,” he answered. “Think you that you can bear such exile?”

“Sir,” she faltered, trembling excessively, “do not jest, I pray thee. I—I cannot bear it.”

“Child,” he said dropping the banter, “I jest not. I am going to take you to Georgetown and put you aboard ship for the North. I am sincere, I assure you.”

“Thee will do this?” she cried not daring to credit her senses.

“Yes; and for this reason: In all this land, ay! and in England also, no one hath ever before shed a tear when aught of ill hath befallen Banastre Tarleton. Had any other woman, or girl, or man in 431
this entire Southland wounded me there would have been rejoicing instead of sorrow. Had you not been sincere I would have made you repent bitterly. As it is, this is my punishment: that you proceed to your mother as fast as sail can carry you.”

“And they call thee cruel?” cried the girl catching his hand. “Sir, none shall ever do so again in my presence.”

“Come,” he said. “I will go with you to your cousins. You must be ready for an early start to-morrow. A number of loyalists are going to Georgetown to take ship for other ports, so there will be a numerous company.”

But Harriet received the news with dismay.

“What shall I do?” she cried, the tears streaming from her eyes. “I was getting better, and now you will go and leave me again. Oh, Peggy, I want to go too!”

Colonel Owen looked up eagerly.

“Why not?” he asked. “’Twould be the very thing! Peggy, could you not take Harriet with you? In Philadelphia she would regain her strength. A change from this malarious climate is what she 432
needs. Won’t you take her, Peggy?”

“Oh, Peggy, do take me,” pleaded Harriet. “I shall die here!”

But Peggy made no answer. She looked from father to daughter, from daughter to father thoughtfully. Over her rushed the many things that had befallen her since they had entered her life. The father had caused the death of her dog; had treated her mother and herself scornfully; had lodged a spy in their very home; and had finally robbed them of everything the house contained in the way of food.

And Harriet! Had she not deceived them all? Her father, mother and herself? Would she not do so again if she were to be with them once more? Would she not spy and plot against the cause if she were given opportunity? Could she forgive and forget the deceit, the long absence from her mother, the hardships and trials, and take her to her own dear home? Could she do it?

Her heart throbbed painfully as she turned a searching glance toward her cousin. She was so thin, so wasted, so different from her former brilliant self, that the last tinge of bitterness left 433
Peggy, and a sudden glow of tenderness rushed over her.

“Of course thee shall come with me,” she cried, catching Harriet’s hands and drawing her to her. “And thee shall see how soon mother and I will make thee well. And oh, Harriet, thee will be in my very own home!”

“Oh, I shall be so glad,” cried Harriet, a faint flush coming to her face. “Father, do you hear? Peggy says that I am to go!”

“You are a good little thing after all, Peggy,” observed Colonel Owen, not without emotion. “A good little thing!”

“I think that I will leave this love-feast,” exclaimed Colonel Tarleton, laughing cynically. “’Fore George, but I am glad the girl is going. A little more of this sort of influence would be bad for my reputation as leader of the cruel raiders. Be sure that you are up betimes, Mistress Peggy. I will have no dallying in the morning.”

“I will be ready, and so will Harriet,” cried Peggy, darting to his side and seizing the hand of the

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arm that she had wounded. Bending quickly she kissed it, exclaiming, “I will never forget how good thee has been, sir.”

“There,” exclaimed he. “I have no more time to spare.” And he strode away.

It was a snowy day in early December, fourteen days later, that Peggy, mounted on Star and Harriet on Fleetwood, left the ferry, and galloped into Philadelphia.

“’Tis my own dear city at last,” cried Peggy excitedly. “And that is the Delaware in very truth. Thee hasn’t seen a river like it, has thee, Harriet? We will soon be home now. ’Tis not much further.”

