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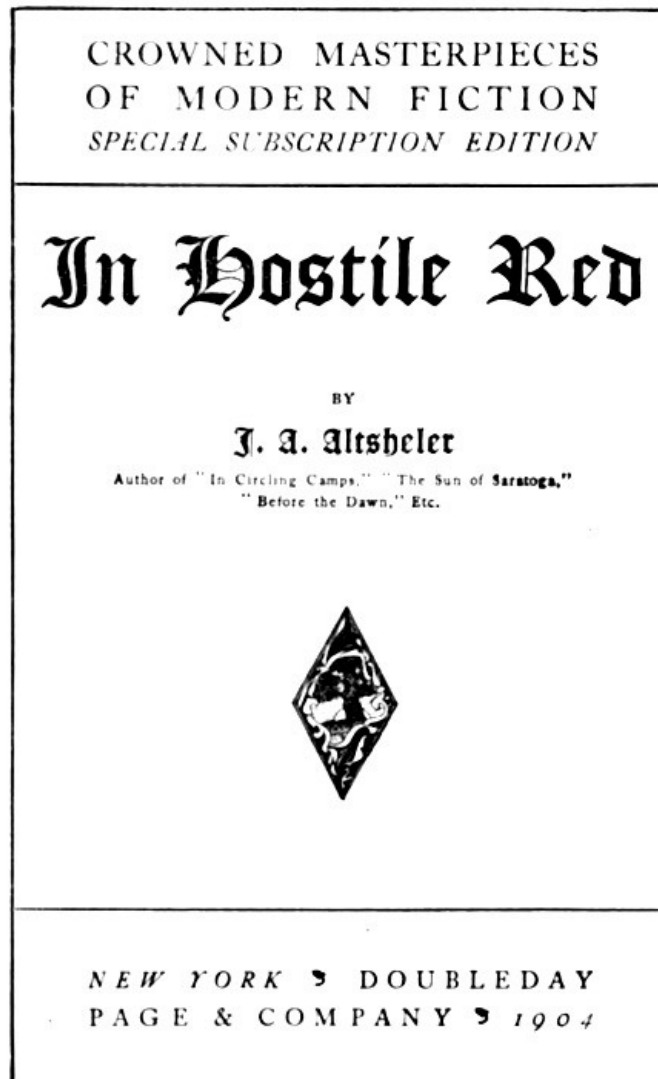
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In Hostile Red

CROWNED MASTERPIECES OF MODERN FICTION

SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTION EDITION

In Hostile Red

BY

J. A. Altscheler

Author of "In Circling Camps," "The Sun of Saratoga," "Before the Dawn," Etc.

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Prefatory Note

The author published three years ago, in Lippincott's Magazine, a short romance, called "A Knight of Philadelphia," which forms the basis of the present story.

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In Hostile Red

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CHAPTER ONE—*In Hostile Red*

"Captain the Honorable Charles Montague, eldest son and heir to Lord George Montague, of Bridgewater Hall, Yorkshire, England," said Marcel, reading the letters, "and Lieutenant Arthur Melville, son to Sir Frederick William Melville, of Newton-on-the-Hill, Staffordshire, England. Those names sound well, don't they, eh, Chester? They roll like the Delaware."

I could not restrain a smile at the prim and choppy way in which Marcel pronounced the names and titles, just as if he were calling the roll of our company. Nevertheless, I wished to hide it, feeling some sympathy for the two young Englishmen because of the grievous state into which they had fallen. As they stood a bit apart from us, they preserved the seeming of dignity, but in truth it was apparent that beneath this cloak they were sore troubled in mind; and well they had a right to be. It was a hard fate to come all the way across the ocean with letters of high recommendation to one's commander-in-chief, only to fall into the hands of the enemy, letters and all, with the place of destination almost in sight.

"They should have stood very high in the graces of Sir William Howe had they reached Philadelphia," said Marcel, "for here are letters from some of the greatest men in England, descending upon their military merits. Perhaps, Chester, we have saved the Thirteen Colonies with this little achievement, you and I. Because, if everything in these letters be true—and it is not for me to criticise the veracity of the writers,—one of our prisoners must be an Alexander at the very least, and the other a Hannibal."

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Marcel had a sprightly humor, and one could never tell how it was going to show itself. But he was not given to malice, and he spoke the latter words in a tone that the Englishmen could not hear.

"Chester," he resumed, drawing me a little farther to one side, "these young gentlemen, barring their mischance of falling into our hands, seem to be veritable pets of fortune. They are rich, of high station, and they come to join a powerful army which has all the resources of war at its command. And look at their raiment, Chester; look at their raiment, I say!"

In good truth, they were apparelled in most comfortable and seemly fashion. There is always a brave dash of color and adornment about the uniform of the British officer, and our prisoners had omitted nothing.

"Now look at our own attire," said Marcel, in tones of the utmost melancholy.

Of a verity, there was cause for his melancholy; the contrast was most piteous. Time and hard wear had played sad tricks with our regimentals, and, what was worse, we knew not when or how we were to replace them.

"I see not why we should grieve over it," I said. "The matter cannot be helped, and we must make the best of it we can."

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"Perhaps," replied Marcel, fingering the letters meditatively. Then he turned and said with much politeness to Captain Montague,—

"I believe you stated that you and your friend are complete strangers to Sir William and his army?"

"Yes," replied Captain Montague; "we have no acquaintance with them at all, and we fear that the unlucky capture of us you have effected will prevent us from making any very soon."

"It was mere chance, and no fault of yours, that threw you into our hands," said Marcel, very courteously; "and it may save you from being killed on the battle-field, which fate I would take to be somewhat unpleasant."

Then he drew me aside again.

"Chester," he said, assuming his most weighty manner, "sit down on this tree-trunk. I wish to hold converse with you for a moment or two."

I occupied the designated seat and waited for him to speak, knowing that he would take his own good time about it.

"Chester," he said, the solemnity of his tone unchanged, "you know what I am."

"Yes," I replied; "by descent three parts French and one part Irish, by birth South Carolinian; therefore wholly irresponsible."

"Quite true," he replied; "and you are by descent three parts English and one part Scotch, and by birth Pennsylvanian; therefore if you were to die the world would come to an end. Now, Bob Chester, still your Quakerish soul and listen. Behold those officers! Their brave clothes and well-rounded figures, which indicate a fine and abundant diet, arouse much envy in my soul, and because of it I have taken a resolution. Now having listened, look!"

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He rose and bowed low.

"Lieutenant Melville," he said, addressing himself to me, "pardon this somewhat formal and abrupt introduction, but I have heard often of your family, and I know of its ancient and honorable extraction. Perhaps my own may fairly make pretensions of a similar character. Lieutenant Melville, permit me to introduce myself. I am Captain the Honorable Charles Montague, eldest son to Lord George Montague, of Bridgewater Hall, Yorkshire. I am delighted to meet you, Lieutenant Melville, and doubly delighted to know that you also have letters to our illustrious commander-in-chief, and that we shall be comrades in arms and in glory."

"Marcel," said I, after a moment's pause, for he had taken the breath from me, "this is impossible. It would mean the halter for both of us before to-morrow night."

"Not so," he replied. "Neither of those men has a personal acquaintance in the British army. What I propose is easy enough, if we only preserve a little coolness and tact. I am tired of skulking about like a half-starved hound, and I want an adventure. It's only for a day or two. Moreover, think what valuable information we might be able to acquire in Philadelphia, and what a great service we might render to our commander-in-chief. But of course, if you are afraid to go with me, I will go alone."

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So speaking, he looked at me in the most provoking manner.

Now, I hold that I am a prudent man, but the Highland fourth in my blood will get the mastery of the English three-fourths now and then, and I never would take a dare from Marcel. Besides, I had a sudden vision and I dreamed of a great service to a desperate cause, to be followed perhaps by high promotion.

"A good idea," I said. "We will go to our colonel and propose it at once."

Marcel laughed, and his manner became more provoking than ever.

"And be called a fool for your trouble," he said. "Now is your chance or not at all. Come, Bob! Our success will bring our pardon. At this moment the way of a true patriot lies there."

He pointed toward Philadelphia, and his words were most tempting.

"Very well," I said; "if you go alone you will surely be detected and hanged as a spy. Since it is necessary for me to go with you to save you, I'll have to do it."

"It is most kind of you," said Marcel; "and then if we must hang it will be pleasanter for us to hang together."

We beckoned to Sergeant Pritchard and told him our plan. He was full of astonishment and protestations. But, as he was under our command, he could do naught but obey.

The two young Englishmen were compelled to retire behind some trees and divest themselves of their fine clothes, which we donned, giving them our rags in return. All the letters and other documents that we found in their possession we put in our pockets. Then we mounted their sleek, fat horses and turned our heads towards Philadelphia.

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"Sergeant Pritchard," I said, "look well to the prisoners, and see that they do not escape ere we return."

"Then they will never escape," he said. "Lieutenant Chester, you and Lieutenant Marcel could find better ways to die. I beg you to come back."

"Sergeant Pritchard," said Marcel, "we will do you the honor of dining with you, at your expense, one month from to-day. Meanwhile report to our colonel the nature of the errand upon which we are now going."

Then we bowed low to the gentlemen whose clothes we wore, and galloped off towards Philadelphia.

One can become intoxicated without drinking, and the air was so brilliant and buoyant that I think it got into our heads and created in us an unusual measure of high spirits. Moreover, we were so nobly clad and had such good horses under us that we felt like gentlemen of quality for the first time in many long and weary months. We galloped at a great rate for a half-hour, and then when we pulled our horses down to a walk Marcel turned a satisfied smile upon me.

"Lieutenant Melville, allow me to congratulate you upon the make and set of your uniform," he said with extreme politeness. "It is in truth most becoming to you, and I dare say there is no officer in the service of our gracious Majesty King George who could present a finer appearance or prove himself more worthy of his commission."

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"A thousand thanks, Captain Montague," I replied. "Such a compliment from an officer of your critical discernment and vast experience is in truth most grateful. Permit me to add, without attempting to flatter you, that you yourself make a most imposing and military figure. May these perverse rebels soon give us both a chance to prove our valor and worth!"

"The warlike words of a warrior," said Marcel. "And it seemeth to me, Lieutenant Melville, that the warrior is worthy of his wage. The country about us is fair. There are hills and dales and running streams and woodland and pasture. I doubt not that when all the rebels are hanged and their goods confiscated, the king will allot brave estates to us for our most faithful services. It will be very pleasant to each of us, Lieutenant Melville, to have fair acres in this country to add to what we may have some day in England. See that tall hill afar to the right. I think I will rear my mansion upon its crest. That curtain of wood on the slope there will make a lordly pad, while my lands will roll back for miles."

"And I trust that I shall be your neighbor, Captain Montague," I replied, "for, behold, to the left is another hill, upon which a noble building shall rise, the home of the famous soldier General Melville, Duke of Pennsylvania."

Then we threw our heads back and laughed like two boys out for a frolic.

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"There is one thing that both of us must bear in mind, Lieutenant Melville," said Marcel, presently.

"What is that?" I asked.

"We must not forget the tragic end of two young American officers whom we knew, Lieutenant Robert Chester, of Pennsylvania, and Lieutenant Philip Marcel, of South Carolina."

"Ah! their fate was sad, very sad," I said.

Marcel put his face in his hands and appeared to weep.

"They departed this life very suddenly," he said, "about ten o'clock of a fine morning, on the 8th of May, 1778, in his Britannic Majesty's province of Pennsylvania, about fifteen miles east of his most loyal city of Philadelphia. The witnesses of their sudden and sorrowful demise were Sergeant Pritchard, four privates in the rebel service, and two young British officers who had just been captured by the aforesaid rebels. But such, alas, are the chances of war; we must even weep their fate, for they were so young and so ingenuous! Lieutenant Melville, will you weep with me?"

We bowed our heads and wept.

"Suppose the English officers should ask us about England and our homes and kin?" I said to Marcel. "How could we answer them without at once convicting ourselves?"

"That will be easy enough," replied Marcel, gayly. "We have brains, haven't we? And if any impertinent fellow becomes too inquisitive we can do as the Connecticut man does: we can answer a question with a question of our own. Besides, there is plenty of information in these letters that we have captured, and we can study them."

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We were now approaching the British lines, but were still in a region that might be called doubtful ground, since parties from either army scouted and foraged over it.

I suggested that we halt in the shade of a convenient grove and examine the letters again with minute care, rehearsing them in order that we might be perfectly familiar with their contents. This we did, and then each tested the knowledge of the other, like a pedagogue questioning his pupil.

"I think we'll do," said Marcel. "Even if we were to lose the letters, we can remember everything that is in them."

"That being granted," I replied, "I propose that we push on at once for Philadelphia. I am amazingly hungry, and I have heard that the rations of the British officers are a delight to the stomach."

We mounted our horses and rode leisurely on. As we were drawing near to the city we expected to meet scouting or skirmishing parties, and we were not subjected to disappointment.

Presently, as our road wound around a hill we heard a clanking of spurs and the jabber of voices. Through some trees we could see bits of sunshine reflected from the metal of guns.

"A British scouting or foraging party," said Marcel. "Now, Bob, remember that we are to carry it off like two young lords, and are to be as weighty of manner as if we equalled Sir William Howe

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himself in rank."

We shook up our horses, and they trotted forward, Marcel and I assuming an air of ease and indifference. A dozen troopers came into our view. They were rather a begrimed and soiled lot, and it was quite evident to us that they had been on a foraging expedition, for one of them carried chickens and turkeys, and another had a newly slain pig resting comfortably across his saddle-bow. The leader seemed to be a large swart man who rode in front and clutched a squawking hen in his left hand.

"They're Americans! They're of our own side, by Jupiter!" exclaimed Marcel. "We'll warn them that this is dangerous ground and that they may meet the enemy at any moment."

So we whipped up our horses and galloped forward with this benevolent purpose in view.

But, to our great amazement and to our equal indignation, the large man drew a horse-pistol of a bigness proportioned to his own, and fired point-blank at us. I heard three or four slugs whizzing in a most uncomfortable manner past my head, and, thinking it was time to stop, drew back my horse with a jerk.

"The confounded whipper-snapper dandies!" exclaimed the big man with the pistol. "Would they dare to ride us down! At them, lads, and knock them off their horses!"

"Stop! stop!" shouted Marcel. "What do you mean by attacking your own countrymen and comrades?"

But his only answer was a shout of derision and the cocking of pistols. Then I remembered that we were clad in the British uniform. The Americans might well believe that our protestations of friendship were but a sham. In truth, they could scarce be expected to believe aught else. With a quick and powerful jerk of the rein I wheeled my horse about. Marcel did likewise, and away we galloped, our countrymen hot at our heels and their bullets whistling about us. [Pg 21]

It was lucky for us that the foragers were well loaded up with spoil and their movements and aim thus impeded. Otherwise I think we should have been slain. But, as it was, none of their bullets struck us, and the suddenness of our flight gave us a good start. We bent down upon our horses' necks, in order to present as small a target as possible.

"I think we ought to stop and explain," I said to Marcel when we had galloped a few hundred yards.

"But there is no time to explain," he replied. "If we were to check our speed we would be overtaken by bullets before we could make explanation. Our uniforms, though very fine and becoming, are much against us, and even if we should escape without wounds we would be taken back as prisoners to the American army."

"Then, Captain Montague," I said, "there is naught for us to do but continue our flight to Philadelphia and escape within the lines of his Britannic Majesty's most devoted army."

"It is even so, Lieutenant Melville," returned Marcel. "How does his Grace the Duke of Pennsylvania like to be pursued thus over his own domain by these wicked rebels?" [Pg 22]

"He likes it not at all," I replied.

"But he must even endure it," said Marcel, grinning in spite of our predicament.

We had gained somewhat upon our pursuers, but we could hear the big man encouraging the others and urging them to greater speed. It was our good fortune that the country was not obstructed by hedges or fences, and it seemed that we might escape, for our horses evidently were the fresher.

I looked back and saw the big man fifteen or twenty feet ahead of his companions. He was making great efforts to reload his pistol, but was keeping a watchful eye upon us at the same time. It was plain to me that he was filled with the ardor of the chase and would not relinquish it as long as it seemed possible to overtake us. Presently he adjusted the charge in his pistol and raised the weapon. I saw that it was aimed at me, and just as he pulled the trigger I made my horse swerve. Nevertheless I felt a smart in my left arm and uttered a short cry.

"Are you hurt?" asked Marcel, apprehensively.

"No," I replied, "not much. I think his bullet took a piece of my skin, but no more."

For all that, a fine trickle of blood that came down my left sleeve and stained my hand made me feel uneasy.

We urged our horses to greater efforts, and the spirited animals responded. We had curved about considerably in the course of our flight, but I had a good idea of the country, and I knew that we were now galloping directly towards Philadelphia. I trusted that if our pursuers were aware of this fact they would abandon the chase, which threatened soon to take them inside the British lines. But many minutes passed, and they showed no signs of stopping. [Pg 23]

"We have our pistols," said Marcel. "We might use them."

"We cannot fire on our own countrymen," I replied.

"No," he replied, "but we can fire over their heads, and it may reduce the infernal eagerness they show in their pursuit. A bullet properly directed discourages overmuch enthusiasm."

We twisted about in our saddles and discharged our weapons as Marcel had suggested. But, unfortunately for us, our countrymen were brave and not at all afraid of our pistols. They came

on as fast as ever, while our movement had checked our flight somewhat and caused us to lose ground perceptibly. We began to grow discouraged.

But in this moment of depression we saw a smudge of red across a valley, and Marcel uttered a little shout of joy.

"A rescue! A rescue, most noble duke!" he cried. "See, the British troops are coming!"

Through the valley a body of British cavalry were galloping. There were at least fifty men in the party, and evidently they had seen us before we saw them, for many of them held their sabres in their hands, and presently they raised a great shout.

Our American pursuers, seeing that they were out-numbered, turned about and took to their heels with considerable precipitation. The next moment we galloped into the middle of the British troop, and then, a curious faintness overcoming me, I slid to the ground. [Pg 24]

Marcel, having thrown himself from his horse, was beside me in a moment, and lifted me to my feet.

"A little water, please, as soon as you can," he said to a fine stalwart officer who had also dismounted and come to my aid. "The lieutenant was wounded in a brush we had with those confounded rebels, and I fear his strength is exhausted."

"Then here is something much better for him than water," said the officer, sympathetically.

He held a canteen to my mouth, and I took a draught of as fine whiskey as I have ever tasted. It put life back into me and I was able to stand upon my feet without assistance.

A half-dozen of the British had remained with the officer who gave me the whiskey, but the others had continued the pursuit. This man, who wore the uniform of a captain, was apparently about thirty-five, and of prepossessing appearance. He looked at us inquiringly, and Marcel, who guessed the nature of his unspoken question, said,—

"My friend here, who is so unfortunate as to be wounded, is Lieutenant Arthur Melville, and I am Captain Charles Montague. We landed but lately in New York, and we undertook to come across the country to Philadelphia, for we have letters to Sir William Howe, and we wished to see active service as soon as possible." [Pg 25]

"You seem to have had an adventure, at any rate," said the officer.

"Why, it was nothing much, only a trifle," replied Marcel, airily. "If the fellows had not been so numerous, I think we could have given a handsome account of them. Melville here, before he got his wound, popped one of them off his horse with a bullet through his head, and I think I gave another a reminder in the shoulder which he will not forget very soon. But it was lucky you came when you did, gentlemen, for they were most persistent scoundrels, and I verily believe they would have overtaken us."

"It is a pleasure to have been in time to render you assistance," said the officer. "My name is Blake, Geoffrey Blake, and I am a captain in the Guards. I am something of a surgeon, and if Lieutenant Melville will permit me I will examine his arm and discover the nature of his wound."

The hurt proved to be very slight, but I readily saw how much the manner of our entry into the British lines was in favor of our plan. We had come up full tilt, pursued by the Americans, and an American bullet had grazed my arm. The chase, after all, was a fortunate accident, for it created a vast prepossession in favor of our assumed identity.

"It was an early and rather rude welcome that the rebels gave us," said Marcel, as we were examining the wounded arm, "but I fancy that we will yet find an opportunity for revenge."

"No doubt of it! No doubt of it!" said Captain Blake. "We have not been able to bring on a general battle for some time, but their skirmishers swarm like flies around us, and nothing is safe beyond the sight of our army. It was very bold of you, gentlemen, to undertake a journey from New York to Philadelphia across a rebel-infested country." [Pg 26]

"We thought we might have a skirmish with the rebels," said Marcel, lightly, "and we had no great objection to such an encounter: did we, eh, Melville?"

"Oh, no, not at all, so long as Captain Blake and his gallant men were at hand to rescue us," I replied.

Captain Blake bowed and regarded us with a look of great favor. I saw that we were fast establishing our reputation with our new British friends as men of dashing courage and good nature. Presently the troopers who had pursued the Americans returned and reported that they had been unable to catch them.

"They disappeared in the woods over there," said a lieutenant, "and we can discover no further traces of them. And they carried all their spoil with them, too; not a chicken, not a turkey, could we retake."

"Let them go," replied Captain Blake. "At least we have saved our friends here from capture."

"Which the aforesaid friends consider to be not the least among your achievements," said Marcel.

Captain Blake laughed good-humoredly, and then we rode into Philadelphia, Marcel and I bearing ourselves like conquering heroes and guests of honor.

We made a fine cavalcade when we rode through the streets of Philadelphia. As we had stopped at the outposts in order to comply with the usual formalities, a rumor of our adventures preceded us, and, since it is not the habit of rumor to diminish the importance of things, it made notable heroes of Marcel and me. Some part of it came to our ears as we proceeded, and we found that between us we had slain at least eight rebels and had pursued a hundred others a matter of not less than ten miles.

"I fear, captain," said Marcel to Blake, "that we have achieved such a reputation for valorous conduct that we will never be able to prove the tenth part of it."

"Trust me, gentlemen, for thinking better of you than that," replied Captain Blake, who seemed to have taken a fine fancy for us. "I doubt not that both of you will be winning honors on bloody battlefields."

"If so," said Marcel, "we trust that General Blake will be there to see it."

Captain Blake, who, like most men, was not inaccessible to flattery, seemed charmed at the high promotion Marcel had conferred so readily upon him, and certain was I that we would have a fast friend in him.

"I am going to take you immediately to Sir William himself," said the captain, "as you have letters of introduction to him, and I doubt not that he will place you on his own personal staff, where you will secure fine opportunities for conspicuous service." [Pg 28]

"I would like to see service first at a well-loaded table," whispered Marcel to me. "I was hungry before I reached Philadelphia, and the sight of all these smug and comfortable people in the streets sharpens the pangs of famine."

And in truth the people we saw were a well-fed lot, with fat cheeks and double chins, very unlike our own lean and hungry fellows, who had to fight on empty stomachs.

We arrived in a short time at the quarters of Sir William Howe, a two-story brick house that had once been a private residence, and I was somewhat astonished at the luxury and display I witnessed there. There were as many articles for ease and adornment as ever I had seen in the mansions of our most wealthy citizens, and seeing it all I did not wonder why this general should have been called "The Sluggard." It contrasted strongly with the simplicity of our own commander-in-chief's hut, and I, who had not slept under a roof in a year, felt oppressed, as if the air were too heavy for my lungs. But it was not so with Marcel, who loved his ease and basked in rich colors.

"We have made a happy change, Chester," he said to me as we waited for Sir William. "This in truth looks to be a most comfortable place, and if we do not find much enjoyment here it will be because we are men of small resources." [Pg 29]

I was thinking of the great risks we were incurring, and made no answer. He did not notice it. He sighed in the most contented fashion, and said it was the first moment of real enjoyment he had experienced in six months. But his lazy pleasure was soon interrupted by the entrance of Sir William Howe himself. The British commander was a swart, thick man, whose plump face and figure indicated a love of good eating. His expression was indolent, and on the whole good-natured. He received us with kindness. It was evident that some one had blown our trumpet for us already: I guessed that it was Blake.

"I am delighted to see you, gentlemen," he said. "It was in truth a daring deed to ride from New York to Philadelphia, as the rebels infest the country between. It is fortunate that Lieutenant Melville escaped with so slight a wound. I should like to hear more about your adventures, gentlemen."

Then Marcel with an air of great modesty told a most remarkable story of our encounter, how we had driven the rebels back once, and had knocked two of them off their horses, but at last under stress of numbers were compelled to retreat. I took careful note of everything he said, because if the time came for me to tell the tale alone, as most like it would, mine must not vary from Marcel's in any particular. Sir William seemed to be much pleased with the story.

"That will bear retelling," he said. "I must have you two, Captain Montague and Lieutenant Melville, at our dinner to-morrow. I am to have a company here composed of my most distinguished officers and of some of our loyal friends of Philadelphia. I shall be glad for you to come, gentlemen; and do you look your best, for there will be beauty at the banquet." [Pg 30]

Of course we accepted the invitation with great alacrity, but a shade came over Marcel's face. The general observed it with keen eye.

"What is it that you find displeasing, Captain Montague?" he asked.

Marcel hesitated, and seemed to be in a state of perplexity.

"I fear it would anger you, general, if I were to name the cause," he replied.

"Speak out! Tell me what it is. Would you rather not come? If so, have no hesitation in declaring it," said Sir William.

But the general did not appear at all pleased at the possibility of his invitation to dinner being declined by a junior officer. At which I did not wonder, for it would have savored much of disparagement, not to say impertinence.

"It is not that, general," replied Marcel, making a most graceful genuflection. "We have already derived acute pleasure in anticipation from the banquet to which you have so graciously invited us. But, general, it is the truth that we have great need of one now. General, it pains me to have to say it in your presence, but we are starving. We have not eaten for a day. Perhaps we could have contained ourselves, if you had not spoken of a feast, but that was too much for our endurance."

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The general burst into a fit of great and hearty laughter. Marcel's sly impertinence, for such it was, seemed to please him.

"Starving, eh?" he exclaimed. "Then I must see that my heroes who fought the rebels so well do not perish of hunger. Britain has not yet come to such a pass that she must deny food to her soldiers. Vivian will care for you."

He called an aide of about our own age and bade him take us to the officers' mess and give us the best that was to be found. This Vivian was a talkative and agreeable young personage. We had to tell our entire story again to him, which perhaps was not a bad thing, as it was a kind of rehearsal and served to fasten the matter in our minds. I was narrator this time, and I am confident that I followed Marcel's story so well that if the two tales had been written out a reader could have found no difference in them. It is so easy to lie sometimes.

"You are caught between luncheon and dinner," said Vivian, "but I think the cook can knock up enough for you to stay the pangs of starvation."

"I trust he may," said Marcel, devoutly, "or else he will be responsible for our deaths, and that would be too heavy a weight for a regimental cook to bear."

It was evident that the cook had faced such emergencies before, as he was nobly equal to it, and we did not restrain the expression of our gratitude when we were seated at a table in the mess-room, with an imposing meat pie, an abundance of bread and vegetables, and a flagon of wine before us.

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"We can do better than this when we are warned," said Vivian.

"This is ample and most comforting," I replied; and that was about the first true thing said by either Marcel or me since we had entered Philadelphia.

There was in this mess-room the same touch of luxury and adornment, though more restrained, that we had noticed at the headquarters of the general. It was evident that his Britannic Majesty's officers lived well in the good city of Philadelphia.

"Oh, why did we not come sooner?" exclaimed Marcel, with a double meaning that I alone understood.

"The rebels seem to have hurried you along fast enough," said Vivian, with a laugh.

"We hope to reverse the case soon," replied Marcel, "and become the pursuers ourselves. Meanwhile I take great comfort in demolishing this pie."

The news of our adventure had been spread very generally about headquarters, as several officers came in while we ate. They were rather a friendly lot, and some of them I liked. Blake, our first British friend, was among them.

"I wonder the rebels had the courage to pursue you," said a very callow youth named Graves.

"Don't the rebels fight well?" asked Marcel.

"Oh, no, not at all," returned Graves, superciliously. "They take to flight at the first glimpse of a British uniform."

"Then why don't you go out and show yourself, Graves?" asked Vivian; "for they say that bands of the rebels do come alarmingly close to Philadelphia."

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There was a general laugh, and Graves turned almost as red as his coat.

"There is no doubt," said an older officer, named Catron, "as to our ability to crush these rebels if we could get them into a corner. But they are most cursedly sly."

"However," said I, for I was determined to defend my countrymen despite our situation, "the rebels are the weaker, and it is the business of the weaker party to avoid being pushed into a corner. And according to all the accounts that have come to England, they seem to show much skill in this particular."

"It is true," replied Catron, "but I must persist in calling it most unhandsome behavior on their part. They don't give us a chance to win any laurels, and they won't let us go home. We are kept in a condition of waiting and uncertainty which is the most unpleasant of all things."

"Well, all that will speedily come to an end," said Marcel, "for my friend Melville has arrived, and I tell you in strict confidence, gentlemen, that Melville is the fiercest warrior since Marlborough. I doubt not that the rebels, having heard of his arrival, are even now fleeing into the wilderness across the Alleghany Mountains, that they may forever be beyond the reach of his mighty arm."

The laugh went around again, and this time at my expense.

"Perhaps, if the discourteous rebels had known that I was one of the gentlemen whom they were pursuing," I said, "it might have saved my friend Captain Montague much exasperation of spirit and the loss of a most elegant military cloak that he brought from England with him. I assure you, gentlemen, that when we were compelled to take to flight the captain's beautiful cloak

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trailed out behind him like a streamer, and finally, a puff of wind catching it, left his shoulders entirely. I doubt not that some ragged rebel is now wearing it as a trophy. Ah, captain, it was a most beautiful cloak to lose, was it not?"

"And it was with that very cloak upon my shoulders," said Marcel, falling into the spirit of the matter, "that I expected to make conquest of some of these provincial maidens of whom report speaks in such glowing terms. Alas, what shall I do?"

"Oh, it will be easy enough to get it back," said a young officer, whose name, as I afterwards learned, was Reginald Belfort. "These rebels are a poor lot. They cannot stand before us."

Belfort was young and handsome, but his face expressed arrogance and superciliousness. I liked him but little.

"I know not much of the rebels from personal observation," I replied, not relishing his sneer, "but General Burgoyne would hardly have said that at Saratoga."

"No," commented Vivian, "for it would be somewhat severe upon General Burgoyne to be captured with all his veterans by such a poor lot of men as Belfort says the rebels are."

"You must not forget," said Catron, good-humoredly, "that Belfort thinks the rebels are inferior in blood. Belfort, as you know, gentlemen, has a lineage that dates back to the Conquest. He claims that these rebels are the descendants of peasants and out-casts, and therefore should admit their inborn and permanent inferiority."

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"And such they are," said Belfort, still sneering. "They should be ruled by the gentlemen of England, and ruled by them they will be."

"What were the Normans themselves in the beginning," I asked, "but Scandinavian pirates and peasants? The ancestors of these rebels may have been peasants, but at any rate they were not pirates."

Belfort flushed, and for a moment could not answer. He knew that I had spoken the truth, as any one who reads history knows also.

"We have come to a fine pass," he said at length, "when a man who has just escaped by the speed of his horse from the rebels sets himself up as their defender."

"That may be," I replied, for I was still somewhat angry; "but I do not think it worth our while to depreciate men who have already taken an entire army of ours, and keep all our other forces cooped up in two or three large towns."

"Melville does not want to diminish the glory of the victories that we are to achieve," said Marcel, lightly. "The more valiant and the more worthy the foe, the greater one's glory to triumph over him."

"That is a very just observation," said Vivian, who seemed anxious to avoid a quarrel, "and I propose that the quality of the rebels and the amount of resistance they will offer to our conquering armies be left to the future. Such warlike questions will keep Milder subjects better become the present."

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"Then would not the dinner that the general is to give to-morrow be a fit topic?" asked young Graves.

"Our new friends are to be there," said Vivian. "You are lucky chaps, Montague, you and Melville, to be invited, so soon after your arrival, to one of Sir William's entertainments. There is not a better diner in America, or Europe either, than the commander-in-chief."

"The banquet is to be blessed by beauty too," said Graves. "Our fair ally and her renegade father are to be there. Oh, but Sir William keeps a sharp eye on the old scoundrel, and well he deserves to be watched thus."

"I beg to avow ignorance of whom you mean," I said, my curiosity aroused. "You must remember that Montague and I have arrived but within the day and know not the great personages of Philadelphia."

"By 'old renegade' we mean John Desmond, merchant and money-lender of this city, who it is said has more wealth than any other man in all this rich colony, ay, even enough to set up a mighty estate in England, if he so chose," replied Vivian; "and by 'our fair ally' we mean his daughter Mary, as fine and fair a woman as these two eyes ever gazed upon. The old Desmond leans to the rebels, and 'tis said would help them with his money if he dared, while the daughter is all for us, as she should be, being a born subject of our liege King George, God bless him. And 'tis reported that it might go hard with the old rebel, but some of his sins are forgiven him for the sake of his loyal and lovely daughter."

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I had not heard of the daughter before, but the name of the father was known to me. Secret assistance of money had reached our camp sometimes, and it was said that this John Desmond had sent it. Repute had it that he was a man of great mind and brain, who would have come in person to join us had not his rich properties in Philadelphia demanded his care and attention; and I could well believe that his situation was of a very precarious nature, despite his daughter's fidelity to the king.

"I am curious to see both the rebel and his loyal daughter," said Marcel, unconsciously speaking my own thoughts also.

"You may yield to the charms of the daughter," replied Vivian, "but I warn you that if you seek to retort her conquests upon her you will have antagonists, and our friend Belfort here would not be

the least among them."

Belfort frowned as if he did not relish the allusion, but it was a jolly young company of officers, and his frowns did not prevent them from having but small mercy upon him.

"I am told," said Catron, "that the young lady looks very high, and it will not be an easy task to win her. I think, Belfort, that the uniform of a colonel would be an exceeding betterment to your chances. And even if you should achieve success with the lady, I know not how the glowering old Desmond will look upon you."

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"It seems to me, gentlemen," said Belfort, a trifle warmly, "that you are over personal in your discussions."

"Then in truth it is a most serious matter with you, eh, Belfort?" exclaimed Vivian.

"Nevertheless the field is open to any of us who choose to enter, and I suspect that some of us do choose," said Catron. "Belfort must not expect to win a battle unopposed."

I saw that Belfort liked the discussion less and less, and that he did not fancy rivalry. Many of the British officers in America, with worldly wisdom, were already seeking alliances with our Colonial heiresses. I had no doubt that Belfort had such designs in his mind, and I took a dislike to him for it.

Our appetites had now been dulled, and Vivian, seeing it, suggested that perhaps we might like to seek repose, adding that we would not be assigned to any regular service for a day or two. We accepted the invitation to rest, as we were in truth tired. Evening was at hand and it had been a long day, filled with many adventures. The officers wished us a hearty good-night and slumber undisturbed by dreams of pursuing rebels, and then left us.

"I must return to Sir William," said Vivian, as he left, "but Waters will take you to your quarters.— Here, Waters, see that Captain Montague and Lieutenant Melville are made comfortable."

Waters, a large, red-headed man in the dress of a British orderly, who had just entered, stepped forward.

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"Waters is American," said Vivian, "but no Englishman is more loyal to the king than he. He is a good soldier and a good fellow. In fact, he has been so useful to us in various ways that he is in some sort a privileged character, and often comes and goes pretty nearly according to his own liking. So you may know that he is esteemed by us all."

When Vivian had gone, Waters led the way to our quarters. Presently this red-headed man said to us, "The rebels are very numerous about the city, are they not, and make travelling a matter of much danger?"

"Why should you think them numerous?" haughtily asked Marcel, who was a great stickler for the formalities, and thought the man presumptuous in speaking unbidden to his superiors.

"I meant no harm, sir," replied Waters, humbly. "I heard that they pursued you and your friend there almost into the city itself."

"Well, at any rate," said Marcel, shortly, "they did not overtake us; and if you will kindly conduct us to our quarters we will undertake to get along without any further questions from you about the rebels."

"Of a certainty, sir," replied Waters. "I see that your honor pays small heed to the rebels."

This savored of fresh impertinence, but neither Marcel nor I replied. When we had reached the room and Waters was adjusting it for us, I saw him regarding Marcel with a pair of remarkably keen and intelligent eyes. It was a more comprehensive gaze than that of an ordinary attendant prompted by curiosity, and there was something in it that struck me with alarm. Presently his gaze shifted from Marcel and fell upon me, but the eyes, meeting mine, passed on. A moment or two later, Waters, having finished his task, bowed to us and left the room, walking with a light, noiseless step, although he was a large, heavy man.

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Sometimes little things stir one overmuch, and it was so with this incident. The man had aroused my apprehensions to a strange degree, and I showed my alarm in my face, for Marcel, turning to me, exclaimed,—

"Why, what ails you? What are you scared about?"

Then I explained how I had noticed the suspicious and inquiring gaze of the man Waters. This made Marcel look serious also.

"Of a truth the man was over-bold in his manner," he said, "and it may be he believes I am no more Captain Montague than you are Lieutenant Melville. He is an American, I believe Vivian said?"

"Yes, one of the Tories."

"They are the worst of all."

But presently we took a more cheerful view of the matter. We reasoned that, situated as we were, the slightest sort of an incident was likely to breed suspicion in our minds.

"At any rate," said Marcel, "I shall not be unhappy just after having eaten the first substantial and plentiful meal that I have had in a year. That red-headed Tory shall not rest upon my mind."

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"Nor upon mine," I said.

"That being the case," continued Marcel, "we'd better go to sleep."

Which we did.

CHAPTER THREE—*Sir William's Revel*

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I had heard that Sir William Howe was of sybaritic temperament. What we had seen on the occasion of our first interview with him indicated the truth of this report, and the sight that burst upon us when we entered the apartments where his banquet of state was served was indubitable confirmation. There was such a confusion of soft carpets and silken hangings and glittering glass and other adornments of luxury that for a few moments both Marcel and I were quite dazzled and overpowered.

"I would like to turn about twenty of our starving soldiers loose here with liberty to do their will for a half-hour," Marcel whispered to me.

I smiled at the thought of the mighty wreckage and despoiling that would ensue. But Vivian and Blake were coming to greet us, and soon we were strolling about with them. We rendered our respects again to Sir William, who received us with kindly courtesy. He was in the full blaze of his most splendid and brilliant uniform, with a gold-hilted sword hanging by his side, and I have rarely seen a more bravely adorned figure.

"Suppose we get a glass of wine," said Blake, after we had performed our duty to our host and commander-in-chief.

We made assent, and he led the way to a smaller room, where there was spread a fine array of bottles and glasses. An attendant hastened to fill the glasses for us, and when he handed mine to me I recognized the face of the man Waters. Perhaps it was my imagination again, but his eyes seemed to dwell upon me for a moment with a look of suspicion or knowledge. But it was only for a moment, and then his face became as blank and stupid as that of a well-trained attendant ought to be. But the feeling of alarm was aroused in me as it had been aroused the night before, and I drank off the wine at a draught to steady my nerves and to still my fears. It had the effect desired: my blood grew warm in my veins again. Then I saw how foolish I had been. The imagination loves to trick us, and if ever we give it any vantage it will treat us in precisely the same way again.

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Waters was asking me in the most respectful tone for the privilege of refilling my glass, but I declined, and passed on with my friends. I determined to say nothing to Marcel about this second alarm that Waters had given me, for I knew that his volatile Southern temperament had long since thrown off the effects of what he might have felt the previous night, and he would only laugh at me.

Marcel and the two Englishmen said by and by that they wanted another glass of wine, and decided to return to the room in search of it. I wished to keep my head cool, and declined to go with them.

"Very well," said Vivian. "Take care of yourself, and we will rejoin you presently."

So they left me; and I was not ill content to be alone,—that is, in so far as one can be alone in the midst of a crowd,—as I wished to look on and to note well, since I apprehended that in the course of our adventure we would need a great store of knowledge as well as tact. I was thinking such thoughts, and meanwhile failing to look about me with the acuteness that I had intended, when I turned an angle of the hall and barely saved myself from a collision with the most beautiful young woman I had ever seen. Startled by my absence of mind and awkwardness, she stepped back with a little cry, while I stammered out some sort of an apology, though all the while I kept my eyes upon her face, which was of that clear, fine, and expressive type that I so much admire. The slight look of annoyance appearing at first in her eyes passed away. I suppose it was my look of admiration that placated her, for I have heard old men who know much of women say that no one of them is so good or so indifferent as not to be pleased by evident admiration. A half-dozen brilliantly uniformed officers were around her, and one of them—Catron it was—stepped forward.

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"Miss Desmond," he said with easy grace, "permit me to introduce to you the valiant Lieutenant Melville, who is one of the heroes of yesterday's encounter with the rebel band, of which you perhaps have heard.—Lieutenant Melville, make obeisance to Miss Desmond, our fairest and most faithful ally."

So this was the woman. As traitorous as she was fair! The apostate daughter of a patriot father! Not all her beauty—and I was fain to confess to myself that it was great—could prevent the anger from rising within me.

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But I concealed my feelings and made a most lowly obeisance.

"You are just from England, I hear, Lieutenant Melville," she said. "Ah, that is a happy land! There the king's subjects are loyal and devoted to his welfare, while this wretched country is rent by treason and war."

Her words increased my anger.

"Miss Desmond," I said, "I am a soldier of his Majesty King George, and hope to serve him well, but I can condemn the rebels as rebels only and not as men also. I hear that Mr. Washington and

many of his officers are, aside from their lack of loyalty, most worthy persons."

These words had a bold sound, but I had determined to adopt such a course, as I believed it would come nearer to allaying suspicion than any over-warm espousal of Britain's cause. This in truth seemed to be the case, for two or three of the officers murmured approval of my words.

"You seem to be as frank as you are bold," said Miss Desmond, coldly. "But perhaps it would be wise for you to keep these opinions from Sir William Howe."

"He has not yet asked me for my opinions," I replied; then adding as an apology for the rudeness, "but if any one could convert me by argument to the belief that the morals of the rebels are as bad as their politics, it would be Miss Desmond."

"Then," she said, somewhat irrelevantly, "you do not believe that all these men should be hanged when the rebellion is crushed?" [Pg 46]

"Miss Desmond," I replied, "you cannot hang an entire nation."

"Fie! fie!" broke in Catron, "to talk of such a gruesome subject at such a time! Melville, acknowledge yourself one of Miss Desmond's subjects, and come with us."

"I yield willingly to such overwhelming odds," I said.

"You are just in time," said Catron, "for here comes Belfort, who is even more fierce against the rebels than Miss Desmond."

Belfort saluted Miss Desmond in his most courtly manner, but was chary of politeness to the remainder of us. It was evident that he wished to assume a certain proprietorship over Miss Desmond, but the gay crowd around her was not willing to submit to that, and Miss Desmond herself would not have allowed such cool appropriation. So among us we made Belfort fight for his ground, and, though it is wrong, perhaps, to confess it, I extracted much enjoyment from his scarce-concealed spleen. In this pleasant exercise we were presently aided by Marcel, who saw how matters stood as soon as he joined us, and turned all the shafts of his sharp wit upon Belfort.

But these passages at arms were soon broken up, as the time for the banquet arrived. The largest room in the house was set apart for the feasting, and the great table which ran almost its full length supported an array of gold and silver plate of a splendor and quality that I had never seen before. In the adjoining chambers were stationed two of the regimental bands, the one to play while the other rested. Scores of wax candles in magnificent candelabra shed a brilliant light over gold and silver plate and the gorgeous uniforms of the gathering guests. Of a truth the British army lived well. How could we blame our ragged and starving men for leaving us sometimes? [Pg 47]

Sir William, as a matter of course, presided, with the general officers on either side of him. But a seat or two away from him was a large man in civilian's dress. This man was of a noble but worn countenance, and I guessed at once that he was John Desmond. I soon found that I was right, and I wondered why Sir William had brought him to the banquet, but supposed it was for his daughter's sake.

Miss Desmond was near the upper end of the table, with Belfort by her side. Nor was she the only beauty at the banquet, as the wives and daughters of our rich Philadelphians were very partial to the British, whose triumph in America they considered certain. This fact was not a matter of pleasure and encouragement to good patriots.

I would have liked to be near Miss Desmond, as I wished to draw her out further in regard to her political principles. I did not understand why an American woman could be so bitter against the best of her countrymen, and moreover there is a certain pleasure in opposition. We soon grow tired of people who always agree with us. But it was not my fortune to be near enough to converse with her. Nevertheless I could watch the changing expression of her brilliant countenance. [Pg 48]

The viands and the liquors were of surpassing quality, and under their satisfying influence the dinner proceeded smoothly. There was much talk, mostly of the war and its progress, and everybody was in fine feather. Despite the late successes of the Americans in the North, there seemed to be no one present who did not anticipate the speedy and complete triumph of the British arms.

"Sir William expects to be made a marquis at least," said Blake, who was one of my neighbors, to me, "and if he should take Mr. Washington he would deserve it."

"Of a certainty he would deserve it if he should do that," I said.

Miss Desmond was talking with great animation to some officers of high rank, but my attention presently wandered from her to her father, and was held there by his square, strong, Quakerish face and moody look. This man wore the appearance of a prisoner rather than that of a guest, and replied but curtly to the questions addressed to him, even when Sir William himself was the questioner. I was near enough to hear some of these questions and replies.

"It is a gay and festal scene, is it not, Mr. Desmond?" said Sir William. "It seems to me that the pinched condition of the rebels, of which we hear so much, would contrast greatly with this."

"You speak truly, Sir William," said Mr. Desmond, "but you do not say in whose favor the contrast would be."

I inwardly rejoiced at the bold and blunt reply, but Sir William only smiled. In truth I soon saw that he and some of the high officers around him had set out to badger the old Philadelphian, [Pg 49]

which I deemed to be a most ungallant thing, as he was wholly in their power.

"Mr. Desmond still feels some lingering sympathy for his misguided countrymen," said a general. "But perhaps it is as well that he does, is it not, Sir William? they will need it."

"It is a characteristic of my countrymen to show patience and endurance in adversity," said Mr. Desmond, proudly.

"Let us attribute that to their British blood," said Sir William.

"And the bad qualities that they show," added a colonel, "we will attribute to their American birth."

"If you will pardon me for making the observation, gentlemen," said Mr. Desmond, with great dignity, "it was such attempts at discrimination, such reflections upon the American birth of British subjects, that were among the many causes of this present unfortunate war."

I would have applauded the stanch old merchant had I dared, and I listened without any reproach of my conscience for more, but Sir William's reply was lost amid a jangle of talk and the clinking of glasses. Moreover, at that precise moment an insinuating voice at my elbow asked me if I would have my wineglass filled again. There was a familiar tone in the voice, and, turning my head slightly, I beheld the leering visage of Waters. At least there seemed to me to be a leer upon his face, though I am willing to admit that imagination may have played a trick upon me. [Pg 50]

Either this man was dogging me, or it was a curious chance that put him so often at my elbow. But I preserved my equanimity and curtly ordered him to fill my glass again. This he did, and then passed on about his business, leaving me much vexed, and all the more so because I had lost the thread of the most interesting dialogue between Mr. Desmond and the British officers. Mr. Desmond's face was flushed, and there was a sparkle in his eye that told of much anger.

"They're worrying the old rebel," said Blake to me, "but he has a stern spirit, and, as he is aware that his opinions are known, it is not likely that he will try to curry favor."

"It seems to me to be scarce fair to treat him thus," I said.

"Perhaps not," he replied, "but it is not so bad as it would appear, for by my faith the old man has a sharp tongue and the spirit to use it."

"Do you have many such events as this in Philadelphia?" I asked, meaning the banquet.

"We do not suffer from a lack of food and drink," replied Blake, with a laugh, "and on the whole we manage to while away the hours in a pleasurable manner. But we have a bit of the real military life now and then also. For instance, the day we rescued you and Montague from the rebels, we were out looking for that troublesome fellow Wildfoot and his band. A loyal farmer brought us word that he was lying in the woods within a few miles of the city." [Pg 51]

"Did you find him?" I asked.

"No," said Blake, with an expression of disappointment, "but we found where he had been, for every horse and cow of the aforesaid loyal farmer had been carried off in his absence."

"It was not very far from serving him right," I said.

"From the standpoint of an American it was extremely even-handed justice," said Blake.

Now, this Wildfoot was a most noted partisan or ranger who had come up from Virginia, and, though I had not seen him yet, our army—and the British army also, I doubt not—was filled with the tale of his deeds, such as the cutting off of British scouting and skirmishing parties and the taking of wagons loaded with provisions, which last were worth much more to us than the taking of prisoners; for we could not eat the prisoners, though I have seen the time when I was sorely tempted to do so.

In consequence of these things, all patriotic Americans regarded Wildfoot with pride and gratitude. But, as the tale went, I had been so short a time in America it was not meet that I should know much about him; so I requested Blake to enlighten my understanding on the point, which he proceeded to do, and to my great delight, gave a most marvellous account of the pestiferous fellow's misdeeds.

"He is here, there, and everywhere, chiefly everywhere," said Blake; "and I must admit that so far his ways are past finding out. He is doing more harm to us than a big battle lost. What is most annoying is the fellow's impertinence. One afternoon he and his band rode up to the river within full sight of the city and stopped a barge loaded with soldiers. They could not carry off the men, but they took their muskets and bayonets and all their ammunition, and, what is more, they got away without a scratch." [Pg 52]

I had heard of the deed. In truth, some of the muskets taken on that occasion by Wildfoot and his men found their way to our regiment, where they proved a most welcome and serviceable addition, for, as I have said before, the British always arm and equip their soldiers well.

Blake was going into some further account of Wildfoot's exploits, when he was interrupted by the toast. Very heavy inroads had been made upon the wine supplied by his Majesty to his officers in America, and though the guests were not so far advanced into a state of hilarity as to render the absence of the ladies necessary, yet it was manifest that their spirits were rising. It was in truth fit that the toast-making should not be put off much longer, for, though the capacity of the British stomach is one of the wonders of the world, there is a limit to all things.

Sir William rose in a very stately manner, considering his deep potations, and called for a toast to

his Britannic Majesty.

"And may he soon triumph over his rebellious subjects here and wherever else they choose to raise their heads!" said Sir William.

My glass had been filled before this toast by the ready Waters, as those of all the others had been filled for them, and I was even compelled to drink it. I looked across at Marcel and caught his eye. It twinkled with humor. It was easy to see that he did not look at the matter in the same serious light as I, and that reconciled me to it somewhat. But as I swallowed the wine I changed the toast and said to myself,—

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"Here is to the long life and success of General Washington and his patriot army!"

This eased my conscience still further. Then there was another toast to the "speedy destruction of Mr. Washington and his rebels."

I drank to this also, as drink I must, but again I said to myself,—

"I drink to the speedy destruction of the army of Sir William Howe and of all the other armies of the oppressor in America, even as the army of Burgoyne was destroyed."

These and other toasts were accompanied by great applause; and when there was some subsidence of the noise, Sir William, whose face, through overmuch drinking, was now a fine mottle of red and purple, turned towards Mr. Desmond and exclaimed,—

"We have had loyal and heartfelt expressions for our king and country, but they have all come from Britain. His Majesty has other subjects who owe him allegiance. I call upon my guest, the loyal Mr. Desmond of the good city of Philadelphia, to propound a toast for us. Fill up your glasses, gentlemen. We await your sentiments, Mr. Desmond."

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The noise of the talk ceased at once, for I think all were surprised at this request from Sir William, knowing as they did that Mr. Desmond thought not much of their cause. I wondered how the old merchant would evade the matter, and looked at his daughter, who was watching his face with evident anxiety. But Mr. Desmond, though the traces of anger were still visible on his countenance, seemed to be in no state of perplexity. He rose promptly to his feet with a full glass in his hand, and said, in a voice that was very firm and clear,—

"Yes, gentlemen, you shall have a toast from a loyal American, loyal to what is right. I drink to the health of General Washington, the best and the greatest of men, and likewise to the health of his gallant and devoted soldiers."

So saying, and before a hand could be lifted to stop him, he raised the glass to his lips and emptied it at a draught, I and many others doing likewise, I because it was a toast that I liked, and the others because it was the wine that they liked, and they seized the opportunity to drink it before their dazed brains comprehended the nature of the toast. Replacing the glass upon the table, Mr. Desmond looked defiantly about him. For a moment there was the heavy hush which so often succeeds impressive events, and then the company burst into a confused and angry clamor. One officer, who had been performing most notably at the wine-cup, leaned over, his face quite gray with passion, and would have struck at the daring speaker, but another less heated seized him and threw him not lightly back into his seat. Sir William turned furiously upon the old man and exclaimed,—

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"How dare you, sir, how dare you speak thus in my presence and in the presence of all these gentlemen, loyal subjects of the king?"

"Sir William," said a clear voice, "you must not forget that you asked him for a toast. I say it with all due respect; but you knew his principles, and perhaps you could not have expected anything else. Let his daughter plead for his forgiveness, Sir William."

Miss Desmond was standing. One hand rested upon the table in front of her, the other was slightly raised. Her eyes were aflame, her attitude was that of fearlessness. Above her white brow shone the black masses of her hair like a coronet, and a ruby placed there gathered the light and flashed it back in a thousand rays. Tory and traitor though she was, she seemed to me then as noble as she was beautiful.

"I need no defence," said Mr. Desmond, rising; "at least not from my own daughter."

She flushed deeply at the rebuke, but she went on nevertheless.

"Sir William," she said, "remember that this was said at a banquet where much wine has been drunk, and under provocation."

"Sir William must yield to her," said Blake to me.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because it is as she says," he replied. "Bear in mind the place and the incitement. Sir William brought the retort upon himself. If he punishes the old rebel, the report of this is sure to get back to England, and see what a reflection it would be upon the dignity and duty of the commander-in-chief. High though his favor be, the king and the ministers are but ill pleased with Sir William's conduct of the war, and the tale of such an incident as this would do him much hurt in their esteem."

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It was even as Blake said. Sir William hesitated. Moreover, I am not loath to relate that many of the British officers were ruled by a spirit of gallantry and fair play. They crowded around Sir William and told him to let the matter pass as a jest. I suspect he was glad of their interference, because he soon yielded.

"Since the daughter pleads for the father's forgiveness, it shall even be awarded to her," he said. "To beauty and loyalty we could forgive greater sins."

Miss Desmond bowed, but the frown gathered more deeply on the old patriot's face.

"I admire his spirit," said Blake, "but I would that it were displayed on the right side. It is such stubborn men as he that make this country so hard to conquer."

"There are many such," I said, and I spoke with more knowledge than Blake suspected.

"I doubt it not," he replied.

The banquet proceeded, but all the spirit and zest had gone out of it, and very soon it ended, as in truth it was time it should. When we withdrew from the apartment, I came near to Miss Desmond. She had thrown a rich cloak over her shoulders in preparation for her departure, and some traces of excitement or other emotion were still visible on her face. Belfort was standing near. The man was always hovering about her.

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"Lieutenant Melville," said Miss Desmond, "you are only a short time in this country, but you find that strange things happen here."

"Not so strange, perhaps, as interesting," I replied. "However much I may condemn your father's sentiments, Miss Desmond, I would be a churl in truth to refuse admiration for the boldness and spirit with which they have been expressed to-night."

I spoke my opinion thus, knowing that she had the events of the evening in mind. But she turned upon me sharply.

"If it is unwise in my father to speak such sentiments so openly, it is still more unwise in you to commend him for them, as he is an American and may have some excuse, while you are an Englishman and can have none," she said.

Then she turned away with Belfort, who took her triumphantly to her father.

"Chester," said Marcel, when we were back in our quarters and were sleepily going to bed, "the old Desmond hath a temper of which I approve, and his daughter is fair, very fair."

"But she has the tongue of a shrew," I said.

"I am not sorry for that," he replied, "for she may exercise it on that fellow Belfort when she is Madame Belfort."

"Marcel," said I, after a silence of some minutes, "do you not think our position is growing more dangerous every hour? Suppose Sir William detects us."

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"Sir William," said Marcel, half asleep, "is not a great general, but his wine is good, very good, and there was a noble supply of it."

CHAPTER FOUR—*On a New Service*

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When we awoke the next morning we found that the man who had put our uniforms in order and attended to the other duties about the quarters was Waters. There he was, grinning at us in the familiar way that made my anger rise. Again I became suspicious of the fellow, although there was nothing particular upon which I could rest my apprehensions, unless it was the air of secret knowledge and importance I fancied I saw so often on his face. But I reflected that such looks were as much the characteristic of fools as of sages, and with this reflection I turned very cheerfully to receive the morning draught which Waters handed to me. The taste of it left no doubt that he was a noble compounder of beverages, and when I had drunk it all I readily forgave him his wise looks, for, as everybody knows, a cool draught in the morning is a necessity after a revel of the night before. Moreover, in a talkative way he volunteered us much information concerning the army and its prospects. Suspecting that this would be useful to us, we had no hesitancy in listening to him.

I knew that the attendants about the quarters of the officers often came into possession of valuable information, so I asked him, though I pretended a very careless and indifferent manner, if anything weighty were afoot.

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"A company of mounted dragoons are looking for Wildfoot, the American ranger," he said, "and a wagon-train loaded with provisions gathered from the farmers is expected in the afternoon. The general thinks the train may draw Wildfoot and his robbers, and then the dragoons will come down on him and put an end to him and his band."

That Waters spoke the truth we soon had good proof, for somewhat later both Marcel and I were ordered to join a troop commanded by Blake, which was intended to co-operate with the body of dragoons already in search of Wildfoot. Good horses had been secured for us, and we had no choice but to go and serve against our own countrymen.

"Let us trust to the luck which has never deserted us yet," said Marcel. "We may be of service to this Wildfoot without betraying ourselves."

That was a very reasonable and consoling way of putting the matter, and I mounted my horse with a feeling of relief at the prospect of being out in the country again. At least the hangman's noose was not drawn so tightly around our necks there. We attracted attention from the populace

as we rode through the city, and in truth a fine body of men were we, well mounted, well clothed, and well armed. Some of the people cheered us, but I could see other faces glowering, and I liked them the better. Though this Philadelphia, our finest city, lay under the heel of the enemy, I knew it yet contained many faithful friends of the good cause.

A light rain had fallen in the morning, and the beads of water still lay on bush and blade of grass. Forest and field glowed in living green, and the south wind, which had the odor of flowers in its breath, was fresh as the dew upon our faces.

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"It makes one think of the mountains and lakes, and of sleep under the trees," said Vivian, who was of our company.

"I warn you that you will not have a chance, Vivian, to go to sleep under a tree or anywhere else," said Blake. "We have more important business than day-dreaming in hand. This fellow Wildfoot, who is worse than a plague, must be trapped to-day."

"I trust that we shall have him hanging from a strong oak bough before nightfall," said Belfort, who also had been sent on the service.

"I can scarce say that," continued Blake, who was a gallant fellow. "I would rather fight these people with the sword than with the cord."

The country seemed to be the abiding-place of peace. The district through which we rode had not been harried, and we saw some farmers going about their business.