And so in exuberance of spirit she talked until at length the home in Chestnut Street was reached. She sprang to the ground just as Tom, the groom, came to the front of the house. The darkey gave one glance and then ran forward, crying:

“Foh massy sake, ef hit ain’t Miss Peggy! An’ Star! Yas, suh, an’ Star! Mis’ Owen will be powerful glad ter see yer. She am in de dinin’-room.”

“Yes, it’s Peggy. Peggy—come to stay,” cried she, giving the bridle into his hand. “Come, Harriet!” 435

But Harriet hesitated. For the first time something like confusion and shame appeared upon her face.

“Your mother?” she whispered. “How will she receive me?” She clasped Peggy’s hand convulsively. “What will she say to me?”

Before Peggy could answer, the door of the dwelling opened and Mistress Owen herself appeared on the threshold. There were lines of care and grief in her face, and Peggy was shocked to see that her hair was entirely white, but in manner she was as serene as of yore.

“I thought——” she began, but at sight of the slender maiden advancing toward her, she grew pale, and leaned against the door weakly. “Peggy?” she whispered.

“Mother! Mother! Mother!” screamed the girl springing to her arms. “Mother, at last!”

Her mother clasped her close, as though she would never let her go again, and so they stood for a long time. Presently Peggy uttered a little cry. “Harriet!” she exclaimed in dismay. “I had forgotten Harriet.” She ran quickly down the steps, and putting her arm around her cousin drew 436 her up the stoop toward Mistress Owen.

For the briefest second a shadow marred the serenity of the lady’s countenance. Then, as she noted the girl’s wasted form, her glance changed to one of solicitude and she took Harriet into her motherly arms.

“Thou poor child,” she said gently. “Thou hast been ill.”

“I feared you would not want me,” faltered Harriet, the ready tears beginning to flow.

“We have always wanted thee, my child, when thou wert thine own true self,” answered the lady. “But come into the sitting-room. Sukey shall bring us some tea and thou shalt rest while Peggy and I talk. Thee must be tired.”

“Tired?” echoed Harriet, sinking into the great easy chair which Peggy hastened to pull forward. “Tired?” she repeated with a sigh of content as the exquisite peacefulness of the room stole over her senses. “I feel as though I should never be tired again. ’Tis so restful here.”

“It’s home,” cried Peggy, dancing from one object to another in her delight. “And how clean 437 everything is! Was it always so, mother?”

“That speech doth not speak well for the places of thy sojourning, my daughter,” observed her mother with a slight smile. “But tell me how it hath happened that thou hast returned at last? I wish to know everything that hath befallen thee.”

And nestling close to her mother’s side, Peggy told all her story.

LUCY FOSTER MADISON

Mrs. Madison was born in Kirkville, Adair County, Missouri, but when she was four years old her parents removed to Louisiana, Missouri, and there her girlhood was spent. She was educated in the public schools of that place, and graduated from the High School with the highest honor—the valedictory.

As a child she was passionately fond of fairy stories, dolls and flowers. Up to her eleventh year the book that influenced her most was “Pilgrim’s Progress.” Mrs. Madison’s father had a large library filled with general literature, and she read whatever she thought interesting. In this way she became acquainted with the poets, ancient history and the novelists, Dickens and Scott. It was not until she was twelve that she came in contact with Miss Alcott’s works, but after that Joe, Meg, Amy and Beth were her constant companions. At this time she was also devoted to “Scottish Chiefs,” “Thaddeus of Warsaw” and “Ivanhoe,” and always poetry.

She doesn’t remember a time when she did not write. From her earliest childhood she made up little stories. In school she wrote poems, stories and essays. When she became a teacher she wrote her own stories and entertainments for the children’s work.

Mrs. Madison’s stories for girls are:

Peggy Owen
Peggy Owen, Patriot
Peggy Owen at Yorktown
Peggy Owen and Liberty
A Colonial Maid of Old Virginia
A Daughter of the Union
In Doublet and Hose
A Maid of King Alfred’s Court
A Maid of the First Century

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PEGGY OWEN, PATRIOT: A STORY FOR GIRLS ***

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