They noticed us but little; doubtless soldiers had ceased long since to be an unaccustomed sight to them. The fresh air and the beauty of the country acted like a tonic upon us. We broke into a gallop, our sabres clanking at our sides. I forgot for the moment that I was with enemies,—official enemies.

"We should meet Barton somewhere near here," said Blake.

Barton was the commander of the first troop that had been sent out to trap Wildfoot. Blake had been sent along later, for fear Barton's squad would not be strong enough for its task. Blake was to command both detachments when they united.

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"Barton may not like to be superseded thus," said Blake, "but it is the general's orders. He did not wish to take unnecessary risks."

"Anyway, we will make sure of the rebels," said Belfort, "and a bit of service like this does not come amiss, after so many weeks of feasting and dancing in Philadelphia."

"Those must be our friends on that distant hill-side yonder," broke in Marcel, "for against the green of the grass there is a blur of red, which I take to be British coats."

Marcel was right, and the two parties soon formed a junction. Barton, a middle-aged officer, did not seem so displeased as Blake thought he would be at the coming of the reinforcements and his own supersession in the command.

"What news?" asked Blake eagerly of him. "Have you seen anything of the rebels yet?"

"No," replied Barton; "but if you will ride with me to the crest of this hill, I will show you the wagon-train."

Blake beckoned to several of us to accompany him, and we ascended the hill, which was crowned with oak-trees.

"See, there they are," said Barton, pointing into the valley beyond, "and I think those wagons carry enough food to tempt the starving rebels to almost any desperate deed."

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About thirty large Conestoga wagons, each drawn by four stout bullocks, were moving along slowly and in single file. From where we stood we could hear the creaking of the wagon wheels and the cracking whips of the drivers.

"You are right about the temptation," said Blake, "and if Wildfoot and his men mean to make the dash upon them according to our advices, this is the place for it. It would be a matter of great ease for them to surround the wagons in that valley. You have been careful to leave no evidence of your presence, Barton?"

"Yes; this is the nearest that we have been to the wagons," replied Barton. "If the rebels are about, they cannot suspect that the train has other guard than the soldiers you see riding with it."

"I think it would be wise to keep watch as long as we can from this summit," said Blake. "It is well wooded, and will serve to conceal us from the rebels."

"Captain," said a soldier who had ridden up hastily, "Lieutenant Vivian wishes your presence immediately."

Vivian had been left in charge for the moment of the soldiers down the hill-side; and Blake, saying to us, "Come on, gentlemen," galloped back to him. We found the entire troop drawn up as we had left them, but all were gazing towards the north. We looked that way too, and at once saw the cause of this concentrated vision. Just out of musket-range and under the boughs of a large oak-tree were three or four horsemen. Their reins hung loose, and their attitudes were negligent and easy, but all wore the uniforms of Continental soldiers. Their coats were ragged and faded, as in truth were all the uniforms in our army, but enough of the color was left to allow no room for doubt.

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"By heavens, this savors much of impertinence!" said Blake. "How came they there?"

"We do not know," responded Vivian. "One of the men called my attention, and we saw them sitting there just as they are now."

I had been examining the men with great attention. The one who was nearest to us was large, dark, and apparently very powerful. His figure did not appear altogether strange to me. I was vexing my brain in an endeavor to account for the recollection, when Marcel leaned over and whispered to me,—

"Behold him, Chester. It is the lively gentleman who chased us so hotly when we fled into the arms of our friends the British."

"What is that you say?" asked Blake, who saw Marcel whispering to me.

"I was reminding Lieutenant Melville," replied Marcel, "that we had unexpectedly renewed an acquaintance. The large man who sits nearest to us is the leader of the band who chased us into the midst of your troop the other day."

"We failed to take him then," responded Blake, quickly, "but I do not think he can escape us now."

"It would be a pity to use arms on such skulkers," said Belfort. "They should be lashed into submission with whips." [Pg 65]

A hot reply was rising to my lips, but Blake said lightly: "Then we will even delegate the task of lashing them to you, Belfort. We will look on while you ride forward and perform your duty. But wait! what does that fellow mean?"

The large man had taken notice of us apparently for the first time. With deliberate action he hoisted a piece of white cloth on the muzzle of his gun-barrel, and then began to ride slowly towards us.

"Does he mean that they surrender?" asked Blake.

"I think not," said Marcel. "That is a flag of truce. He wishes to confer with you."

"I would hold no conference with him," said Belfort. "He is a rebel and not worthy of it. Let us ride forward and shoot them down."

"Not so," said Blake; "we must recognize a certain degree of belligerency in them, rebels though they be, and we will hear what he may have to say. Let no one raise a weapon against him while he bears that white flag. The honor of England forbids it."

Belfort was silent under the rebuke, but I could see that it stung him. The American continued to approach, but when he was midway between us and his companions he stopped.

"Come," said Blake, "we will meet him." Accompanied by a party of officers—Marcel, Belfort, Vivian, and myself among the number—he rode forward. We stopped within speaking-distance of the man, who waited very composedly. Then Blake hailed him and demanded his name and his errand. [Pg 66]

"I am Captain William Wildfoot, of the American army," said the man, "and I have somewhat to say to you that may be to your profit, if you take heed of it."

There were some murmurs in our group when the famous ranger so boldly announced himself, and Blake said, in an undertone, "It would in truth be a great mischance if the fellow escaped us now."

Then he said to Wildfoot: "We have heard of you, and I may say have been looking for you, but did not expect that you would come to meet us. What is your message?"

"I demand the surrender of your command," replied the ranger. "I would spare bloodshed, which is distasteful to me, and I pledge you my word that I will treat you well, all of you, officers and men."

At this marvellous effrontery Blake swore a deep oath, and a murmur arose from the soldiers behind us, who heard the demand, as the ranger probably intended they should.

"You may be witty, but you are not wise, Sir Rebel," returned Blake. "Yield yourself at once, and perhaps you may secure the pardon of Sir William, our commander-in-chief, though your misdeeds are many."

"Not so fast, my friend," returned Wildfoot. "What you call my misdeeds are deeds of which I am proud. At least they have been of some service to our cause and of some disservice to yours, and that, I take it, is the purpose of war. My demand for your surrender you may receive in jocular vein, but I make it again." [Pg 67]

The man spoke with dignity, but it made no impression upon the English officers, some of whom angrily exclaimed, "Ride the insolent rebel down!" But Blake again restrained them, calling their attention to the flag of truce.

"Rejoin your companions," he said to Wildfoot "To that much grace you are entitled, but no more, since you choose to boast of your treason and other misdeeds."

"It shall be as you wish," rejoined Wildfoot, "but I will find means to let Sir William Howe know that I gave you fair warning. He cannot say that I took advantage of you."

He turned his horse and rode placidly back to his companions, while Blake sat all a-tremble with rage. The moment Wildfoot reached his comrades, who had been waiting for him in apparent listlessness, he pulled off his wide-brimmed hat, which had shaded his face during the interview,

waved it to us, and galloped away through the forest, while we, with a wild shout, galloped after him.

"He will soon bitterly rue his theatrical display," said Blake, "for I doubt not that Sir William will show little mercy to such a marauder as he. So ho, my lads! Yonder goes the chase! Lose not sight of them!"

The little American band had disappeared from our view for a moment, but as we came into an opening we saw them again galloping ahead of us just out of range.

"Give them a hunting call!" said Blake to a trumpeter who galloped by his side. "We will show these fellows what we think of them." [Pg 68]

The man raised the trumpet to his lips, and the clear and inspiring strains of a hunting catch rang through the forest. It was a note of derision, a summons for the hunter to pursue the game, and in recognition of its meaning the troopers burst into a cheer.

"It will be a fine hunt,—ay, finer than to pursue the fox or the deer," said Belfort.

The fugitives were well horsed, for the distance between them and the pursuers did not diminish. Some scattering shots were fired at them, but all fell short, and Blake commanded the firing to cease until the opportunities for execution grew better.

The flight of the Americans led us gradually towards the foot of the slope, and we came to a broad sweep of country which was free from trees or undergrowth. Here the British pushed their horses to the utmost, and Blake commanded his men to spread out fan-like, in the hope of enclosing the fugitives if they sought to turn or double like foxes. There seemed to be wisdom in this plan, for beyond the open the stretch of ground practicable for horsemen narrowed rapidly. The country farther on was broken by hillocks and curtained with scrubby woods.

"We have them now," exclaimed Blake, joyously. "So ho! So ho! my lads!"

The trumpeter again merrily blew his hunting catch, and the men cheered its inspiring notes. I could easily understand why Blake was so eager to overtake Wildfoot, who in himself would be a very important capture, while his conduct on this occasion had been most irritating. It was his wish to get within firing range of the fugitives before they crossed the open stretch, but it was soon evident that such effort would be in vain. The long easy stride of the horses that Wildfoot and his men rode showed that they had strength in reserve. [Pg 69]

"There is a ravine in front of that wood," exclaimed Belfort, who rode at my left hand. "Mr. Fox and his friends have trapped themselves."

So it seemed. But, though Wildfoot must have seen the ravine, he and his men galloped towards it without hesitation.

"Forward, my men," cried Blake; "we'll take them now."

Wildfoot and his men were at the edge of the gully, which we could now see was wide and lined with bushes. They checked their horses, spoke to them soothingly, and the next moment the gallant animals, gathering themselves up, leaped over the bushes into the ravine, horses and men alike disappearing from our view.

"'Tis but a last desperate trick to delude us," cried Blake. "On, my lads!"

In a wide but converging line we swept down upon the gully. We were scarce fifty feet from it when I heard a sharp, brief cry like a command, and from the dense wood that lined its farther bank there burst forth a flash of flame like the gleaming edge of a sword, only many times longer and brighter, and the next moment we went down as if smitten by a thunderbolt.

In war there is nothing that strikes fear to the heart like a surprise. While the front ranks of the British force crumbled away like a wrecked ship before the beat of the sea, cries of terror burst from those behind, and, mingling with the groans and the terrified neighing of the horses, produced a din that bewildered me. From this stupor I was aroused by the plunging of my horse, which had been wounded in the neck. I seized the reins, dropped from my hands in the first shock, and was endeavoring to draw back the frightened animal, so that he might not trample upon the fallen, when Marcel's face appeared through the dense smoke, and he shouted to me,— [Pg 70]

"Shelter yourself behind your horse as much as you can. It is time for them to give us another volley!"

I took his advice not a whit too soon, for almost as he spoke, the withering flame flashed from the wood a second time, and once again our command cried out under the force of it.

But the British—I will give them credit for bravery and all soldierly qualities—began to recover from their surprise. Blake shouted and cursed, and the officers, with a fine display of gallantry, helped him to restore order in the command. Thus was the column beaten at length into some sort of shape and the fire of the ambushers returned, though no one could see whether the counter-fire did any execution.

After a few moments of this fusillade the British began to retreat, which was the wisest thing to do, for one who falls into a trap must needs try to get out of it the best he can. But we heard a loud shout on the slope above us, and a party of horsemen led by Wildfoot himself burst from the covert and charged down upon us. [Pg 71]

"Here are enemies whom we can see!" shouted Blake. "At them, my lads!"

The whole troop turned to meet the charge, but they were ill fitted to endure it, for their flanks

were still quivering beneath the fire from beyond the gully. The two bodies of horsemen met with a crash, and the British line staggered back. The next moment Wildfoot and his men were among us.

"By all the saints, I will do for him!" exclaimed Belfort, who had a ready pistol in his hand. Wildfoot and Blake were crossing swords in so fierce a combat that the ring of their blades was like the beat of the hammer upon the anvil.

Belfort levelled his pistol point-blank at the partisan, and would have slain him then and there, but at that moment, why I need not say, my horse stumbled and fell almost with his full weight against Belfort's. His pistol was knocked from his hand, and he barely kept his seat in his saddle.

"Damnation!" he roared. "What are—" and the rest of his words were lost in the din.

Just then the duel between the two leaders ended. Blake was unable to cope with his larger and more powerful antagonist, and his blade was dashed from his hand. Wildfoot might have shorn his head from his shoulders with one blow of his great sabre. Instead, he thrust the weapon into his belt, seized Blake by both shoulders, and hurled him to the earth, where the stricken man lay, prone and still.

Daunted by the fall of their leader, the British line bent and broke, and the men fled towards the cover of the forest. My heart sickened at the plight of Blake, enemy though he was. [Pg 72]

The Americans, much to the surprise of the British, did not pursue, but drew off towards cover. Blake lay between the two detachments, his face almost concealed in the grass. I could not leave him there while life might still be in his body, to be trampled to pieces in the next charge of the horsemen, and driven by a sudden impulse, I sprang from my saddle, ran forward, and seized him by the shoulders, just as the great ranger whirled his horse and galloped by me. He had his sabre in his hand again, and I thought he was going to cut me down, as he might easily have done, but, to my unutterable surprise and relief, he made no motion to strike. Instead he said to me, as he galloped by,—

"You are a brave man, but you are a fool, a most wondrous fool!"

I stayed not to reflect wherein I was a most wondrous fool, but, with a strength which was a creation of the emergency and the excitement, I ran back towards the British lines, dragging poor Blake after me. Every moment I expected to feel an American bullet in my back, but none came, nor did I hear the sound of shots.

Then, after a space of time which it seemed to me would never come to an end, I reached the trees, and strong hands seized both Blake and me, dragging us under cover.

CHAPTER FIVE—*The Work of Wildfoot*

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I remained for a minute or two in a stupor, superinduced by the excitement of the fight and my great physical exertions. From this I was aroused by Barton, who was now in command, Blake being disabled.

"It was gallantly done, Lieutenant Melville," he said. "You have saved our captain's life."

"Are you sure he is still living?" I asked.

"He is stunned by the shock he received when that great rebel hurled him to the ground," said Barton, "but he will be well enough in time."

"You have saved more lives than Blake's," whispered Marcel, as Barton turned. "You have saved yours and mine, for that villain Belfort suspected that you threw your horse purposely against his. In face of this he dare not declare his suspicions."

"By the way," resumed Marcel, a moment later, "you might ask our haughty Norman noble over there if the rebel dogs can fight."

I did not ask the question, though, had time and place been otherwise, it would have pleased me much to do so.

All the troopers had dismounted and were putting themselves in posture of defence behind the rocks, hillocks, and trees. Barton expected another attack upon the instant, but it was not made. In fact, when he examined with his field-glass the wood into which Wildfoot and his men had withdrawn, he announced that he could see naught of them. [Pg 74]

"I see nothing among those trees over there," he said; "not a horse, not a man. Verily the fellows have learned to perfection the art of hiding themselves. By St. George, they need it in their dealings with us!"

It was sometimes the temper of the British in our country to boast and to show arrogance even when sore outwitted and outfought by us, and then to wonder why we did not love them. Perhaps this fault was not theirs, exclusively.

"Likely enough this silence is some new trick," said Belfort, "some scheme to draw us into another ambush."

"I suspect that you speak the truth," replied Barton. "Stand close, men. We have suffered too much already to risk another trap."

The men were quite willing to obey his order and stand close. Thus we waited. Blake revived by and by, and a careful examination showed that he had no bones broken, though he was sore in every muscle and still somewhat dazed in mind. But he was urgent in entreating his officers not to take excessive risks.

"I fancy that we have nothing to do but to wait here," said Barton to him, "for the rebels will of a surety attack us again very soon."

But in this Barton was mistaken, for the Americans seemed to have gone away. We waited a full hour, and then, as they gave no evidence of being anywhere near us, a small scouting-party was sent out, which presently returned with word that they were in truth gone, and that the woods were empty.

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"They feared to attack us when we were on our guard," said Barton, triumphantly. "There is naught for us to do now but to go and escort the wagon-train back to the city."

We gathered up the wounded and rode over the ridge in search of the wagon-train. We found with ease the tracks of the wheels and followed them towards the city, expecting to overtake the wagons. Presently, as we turned around a hill, we rode almost full tilt into three or four of them lying upon the ground, too much shattered and broken ever to be of use again.

In his surprise Barton reined back his horse against mine, for I rode just behind him.

"What is this?" he exclaimed.

"It seems that we have the wagon-train, or what is left of it," said Marcel. "There is a placard; it may inform us."

A pine board was stuck in a conspicuous place upon one of the wagons, and some words had been written upon it with a piece of charcoal. We rode forward and read,—

"To Sir William Howe or His Representative.
For the Wagons and their Contents
We Are Much Indebted
As we were Hungry
And You Have Fed Us.
We Give You Leave to Take Repayment
At Such Time and Place
As You May Choose.

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"WILLIAM WILDFOOT."

Barton swore in his rage. It was easy enough to see now why the patriots had withdrawn after the first attack. The provision-train was more valuable than arms or prisoners to the American army, and, barring the broken wagons, Wildfoot and his men had carried off everything. Nor were the British in any trim to pursue, a business at which, most like, they would have had their faces slapped.

Barton swore with a force and fluency that I have seldom heard surpassed, and Blake said with a melancholy smile,—

"It is well that I have this broken head to offer as some sort of an excuse, or I think it would go hard with me."

He spoke truly, for, though his expedition had been a most dire failure, his own condition was proof that he had done valiant duty.

The British gathered up their wounded again and began their march to the city. The country glowed in the brilliant sunshine of a summer afternoon, but I was in no mood to enjoy its beauty now. Our column marched mournfully along, as sad as a funeral procession. Even though the victory had gone where I wished it to go, yet there were others before my eyes, and I felt sorrow for them in their wounds and defeat.

When we approached Philadelphia, some people on horseback turned and galloped towards us. As they came nearer, I saw that two of them were women, one of whom I recognized as Miss Desmond. They were accompanied by two British officers whom I had seen at the banquet, Colonel Ingram and Major Parsons. The other young woman I learned afterwards was the daughter of a rich Tory of Philadelphia.

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Belfort rode forward to meet them, and Marcel and I followed, though at a somewhat slacker pace. We could take this privilege, as we were now within the lines. I judged that the officers and the ladies had been taking a ride for the sake of the air and the exercise, and such proved to be the case.

"Here comes Blake's expedition," exclaimed Ingram, as they rode up, "and I see wounded men. Verily I believe we have taken the rebel Wildfoot at last."

"Is it true, Lieutenant Belfort?" asked Miss Desmond. "Has the robber Wildfoot been taken?"

Belfort was thrown into a state of embarrassment by this question, to which he knew he must return an unwelcome answer; and he hesitated, pulling uneasily at his bridle-rein. But Marcel, the readiness of whose wit was equalled only by his lack of a sense of responsibility, spoke up.

"I fear, Miss Desmond," he said, "that we have but sad news. The wounded men you see are not rebels, but our own. As for Mr. Wildfoot the robber, we suspect that he has had fine entertainment at our expense. Of a certainty he gave us all the sport we wanted."

"It was a trick, a dastard American trick!" exclaimed Belfort. "They gave us no chance."

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"Then you have not captured this Wildfoot?" asked Miss Desmond.

"No," replied Marcel. "He came much nearer to capturing us, and in addition he has taken off our wagon-train, provisions, bullocks, drivers, and all, which I dare say will be welcome food to the Americans, drivers included, for we hear that they are starving."

"They did not stay to fight us to the end," broke in Belfort, "but ran away with the spoil."

"No doubt they had obtained all they wanted," said Miss Desmond, dryly. "Do not forget, Lieutenant Belfort, that, however misguided my countrymen may be, they are able to meet anybody in battle, Englishmen not excepted."

"For you to say anything makes it true," said Belfort.

"You should also take note," said Marcel, "that Miss Desmond is more chivalrous than some other opponents of the Americans."

"I do not take your full meaning," said Belfort.

"It is easy enough to understand it," said Marcel. "Miss Desmond gives to our enemies the credit for the bravery and skill which they have shown so plainly that they possess."

"I think you have taken a very long journey for strange purposes," said Belfort, "if you have come all the way from England to defend the rebels and to insult the officers of the king."

A fierce quarrel between them might have occurred then, for it was breeding fast, but Miss Desmond interfered.

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"If you say any more upon this subject, gentlemen," she said, "I shall not speak to either of you again."

"Where no other penalty might prevent us, Miss Desmond," said Marcel, with a low bow, "that of a surety will."

Marcel was a graceless scamp, but I always envied his skill at saying things which fitted the matter in hand.

Our shot-riddled party had now come up, and while the colonel and the major were receiving the full story from Barton, I found myself for a few moments the only attendant upon Miss Desmond.

"Since I can now do it without risk of sudden death, our friend Lieutenant Belfort being absent, I assure you again that your countrymen showed great bravery and military skill in our action with them," I said.

"The appearance of your column," she replied, looking pityingly at the wounded soldiers, "is proof that you came off none too well."

"It would be better," I said, "to avow the full truth, that we were sadly beaten."

"Lieutenant Melville," she said, "why are you so quick in the defence and even the praise of the rebels? Such is not the custom of most of the British officers. It seems strange to me."

"Does it seem more strange," I asked, "than the fact that you, an American, espouse the cause of the British?"

The question appeared to cause her some embarrassment. Her lip quivered, and an unusual though very becoming redness came into her face. But in a moment she recovered her self-possession.

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"If you had been born an American, Lieutenant Melville," she asked, "would you have fought with the Americans?"

"The question is unfair," I answered hastily.

"Then let the subject be changed," she said; and changed it was. In a few more minutes we entered the city, where the news we brought, and the abundant evidence of its truth that we likewise brought with us, carried much disturbance, and I may also add joy too, for there were many good and loyal patriots among the civilians of Philadelphia, and some who feared not to show their feelings in the face of the whole British army.

My rescue of Blake, more the result of impulse than of resolution, came in for much praise, which I would rather not have had, and of which I was in secret not a little ashamed. But there was naught for me to do but to receive it with a good grace, in which effort I was much aided by the knowledge that the incident formed a coat of armor against any suspicions that Belfort might have formed.

"Well, Lieutenant Melville," said Marcel, as we were returning to our quarters, "you have distinguished yourself to-day and established yourself in the esteem of your fellow-Britons."

"And you," I said, "have almost quarrelled with one of these same Britons, who hates us both already and would be glad to see us hanged."

"My chief regret," replied Marcel, "is that it was not a quarrel in fact. It would be the pleasantest task of my life to teach our haughty Norman nobleman a lesson in manners."

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"Such lessons might prove to be very dangerous to us just now," I remarked.

"This one would be worth all the risk," replied he.

I saw that he was obstinate upon the point, and so I said no more about it.

By the time we regained our quarters that afternoon I was feeling decidedly serious. In adopting the wild suggestion of Marcel and riding into Philadelphia in British red, I had never expected such a complication as this. We were to do our work quickly, ride away and be with our own again, in true colors. But the inch had become a yard, and here we were, involved already in a perfect network of circumstances. Some one who knew the real Melville and Montague might arrive at any moment, and then what would become of us? Walking on bayonet points may be well enough as a novelty, for a moment or two, but as a regular thing I prefer solid ground.

I know that I looked exceedingly glum, but Marcel's face was careless and gay. In truth the situation seemed to delight him.

"Marcel!" I exclaimed, "why did the Lord create such a rattle-brained, South-Carolina, Irish-French American as you?"

"Probably he did it to ease his mind after creating you," he replied, and continued humming a dance air. His carelessness and apparent disregard of consequences annoyed me, but I remained silent.

"If I were you, Bob," he said presently, "I'd leave to old man Atlas the task of carrying the earth on his back. He's been doing it a long time and knows his business. A beginner like you might miscalculate the weight, and think what a terrible smash up we'd have then! Moreover, I don't see what we have to worry about!"

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"I don't see what we don't have to worry about!" I replied.

"I'm sure that I have nothing," he continued calmly. "I know of no young man who is better placed than my own humble self. Behold me, the Honorable Charles Montague, heir to the noble estate of Bridgewater Hall in England, a captain in the finest army on the planet, comfortably quartered in the good city of Philadelphia, which is full of gallant men and handsome women. I already have friends here in abundance, and a reputation, too, that is not so bad. I am satisfied, and I recommend you, Lieutenant Melville, who are equally well situated, to accept your blessings and cease these untimely laments.

"The lovely Thais sits beside thee.
Take the goods the Gods provide thee!"

He looked at me with such an air of satisfaction and conceit that I was compelled to laugh. Of course that was an end of all attempts to argue with Phil Marcel, and nothing was left to me but resignation.

"You don't complain of your company, do you?" he asked.

"I do not," I replied; "the English officers are a jolly lot,—a fine set, I will say,—if they are our enemies; and it's a pity we have to fight them,—all except Belfort, who I know does not like us and who I believe suspects us."

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Marcel looked grave for a moment.

"Yes, Belfort's the possible thorn in our side," he said; "but your saving Blake as I have told you once before has been a great advertisement for us. You did that well, Bob, very well for you, though not as gracefully as I would have done it if the chance had been mine. Can you tell why it is, Bob, that I always have the merit and you always have the luck?"

"Perhaps it's because, if you had both, your conceit would set the Delaware on fire."

Catron and Vivian came in, a half-hour later, and urged us to spend the evening at the former's quarters, where we would meet all the men whom we knew, for a good time. They would accept no excuse. Marcel's spontaneous wit and gayety made him a favorite wherever he went, and I was a temporary hero through that happy chance of the Blake affair, and so we were in demand. Secretly I was not unwilling, and Marcel certainly was not. This lively, luxurious, and careless life, this companionship of young men who knew all the ways and gossip and pleasant manners of the great world, took instant hold of me, and I felt its charm powerfully. Having gone so far, it seemed to me the best thing we could now do was to do as those around us did, until our own opportunity came.

I do not speak of the luxurious and unmilitary life of the British in Philadelphia that season in any spirit of criticism, or with a desire to call special attention to it as something extraordinary. If the case had been reversed, the American army probably would have done the same thing. Nearly all the English generals regarded the rebellion as dead or dying, and many Americans were of the same opinion. Then why not let it die without being helped on by slaughter? Moreover, many of the British officers had no feeling of personal hostility whatever towards us, and all of us know, or ought to know, and remember with gratitude, that a powerful party in England defended us to the end.

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Marcel looked at me with his suggestive smile and drooping of the eyelid when Catron and Vivian had gone.

"It seems to me that we have found favor at court," he said, "and must do as the king and courtiers do. Come, Bob, let's float with the stream."

Vivian, a young officer named Conant, and Vincent Moore, an Irish lieutenant, came for us about eight o'clock in the evening, and on the way to Catron's quarters we stopped a few moments to enjoy the fresh air. The day had been hot, and all of us had felt it.

"I don't think the Lord treated this country fairly in the matter of climate," said Vivian. "He gave it too much cold in winter and too much heat in summer."

"Oh, that's nothing," said Marcel; "you'll soon grow used to these hot summers."

"Why, what do you know about them?" asked Moore, quick as lightning, "when you've been here less than a week."

I almost groaned at my comrade's thoughtless remark, and my heart paused for a long time over its next beat. But Marcel was as calm as the sphinx. [Pg 86]

"Why shouldn't I know a great deal about the heat here?" he replied. "Did I not make my entry into Philadelphia at the rifle muzzles of a lot of American rascals? Did they not make it warm enough for me then to become an expert on the subject of heat? Don't you think that I can endure any temperature after that?"

"You certainly came in a hurry," said Moore, "but you have redeemed yourselves as quickly as if you were Irishmen, and, after all, what a pity you were not born Irishmen!"

"Ireland is always unfortunate; she misses everything good," said Marcel, briefly.

The next instant we met Belfort, and I was devoutly thankful that he had not been present when Marcel made his remark about our hot summers. Its suggestive nature would not have been swept so quickly from his mind as it had been swept from the minds of the others.

But Belfort was in a good humor and was courteous, even cordial, to us. He complimented us on our share in the skirmish, and to me especially he hoped that further honors would soon come. Just as we reached Catron's door he turned to Marcel and said,—

"I've a pleasant bit of news for you, Captain Montague. Your cousin Harding—Sir John Harding's son, you know—arrived to-day on a frigate that came up the Delaware, and no doubt he will be as glad to see you as you will be to see him." [Pg 87]

I was thankful for the darkness, as I know I turned pale. Already I felt piercing me those bayonet points on which we had been dancing so recklessly. Of course, this cousin arriving in such untimely fashion would expose us. Confound him! Why had not a merciful Providence wrecked his ship?

"I hope that I shall meet him soon, to-morrow or perhaps the next day, when he has fully recovered from the long journey," said Marcel.

"There will be no such wait as that," replied Belfort, cheerfully. "He will be here to-night, to meet all of us. Catron invited him, and he was glad to come. I saw him this afternoon, and as he is a good sailor, he needed no rest."

"So much the better," said Marcel, with unbroken calm. "We can initiate him to-night into the mysteries of Philadelphia. But all of our family take readily to new countries."

We were in the anteroom now, and I thought it best to imitate Marcel's seeming unconcern. It was impossible to withdraw, and it was more dignified to preserve a bold manner to the last.

A servant opened the door for us, and we passed into the rooms where the others were gathered. I was blinded for a moment by the lights, but when my eyes cleared I looked eagerly about me. I knew every man present, and curiously enough the knowledge gave me a sense of relief.

"I do not see my cousin," said Marcel, as we returned our greetings. "Belfort told us that he would be here." [Pg 88]

"He will come in half an hour," replied Catron. "Remember that he landed from the ship only this afternoon, and we are not usually in a break-neck hurry to see cousins, unless they be of the other sex, and very fair."

We drank wine, and then began to play cards,—whist, picquet, and vingt et un. Belfort was at our table, and apparently he sought to make himself most agreeable. As it was unusual in one of his haughty and arrogant temper, it deceived completely all except Marcel and myself. But we understood him. We knew that he was expecting some great blow to fall upon us, and that his good humor arose wholly from the hope and expectation. What he suspected of us—whether he believed us to be in false attire, or merely considered us enemies because I had been so bold as to admire Miss Desmond, the lady of his choice—I could not say. Yet he undoubtedly expected us to be knocked over by the arrival of this unexpected and unknown cousin of Marcel's, and it was equally sure that he hated us both.

He began to talk presently of Harding,—Rupert Harding he called him; and though he pretended to have eyes only for his cards, I believed that he was covertly watching our faces. Marcel thought to lead him to a pleasanter subject, but he would not follow, and the life, career, and ambitions of Rupert Harding seemed to have become a weight upon his mind, of which he must talk. Chills, each colder than its predecessor, raced up and down my backbone, but my face looked calm, and I was proud that I could keep it so. [Pg 89]

Marcel, unable to draw Belfort away from Rupert Harding, began by and by to show an interest in the subject and to talk of it as volubly as Belfort himself. But I noticed that nearly everything he said was an indirect question, and I noticed, too, that he was steadily drawing from Belfort a full history of this troublesome young man, for the arrival of whom we were now looking every

moment.

Marcel dropped a card presently, and when he leaned over to pick it up, he whispered,—

"You are keeping a splendid face, old comrade. Let it never be said that we flinched."

A certain spirit of recklessness now took possession of me. We were past all helping, we had suffered the torments of anticipated detection, and having paid the penalty, we might endure the short shrift that was left to us. I laughed with the loudest and grew reckless with the cards. Luck having deserted me at all other points, now, as an atonement, made me a favorite at the gaming-table, and I won rapidly. The arrival of Harding was long delayed, and I hoped it would be further postponed, at least long enough for me to win ten more pounds. Then my ambition would be satisfied.

"It has been a long time since you have seen Harding, has it not?" asked Belfort of Marcel.

By pure chance all the players happened to be quiet then, but it seemed as if they were silent merely to hear his answer.

"It has been such a while since I have held a good hand of cards," replied Marcel, with a comic gesture of despair, "that my mind can hold no other measurements of time." [Pg 90]

"Don't be downcast, Montague," said Catron, laughing; "your luck will change if you only play long enough."

"Unless the bottom of my pocket is reached first," said Marcel, with another rueful face.

Only he and I knew how little was in that pocket.

"Why is that cousin of mine such a laggard?" asked Marcel, presently. "We have been at the cards nearly an hour and he has not come."

"He will be here," said Belfort. "Does he play a good game?"

"If he doesn't play better than I do," replied Marcel, "he ought to be banished forever from such good company as this."

"Come, come, Montague!" said Catron, "a soldier like you, who can look into the angry face of an enemy, should show more courage before the painted face of a card."

I saw that no suspicion had entered the mind of any save Belfort, and he pressed his lips together a little in his anger at the way in which his questions were turned aside. But he was too wise to make a direct accusation, for all the others would have taken it as absurd, and would have credited his feelings immediately to the jealousy which he had shown of me.

The door opened, and a tall young man of our own age in the uniform of a British officer entered, and stood for a moment looking at us. His face was unknown to me, and this I felt sure must be Marcel's cursed cousin Rupert. I saw Marcel's lip moving as if he would greet the stranger but he remained silent, and I, resolving to keep a bold face throughout, played the card that I held in my hand. [Pg 91]

"You are late, Richmond," said Catron, "but your welcome is the greater. There are some present whom you do not know. Come, let me introduce you. This is Lieutenant Moore, and this is Captain Montague, and this, Lieutenant Melville; the last two just arrived from England, and of whose adventures you perhaps have heard. Gentlemen, Lieutenant Henry Richmond of Pennsylvania, one of his Majesty's most loyal and gallant officers."

So it was not the cousin after all, but a Tory, and my heart sprang up with a strange sense of relief. A place was made for him at one of the tables, and the game, or rather games, went on.

"It is warm to-night," said Belfort to me. He called one of the servants, who opened another window. With Marcel's blunder fresh before me, I was not likely to repeat it, and I continued to play the cards in silence.

"Do you not regard the insurrection as dead?" he asked.

"I have been too short a time in America," I replied in a judicial tone, "to be an authority, but I should say no."

"What do they think at home?" he asked.

"Some one way and some another," I replied. "Fox and Burke and their followers think, or pretend to think, that the rebels will yet win, and the loyal servants of the king, who are in the great majority, God bless him! think that if the insurrection is not dead it soon will be. But why speak of politics to-night, Lieutenant Belfort, when we are here for pleasure?" [Pg 92]

I was afraid that he would lead me into treacherous fields. He listened, and then turned back to the subject of Harding.

"He is unusually late," he said, "but I suppose that Captain Montague can stand it."

"Undoubtedly," I replied. "Cousins are usually superfluous, any way."

I had made up my mind that we would maintain the illusion until the actual exposure and my nerves had become steady.

The door opened once more, and another young man entered. His features were unmistakably English. He looked around with the air of a stranger, and Marcel and I again were silent, just waiting.

"Harding!" exclaimed Catron. "You have found us at last. I was afraid that you had lost your way."

"So I did," said Harding, "but some one was kind enough to set me on the right road."

His eyes went from one to another of us, lingered for a moment on Marcel, and passed on without the slightest sign of recognition. Then I noticed that the card I held was wet with the sweat of my hand. Catron began to introduce us, beginning with Vivian. I believed that Belfort was watching Marcel and me, but I did not dare to look at him and see.

"I have a cousin here, have I not?" broke in Harding,—"Charlie Montague of Yorkshire? At least I was told that I would find him here, and as we have never seen each other, I am curious to meet him. Strange, isn't it, that one should have to come to America to meet one's English kin who live in the next county."

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He laughed a hearty resonant laugh, and a painful weight rolled off my brain. He had never seen his cousin Montague before! Then he might look upon his cousin Marcel with safety,—safety to us. My own face remained impassive, but I saw Belfort's fall a little, and as for Marcel, the volatile and daring Marcel, he was already metaphorically falling into his cousin's arms and weeping with joy at the sight of him. Moreover I knew Marcel well enough to be sure that he could take care of the conversation and guide it into far-away channels, if Cousin Rupert wished to lead it upon the subject of their mutual interests and ties in England.

CHAPTER SEVEN—*The Quarrel*

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Harding was the last arrival, and in his honor the card games were discontinued for a little, while we talked about home. Marcel justified my confidence in him; he discoursed so brilliantly upon England that one would have fancied he knew more about the old country than all the remainder of us combined. But Marcel has at times a large, generous way, and he talked wholly of extensive generalities, never condescending to particulars. This period of conversation was brought to a successful end by glasses of wine all around, and then we settled again to the more serious business of cards. Belfort had been very quiet after his failure with Harding, and he looked both mortified and thoughtful. I was inclined to the belief that his suspicions about our identity had been dissipated, and that he would seek a quarrel with at least one of us on other grounds.

The game proceeded, and I won steadily. My luck was remarkable. If I ever succeeded in escaping from Philadelphia with a sound neck, my stay there was likely to prove of profit.

The night advanced, but we played on, although it was far past twelve o'clock, and probably we would have played with equal zest had the daylight been coming in at the windows. The room was hot and close; but we paid no attention to such trifles, having eyes only for the cards and the money, and the shifting chances of the game. My luck held, and the little heap of shining gold coins gathered at my elbow was growing fast.

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"Evidently the Goddess, fickle to others, favors you," said Belfort, at last. He regarded me with no pleasant eye. Much of his money had gone to swell my yellow hoard. Doubtless it seemed to the man that I was destined always to come in his way, to be to him a sort of evil genius. I was in an exultant mood, my winnings and my release from the great fear that had fallen upon me lifting me up, and I had no wish to soothe him.

"If the Goddess favors me, it is not for me to criticise her taste," I replied.

"No; that can safely be left to others," said Belfort.

He had been drinking much wine, and while all of us were hot and flushed, he seemed to have felt the effects of the night, the gaming, and the liquors more than anybody else. But despite our condition, his remark created surprise.

"Pshaw, Belfort, you jest badly!" said Vivian.

Belfort flushed a deeper red, but did not reply. Neither did I say anything. I have heard that the card-table is more prolific in quarrels than any other place in the world, and I saw the need of prudence. I had concluded that it would be very unwise to quarrel with Belfort, and my reckless mood abating, I determined not to lead him on. But a chance remark of Moore's set flame to the fuel again.

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"I would pursue my luck, if I were you, Melville," he said. "Any Irishman would, and an Englishman ought not to be slack."

"How?" I asked.

"In the two accompaniments of cards, war and love. You have shown what you can do in cards and in a measure in war. Now, to be the complete gentleman, you must be successful in love."

"Melville has proved already that he has a correct eye for beauty," said Vivian.

"You mean Miss Desmond," said Catron, "but his eye has been neither quicker nor surer than those of others. There are enough officers at her feet to make a regiment."

I was sorry that they had brought up Miss Desmond's name, yet these young officers meant no disrespect to her. In our time all beautiful women were discussed by the men over cards and wine, and it was considered no familiarity, but a compliment.

"I wish you would not speak so often and with such little excuse of Miss Desmond," exclaimed Belfort, angrily.

"Why not?" I asked, replying for Vivian. His manner of appropriating Miss Desmond, a manner that I had noticed before, was excessively haughty and presumptuous, and it irritated every nerve in me.

"If you speak for yourself," he replied, turning a hot face upon me, "it is because you have known her only a few days and you have assumed an air which impresses me particularly as being impertinent."

It seemed as if there could be no end to his arrogance. He even made himself the sole judge of my manners, dismissing all the others as incompetent. Yet I was able to control my temper in face of such an insult in a way that surprised me.

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"Your opinion of impertinence, Mr. Belfort, appears to differ from that of other people, and I fear you are not an authority on the subject," I replied, and I think there was no break in my voice, "yet I am willing to discuss the subject in any fashion you wish until we shall have reached some sort of a conclusion."

I knew he was bent upon forcing a quarrel upon me, and I did not see how I could honorably make further attempts to avoid it.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Catron. "You shall not quarrel. I am your host, and I forbid it. You have both taken too much wine, and the code does not demand that hot words spoken at three o'clock in the morning shall breed sparks the next day."

Now, I had drunk very little wine, and Catron knew it, but he included me in his indictment in order to ease Belfort, and I did not object. I waited, willing, even after what had been said, that peace should be made between us, but Belfort shook his head.

"Lieutenant Melville's words amounted to a challenge," he said, "and I would deem myself but the small part of a man if I refused it."

"I have nothing to withdraw," I interrupted. It seemed best to me to have it out with Belfort. I had been willing to smooth over all differences with him until he made Mary Desmond the issue between us. Somehow I could not pass that by, although she might never be anything to either him or me. Even in that moment when the quarrel was hot upon me, I wondered at the hold this Tory girl had taken upon my mind,—a girl whom I had seen but two or three times, and from whom I had received nothing but haughtiness.

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"So be it, then," said Catron, impatiently, "but I trust that both of you will permit me to say what I think of you."

"Certainly! Tell us!" I said.

"Then I think you are both confounded fools to push a quarrel and cut each other up with pistol bullets or sword blades when you might dwell together in peace and friendship. Moreover, you have disturbed the game."

"We can go on with the cards," I suggested, "and Lieutenant Belfort and I will settle our affairs later."

"Of course," replied Catron. "You cannot fight at night, and we will meet here to-morrow in the afternoon to arrange for this business that you and Belfort seem bent on transacting. Meanwhile we will make the most of the night's remainder."

A few moments later we were absorbed in the cards, and the subject of the duel seemed to be banished from the minds of all, save those most concerned.

"What do you think of it?" I asked Marcel, when I was first able to speak to him, unheard by others.

"It is unfortunate, on the whole, though you are not to blame," he replied, pursing up his lips. "If you were to run him through with your sword, his inquisitive tongue would be silenced and his suspicious eyes shut forever. And yet I would not wish you to do that."

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"Nor I," I said with deep conviction.

The gray in the east soon grew, and the world slid into the daylight. I looked at my comrades, and they were all haggard, their features drawn and great black streaks showing under their eyes. I shoved my gold into my pockets and said that we must go.

"And all the rest of us, too," said Moore. "Heavens! suppose that Sir William should have some active duty for us to-day! What would he think that we had been doing?"

His query was certainly pertinent, and the little gathering hastily dissolved, Marcel bidding his new-found cousin an affectionate good-night or rather good-morning.

As Marcel and I were about to pass out of the room, Waters appeared before us with a hot glass of mixed spirits in either hand.

"Better drink these before you go," he said. "They will freshen you."

The presence of this man with his evil eyes and significant glance coming upon us like an apparition was startling and decidedly unpleasant. I disliked him almost as much as I did Belfort, and in my soul I feared him more. I saw that self-same look of smirking satisfaction on his face, and I trembled not only with anger, but because I feared that the man possessed our secret and was playing with us for his own malicious sport. However we accepted his invitation and drank.

"When do you fight Lieutenant Belfort?" he asked, looking me straight in the eye as I handed

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back to him the empty glass.

"Is it any business of yours?" I said, flushing with anger.

"No, but I wondered why you and Lieutenant Belfort were so eager to quarrel," he replied, his eyes showing no fear of me.

"What damned impertinence is this!" broke out Marcel. "How dare you, a servant, speak in such a manner?"

"I beg your pardon, sir, I spoke hastily, I meant no harm," said the man, suddenly becoming humble, as if frightened by Marcel's heat.

"Then see that hereafter your actions conform better with your intentions," continued Marcel, as we passed out.

"That man is more to be feared than Belfort," I said a little later, speaking the thought that was in my mind.

"Yes, I think so, too," replied Marcel. "Confound him! Those eyes of his look me through, and I have the fancy that he is all the time laughing at us."

But Marcel's ill humor and suspicion lasted less than half a hour, and he was cheerfully humming a love song when he finally jumped into bed.

CHAPTER EIGHT—*A File of Prisoners*

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We rose at noon the next day, and after the fashion of those times strolled toward the centre of the city to meet our friends and hear whatever news might chance to be going. Twenty-four hours earlier I would have escaped from Philadelphia if possible, but now I felt that my engagement with Belfort held me there. It was singular how circumstances combined to prevent our flight. "*Our flight*," I said, and yet I did not know that Marcel would go with me even if I fled. "*My flight*," I should say, and that, too, was impossible until I met Belfort. Then? Suppose I should slay him!

We met Vivian and Moore looking as fresh as if they had slept all the preceding night instead of playing cards, which, though perhaps not surprising in an Irishman, is somewhat beyond the power of most other people. A few moments later we met Belfort also, and he and I saluted gravely as became men who were to meet in another fashion soon.

"Come and see the American prisoners," said Moore. "The light cavalry took more than twenty yesterday, and they are just passing down the street to the prison, where I suspect that they will get better fare, bad as it is, than they have had for a long time."

The prisoners filed past, a lean and ragged band, and my heart was filled with sympathy.

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"What a deuced shame that we should have to fight them!" said Moore. "Why couldn't they go back to their farms like peaceable men and obey King George like the loyal subjects they ought to be? That would end the trouble at once, and how simple! What a logician I am!"

"But the Irish don't obey King George," I said, "and they are his subjects too."

"That's different," rejoined Moore, quickly. "The Irish don't obey anybody, and never will."

Marcel suddenly pulled my arm, and when I looked around at him his face was pale. The fourth man in the line of prisoners was gazing intently at us, and his eyes expressed two emotions,—first recognition and then deep, bitter hatred. All soldiers detest traitors, and this man was one of the four whom Sergeant Pritchard had commanded. He knew us well, as we stood there in the gay uniforms of the enemy, and while he could not divine what we intended when we rode away in our borrowed plumage, he could believe but one thing now. His lips moved as if he were about to speak and denounce us; but I shook my head, gave him the most significant look I could, and then putting my hand on Marcel's shoulder to indicate clearly that I was speaking to him, said in a loud voice,—

"Captain Montague, look at the fourth man in the line; does he not look wonderfully like one of the villains who chased us into the city?"

Thank heaven the man—Alloway was his name—was as quick as a flash. He heard me call Marcel Montague, and everything else may have been obscure to him, but he knew that we were not there under our right names, and that that probably meant something else other than treason. He dropped his head, looked no more at us, and walked on as impassive as the rest.

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Two others had seen and taken notice, the two whom we dreaded most. They were Belfort and the scoundrel Waters, whom I now for the first time saw standing behind us, his red head towering above those around him. He seemed to have made it his special business to follow Marcel and me and to spy upon our doings. That hateful look of cunning was in his eyes, while Belfort's blazed with triumph. But both quickly dismissed all unusual expression, and Belfort was silent until the last man in the file had passed. Then he said,—

"I propose that we go to the prison and talk to those men. They are broken down and starving, and would gladly tell their woes to those who bring them food. We may acquire wonderful information concerning Mr. Washington and his army."

"It would be but a useless annoyance of prisoners," I said, seeing the drift of his mind.

"Not so," he replied. "It is a worthy object and is in the service of the king. I can easily get the necessary permission from the commandant of the prison."

Unluckily enough, Moore was greatly taken with the idea, and Vivian too liked it. They were all for talking with the prisoners, and Marcel and I were compelled to yield. We could have refused to go, but that, I felt sure, would be our undoing. I preferred that the questions Belfort wished to ask should be asked in our presence. [Pg 104]

Belfort called Waters and sent him to the commandant with a request for the necessary permission, and we proceeded with our stroll until his return.

"This man Belfort is bound to catch us, if not by one method then by another," whispered Marcel to me. "You should not have looked with such admiring eyes upon the lady whom he has chosen for his own."

"But she has not chosen him, so far as you know," I replied, "and Mr. Belfort is not to be the master of my inclinations."

"Oh, well, don't pick a quarrel with me about it," he replied, with a wry face and then a smile. He did not seem to feel any apprehension, and I wondered if fear for the future was ever a quality that entered into his mental constitution. I had begun to believe that it did not, and that he was not to be held accountable for it.

Belfort burst suddenly into smiles and began to bow with great energy. Miss Desmond was approaching, and with her was Miss Rankin, a Tory's daughter. Miss Desmond was very simply dressed in light gray, and wore a single pink rose in her corsage. Her bearing was full of dignity, and she looked very beautiful, but, as always, cold and distant. We began to speak of the usual topics, for in our little pent-up city news soon became common; but at that moment Waters arrived with the necessary permission.

"The prisoners are sulky, sir," said Waters, with a respectful bow to Belfort, "and are not disposed to talk to anybody, but the commandant says that you may try." [Pg 105]

I wondered if he had some sort of an understanding with Belfort. It did not seem wholly unlikely.

"At any rate it will be a novelty to talk to them," said Belfort, "and to see the inside of a prison, knowing that you can leave it whenever you wish. But I think that at least one of them will talk."

It was impossible for Marcel or me to mistake the significance of his last sentence or his intentions. Nothing else could account for this sudden desire to visit the prisoners, which looked to an ordinary observer like the freak of some one who had more time than occupation. Yet I could see purpose, determined purpose, in it.

"We are going to ask some American prisoners, just taken, why they are so foolish and wicked as to fight against the king," said Belfort, looking at Miss Desmond. "Will you not, Miss Desmond, and you, Miss Rankin, go with us and hear what they have to say? I assure you that it will be both interesting and instructive."

The man's effrontery amazed me, but I fathomed the depth of his malice and his proposed method. His defeat the night before had lulled his suspicions, but the look and manner of the prisoners had caused them to flame afresh. Now he hoped to expose us in the presence of our friends, and above all in the presence of Miss Desmond. Fortune seemed at last to have put all the chances in his favor.

"Oh, do let's go!" spoke up Miss Rankin, a young woman whose mind was not too important. "I have never been in a prison, and I should like to see how they live there." [Pg 106]

"Believe me it is not a joyous sight, Miss Rankin," I said, hoping to keep the ladies away.

"Are you fully acquainted with it?" asked Belfort, in a low voice.

"Not as well, perhaps, as some others ought to be," I said in the same tone.

"Come, Miss Desmond, will you not go?" repeated Belfort. "It will be a valuable experience, one worth remembering."

Her eyes wandered over us, but I could not read the expression in them. They dwelt for a moment on Waters, as if wondering why a man of his condition was with us; and then she said that she would go, a flush of interest showing in her face. So we walked together toward the city prison, Belfort and Vivian escorting Miss Desmond, while the others devoted themselves to Miss Rankin. Marcel and I dropped a little behind.

"Phil," I said, "the gauntlet is nicely prepared for us."

"But we may run it," he replied cheerfully. "There's always a chance."

We were soon at the prison, and the commandant made no difficulties. In truth, Belfort seemed to have much influence with him, and five minutes later we were in the presence of the new prisoners, all of whom sat in one room where the dirt and cobwebs had gathered against the low ceiling, and where the light came dimly in at the narrow and iron-barred window. It was a gloomy place and its influence was visible at once upon us all. Even Miss Rankin ceased her chatter. The prisoners had just taken their food, and were making themselves as comfortable as they could, some upon two old wooden benches against the stone wall and some upon the floor. It suddenly occurred to me that they would send us here before they hung us, and the idea was not cheerful. [Pg 107]

I wondered what the prisoners thought of us and our presence there, but they showed no

curiosity. The man Alloway was sitting on the floor in a slouching attitude and took no notice.

"Here sit up, you!" exclaimed Waters, taking him roughly by the shoulders and jerking him up. "Do you not see that there are ladies present?"

"I can't imagine that they have come to this place for bright company," said Alloway, grimly.

Then Belfort began to talk to one of the men, purposely delaying his examination of Alloway as if he would linger over a choice morsel. I paid little attention to his questions, which seemed to elicit no satisfactory answer, but kept my eyes on Miss Desmond. Could a woman, young and beautiful, a Tory even, be without sympathy in the presence of her unfortunate countrymen, locked thus in a prison for no crime save fighting in defence of their own land, if that can be called a crime? Could she have so little heart? I did not believe it. In spite of her coldness and pride there was some charm about her which had drawn me to her, and I would not believe that a woman without heart could influence me so. Therefore I watched her closely, and at last I saw the light appear in the impassive eyes. When the others were not looking, she bent over the youngest of the prisoners and slipped something in his hand. I saw the flash of the golden guinea and the look of deep human feeling, and I knew that my lady had a heart. But she said nothing either to the prisoners or to us, and I believed that in her Tory soul she still condemned while for the moment she pitied.

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I wished to speak to the man Alloway, to give him some hint, while Belfort was examining the others but I could find no opportunity. Always Belfort was watching me out of the corner of his eye, and Waters had the gaze of both eyes, full and square, upon me and Marcel. It was impossible for either of us to speak to Alloway without being seen or heard.

"Suppose we try this hulking fellow here, colonel," said Belfort to the commandant, pointing to Alloway.

"Would you like to ask him some questions, Captain Montague?" said Belfort, politely, to Marcel.

"No," replied Marcel, "it is no part of a British officer's duty."

Belfort flushed at the reply, and so did the commandant, who was an accessory to this proceeding. I saw that Marcel had made a new enemy.

"Come, my man, won't you give us some information?" said Belfort to Alloway.

Alloway's face settled into a defiant frown, but his eyes met mine once, and the swift look he gave me was full of curiosity. Nor did I read any threat there.

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"We are all friends of yours; that is, all of us want to be your friends," said Belfort.

"Is that so? Then do your people have a habit of locking up in prison those of whom you think most?" returned Alloway, ironically.

"While we are all friends," resumed Belfort, "some of us are perhaps better friends than others, or better acquaintances. Are you sure there are not several of us whom you knew before to-day?"

"Why, what a strange examination, Lieutenant Belfort!" exclaimed Miss Desmond. Others, too, were looking at him in surprise. Belfort reddened, but it was not in him to be daunted.

"I asked for an excellent reason," he said politely to the commandant. "When these prisoners were passing through the street, this man seemed to recognize one of us and I wished to know which it was."

"What of that?" asked the commandant.

"It may lead to something else that I have in mind," replied Belfort, with tenacity.

"Proceed then," said the commandant, wonderingly.

"Do you not know some one of us?" asked Belfort of Alloway. His face showed the eagerness with which he put the question.

"Yes," replied Alloway.

Perhaps I had no right to expect anything else, but the answer came like a thunderbolt, and my heart fell. Alloway would betray us, and after all there was no reason why he should not.

Belfort's eyes flashed with triumph, and his hopes overran his caution.

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"Who is it? who is it?" he cried. "Is it not he?" and he pointed his finger straight at me.

Alloway examined me critically, and then said, "No, I never saw him before in my life. There's the man I meant!" He pointed at Moore and continued: "He was a prisoner with us for a while after White Plains, and I was one of the escort that took him to the British lines when we exchanged him and others."

"It's true! It's true!" said Moore. "I remember you very well since you have spoken of it; and polite you were to me, for which I thank you. Right sorry am I to see you here."

It was another release from the hangman's rope, and Belfort was defeated for the second time. He recognized the fact and fell back, looking at me in a puzzled and mortified way. I believe he was convinced then that his suspicions were wrong. Why Alloway denied me I could not guess, for surely the look from me in the street was not sufficient to disclose such a complicated situation as ours. But it had happened so, and it was not for Marcel or me to complain.

"Have you finished, Lieutenant Belfort?" asked the commandant. "I understood that something important was to follow these questions or I would not have consented to such an irregularity."

"It is a mistake! I was upon the wrong path! I will explain another time!" said Belfort, hurriedly.

Marcel tapped his forehead suggestively, and all looked curiously at Belfort. They seemed to think that there was something in Marcel's idea. Of course, Belfort might have accused us openly, but he had no proof whatever, and the chances seemed at least a hundred to one that he would make himself ridiculous by such a declaration. No, I was not afraid of that, unless something else to arouse his smouldering suspicions should occur.

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As we left the prison, Miss Desmond said to me, "I wish to ask Lieutenant Melville about Staffordshire."

"Ah, Miss Desmond," spoke up Moore, "if you want to know the truth about any part of England, you should ask an Irishman."

So saying, he placed his hand upon his heart and bowed.

"An Irishman always talks best about the thing of which he knows least," said Vivian.

But all walked on, and Miss Desmond and I were the last of the company. I wondered why she had chosen me thus. There was very little that I could tell her about Staffordshire, and in truth, it seemed a poor subject for conversation just then.

"Lieutenant Melville," she said, "why are you and Lieutenant Belfort to fight a duel?"

Her question was so sudden and direct that it startled me. I had not suspected that she knew of our quarrel.

"It is because we could not agree upon a point of honor," I said.

"Do you think that it is a proper business for two of the king's officers?" she asked.

"Since you wish me to be frank, I do not," I replied, "but it was impossible for me to avoid it, and perhaps my antagonist will say the same concerning himself."

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"Why do you fight?" she asked. Then I knew that she had not heard the full tale, the cause of our quarrel, and I reflected for a moment while she looked at me with bright eyes. I felt like a little boy called up for punishment and seeking excuse.

"It was over the cards," I said. "There was some talk about the measures that should be taken against the rebels. Lieutenant Belfort advocated more severity, I more mildness. I do not think the opinion of either would have had any influence on the policy of the Government, but that did not restrain our heat. We quarrelled like cabinet ministers at odds. There was a blow, I think, a demand for an apology, which was refused; and what followed is to be left to the seconds, who have not yet been named."

"I do not believe you," she said, still holding me with her calm, bright eyes.

I felt the hot blood flushing my face, but neither in her tone nor manner did she condemn me or speak as one who despised a man caught in a falsehood. Rather she was reproachful.

"There is some other reason," she said, "and you will not tell it to me, but I shall not ask you again."

I was silent, and she resumed,—

"Promise me that you will not fight this duel, Lieutenant Melville."

I was as much surprised at the request as I had been when she asked me why Belfort and I were to meet. It was my first thought that she was in fear for him, and I asked with a little malice,—

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"Do you make the same request of Lieutenant Belfort?"

When I saw the faint flush of color rising in her face, I was sorry that I had asked the question.

"No," she replied, "I would not make such a request of him, although I have known him longer than I have you."

I was pleased, greatly pleased; but she reminded me that I had not answered her question.

"The challenge has been issued," I said, "and if I withdraw at so late a moment I should be called a coward. Would you have me bear such a name in Philadelphia?"

"No; but is there no other way?"

"None that I know of."

A look of sadness replaced the flush on her face.

"It is a barbarous custom, I think," she said, "and belongs to a barbarous age. It is merely the better swordsman or marksman who wins, and not of necessity the better man. It decides no more than the hot ploughshare of the Middle Ages, and of the two customs I think the trial by hot iron was the saner."

I was silent, again not knowing what to answer, and she too said no more. I believe that at the last, and after weighing my evasions, she began to guess why Belfort and I had quarrelled. In a few moments we joined the others, and we bore the ladies company to their houses. Belfort was silent and moody over his failure, and bade us a brief adieu. It was ten o'clock then, and soon we were due at Catron's rooms to arrange for the duel. But before the time had elapsed the man Waters came to our quarters, his evil eyes peering under his shock of red hair.

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"Confound it," I cried, "your company is an honor that I can well do without!"

"I would not intrude," he said, "but I am sent by the commander-in-chief, Sir William Howe, himself, who wishes you to come at once to his headquarters."

I was startled. The detection of our identity, or punishment for preparing to fight a duel were the ideas that sprang up in my head. But the first disappeared quickly. If Sir William had discovered who we were, he would have sent a file of soldiers for both of us, and not an order to me alone to come to his headquarters.

"You have no choice but to go," said Marcel, "and if you do not return in time I will report to Catron what has happened. I will see that Belfort does not make any charges against you."

CHAPTER NINE—*With the Commander-in-Chief*

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I knew that my honor was safe in Marcel's hands, and I followed Waters to Sir William Howe, whom I found dictating to his secretary. He gave me a little nod and said,—

"I have sent my aide, Vivian, away on other duty and I wish you to take his place. You will find a chair there and you can wait."

I sat down, and he paid no further attention to me for a long time. Then he relieved the secretary, who looked worn out, and put me in his place. I write a fair round hand with a goose quill, and Sir William seemed pleased with my work. The letters were on official business, mostly to cabinet ministers in London, and to this day I often wonder if the British archives still contain documents written by that most disloyal rebel Robert Chester.

Evidently it was a busy day with Sir William Howe, as we wrote on hour after hour, long past four o'clock, the time for arranging the duel, though my work did not keep me from noticing more than once the luxury of Sir William's quarters, and the abundant proof that this man was made for a life of easy good-nature and not for stern war. How well the British served us with most of their generals! I inferred that busy days such as this were rare with Sir William Howe.

Orderlies came in with reports and went directly out again. The night darkened through the windows at last, and supper was brought to us, which I had the honor of sharing with Sir William.

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It was full ten o'clock when he sat down in a chair and ceased to dictate, while I opened and shut my cramped fingers to be sure that I still had over them the power of motion.

"You are tired, Melville," said Sir William, "and you have honestly earned your weariness."

"I hope that I have served you well, Sir William," I replied. I was thoroughly sincere when I said this. God knows that I had cause only to like Sir William Howe, and in truth I did like him. I thought of him as a good man in the wrong place.

"Yes, you have done well," he said, "but I did not send for you merely to help me in this work. I wished to break up the plans for that silly duel that you and Lieutenant Belfort are trying to arrange. Do not flush; none of your friends have betrayed you. I heard of it through a proper channel. I could have arrested and punished you both, but I preferred a milder method. I liked you from the first, Lieutenant Melville, and I do not wish my young officers to kill one another. You cannot serve either the king, me, or one another by sharpening your swords on the bones of your comrades. No protestations, but understand that I forbid this! Do I wish either you or Lieutenant Belfort to come to me with British blood on his hands? Is it not bad enough when the Englishmen of the Old World and the New are cutting one another's throats?"

It was a time when silence became me, and in truth no answer was needed. Sir William seemed to be excited. He walked hurriedly back and forth, and apparently forgot the lowness of my rank when he continued,—

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"I have been blamed by a numerous and powerful party in England because I have not pushed the campaign more vigorously, because I have not used more severity. I say this to you, a young man, because every one knows it. A wasted country, burning towns, and slaughtered people do not look so bad when they are thousands of miles away. But put yourself in my place, in the place of the general-in-chief. Did I wish to kill the sons and grandsons of Englishmen? Did I wish to waste this English domain, greater than England herself? I hoped, when leaving England, that the quarrel would be made up, that all Englishmen would remain brethren. My brother and I made offers, and I still hoped, even after the battle of Long Island and our capture of New York, that the rebels would come back to us. But they have not, and those who remain loyal, like the rich of this city and New York, do not seem to know the temper and resources of their own countrymen who oppose us. How could I fight well with the torch of peace in one hand and the torch of war in the other? There must be either peace or war. A country cannot have both at the same time."

"It is certain," I said, "that if any other country possessed these colonies it would not have treated them as well as England has done."

In making that assertion I was thoroughly sincere. While convinced that we had ample cause for rebellion, I had always felt that the cause would have been much greater had our mother nation been any other than England. She ruled us mildly or rather let us rule ourselves until we grew strong and proud, and then suddenly and against the wishes of many of her best, sought to give us a master when we had never known one.

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"It is true, or at least I hope so," said Sir William, "but that does not end the war. How are we to

achieve the conquest of a country six or seven times as large as England, and inhabited by a people of our own race and spirit? If we beat an army in one place, another appears elsewhere; if we hold a city, it is merely an island in a sea of rebels, and we cannot convert the whole thirteen colonies into one huge camp!"

As I have said before, Sir William seemed much agitated. I noticed a letter with the royal seal lying upon the table, to which his eyes frequently turned and which he took in his hand several times, though he did not reopen it in my presence. I judged that its contents were unpleasant to him, though I could not guess their nature. That and his agitation would account for the extraordinary freedom with which he spoke to me, a comparative stranger. And I was sincerely sorry for him, knowing his unfitness for the task in which he had failed, and believing too that he bore my countrymen no ill will. He continued his uneasy walk for a few minutes, and then sitting down endeavoured to compose himself.

"Do not repeat any of the things that I have said to you, Melville; see that you do not," he said to me; but he added in a lower tone, as if to himself, "But I know of no good reason why my opinions should not be heard."

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I assured him that nothing he had said would be repeated by me, and in truth I had no thought of doing so, even before he gave his caution.

"Melville," he said, "you are tired and sleepy, and so am I. I shall not send you to your quarters, but there is a lounge in the anteroom upon which Vivian sleeps. You may take his place there to-night, and consider yourself the commander of my guard. Merely see that the sentinels are on duty at the door and have received proper instructions. Then you may go to sleep."

I bade him good-night, found that all was right with the sentinels, and lay down in my clothes on the lounge. I was worn out with the long work, but I did not go to sleep. I was compelled to reflect upon the extreme singularity of my position. I, Robert Chester, a lieutenant in the rebel army and most loyal to the Congress, was on watch at the door of Sir William Howe, the British commander-in-chief, as commander of his guard. And moreover I meant to be faithful to my trust. Upon these points my conscience gave me no twinge, but it urged with increasing force the necessity of our speedy flight from Philadelphia. Our errand had been a fruitless one. Honor called us away and danger hurried us on. Only the duel with Belfort stood in the way of an attempt to escape. It is true that Sir William Howe had forbidden the meeting, but I did not feel that I could withdraw from it despite his command. I was too deeply involved.

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Shortly after I lay down I heard loud voices, and two men who gave the countersign passed the sentinel and entered the room where I lay. I had not put out the light, and I saw their faces distinctly. They were Hessians, and colonels, as I judged by their uniform. Now I always hated the sight of a Hessian, and when they told me that they wished to see Sir William Howe on important business, I examined them long and critically, from their flushed faces down to their great jackboots, before I condescended to answer.

"Don't you hear us?" exclaimed the younger with an oath and in bad English. "We wish to see Sir William Howe!"

"Yes, I hear you," I said, "but I do not know that Sir William wishes to see you."

"He himself is to be the judge of that," replied the elder, "and do you tell him that we are here."

Their faces were sure proof that both men had been drinking, but evidently the potations of the younger had been the deeper. Otherwise even a Hessian would scarcely have dared to be so violent in manner. I told them that Sir William probably had retired, and on no account could they disturb him. They insisted in angry tones, but I would have stood by my refusal had not Sir William himself, who had heard the altercation, appeared, fully dressed, at the door, and bade them enter. I was about to retire, but Sir William signed to me to stay, and I sat down in a chair near the window.

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It was merely a matter concerning the Hessian troops,—a claim of the colonels that they had received an over-share of danger and an under-share of rations, while the British had been petted; and I would not put down the narration of it here had it not produced an event that advanced me still further in the good graces of Sir William.

Hessian soldiers in those days even ordinarily had but few manners, but when in liquor none at all. They seemed to presume, too, upon the widely reported fact that Sir William Howe was fast losing credit with his government and might be supplanted at any time. They were accusing, even violent in their claims; and the red flush appeared more than once upon the swarthy skin of Sir William's face. I wondered how he could restrain his anger, but he was essentially self-restrained, and though he was their commander he did not reply to them in kind. At last the younger man, Schwarzfelder was his name, denied outright and in an insulting manner some statement made by Sir William, and I rose at once. Sir William's eye met mine, and his look was in the affirmative. I took the Hessian colonel, who in truth was staggering with drink, dragged him through the anteroom, and threw him into the street. This brought his comrade to his senses, and he apologized hastily both for himself and Colonel Schwarzfelder.

"Deem yourself fortunate," said Sir William, sternly and with much dignity, "that you and Colonel Schwarzfelder do not hear more of this. I am yet the commander-in-chief of his Majesty's forces in America, and I am not to be insulted by any of my subordinates, either here or elsewhere. Go back, sir, to your quarters at once and take your drunken comrade with you. Lieutenant Melville, I thank you again for your services."

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The officer retired in great confusion, and Sir William sent me back to the anteroom. I left him

CHAPTER TEN—*The Fine Finish of a Play*

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When I reached our room the next morning, I found Marcel just rising, though there were black lines under his eyes, from which I judged that his sleep had not been adequate to the demands of nature. Yet he seemed happy and contented. There was upon his face no shadow, either of troubles past, present, or to come.

"Ah, Philadelphia is a pleasant place, Robert my bold knight!" he said. "I would that I could stay here long enough to exhaust its pleasures. It is seldom that I have met fellows of such wit, fancy and resource as Moore, Vivian, and the others. They have an abundance to eat here, cards without limit, beautiful women to look upon and admire and dance with; a theatre where they say the plays are not bad, and upon the stage of which the beautiful Mary Desmond herself is to appear with honor and distinction, for she could not appear otherwise. Now tell me, out of the truth that is in your soul, Robert Chester, can life at Valley Forge compare with life in Philadelphia?"

The mention of Mary Desmond's name in such a connection of course caught my attention, but I deferred all question about it until I could draw from Marcel the narration of what had occurred at Catron's room when I did not come to arrange the duel.

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"We had a game, a most beautiful game," said Marcel, in reply. "Vincent Moore and I were partners, and we won everything that the others could transfer from their pockets to the table. Upon my soul, Bob, I love that Irishman almost as much as I do you!"

"But the duel?" I said; "what explanation did you make for me?"

"By my faith," he cried, "Vivian and Belfort and Catron wanted us to explain how we could win so handsomely and so continuously. They said that Old Nick was surely at our elbow, and if you consider the invisible character of the gentleman aforesaid, I cannot deny that he was or wasn't."

"But the duel, the duel?" I said. "Marcel, be serious for two consecutive minutes!"

"Oh, that little affair of yours and Belfort's! I had forgotten about it in the midst of more important subjects. Why do you bother so much over trifles, Chester? It's that confounded Quakerish sense of responsibility you have. Get rid of it. It will never do you any good in this world or the next, and will spoil many otherwise pleasant moments. But your little affair? I see that you are growing red in the face with impatience or annoyance, and are not to be satisfied without a narration. Well, I arrived at Catron's room on time, and explained that you had been summoned by Sir William Howe, and would communicate with us as soon as you could escape from the honor conferred upon you by the commander-in-chief. All of which I spoke in most stately and proper fashion, and the result seemed extremely satisfactory to every gentleman present, saving his High Mightiness, Lieutenant Reginald Belfort, who was disposed to impugn your courage or at least your zeal for a trial at arms, whereupon I offered to fight him myself, without delay, in that very room and at that very minute. Moore was eager for it, saying that the proposition was most becoming to a gentleman like myself (I gave him my best bow) and was in the highest interest of true sport, but the others lacked his fine perceptions and just appreciation of a situation and would not allow it. Then Moore proposed cards, and we sat down to the game at exactly ten minutes past four o'clock by my watch, and we did not rise until ten minutes past four o'clock this morning by the same watch, rounding out the twelve hours most handsomely. At some point in those twelve hours,—I do not remember just when, for I held a most beautiful hand at that moment,—Sir William's secretary came in with a report that you had been installed for the night in his place, which, of course, checked any further aspersion on your honor that Belfort might have had in store for you."

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Then I told him that Sir William Howe knew of the projected duel and had forbidden it.

"What do you say now, Marcel?" I asked.

"Why, it was a pretty affair before," he exclaimed, and his face expressed supreme satisfaction, "but it is famous now. A duel is a duel at any time, but a forbidden duel is best of all. You and Belfort are bound to fight since the commander-in-chief has forbidden it. I can conceive of no possible set of circumstances able to drive us away from Philadelphia until the edges of your swords shall have met."

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"But how?" I asked helplessly.

"Don't worry," he said with confidence. "Moore and I will arrange it. With that man to help me, I would agree to arrange anything. Now, Bob, you just be calm and trust me. Don't bother yourself at all about this duel until you get your sword in your hand and Belfort before you; then do your best."

It is the truth that I had no wish to fight a duel, but I did not intend that I alone should appear unwilling; so I left the affair in Marcel's hands, meanwhile seeming to look forward to the meeting as a man does to his wedding. Then I asked Marcel what he meant by the appearance of Miss Desmond in the play.

"I was going to tell you of that," he said. "You know the little theatre in South Street. It has been

the scene of some famous plays during the past winter. They have officers here who write them and act them too. There's 'The Mock Doctor,' and 'The Devil is in it,' and 'The Wonder,'—the wonder of which last is a woman who kept a secret,—and maybe a dozen more. Well, they are going to give one to-night that has in it many parts for gallant knights and beautiful ladies. The British officers are, of course, the gallant knights, and our Tory maidens are the beautiful ladies. They asked Miss Desmond to take a leading part. She objected to appearing on the stage, and her father, the crusty old merchant, sustained her in the refusal. But they tacked about and poured in a broadside from another quarter,—it was a naval officer who told me about it. They said that she was the most conspicuous of the Tory young ladies in Philadelphia, and she would seem lacking in zeal if she refused to share in an affair devised, given, and patronized by the most loyal. Whereupon she withdrew her refusal, and I suppose has prevailed upon her father to withdraw his also,—at least he has made no further objection. You will go, of course, Robert, and see her act."

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Yes, I would go, but I was conscious in my heart of a secret dislike to the appearance of Mary Desmond upon the stage. It was an affair for ladies and gentlemen, and but few of the general public would be present; still it was not a time when play acting was regarded with very favorable eyes, especially in America. Yet I was conscious that my objection was not founded upon that feeling. I did not wish to see Mary Desmond, to whom I was naught, seeking the applause of a crowd, and above all, I was not willing to hear these men from England discussing her as they would discuss some stage queen of their own London.

Belfort, who was a fine actor, so Marcel told me, was to have the hero's part, and he was to make love to Miss Desmond.

"But I promise you it's all in the play, Bob," said Phil, looking at me from under his eyebrows.

I was not so sure of that, but this additional news increased my distaste for the play, and I would have changed my mind and stayed away if Marcel had not assured me that it could not be done.

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"You are to go with us behind the scenes, Bob," he said. "We have already arranged for that. Moore is one of the managers, and he has made me his assistant. Behold, how invaluable I have become to the British army in the few days that we have been in Philadelphia! We may need your help, too. You are to be held in reserve, and Moore will never forgive you if you do not come."

I was a little surprised at his eagerness on the point, but at the appointed time I went with him to the theatre. It had never lacked for attendance when the plays were given in the course of the winter, and to-night, as usual, it was crowded with British and Hessian officers, and Philadelphia Tories with their wives and daughters. I peeped at the audience from my place behind the curtain, and it had been a longtime since I had seen so much white powder and rose-pink and silk ribbon and golden epaulet.

I do not remember much about the play or even its name, only that it had in it a large proportion of love-making, and fighting with swords, all after the approved fashion. I might have taken more careful note, had not Reginald Belfort and Mary Desmond filled the principal parts, and my eyes and ears were for them in particular rather than for the play in general. There was a great chorus of "Bravos," and a mighty clapping of hands when she appeared upon the stage as the oppressed and distressed daughter of a mediæval English Lord whom the brave knight, Lieutenant Reginald Belfort, was to win, sword in hand, and to whom he was to make the most ardent love. Belfort did his part well. I give him full credit for that. He did not miss a sigh or vow of passion, and his voice, his looks, his gestures were so true, so earnest, that the audience thundered its applause.

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"Doesn't he play it splendidly?" said Marcel, in an ecstasy to me.

"Yes, damn him!" I growled.

And she! she merely walked through the part for a long time, but she gradually caught the spirit of the lines—perhaps in spite of herself, I hoped—and became the persecuted and distressed maiden that the play would have her. Then her acting was real and sincere, and, with her wondrous beauty to aid her, the audience gave her an applause even exceeding that they had yielded to Belfort.

"It's a dazzling success!" said Marcel to me, with continued enthusiasm at the end of the second act.

I was bound to own that it was.

"But the best scene is to come yet," said Marcel, as he hurried away. "It will close the play."

The curtain soon fell on the last act and the distressed maiden and the gallant knight who had rescued her, drawn sword yet in hand, had been united forever amid the applause of all. This I supposed was the best scene, though I could not see why Marcel should say so, and I was about to leave, when he reappeared again and seemed to be in great haste.

"Come this way, Bob!" he said, putting his hand on my shoulder. "If you go in that direction, you will lose yourself among the scenes and stage trappings."

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I let him lead me as he wished, and in a few moments we came out, not into the street as I had expected, but in an open space at the rear of the theatre, where the moonlight was shining upon five men who were standing there. They were Vivian, Catron, Moore, Harding, and two others in plain dress who looked like surgeons. Marcel put a sword in my hand.

"This is to be that last, the best scene, of which I told you," he said gleefully.

At that moment Belfort appeared escorted by Moore. Belfort still held in his hand the sword that

he had carried on the stage.

There was no time for either of us to take thought; perhaps we would not have taken it if there had been. The love-making scenes of the play were fresh in my memory, and as for Belfort he hated me with sincerity and persistency. We faced each other, sword in hand.

"Isn't it glorious?" I heard Marcel say behind me. "Moore and I arranged it. Could we have conceived of a prettier situation? And as the finishing act, the last perfect touch to the play!"

Belfort's eye was upon mine, and it was full of malice. He seemed glad that this opportunity had come. I was only a fair swordsman, but I was cool and felt confident. We raised our swords and the blades clashed together.

But the duel was not destined to be. The fine erection of circumstance which Marcel and Moore—
fit spirits well matched—had raised with so much care and of which they were so proud, crumbled at a stroke to the ground. [Pg 131]

Mary Desmond, still in her costume of the play, but changed from the distressed maiden to an indignant goddess, rushed amongst us.

"For shame!" she cried. "How dare you fight when Sir William Howe has forbidden this duel! Are you so eager to kill each other that you must slip from a stage at midnight to do it?"

I have always remembered the look of comic dismay on the faces of Marcel and Moore at this unhappy interference with their plans, but Marcel spoke up promptly.

"So far as time and place are concerned, Miss Desmond," he said, "Lieutenant Melville and Lieutenant Belfort are not to blame. Moore and I arranged it." (Moore bowed in assent.)

She paid no attention to them, but reminded Belfort and me of our obligations to obey the orders of the commander-in-chief. She looked very beautiful in her indignation, the high color rising in her cheeks, and, even with a fear of the charge that I dreaded the combat, I was inclined to promise her that I would not fight Lieutenant Belfort.

"Lieutenant Melville, will you not escort me back to the dressing-room in the theatre?" she asked suddenly of me.

I bowed, handed my sword to Marcel, and went with her, happy that she had chosen me, though hardly knowing why.

"I have no wish to hurt Lieutenant Belfort, and certainly none to be hurt by him," I said, as we passed between stage scenery. "If it grieves you to think that perchance he should be wounded by me, I will not fight him at all." [Pg 132]

Perhaps I was not wholly sincere in that, but I said it.

"I saw him to-night in the play," I continued, "and he was most earnest and successful."

"But it was a play, and a play only. Do not forget that," she said, and was gone.

When I returned to the court, I found no one there, save Waters, who had helped that night in moving the scenery.

"You are disappointed, Lieutenant Melville," he said, leering at me with his cunning eyes. "You cannot have your duel. I came up just as you left with Miss Desmond; there was an alarm that the provost guard was at hand, and they all ran away, carrying Lieutenant Belfort with them. It may have been part of Miss Desmond's plan."

I did not even thank the man for his information, so much did I resent his familiarity, and I resented, too, the fear which I felt of him and which I could not dismiss despite myself. I went to my room, and found Marcel waiting for me.

"We have concluded to abandon the duel, Bob," he said. "Fate is apparently against it. But 'tis a great pity that 'tis so. The finest situation that I ever knew spoiled when it seemed to be most successful. But don't think, Bob, that I wanted the life of you, my best friend, put in risk merely for sport. Since I could not get the chance, I hoped that you would give the insolent fellow some punishment, and I can tell you in confidence, too, that Moore and the others had the same wish." [Pg 133]

I needed no apology from Marcel, as I knew that if necessary he would go through fire for me; and I told him so.

CHAPTER ELEVEN—*A Man Hunt*

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The next day was dull, and the night began the same way, but it was not destined to remain so. Great results accrue from small causes, and it seemed that the arrival of Marcel and myself had given a fillip to the quiet city and the lazy army reposing there. At least it flattered our vanity to think so.

Having nothing to do in the evening, our footsteps inevitably took us toward Catron's quarters. I had not intended to go there, but the way of amusement and luxury is easy, and I went. Moreover it was policy, I persuaded myself, for us in our situation to live this rapid life, as it would divert suspicion, and I found my conscience somewhat eased by the thought.

Catron had most comfortable quarters, and he was rarely troubled with useless messages about

military duty. So it had become a habit with the others to gather there, and when we arrived we found Moore, Blake, who was now quite well, and several others already present. Vivian was on duty at Sir William's headquarters and could not come. They received us warmly. Moore and Marcel indulged in some laments over their upset plans of the night before, told each other how much better the affair would have terminated had they been the principals instead of the seconds, and then forgot it. Belfort came in promptly, and nodded to us in a manner that indicated neither friendship nor hostility. I believed that he had given up, unwilling to risk more failures, or perhaps convinced that we were really what we claimed to be, but I decided to remain wary and watch him.

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The night was dark, the clouds making threats of rain, and we felt it was a good time to be indoors. Taking advantage of this feeling, Catron and Moore began to urge cards. I feared the fascination of gaming, and would have avoided the challenge, but I knew that I should have thought of that before coming. Being there, it was not permitted me to escape, and I sat down to picquet with the others. About the beginning of the second hour of the play we heard a musket-shot, and in a moment or so, several others, fired in a scattering volley.

We threw down the cards and ran to the door. The night had darkened further, and rain had begun to fall in a fine drizzle. Just as we reached the door, we saw the flash of another musket-shot and the dim forms of men running.

"What is it?" we cried, stirred by the flash and the report and the beat of flying feet.

"The American prisoners have broken from the jail and the guards are pursuing them!" some one replied.

"A chase! a chase!" cried Moore and Catron, at once. "Come, lads, and help the guards!"

Hastily buckling on our swords, we rushed into the street and joined in the pursuit. It was far from the thoughts of either Marcel or me to aid in the seizure of any countrymen of ours who might be in the way of escape, but in truth we were compelled to take up the chase with the others. It was our duty as British officers, and I reflected with some degree of pleasure that it was easy to pretend zeal and have it not.

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Brief as was my stay in Philadelphia, I had often looked at the gloomy building on Washington Square, the Walnut Street jail, where so many of my countrymen were confined and where so many of them suffered so grievously. Once, in truth, I had been inside of it, at the harrying of Alloway, and that visit did not increase my love for the place. It was of such strength, and guarded with such care, that the report of all the prisoners breaking from it seemed past belief. In truth, we soon found that only a score had escaped, the score the next minute became a dozen, then three or four, and, at last, only one.

We rushed through the square brandishing our swords, firing two or three shots from our pistols, and showing great enthusiasm. Belfort suddenly caught sight of a fugitive form, fired a shot at it, and gave chase, shouting that it was the escaped prisoner. He was right, for as we followed, the man turned suddenly, discharged a pistol at his pursuers, the bullet breaking a private's leg, and then ran toward the encampment of the Hessian grenadiers between Fifth and Seventh Streets.

On we sped through the dim light after him, and I began to revolve in my mind some plan for helping the desperate fugitive. The very numbers of the pursuers were an advantage, as we got in one another's way, and moreover, a pursuer was sometimes mistaken for the prisoners, the mistake not being discerned until he was overtaken with great violence. Some of the people joined in the hunt, and I was heartily ashamed of them. Presently a spacious citizen and myself collided with excessive force. He sank to the ground, gasping, but I, who had some expectation of the event, ran on, sure that I had done a good deed. Yet, in spite of myself, I felt the enthusiasm of the chase rising in me. I suppose that it does not matter what a man hunts so long as he hunts. But the fugitive winding among streets and alleys led us a long chase and proved himself to be noble game. Presently I heard Moore panting at my elbow.

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"The fellow runs well!" he exclaimed to me. "I'd like to capture him, but I hope he'll escape!"

Moore, it is to be remembered, was an Irishman.

We lost sight of the fugitive a little later, but in a few moments saw him again, his figure wavering as if he were approaching exhaustion. I felt deep pity for him, and anger for myself because I had found no way to help him in his desperate plight. He had succeeded in shaking off, for the time being, all except our own party, which I now noticed had been reinforced by Waters. Where he came from, I do not know, but he seemed to be watching Marcel and me more than the fugitive.

It was now hare and hounds, and the hare suddenly dashed into an alley, which cut the middle of a city square. The others followed at once, but, unnoticed, I left them and took a different direction, intending to curve about the square and meet the fugitive on the other side, as I thought it likely that he would turn when we came out of the alley and run toward the north, which presented the best side for escape. It was a chance, but I was determined to take it and it served me well.

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The rain was whipped into my face by the wind, and it half blinded me at times, but I ran on, and presently the sounds of the pursuit up the alley died. I was much bent upon helping the fugitive, and great was my pleasure when I reached the parallel street to see a dim figure running towards me. Even at a distance the figure showed great signs of weariness, and I was sure that it was our man.

I do not think that he saw me until he was very near, and then he threw up his hands as if in despair. But he recovered himself in a moment, and coming on quite fiercely struck at me with his unloaded pistol. Then I saw, to my infinite surprise, that it was Alloway. I held my sword in my hand, but I did not raise it against him or make any hostile movement, and the fact made him look at me more closely. Then he saw my face and knew me.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"Don't you hear the shouts of men before you?" I said. "The way is closed there, and you know that others are hot behind you! You must hide, and escape when the pursuit dies! See that house, the one with the lawn in front and the gardens behind! Run! hide yourself there! It's the house of John Desmond, a friend!"

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Without my noticing it until then, the windings of the chase had brought us before John Desmond's home, and I saw no chance for Alloway unless he could hide for the time in the house or gardens.

"Quick," I cried, "over the fence! See, there is a light appearing in the house now! It may be John Desmond himself! If it is an old man of noble appearance, trust him, but put yourself in the hands of no woman, and say nothing of me!"

He obeyed, leaped the fence, and disappeared instantly in the shrubbery just as the hue and cry emerged from the alley and swept up the street towards me.

I was in the shadow of the buildings, and I ran forward with great energy, plunging violently into the arms of somebody who went down under the shock of the collision. But he held tightly to me and shouted,—

"I have him! I have him! It's my capture!"

I displayed a similar fierce zeal, and clung to him, exclaiming,—

"I thought that I would cut you off, and I have done it! Yield yourself!"

I reinforced my victory by sundry sound blows on the side of my antagonist's head, but in a few moments the crowd surrounded and then separated us, disclosing the bedraggled features of Moore, my captive.

"Thunder and lightning!" exclaimed the Irishman, a broad smile overspreading his face. "I thought you were a fool as you came straight towards me, and you must have thought I was a fool coming straight towards you; and sure both of us were right!"

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"Didn't you see him?" I cried, affecting the greatest impatience. "He turned and ran back this way! He must have passed, as one of the crowd!"

"Aye, yonder he goes, that must be he!" cried Moore, pointing in a direction that led far away from Mr. Desmond's house. I think that Moore saw double through the violence of his meeting with me, or perhaps he mistook the dim figure of some one else for the fugitive. But as it was, we followed the wrong trail at good speed. Belfort in the lead and I last, wondering at the escape of Alloway and its singular timeliness, for however well disposed he might be toward us, he might let slip at any time, and without intending it, a word or two that would betray us.

I knew that Belfort had no suspicions of my intervention in this case, but the man Waters was there, and I believed that he was watching me always. He dropped back presently to my side and said,—

"Do you think that the man will escape, lieutenant?"

"I have no thoughts upon the subject," I said roughly, "and if I had I certainly would not confide them to you."

"I meant no harm, sir," he replied, "but one sometimes feels a little sympathy for such poor hunted fellows."

But I was not to be betrayed by such dangerous admissions. I would not allow a man of his humble rank to question me, and I did not answer him.

The chase died presently. You cannot keep a fire going without fuel, and since there was no longer a fugitive, we were no longer able to maintain a pursuit. At last we gave up entirely and returned slowly and wearily to Catron's quarters. I was sure that Alloway had been concealed by John Desmond, and later on would slip out of the city. On the whole I felt extreme satisfaction with the evening's work. My old wonder about the timeliness of Alloway's escape returned, but there was no solution. What Belfort thought of it he did not care to say, being silent like myself.

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CHAPTER TWELVE—*A Delicate Search*

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I was aroused early the next morning by Marcel, who stood at my bedside shaking me vigorously.

"Get up, Bob," he said, "there is work for you to do."

He was dressed already, and regarding me curiously, his gaze containing a faint suggestion of humor.

"What is it?" I asked, sitting up and rubbing my eyes sleepily.

"Your particular friend, Mr. Waters, is here with orders," he replied, stepping to the door and giving a signal.

The big, red-headed orderly entered and handed me a letter, gazing the while respectfully at the wall, although I was sure that in his inmost heart he suspected us and enjoyed our danger. I took the paper and held it a moment between thumb and finger, fearing to read its contents, but in a moment I dismissed my alarm as unworthy of a man and broke the seal.

Lieutenant Melville is ordered to take a file of men at once and search the house of John Desmond for one Alloway, an American soldier who escaped from the prison last night and is believed to have hidden himself there. The search is to be conducted with all the courtesy consistent with thoroughness.

HOWE, Commander-in-chief.

I felt a rush of blood from the heart to the head when I read this order. Who had betrayed Alloway? Marcel's fate and mine were in a way bound up with his, and whoever had seen him entering the Desmond house might too have seen me advising him to hide there. I looked fixedly at Waters, but he was still gazing at the same spot on the wall and his face was without expression. I studied his profile, the heavy cheek-bones, the massive projecting jaw, and the steady black eyes, the whole forming a countenance of unusual strength and boldness, and I felt that he would dare anything. This was a man who could use his power over Marcel and me merely for his own sport, torturing us until he chose to crush us. [Pg 143]

And then another thought, even more unpleasant, came into my mind. Perhaps it was Mary Desmond herself who had betrayed Alloway! It was altogether likely that she would discover him in her father's house. But I rejected the thought the next instant, since, Tory though she was, she could not have stooped to such an act.

"You can go," I said to Waters; and he left, first saluting both Marcel and me, his face remaining a complete mask.

Then I showed the order to Marcel.

"I trust that you will find nothing," he said significantly, "but you know, Lieutenant Arthur Melville of Newton-on-the-hill, Staffordshire, England, that there is naught for you to do but go and do it."

"I know it," I replied, "and I shall not hesitate."

"Take care that you search properly," said Marcel, looking me straight in the eye. I believed that he understood, but he said no more now, and I went forth to do my distasteful duty. I took ten men and proceeded towards the Desmond house. We attracted no attention in the street, as soldiers had long since grown to be a common sight in Philadelphia, but on the way we met Belfort and the Hessian Colonel Schwarzfelder, whom I had thrown out of General Howe's room. They seemed to be acquainted and on good terms, and I did not like this alliance of two men whom I knew to be my enemies. I liked still less the question that Belfort asked me. [Pg 144]

"On duty, eh, Melville?" he said jauntily, as if he knew what I was about, but preferred that I should tell it.

I glanced at Schwarzfelder too, and noticed a sneering look on his face as if he were prepared to enjoy a triumph over me. Perhaps it was Belfort, after all, who was the cause of the proposed search. But I did not hesitate to tell them the truth.

"I am going to search John Desmond's house for the man who escaped from the prison last night," I replied calmly. "It is the order of General Howe."

"And the beautiful Miss Desmond such a good Royalist!" said Belfort. "I do not envy you."

"I do not envy myself," I replied frankly, and walked on with my men, arriving presently at Mr. Desmond's house, which looked as if all its occupants were yet asleep. And in truth they might well be, since the sun was just showing his red rim above the eastern hills, and in the west the mists of early dawn yet lingered.

I ordered my men to stand ready, and then I struck the door a resounding blow with the great brass knocker. I listened a minute or two, but no one answered, nor could I hear anything within the house to indicate life and movement. I knocked a second and a third time, and presently there was a sound on the inside as of some one moving a bar from the door, which was opened the next moment by John Desmond himself. He was fully dressed in sober Quaker gray, and regarded us with the greatest sternness. I own that I was much embarrassed and felt extremely uncomfortable. John Desmond was a man of imposing appearance and severe countenance, and when he was angry, such being his present state of mind, as any one could easily see, not even the most brazen subaltern could be flippant in his presence. [Pg 145]

"What is it?" he asked; "why am I summoned at such an hour by an armed guard? May I ask if his Majesty's officers have begun a systematic persecution of all those who are friendly to the Congress?"

"I am ordered to search your house, Mr. Desmond, for an American soldier who escaped from the prison last night," I replied, "and who may have hidden here. It is the order of General Howe."

The old man's eyes flashed with anger.

"I know nothing of this soldier," he said, "and there is nobody concealed in my house, nor has

there been."

I said to myself that he was a good actor, but I also saw Belfort and Schwarzfelder standing on the other side of the street and I knew they were watching me. Every consideration demanded that I do my duty promptly.

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"My orders are to search your house, Mr. Desmond," I said respectfully, but in decided tones, "and surely you have seen enough of armies recently to know what orders are. I shall have to enter and perform my task."

"He speaks the truth, father, and we should not resist," said a voice that I knew behind him, and Miss Desmond appeared in the hall, composed and as beautiful as ever. My suspicion returned. Could it be possible that this girl in her zeal for Britain would give up Alloway, and thereby destroy both Marcel and me? But she could know nothing of our false attire, and I quickly absolved her of that intention.

"Conduct your search," said Mr. Desmond; and placing six of my men about the house as guards, I took the remaining four and entered. One, Sergeant Blathwayt, an especially zealous man in the British cause, I kept beside me in order that he might see how well I performed my trust, as I knew not what consequences might arise from the incident.

Mr. Desmond, haughtily indignant, withdrew to his own room, saying that the search was an outrage upon the rights of a peaceable citizen, and if the British could find no better way of making war, they should not make it at all. I took his rebuke in silence, feeling the truth of his words and my own inability to resent them. Miss Desmond, too, was silent until her father disappeared, and I watched her, wondering at the strength, calmness, and courage that this young girl always showed. Did she ever feel fear? In truth she must feel it, but never before had I seen a woman who could so well conceal all emotion.

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"Kindly continue the search, Lieutenant Melville," she said, in even cold tones, "but I assure you in advance that my father tells you the exact truth."

She added the last sentence proudly and with another uplift of her high head.

"I trust, Miss Desmond, that for your father's sake the search will prove fruitless," I said; "no one could wish a vain result of my task more than I."

She did not acknowledge my courtesy, and I proceeded with the work. Blathwayt, in his eagerness, was already poking among the rooms, looking behind curtains, opening the clothes-closets, and seeking in all manner of possible and impossible places for the hidden man. I did not rebuke his zeal, but began to pretend also to a similar enthusiasm, although I remained in constant fear lest we should discover Alloway. I was sure that he was in the house somewhere, and I did not see how we could avoid finding him, to the consequent ruin of Marcel and myself. Mine was a most peculiar position, and the chills coursed down my spine. Yet Mary Desmond's cold eye was upon me, and I would rather have died than shown apprehension while she looked so at me. The strange mingling of motives in her character and conduct, her loyalty to the Royal cause and her equal loyalty to her father, impressed me even then in that moment of danger.

We continued the search with vigor, going through all the rooms on the lower floors, and then into the cellars. It was a large and fine house, with spacious rooms, well stocked with furniture of mahogany and brass, and we saw in the cellars so many bottles of Madeira and port and old Spanish wines that the eyes of my English comrades began to glitter. "'Ow I would like to 'elp loot this 'ouse," said a good-natured private to me. I did not doubt the sincerity of his statement, but I saw no chance for him.

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Miss Desmond accompanied us into the cellars, and as far as she showed any feeling at all, apparently wished to facilitate my task. The cellars were so extensive, and contained so many dark recesses, that the search there lasted a full half-hour. We were about to return to the upper floors, when I noticed a small door painted the color of the stone wall, and fitting into it so neatly that we might well have passed over it at a first look. Blathwayt himself had not seen it, but my eyes lingered there, and when I looked up Miss Desmond was gazing at me. My heart began to beat more rapidly. Alloway was behind that little gray door. I divined it at once. But what were Miss Desmond's feelings? What would she wish me to do? Was her loyalty to her father overcoming her loyalty to the king? And then another question intervened. I alone had passed it by; would she call attention to it?

I hesitated a little, and then walked unnoticing past the door, but I could not refrain from giving her a look of understanding, to tell her that I had seen it but would save her father. Her eye glittered, whether with scorn I could not say.

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"You are overlooking the alcove, Lieutenant Melville," she said.

I paused, astounded, and I looked reproachfully at her, but her expression did not change. Then I walked a little farther, as if I had not heard, and she repeated,—

"You are overlooking the alcove, Lieutenant Melville."

The others were at the far end of the cellar and could not hear her.

"Miss Desmond," I said, "I have more regard than you for your father's safety."

Her eyes flashed.

"Lieutenant Melville," she said, "I demand that you search the alcove."

I hesitated, murmuring that I did not think it worth while; no one could lie concealed in such a

small, close place.

"I shall report you to the commander-in-chief himself unless you search it," she said, looking at me steadily.

There could be no mistake; her manner and her tone alike indicated decision, and that I must obey. Yet I did not withhold these words,—

"I know that you are a Tory, Miss Desmond, but I did not think that you would go to such extremes."

She made no reply, and surrendering all hope for Marcel and myself, I turned the bolt and threw open the little door of the alcove.

It was empty!

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I stood still, too much surprised to speak; relief, at that moment, not having any part in my emotions, although it came later.

"You know now, Lieutenant Melville, that your belief is as false as it was unjust," said Miss Desmond, proudly. "You have wronged my father."

"It is true," I confessed; and I confessed too, though not aloud, that perhaps I had wronged some one else yet more. Then I called to Blathwayt and censured him for overlooking the alcove.

"The fugitive might have lain there safely hidden from all of us," I said, "but I saw the place, and perhaps we may find others like it."

He admitted his error humbly, and we passed to the other floors. Here the feeling of relief disappeared from my mind, as we would surely find Alloway near the roof since he was not in the cellar. We searched three rooms, and then I put my hand upon the bolt fastening the door of the third.

"It is my bedroom," said Miss Desmond.

"I regret to say that I am compelled to search it too," I replied.

She bowed, making no further opposition, and, turning the key, I entered. It was a large, light apartment. In a corner the high bed stood within its white curtains, there were heavy rugs on the floor, a little round table of ebony, and at the far end of the room, tongs and shovel of brass hung beside the grate, in which two brazen fire dogs upheld haughty heads. It was a handsome room, worthy of its mistress, and yet I could not spare it. I looked everywhere,—behind the curtains, under the bed, and in the clothes-closets,—but I did not find Alloway.

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When I finished Miss Desmond said to me,—

"I hope you believe that no man is concealed in my room."

The color had risen in her cheeks, and I replied in great haste,—

"I have not believed it any time, Miss Desmond, and only my duty compelled me to look here."

What a consoling word those four little letters, "d-u-t-y," sometimes spell! Blathwayt came to me the next moment, and reported that he had searched the upper rooms and the garret without finding the lost soldier. "But what a house it would be to loot!" he added in a whisper to me, showing, like his comrade, those predatory instincts which the British soldier often loves to indulge.

I pretended to a belief that he had not searched well the top of the house, and to show my zeal insisted upon conducting a hunt in those regions myself. But I thought, as I ascended the last stairway, that it would be rather a grim joke on me, if I found Alloway there after Blathwayt had failed to do so. But no such bad luck happened, and ten minutes later I announced with great but secret joy that his Britannic Majesty's army in Philadelphia had done Mr. Desmond an injustice; no soldier was concealed in his house, and I was sure that none ever had been. But while I said this I was wondering what had become of Alloway; he had entered the Desmond house, I knew beyond a doubt, and he must be in it yet, hidden in some secret recess. Well, at any rate, the luck which Marcel claimed was watching over us was still on guard.

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"I shall be pleased to tell your father how vain our search has been," I said to Miss Desmond. But Mr. Desmond was yet in his own room and would not come forth. The haughty old Quaker, as was evident to us all, considered this search of his house a piece of gross insolence.

"I trust that I shall never again be sent on such an errand," I said to Miss Desmond as we prepared to go.

She made the formal reply that she hoped so too, and I could read nothing in her eyes. I was sure now that she had never known of Alloway's presence in the house. Then I took my soldiers and went into the street.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN—*Hessian Wrath*

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There was a narrow lawn in front of Mr. Desmond's house, and between that and the street an ornate iron fence. As I opened the gate that permitted egress, I saw Belfort and Schwarzfelder leaning upon the fence, while Waters hovered near. The two officers were twirling their

mustaches after the most approved style of Old World dandies, and were looking at me in a manner that I could interpret only as insolent. I inferred at once that they and the Frenchman Waters were responsible for the search, and had gone there to enjoy a triumph containing the sweetest of flavor, my exposure and disgrace compelled by my own act. I became sure of it when I saw the look of triumph on the faces of Belfort and Schwarzfelder give way to one of surprise and disappointment.

"Where is your prisoner, Lieutenant Melville?" exclaimed Belfort, unable to control himself.

I gave him a stare as haughty as I knew how to make it.

"Did I understand you to ask where my prisoner was, Lieutenant Belfort?" I asked.

Both he and Schwarzfelder nodded.

"Permit me to remark that this is very extraordinary," I said, continuing my haughty manner, which suited my state of mind. "I am sent on a secret errand of great importance by Sir William Howe, and before I can report to him I am called to account concerning it in the streets of Philadelphia by one of his Majesty's sub-lieutenants. Or perhaps I have made a mistake, and General Howe has resigned in your favor. Do I have the pleasure of addressing General Belfort, and not Lieutenant Belfort?"

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I gave him an extremely polite bow as I added the last sentence, and my tone grew most humble. But he did not seem to appreciate my homage. His face turned red.

"Lieutenant Melville," he said, "I shall have satisfaction for this insolence."

"Don't make a fuss about it," I said lightly. "I was merely speaking for your good, because if I had reported to you earlier than to Sir William he might have resented it. Still, I don't mind telling you, lieutenant, that we did not find the man, although we searched the house most thoroughly."

I was now happy, feeling my triumph somewhat, which may account for my levity; but the mention of the prisoner again set Belfort on fire.

"Did you look everywhere?" he asked eagerly. "It is certain that he took refuge there."

"Oh yes, sir!" interrupted Blathwayt, touching his cap, "we searched every square inch of the house, and it was impossible for a man to be hid there, and us not find him."

It was disrespectful of Blathwayt to interrupt when his superiors were talking, but for obvious reasons I did not correct him.

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"He must have been there! he must have been there!" repeated Belfort, in disappointed tones. "Schwarzfelder says that he saw him dart among the shrubbery around the house, and he did not come out of it again last night."

So it was Schwarzfelder who had played the spy! But even so, he had not seen me give Alloway the warning or he would have betrayed me at once. I began to bear towards Schwarzfelder a feeling akin to that I felt for Belfort.

"I think that Colonel Schwarzfelder must have been mistaken," I said. "It is well known that our valiant Hessian officers often see double, especially when it is so late at night. Forward, march, men!"

I gave the order in a loud, peremptory tone, and my soldiers marched at once in their stiffest and most precise manner. Schwarzfelder was standing in the middle of the pavement, and they would have walked into him had he not skipped to one side in the most undignified way. I think that they would have been glad to do it, as generally the English soldiers hated the Hessians.

Schwarzfelder glowered at me, first because I had taunted him with his German drunkenness and the memory of his ejection from Sir William's headquarters, and secondly because in a metaphorical sense I had thrown him off the sidewalk. But he said nothing. He was choking too badly over his German wrath to enunciate words. I marched on with my men, leaving him and Belfort to concoct whatever mischief they would.

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The man Waters, whom in truth I dreaded more than either Belfort or Schwarzfelder, had drawn somewhat nearer and was gazing steadily at me.

"Are you too looking for this American soldier, Waters?" I asked. "It seems that the commander-in-chief is receiving a great deal of voluntary assistance."

"Your pardon, sir," said Waters, with respect, or the assumption of it, "but I could not help hearing what the search was about, and I was merely wondering if that old rebel John Desmond was caught at last."

"Mr. Desmond may be a rebel," I replied angrily, "but it is not for you to speak of him in such a manner."

"I beg your pardon, sir, if I was presumptuous," he said meekly, dropping his eyes. Yet I was sure that he was deriding me, and I walked off, feeling an unpleasant chill again. I reported duly to Sir William that the search had brought forth nothing, and he expressed disappointment.

"I cannot understand how the man escaped," he said thoughtfully. "It was told to me that he was in the Desmond house, and I should have been glad to find him there, because it would give me a power over this rebellious old Quaker which I should be glad to use. I chose you for the task because I felt sure of your loyalty and devotion to the king, and also I know that you are a good friend of mine. There might have been promotion in it for you."

I thanked him humbly for his consideration, and I began to feel that the well-meant friendship of Sir William Howe would prove troublesome. Yet I was able to preserve a thankful countenance. Then he excused me, saying, as I departed, that I might look for further rewards at his hands, even in the short time left to him. Again I gave him thanks, and went out into the street, where I knew that I should find some of my new comrades ogling the pretty Philadelphia maids. The first that I beheld were Marcel and Vincent Moore, walking arm in arm. Marcel was in a splendid new uniform that fairly glittered with gold lace,—where he got it he has never told me, although I suppose that promptly after its arrival from England he won it at cards from some brother officer, perhaps from Harding, the new cousin, as they were about of a size and the uniform fitted Marcel beautifully. Moore also had achieved his utmost splendor, looking almost as fine as Marcel, and I saw clearly that the two were out to "kill" whatever beauty came their way.

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"And you did not find the man, Melville?" exclaimed Marcel, seizing me by the arm; I was sure that he had heard the vain result of the search.

"If the bird was ever there, it had flown before our arrival," I replied, putting as much regret into my tones as I could.

"Then let war go! Come with us and look for the smiles of beauty," said Marcel, in his high flown manner. In truth, after inviting me, they gave me no choice, for Marcel took me by one arm and Moore by the other, and I could not escape swaggering on with them. I felt such relief from the situation of the morning, and the sunshine was so brilliant and inspiring, that I began to share their exultant views of life. We presently met Miss Rankin and another girl whom we knew, and, turning in our course, we walked beside them, exchanging the courtesies of the day, pouring out extravagant compliments, and otherwise behaving in a manner not unusual to masculine youth on such occasions.

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Marcel, with incredible effrontery, began to tell some of the latest news about people of fashion in London, speaking as if he knew them intimately. I supposed that he had picked up the gossip, like the uniform, from Harding. This lasted a full ten minutes, and then we met Miss Desmond and her father, also walking in the sunshine. We gave them most ornate salutations, but their reply was not in kind. Miss Desmond's slight bow was accompanied by a look of surprise and disdain directed towards me. I know that I reddened under the glance, for, in truth, I became suddenly ashamed of myself, being fully aware that I had been behaving like a Jack o' dandy with more youth than brains. But there was no escape for me, and I walked on with my chattering companions, suddenly become silent, although they did not notice it, since they were making so much noise themselves. The ladies left us in another ten minutes, and then I would have excused myself from Marcel and Moore, but they would not hear of it.

"If we don't keep you, you will get into mischief," said Marcel, with a significance that Moore did not see, and they retained hold of my arms. Shortly after, our party was increased by Vivian and Catron, and we filled the sidewalk from edge to edge, all talking in lively fashion except myself, Marcel being in his element. In truth, there was no need that I should talk, since Marcel and Moore were doing enough and to spare for us all. They continued to twirl their mustaches and look for the pretty maids, but our next acquaintances who approached us were men not maids, being, in truth, Belfort, Schwarzfelder, and Graves, arm in arm, with the German in the centre. They walked straight towards us, and I saw that unless either they or we turned aside, a most unpleasant collision would occur, as the sidewalk was narrow. I observed no evidence of an intent on the part of either my comrades or Belfort and his friends to change their course, and I was annoyed excessively at the prospect of a collision and a quarrel. In fact, I have never felt any desire to be a swaggerer, and I began to wonder how I could get out of the difficulty. If the others insisted upon trouble for themselves, they might have it.

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I saw no solution of the difficulty; but, to my great amazement, my friends suddenly stepped to one side when we were within a half-dozen paces of our antagonists, forming a line at the edge of the sidewalk, as if we were a guard of honor stationed there to give distinction to the passage of Belfort and his companions; furthermore, they strengthened the idea by taking off their caps and giving the others a bow of astonishing sweep and depth, which Graves returned in kind, Belfort slightly, and Schwarzfelder not at all. Not a word was said, the three stalking solemnly past us, and then disappearing down the street, while we returned to our natural place on the sidewalk, and walked on in the way that we had been going.

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"Gentlemen," I said gravely, when we had gone about twenty yards, "I did not think this of you."

"And why not?" replied Marcel. "Could we have done otherwise after the delicate attentions that you have received from Colonel Schwarzfelder. We were the larger party, and therefore it was our duty, under the circumstances, to give way to the smaller. Is that not so, Moore?"

"Certainly," replied Moore. "We did our duty."

I looked at them questioningly, and Marcel's eye began to twinkle.

"Oh, you have not heard of the billet-doux that Schwarzfelder has written you?" he asked.

"What are you talking about?" I replied.

"It was done in the most perfect manner," said Moore; "I wish that it had come for me."

"I refuse to go a step farther unless you tell me what you are talking about," I said, and I stopped short. They could have carried me on only by dragging me, and that would have looked undignified.

"Suppose we let him have the letter,—Schwarzfelder's masterly production," said Marcel.

"Yes, let him see it," said Vivian.

Marcel accordingly took from his waistcoat pocket, an envelope with a broken seal, superscribed in a large heavy hand, "To Captain, the Honorable Charles Montague." I put it to my nose, and it smelled of both tobacco and wine. [Pg 161]

"But think of its contents," said Marcel.

I opened it, and stared at the writing, of which I could not read a word. It was in German. The others burst into laughter.

"That billet-doux," said Marcel, "is a challenge from your dear friend, Schwarzfelder. It seems that you did him a wrong this morning, or at least he thinks so, and off he rushed to his headquarters so blindingly angry that he must challenge you at once. He thinks of me as your best friend, and, still mad with anger, he forgets himself so far as to write the body of the letter in German, and also to ignore the use of a second for himself. But Belfort has set all of that right. Now it seems that fate won't let you fight Belfort; but I don't see how you can keep from meeting Schwarzfelder. Lieutenant Melville, if I had your quarrelsome disposition, I certainly should expect to die on the field of honor before I was turned twenty-five."

Then they laughed again, enjoying my plight and vexation.

"Belfort is at any rate a gentleman," I said; "but Schwarzfelder is at least three-fourths ruffian, and I think that it would be a disgrace to meet him."

"But you cannot refuse on that account," said Catron, gravely, "these men seem bent upon persecuting you, Melville, and you will have to put a stop to it with either sword or pistol. Suppose that we go to your quarters and discuss it."

I was willing, and ten minutes later we were around a table in our room, talking over the situation. Marcel had ordered wine from the commissariat, and the glasses were filled by the orderly, Waters, who was silent, and, as usual, apparently respectful. [Pg 162]

"It is obvious that our friend Melville must meet Schwarzfelder," said Marcel, at length. "This Hessian is a drunkard and a bravo; but he is an officer of rank, even of much higher rank than Melville. Our man, therefore, must teach him a lesson. Do you say so, gentlemen?"

"We do say so," replied Catron, Moore, and Vivian together.

I saw that they were right, according to the code of the day, and I began, in spite of myself, to feel a willingness for the combat. Catron said that they were persecuting me, and that word "Persecute" began to inflame my anger. I would show them that persecuting had its risks.

"I am not much of a swordsman," I said; "but I am a good shot, and so I choose pistols at twenty paces."

"Then pistols it is," said Catron; "and now for a letter to Belfort, who is to be Schwarzfelder's second, which will show that we know how to manage such an affair as this in the most courteous manner."

Then we set ourselves to the task of writing the letter,—a labor that was by no means small,—and while we were hard-set at it, Waters came into the room again and saluted.

"Well?" said Catron, impatiently.

"Your honor," said Waters, apologetically, "there is some news of interest in the city, and I thought that you would pardon me for telling it to you." [Pg 163]

"Wait! Do you not see that we are busy? You should not interrupt!" replied Marcel.

"But this is a most extraordinary affair, and the whole town is ringing with it," rejoined the man.

I saw now that his eyes were sparkling after the manner of one who has a budget of good gossip to tell and is anxious to tell it. The others noticed it too, and our own curiosity began to rise.

"What is it, Waters?" I asked.

He opened his hands, showing a piece of white paper about a foot long and perhaps half as wide.

"There is writing upon it; I ask your honor to read it," he said.

I took it and read:

TO SIR WILLIAM HOWE, *Commander-in-chief of His Britannic Majesty's forces in Philadelphia*:—

I beg to present to you my compliments, and to notify you that I shall pay a visit to the City of Philadelphia one night this week, in order that you may prepare a reception worthy of yourself and me.

Yours faithfully,

WILLIAM WILDFOOT,
Captain in the Continental Army.

"It is said that over twenty of these have been found in the city to-day," said Waters, "all exactly alike, and written in the same hand."

The penmanship was large, rough, and angular, evidently that of a man more accustomed to

grasping the sword than the goose quill.

Catron swore a tremendous oath.

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"Well, of all unmitigated impertinences this is the greatest!" he exclaimed.

"It's mere bravado," said Vivian. "Of course the man will not think of venturing into Philadelphia."

"They say that he surely will come," said Waters; "it is the gossip of the city."

"If he does," added Vivian, scornfully, "he will come only to be hanged."

I was not so sure, but I said nothing. I remembered our former encounter with Wildfoot, and the singular words that he shouted to me as he dashed past. The others discussed the insolent placards with some degree of heat.

"Have you heard what Sir William says about this piece of presumption?" asked Vivian of Waters, letting his curiosity overcome his dignity.

"I have heard only, sir, that he was extremely angry," replied Waters.

"An entirely natural emotion under the circumstances," added Marcel.

Then we returned to the discussion of my own affair, and shortly after the important letter was finished, notifying Belfort that I accepted Schwarzfelder's challenge, naming pistols as the weapons, and stating that Captain Montague would call upon him as soon as possible to make arrangements as to time and place.

"There," said Marcel, his face flushing with satisfaction, as he looked at the completed letter, "I think that's as pretty a piece of work as any one of us has done in many a day. I don't want you to kill that Hessian fellow, Melville; but if you could let a lot of blood from him with a bullet, say in his shoulder, it would improve both his appearance and his manners."

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Waters was deputed to bear the letter to Belfort, and then we went out to enjoy the small portion of the day and the sunshine that was left to us. This was Tuesday, and Marcel and Moore began to calculate when they could have the duel, the two undertaking to manage it, just as they had managed my abortive affair with Belfort. Marcel was of the opinion that the meeting could be held within two or three days, the time to be just at dawn, and the place to be a spot in the Northern suburbs, barely within the line of the British pickets, but where they could not see us.

We were not permitted to think long of the proposed duel. Wildfoot's placard was making a great buzz in the city, and many of the British officers who believed that he would keep his promise thought that the time to catch him had come.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN—*According to Promise*

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I was at mess when an orderly arrived from Sir William, bidding my immediate presence at his quarters, a command that I could not think of disobeying, however reluctant I might be to go. It was in truth somewhat unpleasant to leave the brilliantly lighted room with its glittering china and silver, its abundant wines, and the talk and laughter of the good comrades who were there, for the loneliness and work of the commander-in-chief's house. I like to be popular with my superior officers, but now and then popularity is burdensome, and I leave it to anybody if Sir William's favor was not extremely embarrassing to one in my position. So I rose and apologized with reluctance for my departure, which I said I must take at once, and at the same time naming the cause.

"Farewell, Melville," they shouted with mock solemnity. "He goes to sure promotion, and this is another good man lost to those who love him."

I found Sir William at the table in his workroom, and the heap of papers that lay before him was larger than the one which had been there the first night that I had helped him. These were the closing days of his command, and much remained to be done. He was, as I have said before, and as all the world knows, an easy, sluggish, good-natured man, fond of pleasure, and his work always came last. Vivian was there helping him, and not looking over-happy. I was sure that he, like myself, was thinking longingly of the mess and its lights and the good company. But his face brightened a bit when he saw me, knowing now that he would have a companion in misery.

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Sir William turned to me a face upon which annoyance was plainly written, and I saw in his hand a placard like that which Waters had shown to us.

"Melville, have you heard of this?" he asked, holding up the placard.

"Yes, sir, I have heard of it."

"This placard, or paper, or whatever it may be, is the most unexampled impertinence," he said, the red flushing into his swarthy face. "I think that it is intended as a personal insult to me. This outlaw Wildfoot must know of my forthcoming departure for England, and he is seeking to taunt me. But he shall not do it! I tell you, he shall not do it!"

He struck his fist upon the table to give emphasis to his statement that he would not allow a rebel partisan to upset his dignity, but it was entirely obvious that it *was* very much upset.

"If the man is so foolish and reckless as to enter Philadelphia," continued Sir William, "he will

never get out again. I shall at least have the satisfaction of disposing of this troublesome fellow before I go to England."

The thought gave him consolation, and he began to dictate to us orders about the watch for Wildfoot, doubling the sentries, cautioning them to increase their vigilance, and making new dispositions of the pickets which he thought would guard the city better. Many of these movements could not be executed before the next morning; but Sir William did not look for Wildfoot for two or three nights, provided he came at all, and his countenance and voice began, by and by, to express satisfaction.

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"We shall have our trap set," he said, "and the outlaw will walk into it just as we wish."

The time passed slowly, and we were reinforced presently by another secretary, who proved to be young Graves, a man who was the friend of Belfort and Schwarzfelder, and more or less hostile to me. But he was in a good humor, thinking of the prospective duel, in which he was to have a part as one of the managers,—a circumstance which flattered his pride, and he was very courteous to me. He exchanged a word occasionally with me about it in a whisper, and informed me, by and by, that he was not sure Schwarzfelder would win.

In a short while, Graves was sent to the anteroom to copy some documents there. He sat at a table near the wall, and once, when I went to take him some papers, I saw the sentinel, loaded gun on shoulder, walking back and forth in front of the door. I heard the sound of footsteps outside and, looking through the window, beheld a company of troops marching past. It was evident that Sir William's anger over Wildfoot's impertinence was producing activity. Then I went back to the commander-in-chief's table and resumed my work there.

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I think it was about 10 o'clock when Sir William told me to go and help Graves, who seemed to be falling behind in his task. I drew up a chair and sat down at the table facing Graves, and with my back to the door. He, feeling his importance, wanted to exchange with me more whispered comments on the duel; but I wished to avoid the subject, and worked so industriously that he gave up the attempt.

We heard nothing during the next quarter of an hour but the scratching of our goose quills and the occasional words of Sir William in the next room as he gave an order. Then, chancing to look up, I beheld a most extraordinary expression on the face of Graves. His eyes were distended to a great width, and the white in them was shot with little specks of red, the muscles of his face were drawn, and his whole look was that of a man suffering from the most alarmed surprise.

"Why, what under the sun is the matter, Graves?" I exclaimed.

He did not say a word, but pointed behind me. I wheeled around to see; but powerful hands grasped me by the throat, while other hands thrust the muzzle of a pistol into my face. It was not necessary for anybody to say to me: "Move a foot, or say a word, and you shall be a dead man!" I knew it perfectly well without the telling, and I neither moved nor spoke. Graves, who at the same instant had been served as I was, showed a similar wisdom. Something soft, but very filling, was thrust into my mouth, and, with an expedition as unpleasant as it was astonishing, I was bound tightly to the table. Then the strong hands slipped off me, and I was at liberty to gaze as much as I wished into the eyes of Graves, who sat opposite me just as he had sat when we were at work, and who was as securely bound and gagged as I. I always fancy that we made a pretty pair, trussed up there like two turkeys ready for the spit. I would have given much for a few words to express my feelings, but my mouth was too full. I merely read the various looks in the eyes of Graves, all of which expressed anger.

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The men, four in number, who had performed this impolite deed, brushed past me, and I saw only their backs, which were large and powerful. The door between our room and Sir William's was shut; but they opened it, leaving it so, and entered. I faced the apartment, and I saw distinctly all that passed. Thus it was my fortune, while listening to the most amazing conversation that I ever heard, to see also those who talked, though only the back of one of the most important.

Sir William and Vivian were writing busily at the large table in the centre of the room, when the intruders entered. Sir William sat at the side of the table facing us, and Vivian was at the end. I saw the faces of both clearly by the light of wax candles. Sir William had begun to wear his usual placid look. I inferred that he was pleased at what he was writing just then, and I think that it was instructions which he felt soon would cause the capture of Wildfoot. The largest man of the four put his hand on a chair, and drawing it up to the table sat down opposite to Sir William and with his back to me. Neither Sir William nor Vivian noticed their entrance until then, as they had walked with extreme lightness. But when Sir William looked up and beheld the stranger sitting uninvited and so calmly before him, his face flamed into anger. I could see the rush of blood to his head.

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"Who are you, and how dare you come here?" he cried, springing to his feet.

"Be seated, Sir William, be seated," replied the man, in a strong, clear, and soothing voice. "There is no occasion for surprise or wrath. I am not an intruder. I sent you word in writing that I would call."

I saw Sir William's face turn quite black, and he began to choke.

"You are—you are—" he gasped.

"You have divined it, Sir William," replied the man. "I am Captain William Wildfoot, captain of rangers in the Continental service. Your guest, if you please, and I must warn you and your assistant not to shout for help, or my men will shoot you instantly. The young lieutenants in the

front room, as you can see for yourself, will keep very quiet."

What I wished most of all at that moment was to see the man's face. His effrontery, his astonishing recklessness, inspired me with the deepest curiosity. I thought that Marcel and I had shown considerable presumption, but we were children, raw beginners, compared with this man. [Pg 172]

"What do you want?" asked Sir William, at last.

"First, that you and your assistant put your hands upon the table, or else I shall have to bind you," replied Wildfoot.

Sir William frowned and choked again; but there was no recourse, and he and Vivian both laid their empty hands upon the table.

"That is better," said Wildfoot, in a pleased tone; "I know that it is undignified in you, but the good of our service demands it. And now for serious talk. I came to show you, Sir William, the insecurity of your position, and the great resources of the patriots."

"I must say," replied Sir William, "that I never before saw a man so anxious to give his side of the argument."

"Yes," replied Wildfoot, "I have been at some trouble and risk to do so."

I saw a faint gleam of humor appear in the eyes of Sir William, and I inferred that the quality of geniality or good fellowship in him, which perhaps made him such a poor soldier, was rising to the surface. He seemed to appreciate, to a slight degree at least, the humor of the situation. His eye suddenly sought mine, and then I distinctly saw a trace of amusement mingling with his perplexed and annoyed expression.

"You seem to have made sure of the attention of Lieutenant Melville and Lieutenant Graves," he said.

"I have no doubt that they can maintain their interest," replied Wildfoot, "and their present position is only temporary." [Pg 173]

"You say that you came to show me the strength and resources of the colonists. Will you tell me how this is so?" asked Sir William.

"That I am here is the proof of it."

"It is true that you are here, but I have an idea, Captain Wildfoot, that you will not go away again."

"Why not?"

"I am hospitable. We need you. Philadelphia needs you."

"I know it, and so I shall come back again."

"No, we wish you to stay with us now."

I should have laughed at this point had not the gag been in my mouth, not at the conversation of Sir William and Wildfoot, but at the funny look on the face of Graves. He had a great sense of dignity and aristocratic importance, and it was hurt by the sudden intrusion of Wildfoot. I said: "Never mind, Graves, it will soon be over," but the words stopped short against that gag, and he did not hear them. I did not even hear them myself. Vivian, on the contrary, was bearing himself like a gentleman. He sat perfectly still, with his eyes either on Sir William or Wildfoot, and so far as I could see, his face was without expression. The three men who accompanied Wildfoot remained standing, but motionless, each with a cocked pistol in his hand. One stood with his face turned towards me, but every feature was hidden by a thick, bushy, black beard.

"So I take it, that you have done this thing merely in a spirit of bravado," said Sir William, "and I wish you to understand, Captain Wildfoot, that I thoroughly appreciate your daring. I could wish that you were one of us; in the king's service you would be a colonel at least, and not a mere rebel captain; moreover, your neck would be in no danger." [Pg 174]

"But I would be colonel in a losing cause," replied Wildfoot, "and to tell the truth, Sir William, I enjoy my captaincy among the rebels, as you call them, much more than any man enjoys his colonelcy among the king's men. No, Sir William, I am happy where I am; then why seek unhappiness elsewhere?"

"Are you quite sure that you are happy where you are?"

"Quite sure."

"Then it is not worth while to attempt persuasion; but to return to another point, Captain Wildfoot, we value men of your spirit and daring too much to give them up when they come once among us. We must even detain you by other means than persuasion."

"I thank you for the honor, Sir William," said Wildfoot, with a grateful inflection, "but I had formed another plan, somewhat different in manner but similar in the result that you mention."

"May I ask just what you mean?"

"It is not necessary for us to be separated under my plan."

"I do not understand yet."

"I had thought, Sir William, of taking you with me when I left Philadelphia."

The deep red flushed Sir William's swarthy face again. My amazement at Wildfoot's presumption [Pg 175]

increased, but I remembered the case of the English general Prescott, who had been kidnapped in Rhode Island by the daring American captain, Barton.

"Do you mean that you would carry me off as a prisoner?" asked Sir William.

"Such was my intention, if you will pardon the rudeness," replied Wildfoot, humbly. "And if you will excuse me again, Sir William, we must hurry."

I saw Vivian suddenly lean over in his chair, throw out his arms, and sweep from the table the candles, extinguishing them instantly, while Graves, with a single strong puff of his breath, blew out the one in front of us. The rooms were plunged into darkness, and what had seemed comedy before, became tragedy, especially for Graves and me, bound as we were to the table and powerless to cry out. I heard the quick, heavy tread of feet, and the crack of a pistol shot, the flash of the powder casting for a moment a fantastic light by which I saw rapidly moving figures, and then the sound of shattering glass and another shot.

I do not think that I breathed for a minute or two. The next room, with the darkness, the pistol shots, the occasional flashes of light and the trampling feet, furnished every evidence of a deadly struggle, and at any moment a pistol ball might take me in the breast, while I sat there bound to the table, powerless to help myself, and unable even to make myself heard.

A man brushed suddenly past me, threw open the outer door, and shouted to the guards, who were already crowding into the room. But the sounds in the inner chamber ceased with great suddenness, and in a moment, a flame flared up. It was Vivian relighting a candle. He was very pale, and the blood was dripping from his left arm, which was limp by his side. Save for himself, the room was empty. Broken glass from both windows lay on the floor. Near the table was a large spot of blood.

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"They escaped through the windows, Sir William," said Vivian, "but I think that one has carried with him the mark of my bullet."

"And you have the mark of his," replied Sir William, who was at the outer door. "One of you men run for a surgeon at once. I owe too much to you, Vivian, to forget this."

Then he began to give hasty orders for the pursuit of Wildfoot and his men. All the anger and chagrin which he had concealed so well in their presence surged up.

"They shall be caught! They shall be caught!" he cried. "I will give a hundred guineas myself to the man who first lays hands on this Wildfoot. Send the alarm to all the pickets, and permit nobody to leave Philadelphia on any pretext whatever!"

He continued his orders, and messengers rushed with them to the outposts, impressed by the anger and emphasis of the commander-in-chief which would permit no delay. Two or three minutes passed thus, and the fierce mental exertion seemed to calm Sir William. More candles had been lighted, and looking about the room, he saw Graves and me still motionless and confronting each other across the table, as silent as sphinxes.

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"What, are you bound?" he exclaimed. "Why didn't you call for help?"

And we were yet silent.

He stared at us in surprise, and then he burst into laughter. I think it was partly relief from the nervous strain that made him laugh.

"I have heard often," he said, "that silence is a virtue, but this seems to me to be carrying it to an extreme point."

He promptly gave orders to have the gags and thongs removed, and I stretched my muscles with a feeling of deep relief. Wildfoot might be a great partisan commander, but there was such a thing as pernicious activity. I was a good American, and it was a grievous insult to be bound and gagged by another good American.

"How did this happen?" asked Sir William.

"I do not know," I replied, glad to be able to speak again. "We were bent over the table, busy with our writing, when we were seized from behind. I cannot understand how they passed the sentinel unnoticed."

Sir William swore a frightful oath.

"The sentinel has disappeared," he said. "Undoubtedly he was in league with them, perhaps an American whom we took to be a faithful Tory. We will capture this Wildfoot before morning, and you shall help."

I exchanged a word or two with Vivian, and found that he was not badly hurt. A small bone in his left arm was broken by the bullet, but it would heal perfectly in a week or two. Then I hurried out with Sir William and Graves.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN—*The Pursuit of Wildfoot*

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The general was so eager that Graves and I were several yards behind him when we emerged from the house into the midst of a great tumult, orderlies galloping from the door with despatches, and others returning for more, while lights were increasing rapidly in the city, and

soldiers were gathering for duty. It was evident that Sir William was thoroughly aroused, and intended to capture Wildfoot if it were possible to do such a thing. My first feeling of anger against the ranger because of his treatment of me passed, as I reflected that he naturally took me for a British officer, and could not have done otherwise, even had he known the difference. Now I began to fear for him. I did not wish this bold man, so valuable to our cause, to be captured, possibly to be hanged upon some pretext or other. But Sir William did not give me much time to think.

"Be sure you follow me, Melville," he said.

He was already on horseback, and, mounting a horse that an orderly held for me, I galloped after him. He had gathered several other aides in his rapid pursuit, and we made quite a cavalcade, the hoofs of our horses thundering upon the hard street. The whole city was awake now; night-capped heads were thrust from windows, and trembling voices asked what was the matter. But we paid no heed, galloping on.

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Catron was among the officers who had joined us, and pointing towards Germantown, he said:—

"They ran this way; I saw four men with pistols in their hands dash down the street. One was very large."

"That was Wildfoot! It was he! Sound the call!" Sir William shouted joyfully to a trumpeter.

The man put the instrument to his lips and blew the hunting call. Merrily rose the notes, and Sir William's spirits rose with them. He felt sure that already he held Wildfoot in the hollow of his hand.

Our rapid ride was bringing us near the outskirts of the city, where the British intrenchments and fortifications lay, and I imagined that it was Sir William's plan to establish first a thorough picket line, and then to search every house in Philadelphia for Wildfoot and his comrades. But, turning my eyes to the southward, I saw a sudden rosy glow under the dark horizon which deepened in a moment into pink and then into red, rising in a lofty pyramid. Sparks shot from it. I pointed it out to Sir William at once. He paused, perplexed.

"It is a fire, clearly enough," he said; "but I wonder what it can be!"

His doubt lasted only a moment. An aide, much excited, galloped up and informed us that the cantonments of the troops to the southward had been set on fire, and were now burning fiercely.

"An accident?" asked Sir William, deeply annoyed.

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"The men are sure that it was caused by the rebels," replied the aide.

"There is nothing to be done but to put it out as best you can," replied Sir William, and he began to give instructions; but even as he spoke the report of rifle-shots came from a point a little farther to the north, distant yet distinct, sounding so far away like the popping of a hickory log under the flames. There were red sparks too, no bigger than fire-flies, and both the cracking noises and the sparks increased. Sir William stopped his horse and gazed anxiously at the little red flashes.

"An attack by the rebels, and at this of all times," he said in tones of great annoyance, but to himself rather than to us. It was not likely that our ragged little army could storm fortified Philadelphia and defeat the powerful and far more numerous force that defended it; but Sir William was so much engrossed with the pursuit of Wildfoot that he resented any interference demanding his attention. He swore again in his wrath.

"Catron," he said, "you must go at once to that point. If the force there is not sufficient, hurry forward these."

He began to name regiments that would be available.

Catron galloped away, and before the sound of his horse's hoofs had died, more rifle-shots were heard still farther to the northward, coming from a point entirely new. The fire quickly blazed up there like a flame in a tinder dry forest, indicating another attack, heavier perhaps than the first. We paused, uncertain which way to go; and while we hesitated, the attack developed at a fourth point far to the southward, some of the ships in the river replying, the deep boom of the cannon rising like the notes of a funeral bell above the crackle of the musketry. A hum sprang up too from Philadelphia, the alarm of the people deepening as the firing seemed to spread and ring them around. They feared another battle fought almost at their doors, like that of Germantown. The cantonments, mostly light wooden structures, burned brightly, adding to the alarm, and casting a glow over the hurrying regiments. I confess, American as I was, and much as I should have enjoyed the doubts of the British, that I, too, was in a daze. My own peculiar position was assuming most perplexing phases.

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"If I only knew what this meant!" exclaimed Sir William. "Perhaps, after all, I can leave my men to brush off those rebels while I continue my search for Wildfoot."

His eagerness to capture the partisan seemed to increase, and I did not wonder at it. I should have felt the same way in his place. We were joined at this moment by more officers, among whom I saw Belfort and Schwarzfelder. The German's face was inflamed by drink, and his talk was full of warlike fury. It died, however, when Sir William looked towards him, although it was Belfort's hand on his arm that warned him to make less noise.

Another light flamed up at the central point of attack, and one of the officers stated that it was a farmhouse occupied as quarters by the troops, evidently set on fire, like the other cantonments,

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by the rebels. The rapid br-r-r of the rifle-shots there indicated that it was the heaviest point of attack.

This seemed to decide Sir William, and he rode towards the farmhouse, ordering us to follow. I looked back and saw the lights of the city twinkling behind us, and I felt sure that Wildfoot and his comrades lay hidden there, perhaps in the houses of trusty patriots. The attack at this particular time was either a lucky chance, or part of a clever scheme, and my admiration of the man, always great, increased. We approached the scene of the combat, and the volume of the firing swelled rapidly, the shouts of the combatants coming to our ears; yet we could see but little of the battle. The night was dark, and the assailing force which had driven back the pickets was sheltered by a rail fence standing within the original British lines. The little jets of flame ran along the fence for some hundreds of yards, but the Americans remained invisible. None could even make a guess at their numbers.

"Stop, Sir William!" exclaimed Belfort, suddenly. "Let us dispose of these skirmishers before you advance."

Belfort never lacked courage, and his remark was well-timed. I heard the br-r-r of a bullet over our heads, and then another, and then many others. Two men were struck the next instant, and a horse was killed. It was obviously not the place of the commander-in-chief to ride into such a hornet's nest, and he drew off a bit. An unusually heavy volley burst from the fence, and the British pickets were driven back. The officers with us gathered up the fugitives, and led them in a charge.

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"Stay with me, Melville," said Sir William to me. "I shall want you for despatches."

I was devoutly thankful for his order, not being willing to join in a charge against my own countrymen, and I sat willingly on my horse beside him. I was of the opinion that the attack of the British would fail, as they were in too small force, and should have waited for the regiments which were coming up rapidly.

All the officers were on horseback save the one whose mount had been shot from beneath him, and a bulky figure which I recognized even in the dark as Schwarzfelder's led the van. The German, for all I knew, was a brave man; but the wine that he had been drinking was now more potent in bringing him on and putting him in the foremost place.

The attacking force of English numbered about a hundred, and, despite their scanty numbers, they rushed forward with the greatest gallantry, shouting to each other and uttering a hearty cheer. The top of the fence burst into a long streak of flame, and the crack of many rifles together made a heavy crash, followed by an irregular crackle, as more rifles were fired. All but a few in the front ranks of the attacking column were cut down, and those in the rear still pushing on, dropped fast before the deliberate fire of the concealed sharpshooters.

"It's a trap," I said to Sir William; "the English are sure to be beaten."

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We heard a rapid drum behind us, and the footsteps of an advancing regiment; but they would be too late to save the forlorn hope charging the fence. The crackling fire swelled again into a volley, and the red blur made by the uniforms of the advancing English became dimmer. I heard a groan beside me. It was Vivian, pale and weak, with a limply hanging arm, who had ridden up.

"They will all be killed," he said.

The charging force was now approaching the fence, and always in the van was the bulky figure of Schwarzfelder, bestriding his horse, man and beast apparently alike untouched, the German brandishing a huge sword, and shouting as if he were possessed by a demon.

"Certainly Schwarzfelder is brave," muttered Sir William, who perhaps remembered the night that I had cast the German out of his quarters. The forlorn hope was almost at the fence, and then the fire of the riflemen increased rapidly. Many of the English fell, and the few who were left, unable to stand such a leaden sleet, turned and ran, as they should have done long before, all except Schwarzfelder, who rode straight at the fence.

Then I saw an unusual thing. Two men, evidently large and powerful, and at the distance the first looked to me remarkably like Wildfoot, sprang over the fence and seized Schwarzfelder from either side. Then, while one tore the sword from his hand, the other, the one who looked like Wildfoot, sprang up behind him, and, holding him around the waist, jumped the horse over the low fence. Then we heard the distant thud of hoofs as they disappeared in the darkness.

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"What an insult to Hessian dignity!" said Vivian beside me. Then he added in a low voice, that Sir William might not hear: "There's an end to your duel, Melville. The gods are surely unwilling for you to fight."

When the regiment advancing to the relief reached the fence, the Americans were gone and no one could discover where. The attack at the other points ceased almost simultaneously, and the fires burned out slowly. The search for Wildfoot in the city was continued, but no trace of him could be found, and, eating his heart out in his anger, Sir William returned to his quarters.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN—*A Rebuke for Waters*

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The next day was a gloomy one in Philadelphia, which was then largely a British town, not only

because of the army of occupation, but because most of the patriot population had gone away, leaving the Tories in possession. The feelings of all were hurt by Wildfoot's extraordinary daring, his easy disappearance with his men, and the utter lack of respect he had shown for the commander-in-chief. Men said: "What if he had really carried off Sir William! What an irregular mode of warfare!" They repeated that they did not fear the American armies, but that they did object to an antagonist who appeared at such unexpected moments and in such an unexpected manner; the irregularity of the thing was what they especially disliked.

A number of us visited Vivian at his quarters as soon as we could obtain leave, and condoled with him over his wound. But he was suffering little pain, and reckoned the bandage upon his arm a badge of distinction. So we gave him our congratulations instead of our condolences.

"I should have been glad to have had the other arm broken, if thereby we could have captured Wildfoot," he said. The words were spoken without affectation, and we knew that he meant them. [Pg 188]

Belfort was there too, and he was gloomy, despite the fact that he had been commended by Sir William for gallantry in action. Vivian rallied him on his looks.

"It is because our luck is bad," replied Belfort. "That prisoner who might have told things of importance has disappeared completely, and Wildfoot seems to be able to enter the city, do what he pleases, and then disappear with impunity. I am of the opinion that there are traitors in Philadelphia."

"If you mean rebels, of course there are," said Vivian; "all of us know that, but they are in a great minority."

"I don't mean rebels precisely, at least not self-confessed rebels," replied Belfort.

"Then whom do you mean?" said the sprightly Marcel; "if you mean Sir William, or Vivian there, who has a rebel bullet through his arm, or my chum Melville and myself, who arrived in Philadelphia amidst a leaden shower, or our lamented friend Schwarzfelder, who rode his own horse among the rebels, and a truly gallant sight he was—why speak out in the name of justice and the king."

Belfort flushed with vexation. There was no adequate reply that he could make, whatever his thoughts might be. But after some hesitation he said,—

"I am glad that you mentioned Schwarzfelder. Why should he disappear at such a time, literally kidnaped, as that bandit wished to kidnap Sir William?"

"It seems to me that Schwarzfelder is irrelevant," interrupted Vivian. "At least he has no connection with these rebel disappearances. He was to fight a duel with Melville, and scarcely can you charge that Melville bribed Wildfoot to come here and carry him off, in order to escape the duel, especially when Wildfoot treated Melville with excessive discourtesy, binding him to a table and thrusting an unfeeling gag into his mouth." [Pg 189]

"I don't mean to impeach Melville's courage," said Belfort, hastily. "I spoke merely of the singularity of these events."

Our little party was broken up presently by orders from Sir William which gave us all work to do. It seemed that he was seized with another spasm of energy, and he resumed the search of the city for both Wildfoot and Alloway. He was not at all sure that Wildfoot had succeeded in joining the rebels who made the attack the night before, and fancied he might still be hidden in the city. So there was a great hunt for him, and my part of it was of an exceedingly unpleasant nature. I was to go to the Desmond house, search it again, and address various penetrating interrogations to the owner thereof.

I acquitted myself in the best style of which I was capable. I found both John Desmond and his daughter in the house, and, much to my surprise, he answered all my questions quite readily and politely. I thought that his courtesy was due, perhaps, to the presence of his daughter at his elbow, but both search and examination, as before, revealed nothing.

As I was returning to Sir William's quarters to report the fruitless task, I met Waters. I would have passed him without notice, but he said,— [Pg 190]

"I take it that it was again a fruitless search at Mr. Desmond's house, was it not, sir?"

This savored most strongly of impertinence in one of his rank, and I felt anger. I disliked his incessant watch of Marcel and me, and in spite of my belief that he either knew or suspected us, caution was swallowed up in wrath.

"Waters," I said, "your question was impertinent and your tone insolent."

He did not apologize as he had done before, but held up his head and his bold eyes looked steadily into mine.

"All the city, sir, is talking of this Wildfoot, and every loyal man wants him captured. The wish is as strong among us of a lower rank as it is among those of a higher."

I thought that I saw a peculiar significance in his words, and I would have given much to keep down the flush that reddened my face.

"What do you mean to intimate, Waters?" I asked.

"Nothing," he replied. "You are pleased, sir, to dislike me, although I do not know why, and to become angry because I ask you about the search of Mr. Desmond's house, a task which I felt sure was most unwelcome to you."

His eyes did not flinch as he said these bold words, and manner and words alike confirmed my long felt fear that he knew me to be an impostor. I hesitated a little, uncertain what course to take, and then, turning scornfully from him, marched on with my men.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN—*Great News*

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As neither Marcel nor I was assigned to any duty for the remainder of the day, we thought to while away a portion of the time by strolling about Philadelphia.

"We need not make spies of ourselves," said Marcel; "but I know no military law against the gratification of our own personal curiosity."

Guided by such worthy motives, we spent some time that was to our amusement and perhaps to our profit also. Barring the presence of the soldiery, Philadelphia showed few evidences that war was encamped upon its threshold. I have seldom witnessed a scene of such bustle and animation, and even of gayety too, as the good Quaker City presented. A stranger would have thought there was no war, and that this was merely a great garrison town.

The presence of fifteen or twenty thousand soldiers was good for trade, and gold clinked with much freedom and merriment. Though wagon-trains of provisions were taken sometimes by the Americans, yet many others came safely into Philadelphia, and the profits were so large that the worthy Pennsylvania farmers could not resist the temptation to take the risks, though most of them would have preferred to sell to the patriots, had the latter possessed something better than Continental paper to offer them.

"The British boast much of their bayonets," said Marcel; "but they fight better with their gold."

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"And we have neither," said I.

"Which merely means," said Marcel, "not that we shall not win, but that we will be longer in the winning."

Our conversation was diverted from this topic by my observance of a peculiar circumstance. Often I would see four or five men, gathered at a street corner or in front of a doorway, talking with an appearance of great earnestness. Whenever Marcel and I, who were in full uniform, and thus were known to be British officers as far as we could be seen, approached, they would lower their tone or cease to talk. This had not happened on any day before, and was not what we would have expected from citizens who had grown used to the presence of the British army. I asked Marcel to take note of it.

"Something unusual that they do not wish to tell us of has happened," he said. "I propose that we find out what it is."

"How?" I said.

"I know no better way than to ask," he replied. "Suppose we seize the very next opportunity, and interrogate our Quaker friends concerning the cause of their strange and mysterious behavior."

Presently we saw four men engaged in one of these discussions. Three appeared to be citizens of Philadelphia, or at least we so judged from the smartness of their dress; the fourth had the heavy, unkempt look of a countryman. We approached; on the instant they became silent, and there was a look of embarrassment upon their faces.

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"Friends," said Marcel, in his courtly manner, "we wish not to interrupt your most pleasant discourse, but we would ask what news of importance you have, if there be no harm in the telling of it."

"It rained last night," said the countryman, "and it is good for the spring planting."

"Yet one might have news more interesting, though not perhaps more important, than that," replied Marcel; "for it has rained before, and the crops have been planted and reaped likewise before."

"Even so," said the countryman, "but its importance increases when there are twenty thousand red-coats in Philadelphia to be fed."

"But is that the whole burden of your news?" asked Marcel. "We have seen others talk together as you four talk together, and we do not think it accords with nature for all Philadelphia to be agog because it rained the night before."

"Some heads hold strange opinions," said the countryman, curtly; "but why should I be held to account for them?"

So saying, he walked off with his companions.

"You can't draw blood from a turnip," said Marcel, "nor the truth from a man who has decided not to tell it."

"Not since the torture-chamber was abolished," I said, "and I would even guess that this countryman is no very warm friend to the British, from the insolent tone that he adopted towards us."

"And I would guess also that his news, whatever it may be, is something that will not be to the

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taste of the British, or he would tell it to us," said Marcel.

But we were not daunted by one repulse, and we decided to try elsewhere. From another little group to which we addressed ourselves we received treatment perhaps not quite so discourteous, but as unproductive of the desired result. All this we took as further proof that there was in reality something of importance afoot. At last we went into a little eating-house where strong liquors also were sold.

"Perhaps if we moisten their throats for them," said Marcel, "they may become less secretive. It is a cure I have rarely known to fail."

There were eight or ten men in this place, some citizens of the town and some countrymen.

"What news?" I asked of one who leaned against the counter. "There seems to be a stir about the town, and we ask its cause."

"You are British officers," he replied. "The British hold this town. You should know more than we."

"But this town has a population of such high intelligence," I said, thinking to flatter him, "that it learns many things before we do."

"If you admit that," he said, "then I can tell you something."

"Ah! what is it?" I asked, showing eagerness.

"Perhaps you may not like to hear it," he said, "but Sir William Howe was nearly carried off last night by Wildfoot."

Then all of them laughed in sneering fashion.

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"I was afraid you would not like my news," said the man, pretending of a sudden to be very humble; "but you would not be satisfied until I told it, and so I had to tell it."

"We must even try elsewhere," said Marcel.

Marcel was a jester, but, like most other jesters, he did not like a jest put upon himself. So we left the eating-house, and as we went out we saw the man Waters coming towards us. As I have often said, I did not like this fellow, and moreover I feared we had reason to dread him, but I thought he could tell us what we wished to know, as he had such a prying temper.

He saluted us with much politeness, and stopped when I beckoned to him. The men in the eating-house had all come to the door.

"Good-morning, Waters," I said. "Can you tell us what interests the people of this city so much, the news that we have been seeking in vain to learn? Here are gentlemen who have something that they would cherish and keep to themselves like a lady's favor."

"It would scarce be proper for me, who am but an orderly, to announce weighty matters to your honors," said the man, with a most aggravating look of humility. The loungers who had come to the door laughed.

"We will overlook that," said Marcel, who kept his temper marvellously well. "But tell us, is not the town really in a stir as it seems to be?"

"It is, your honors," said Waters, "and it has cause for it."

The loungers laughed again; but I did not mind it now, as I was eager to hear what Waters had to say.

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"Let us have this mighty secret," I said.

"I fear your honors will not like it," replied Waters.

"Never mind about that," I said, impatiently. "I do not believe that it amounts to anything at all."

"It is only that the King of France has joined the Americans and declared war on the English," said Waters.

For a moment I could scarce restrain a shout of joy. There had been talk for some time about a French alliance, but we had been disappointed so often that we had given up hope of it. Now the news had come with the suddenness of a thunder-clap. I believe that Marcel felt as I did, but it was of high importance that we should keep our countenances.

"Whence did you get such a report as that?" I asked, affecting to treat it with contempt and unbelief.

"From the people of the city," replied Waters.

"Where did they get it?" asked Marcel.

"I think it was brought in from the American army," replied the man, "and if your honor will pardon me for saying it, there is no doubt whatever about its truth."

"King George will now have two enemies to fight instead of one, and he has not whipped the first," said one of the loungers.

"Fear not that his armies will not be equal to the emergency," said I, thinking it needful to preserve my character as a British officer.

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"Then they will have to do something more than feast and dance in this city," said the bold fellow. The others murmured their approval and applause, and Marcel and I, bidding them to beware

how they talked treason, strolled on.

"I'm sorry to be the bearer of such bad news," said Waters, humbly.

"King Louis and the Americans are responsible for the news, not you," said Marcel. "Still, we thank you for narrating it to us."

His tone was that of curt dismissal, and Waters, accepting it, left us. Marcel and I looked at each other, and Marcel said:—

"If we were able, half-armed, untrained, and unaided, to take one British army at Saratoga, what ought we not to do now with King Louis's regulars to help us, and King Louis's arsenals to arm us?"

"The alliance suggests many things," I said, "and one in particular to you and me."

"What is that?" asked Marcel.

"That we leave Philadelphia at once, or at least as soon as we can find an opportunity," I replied, "and rejoin our army. This should portend great events, perhaps a decisive campaign, and if that be true we ought to share it with our comrades."

"Without denying the truth of what you say," replied Marcel, "we nevertheless cannot leave the city to-day, so we might as well enjoy the leisure the gods have allotted to us. The counting-house of our rich patriot, old John Desmond, is on this street. Perhaps he has not heard the news, and if we were the first to tell it to him he might forgive our apparent British character, though I fear it would be but small recommendation to his handsome Tory daughter."

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We entered the counting-house, where Mr. Desmond still contrived to earn fair profits despite the British occupation. Our British uniforms procured for us a certain amount of respect and deference from the clerks and attendants, but the stern old man, who would not bend to Sir William Howe himself, only glowered at us when we came into his presence.

"I fear I can give you but little time to-day, gentlemen," he said, with asperity, "though I acknowledge the honor of your visit."

"We are not in search of a loan," said Marcel, lightly, "but came merely to ask you if you had any further particulars of the great news which must be so pleasing to you, though I admit that it is less welcome to us."

"The news? the great news? I have no news, either great or small," said Mr. Desmond, not departing from his curt and stiff manner.

"Haven't you heard it?" said Marcel, with affected surprise. "All the people in the city are talking about it, and we poor Britons expect to begin hard service again immediately."

"Your meaning is still strange to me," said Mr. Desmond.

"It's the French alliance that I mean," said Marcel. "We have received positive news this morning that King Louis of France and Mr. Washington of America, in virtue of a formal treaty to that effect, propose to chastise our master, poor King George."

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I had watched Mr. Desmond's face closely, that I might see how he took the news. But not a feature changed. Perhaps he was sorry that he had yielded to his feelings at the recent banquet, and was now undergoing penance. But, whatever the cause, he asked merely, in a quiet voice,—

"Then you know that the King of France has espoused the American cause and will help General Washington with his armies and fleets?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Marcel.

"Then this will be interesting news for my daughter, though she will not like it," he said. He opened the door of an inner room, called, and Miss Desmond came forth.

She looked inquiringly at us, and then spoke with much courtesy. We returned the compliments of the day in a manner that we thought befitting highborn Britons and conquerors in the presence of sympathetic beauty. I took pride to myself too, because my affair with Belfort had ended as she wished. It seemed to give me a claim upon her. But I observed with some chagrin that neither our manners nor our appearance seemed to make much impression upon Miss Desmond.

"Daughter," said Mr. Desmond, in the same expressionless tone that he had used throughout the interview, "these young gentlemen have been kind enough to bring us the news that France and the colonies have signed a formal treaty of alliance for offensive and defensive purposes. The information reached Philadelphia but this morning. I thought it would interest you."

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I watched her face closely, as I had watched that of her father, expecting to see joy on the father's, sorrow on the daughter's. But they could not have been freer from the appearance of emotion if they had planned it all before.

"This will complicate the struggle, I should think," she said, dryly, "and it will increase your chances, Captain Montague and Lieutenant Melville, to win the epaulets of a colonel."

"We had expected," I said, "that Miss Desmond, a sincere friend of our cause, would express sorrow at this coalition which is like to prove so dangerous to us."

"My respect to my father, who does not believe as I do, forbids it," she said. "But I think the king's troops and his officers, all of them, will be equal to every emergency."

We bowed to the compliment, and, there being no further excuse for lingering, departed, patriot father and Tory daughter alike thanking us for our consideration in bringing them the news.

"The lady is very beautiful," said Marcel, when we had left the counting-house, "but she sits in the shadow of the North Pole."

"Self-restraint," I said, "is a good quality in woman as well as in man."

"I see," said Marcel. "It is not very hard to forgive treason when the traitor is a woman and beautiful." [Pg 201]

"I do not know what you mean," I said, with frigidity.

"It does not matter," he replied. "I know."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN—*The Silent Sentinel*

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I doubted not that the news of the French alliance would incite Sir William Howe to activity, for any fool could see that, with his splendid army, splendidly equipped, he had allowed his chances to go to ruin. There was increasing talk, and of a very definite nature too, about his removal from the chief command. So far as the subalterns knew, his successor might have been appointed already, and this would be an additional inducement to Sir William to attempt some sudden blow which would shed glory over the close of his career in America, and leave about him the odor of success and not of failure.

My surmise was correct in all particulars, for both Marcel and I were ordered to report for immediate duty, and though this cut off all chance of escape for that day, we had no choice but to obey. We found an unusually large detachment gathered under the command of a general officer. Belfort, Barton, Moore, and others whom we knew were there; but, inquire as we would, we could not ascertain the nature of the service for which we were designed. In truth, no one seemed to know except the general himself, and he was in no communicative mood. But there was a great overhauling of arms and a very careful examination of the ammunition supply. So I foresaw that the expedition was to be of much importance. [Pg 203]

"Perhaps it will be another such as the attempt to capture our brother-in-arms Mr. Wildfoot," said Marcel.

"If we come out of this as well as we did out of that," I replied, "we will have a right to think that Fortune has us in her especial keeping."

"Dame Fortune is kindest to those who woo her with assiduity," said Marcel, "and she cannot complain of us on that point."

But I knew how fickle the lady is, even towards those who woo her without ceasing, and I was uneasy.

The detachment had gathered in the suburbs, and we were subjected to a long period of waiting there. I also learned that no one was to be allowed to pass from the city during the day, and from this circumstance I inferred that Sir William was building great hopes upon the matter which he had in hand, and which he had placed under the direction of one of his ablest generals. I would have given much to know what it was, but I was as ignorant as the drummer-boy who stood near me. It was not until dusk that we marched, and then we started forth, a fine body, four thousand strong,—a thousand horse and three thousand foot.

"If there is a time for it to-night," I said to Marcel, when the opportunity came for us to speak together in secrecy, "I shall leave these people with whom we have no business, and return to those to whom we belong." [Pg 204]

"And I," said Marcel, with one of his provoking grins, "shall watch over you with paternal care, come what may."

The night was half day. A full silver moon turned the earth—forests, fields, and houses—into that peculiar shimmering gray color which makes one feel as if one were dwelling in a ghost-world that may dissolve into mist at any moment. Our long column was colored the same ghostly gray by the moon. There were no sounds, save the steady tramp of the men and the horses, and the occasional clank of the bayonets together.

I did not like this preternatural silence, this evidence of supreme caution. It warned me of danger to my countrymen, and again I wished in my soul that I knew what business we were about. But there was naught to do save to keep my mouth shut and my eyes open.

We followed one of the main roads out of Philadelphia for some distance, and then turned into a narrower path, along which the detachment had much difficulty in preserving its formation. This part of the country was strange to me, and I did not believe that we were proceeding in the direction of the American encampment. Still, it was obvious that a heavy blow against the Americans was intended.

As the hours passed, clouds came before the moon, and the light waned. The long line of men ahead of me sank into the night so gradually that I could not tell where life ended and darkness began, and still there was no sound but the regular tread of man and beast and the clanking of arms. My sense of foreboding increased. How heartily I wished that I had never come into [Pg 205]

Philadelphia! I silently cursed Marcel for leading me into the adventure. Then I cursed myself for attempting to throw all the blame on Marcel.

The night was advancing, when we came to a long, narrow valley, thickly wooded at one end. We halted there, and the general selected about three hundred men and posted them in the woods at the head of the valley. I was among the number, but I observed with regret that Marcel was not. A colonel was placed in command. Then the main army followed a curving road up the hill-side and went out of sight over the heights. I watched them for some time before they disappeared, horse and foot, steadily tramping on, blended into a long, continuous, swaying mass by the gray moonlight; sometimes a moonbeam would tip the end of a bayonet with silver and gleam for a moment like a falling star. At last the column wound over the slope and left the night to us.

About one-third of our little force were cavalymen; but, under the instructions of our colonel, we dismounted and gave our horses into the care of a few troopers; then all of us moved into the thick woods at the head of the pass, and sat down there, with orders to keep as quiet as possible.

I soon saw that the rising ground and the woods which crowned it merely formed a break between the valley which we had entered at first and another valley beyond it. The latter we were now facing. I had not been a soldier for two years and more for nothing, and I guessed readily that we were to keep this pass clear, while the main force was to perform the more important operation, which I now doubted not was to be the entrapping of some large body of Americans. Perhaps in this number was to be included the general-in-chief himself, the heart and soul of our cause. I shuddered at the thought, and again cursed the reckless spirit that had placed me in such a position.

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At first we had the second valley in view; but our colonel, fearing that we might expose ourselves, drew us farther back into the woods, and then we could see nothing but the trees and the dim forms of each other.

I looked up at the moon, and hoped to see the clouds gathering more thickly before her face. I had confirmed my resolution. If the chance came to me, I would steal away from the English and enter the valley beyond. I doubted not that I would find my own people there. I would warn them of the danger, and remain with them in the future, unless fate should decree that I become a prisoner.

But Dame Fortune was in no such willing humor. The clouds did not gather in quantities, and, besides, the English were numerous around me. Belfort himself sat on the grass only a few feet from me, and, with more friendliness than he had shown hitherto, undertook to talk to me in whispers.

"Do you know what we are going to do to-night, Melville?" he asked.

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"It seems," I said, "that we are to sit here in the woods until morning, and then to be too hoarse with cold to talk."

Then I added, having the after-thought that I might secure some information from him,—

"I suppose we are after important game to-night. The size of our force and the care and secrecy of our movements indicate it, do they not?"

"There is no doubt of it," he replied, "and I hope we shall secure a royal revenge upon the rebels for that Wildfoot affair."

Our conversation was interrupted here by an order from the colonel for me to move farther towards the front, from which point I was to report to him at once anything unusual that I might see or hear. The men near me were common soldiers. They squatted against the trees with their muskets between their knees, and waited in what seemed to me to be a fair degree of content.

An hour, a very long hour, of such waiting passed, and the colonel approached me, asking if all was quiet. I supplemented my affirmative reply with some apparently innocent questions which I thought would draw from him the nature of his expectations. But he said nothing that satisfied me. As he was about to turn away, I thought I heard a movement in the woods in front of us. It was faint, but it resembled a footfall.

"Colonel," I said, in a hurried whisper, "there is some movement out there."

At the same moment one of the soldiers sprang to his feet and exclaimed,—

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"There is somebody coming down on us!"

"Be quiet, men," said the colonel. "Whoever it is, he stops here."

Scarce had he spoken the words when we heard the rush of many feet. The woods leaped into flame; the bullets whistled like hailstones around our ears. By the flash I saw the head of one of the soldiers who was still sitting down fall over against a tree, and a red streak appear upon his forehead. He uttered no cry, and I knew that he was dead.

For a few moments I stood quite still, as cold and stiff as if I had turned to ice. There is nothing, as I have said before, that chills the heart and stops its flow like a sudden surprise. That is why veterans when fired upon in the dark will turn and run sometimes as if pursued by ghosts.

Then my faculties returned, and I shouted,—

"Back on the main body! Fall back for help!"

The colonel and the men, who like me had been seized by surprise, sprang back. Almost in a breath I had formed my resolution, and I ran, neither forward nor back, but to one side. When I

had taken a dozen quick steps, I flung myself upon my face. As I did so, the second volley crashed over my head, and was succeeded by yells of wrath and pain.

"At them, boys! At them!" shouted a loud voice that was not the English colonel's. "Drive the bloody scoundrels off the earth!"

I doubted not that the voice belonged to the leader of the attacking party. I arose and continued my flight. Behind me I heard the British replying to the fire of the assailants, and the other noises of the struggle. The shots and the shouts rose high. I knew that I was following no noble course just then, that I was flying alike from the force to which I pretended to belong, and from the force to which I belonged in reality; but I saw nothing else to do, and I ran, while the combat raged behind. I was in constant fear lest some sharpshooter of either party should pick me off, but my luck was better than my hopes, and no bullet pursued me in my flight.

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When I thought myself well beyond the vortex of the combat, I dropped among the bushes for breath and to see what was going on behind me. I could not hear the cries so well now, but the rapid flashing of the guns was proof enough that the attack was fierce and the resistance the same.

As I watched, my sense of shame increased. I ought to be there with the Americans who were fighting so bravely. For a moment I was tempted to steal around and endeavor to join them. But how could I fire upon the men with whom I had been so friendly and who had looked upon me as one of their own but ten minutes ago? I was no crawling spy. Then, again, I was in full British uniform, and of course the patriots would shoot me the moment they caught sight of me. Richly, too, would I deserve the bullet. Again there was naught for me to do but to resort to that patient waiting which I sometimes think is more effective in this world than the hardest kind of work. And well it may be, too, for it is a more trying task.

I could not tell how the battle was going. So far as the firing was concerned, neither side seemed to advance or retreat. The flashes and the shots increased in rapidity, and then both seemed to converge rapidly towards a common centre. Of a sudden, at the very core of the combat there was a tremendous burst of sound, a great stream of light leaped up and then sank. The firing died away in a feeble crackle, and then I knew that the battle was over. But which side had won was a question made all the more perplexing to me by my inability to decide upon a course of conduct until I could learn just what had happened.

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As I listened, I heard a single shot off in the direction from which the Americans had come. Then they had been beaten, after all. But at the very moment my mind formed the conclusion, I heard another shot in the neck of the valley up which the British had marched. Then the British had been beaten. But my mind again corrected itself. The two shots offset each other, and I returned to my original state of ignorance and uncertainty.

My covert seemed secure, and, resorting again to patience, I determined to lie there for a while and await the course of events. Perhaps I would hear more shots, which would serve as a guide to me. But another half-hour passed away, and I heard nothing. All the clouds had fled from the face of the moon, and the night grew brighter. The world turned from gray to silver, and the light slanted through the leaves. A lizard rattled over a fallen trunk near me, and, saving his light motion, the big earth seemed to be asleep. Readily could I have imagined that I was some lone hunter in the peaceful woods, and that no sound of anger or strife had ever been heard there. The silence and the silver light of the moon falling over the forest, and even throwing streaks across my own hands overpowered me. Though knowing full well that it was the truth, I had to make an effort of the will to convince myself that the attack, my flight, and the battle were facts. Then the rustling of the lizard, though I could not see him, was company to me, and I hoped he would not go away and leave me alone in that vast and heavy silence.

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At last I fell to reasoning with myself. I called myself a coward, a child, to be frightened thus of the dark, when I had faced guns; and by and by this logic brought courage back. I knew I must take action of some kind, and not die there until the day found me cowering like a fox in the shelter of the woods. I had my sword at my side, and a loaded pistol was thrust in my belt. In the hands of a brave man they should be potent for defence.

Without further ado, I began my cautious journey. It was my purpose to proceed through the pass into the second valley and find the Americans, if still they were there. Then, if not too late, I would warn them of the plan against them, that this was not merely the raid of a few skirmishers, but a final attempt. Success looked doubtful. It depended upon the fulfilment of two conditions: first, that the Americans had not been entrapped already, and, second, that I should find them. Still, I would try. I stopped and listened intently for the booming of guns and other noises of conflict in the valley below, but no sound assailed my ears. I renewed my advance, and practised a precaution which was of the utmost necessity. For the present I scarce knew whether to consider myself English or American, and in the event of falling in with either I felt that I would like to make explanations before any action was taken concerning me. I stood up under the shadow of the big trees and looked around me. But there was naught that I could see. Englishmen and Americans alike seemed to have vanished like a wisp of smoke before the wind. Then with my hand on my pistol, I passed on from tree to tree, stopping oftentimes to listen and to search the wood with my eyes for sight of a skulking sharpshooter. Thus I proceeded towards the highest point of the gorge. The crest once reached, I expected that I would obtain a good view of the valley beyond, and thus be able to gather knowledge for my journey.

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As I advanced, my opinion that the wood was now wholly deserted was confirmed. Victor and vanquished alike had vanished, I felt sure, carrying with them the wounded and the dead too.

After a bit, and when almost at the crest, I came to an open space. I walked boldly across it, although the moon's light fell in a flood upon it, and as I entered the belt of trees on the farther side I saw the peak of a fur cap peeping over a log not forty feet before me. It was a most unpleasant surprise, this glimpse of the hidden sharpshooter; and, with the fear of his bullet hot upon me, I sprang for the nearest tree and threw myself behind it.

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I was too quick for him, for the report of no rifle lent speed to my flying heels, and I sank, empty of breath, but full of thanks, behind the sheltering tree. Brief as had been my glimpse of that fur cap, I knew it, or rather its kind. It was the distinguishing mark of Morgan's Virginia Rangers, the deadliest sharpshooters in the world. I had seen their fell work at Saratoga when we beleaguered the doomed British army, where not a red-coat dared put his foot over the lines, for he knew it would be the signal for the Virginia rifle to speak from tree or bush. I do not like such work myself, but I acknowledge its great use.

Again I gave thanks for my presence of mind and agility of foot, for I had no wish to be killed, and least of all by one of our own men.

I lay quite still until my pulses went down and my breath became longer. I was fearful that the sentinel would attempt some movement, but a cautious look reassured me. He could not leave his covert behind the log for other shelter without my seeing him. It was true that I could not leave the tree, but I did not feel much trouble because of that. I had no desire to shoot him, while he, without doubt, would fire at me, if the chance came to him, thinking me to be a British officer.

The tree grew on ground that was lower than the spot from which I had seen the sentinel. In my present crouching position he was invisible to me, and I raised myself carefully to my full height in order that I might see him again. But even by standing on my toes I could see only the fur tip of his cap. I could assure myself that he was still there, but what he was preparing I knew not, nor could I ascertain. Yet I doubted not that his muscles were ready strung to throw his rifle to the shoulder and send a bullet into me the moment I stepped from behind the tree. The unhappy part of my situation lay in the fact that he would fire before I could make explanations, which would be a most uncomfortable thing for me, and in all likelihood would make explanations unnecessary, considering the deadly precision of these Virginia sharpshooters. Confound them! why should they be so vigilant concerning me, when there was a British army near by that stood in much greater need of their watching? But it was not worth while to work myself into a stew because I had got into a fix. The thing to do was to get out of it.

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After some deliberation, I concluded that I would hail my friend who was yet an enemy, or at least in the position of one. I was afraid to shout to him, for most likely, with his forest cunning, he would think it a mere device to entrap him into an unwary action that would cost his life. These wilderness men are not to be deluded in that manner. However, there might be others lurking near, perhaps British and Americans both, and either one or the other would take me for an enemy and shoot me.

But at last I called in a loud whisper to the sentinel. I said that I was a friend, though I came in the guise of an enemy. The whisper was shrill and penetrating, and I was confident that it reached him, for the distance was not great. But he made no sign. If he heard me he trusted me not. I think there are times when we can become too cunning, too suspicious. This I felt with a great conviction to be one of such times.

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As a second experiment, I decided that I would expose my hat or a portion of my uniform, in the hope that it would draw his fire. Then I could rush upon him and shout my explanations at him before he could reload his gun and shoot a second bullet at me. But this attempt was as dire a failure as the whispering. He was too wary to be caught by such a trick, with which he had doubtless been familiar for years.

I almost swore in my vexation at being stopped in such a manner. But vexation soon gave way to deepening alarm. I could not retreat from the tree without exposing myself to his fire, and there I was, a prisoner. As I lay against the tree-trunk, sheltering myself from the sharpshooter, a bullet fired by some one else might cut my life short at any moment. I waited some minutes, and again I raised myself up and took a peep. There he was, crouched behind his log, and still waiting for me. He seemed scarce to have moved. I knew the illimitable patience of these forest-bred men, the hours that they could spend waiting for their prey, immovable like wooden images. I repeat that I had seen them at work at Saratoga, and I knew their capabilities. I liked not the prospect, and I had good reason for it.

The old chill, the old depression, which was born part of the night and part of my situation, came upon me. I could do naught while my grim sentinel lay in the path. I knew of no device that would tempt him to action, to movement. I wearied my brain in the endeavor to think of some way to form a treaty with him or to tell him who and what I was. At last another plan suggested itself, I tore off a piece of the white facing of my uniform, and, putting it on the end of my gun-barrel, thrust it out as a sign of amity. I waved it about for full five minutes, but the watcher heeded not; perchance he thought this too was a trick to draw him from cover, and he would have none of it. Again I cursed excessive caution and suspicion, but that did me no good, save to serve as some slight relief to my feelings.

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A strong wind sprang up, and the woods moved with it. The clouds came again before the moon, and the color of trees and earth faded to an ashen gray. The light became dimmer, and I felt cold, to the bones. Fear resumed sway over me, and dry-lipped, I cursed my folly with bitter curses.

But the shadows before the moon suggested one last plan to me, a plan full of danger in the presence of the watchful sentinel, but like to bring matters to a head. I unbuckled my sword and

laid it upon the ground behind the tree. I also removed everything else of my equipment or uniform that might make a noise as I moved, and then crept from behind the tree. I had heard how Indians could steal through the grass with less noise than a lizard would make, and I had a belief that I could imitate them, at least to some extent.

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I felt in front of me with my hands, lest I should place the weight of my body upon some stick that would snap with a sharp report. But there was only the soft grass, and the faint rustle it made could not reach the ears of the sentinel, no matter how keen of hearing or attentive he might be. All the time I kept my eyes upon the log behind which he lay. Each moment I trembled lest I should see a gun-barrel thrust over the log and pointed at me. Then it was my purpose to spring quickly aside, rush upon him, and cry out who I was.

But the threatening muzzle did not appear. I grew proud of my skill in being able thus to steal upon one of these rangers, who know the forest and all its tricks as the merchant knows his wares. Perchance I could learn to equal them or to surpass them at their own chosen pursuits. I even stopped to laugh inwardly at the surprise and chagrin this man would show when I sprang over the log and dropped down beside him, and he never suspecting, until then, that I was near. Of a truth, I thought, and this time with a better grace, there could be an excess of caution and suspicion.

When I had traversed about half the intervening space, I lay flat upon my face and listened, but without taking my eyes off the particular portion of the log over which I feared the gun-muzzle would appear. But the watcher made no movement, nor could I hear a sound, save that of the rising wind playing its dirge through the woods. Clearly I was doing my work well. Bringing my muscles and nerves back to the acutest tension, I crept on.

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I must have been aided by luck as much as by skill, perhaps more, and I made acknowledgment of it to myself, for never once did I make a false movement with hand or foot. No twigs, no dry sticks, the breaking of which would serve as an alarm, came in my way. All was as smooth and easy as a silk-covered couch. Fortune seemed to look kindly upon me.

In two more minutes I had reached the log, and only its foot or two of diameter lay between me and the sentinel. Complete success had attended my efforts so far. It only remained for me to do one thing now, but that was the most dangerous of all. I lay quite still for a moment or two, drawing easy breaths. Then I drew in a long one, inhaling all the air my lungs would hold. Stretching every muscle to its utmost tension, and crying out, "I'm a friend! I'm a friend!" I sprang in one quick bound over the log.

I alighted almost upon the ranger as he crouched against the fallen trunk, the green of his hunting-shirt blending with the grass, and the gray of his fur cap showing but faintly against the bark of the tree. As I alighted by his side he moved not. His rifle, which was clutched in both his hands, remained unraised. His head still rested against the tree-trunk, though his eyes were wide open.

I put my hand upon him, and sprang back with a cry of affright that I could not check.

The sentinel was dead and cold.

CHAPTER NINETEEN—*A Ride for the Cause*

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When I discovered that I had stalked a dead man as the hunter stalks the living deer, I was seized with a cold chill, and an icy sweat formed upon my brow. My muscles, after so much tension, relaxed as if I had received some sudden and mortal blow, and I fell into a great tremble.

But this did not last long. I trust that I am not a coward, and I quickly regained possession of my limbs and my faculties. Then I turned to the examination of the dead man. He had been shot through the head, and I judged that he had been dead a good two hours. A stray ball must have found him as he lay there watching for the enemy and with his rifle ready. I thought I could still trace the look of the watcher, the eager attention upon his features.

I left him as he was, on duty in death as well as in life, and hurried through the grass, still hoping to reach the Americans in the valley beyond, in time.

A second thought caused me to stop. I knew that in the rush and hurry of the fight our horses must have broken from the men, and perchance might yet be wandering about the woods. If I could secure one, it would save much strength and time. I began to look through the woods, for I had little fear of interruptions now, as I believed that everybody except the dead and myself had left the pass. My forethought and perseverance were not without reward, for presently I found one of the horses, saddled and bridled, and grazing peacefully among the trees. He must have been lonely, for he whinnied when he saw me, and made no effort to escape.

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I sprang into the saddle, and was soon riding rapidly into the farther valley. The slope was not so steep as that up which I had come with the British, and the woods and the underbrush grew more scantily. There was sufficient light for me to see that I would soon be on cleared ground, where I could make good speed and perchance find the object of my search quickly.

There was increase to my joy when my horse's foot rang loud and clear, and, looking down, I saw that I had blundered into a good road. It led straight away down the valley, and, with a quickening gait, we followed it, my good horse and I.

The night brightened somewhat, as if to keep pace with the improvement of my fortune. I could see fields around me, and sometimes caught glimpses of houses surrounded by their shade-trees. From one of these houses a dog came forth and howled at me in most melancholy tune, but I heeded him not. I rode gayly on, and was even in high enough mood to break forth into a jovial song, had I thought it wise. Such was my glee at the thought that I had left the British, had cast off my false character, and was now about to reassume my old self, the only self that was natural to me, and take my place among the men with whom I belonged.

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It was shortly after this that my horse neighed and halted, and, had not my hand been firm on the reins, he would have turned and looked behind him. I urged him forward again, but in a few moments he repeated the same suspicious movement. This caused me to reflect, and I came to the conclusion that some one was behind us, or my horse would not have acted in such fashion. I pulled him to a stand-still, and, bending back, heard with much distinctness the sound of hoof-beats. Nor was it that only; the hoof-beats were rapid, and could be made only by a horse approaching with great speed. Even in the brief space that I listened, the hoof-beats of the galloping horse became much more distinct, and it was evident to me that if I did not put my horse to his own best speed, or turn aside into the fields, I would be overtaken. But I had no mind either to follow the difficult route through the fields or to flee from a single horseman. My loaded pistol and my sword were in my belt; and, while I did not wish to slay or wound any one, it did not seem becoming in me to take to flight.

I eased my grasp on the bridle-rein and took my pistol in my hand. Then, twisting myself round in my saddle, and watching for the appearance of my pursuer, if pursuer it were, I allowed my horse to fall into a walk.

I knew I would not have long to wait, for in the still night the hoof-beats were now ringing on the road. Whoever it was, he rode fast and upon a matter of moment. Presently the figure of the flying horse and rider appeared dimly. Then they grew more distinct. The rider was leaning upon his horse's neck, and as they rushed down upon us I saw that it was a woman. Great was my surprise at the sight.

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My first impulse was to rein aside, but when the woman came within twenty feet of me she raised her face a little, and then I saw that it was Mary Desmond, the Tory. Even in that faint light I could see that her face was strained and anxious, and I was struck with a great wonderment.

I turned my horse into the middle of the road, and she was compelled to rein her own back so suddenly that he nearly fell upon his haunches.

"Out of my way!" she cried. "Why do you stop me?"

"I think you will admit, Miss Desmond," I said, "that the meeting is rather unusual, and that surprise, if nothing else, might justify my stopping you."

"Why is it strange that I am here?" she demanded, in a high tone. "Why is it more strange than your presence here at this time?"

"I am riding forward to join a detachment of the American army which I believe is encamped not much farther on," I said.

In reassuming my proper American character I had forgotten that I still wore the British garb.

"Why are you doing that?" she asked, quickly and keenly.

"I wish to take them a message," I replied.

"Who are you, and what are you?" she asked, abruptly, turning upon me a look before which my eyes fell,—*"you whose garb is English and speech American."*

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"Whatever I am at other times," I replied, "to-night I am your servant only."

"Then," she replied, in a voice that thrilled me, "come with me. I ride to warn the Americans that they are threatened with destruction."

"*You!*" I exclaimed, my surprise growing. "*You* warn them! *You*, the most bitter of Tories, as bitter as only a woman can be!"

She laughed a laugh that was half of triumph, half of scorn.

"I have deceived you too, as I have deceived all the others," she said. "But I should not boast. The part was not difficult, and I despised it. Come! we will waste no more time. Ride with me to the American army, if you are what you have just boasted yourself to be."

Her voice was that of command, and I had no mind to disobey it.

"Come," I cried, "I will prove my words."

"I know the way," she replied. "I will be the guide."

We galloped away side by side. Many thoughts were flying through my head. I understood the whole story at once, or thought I did, which yielded not less of satisfaction to me. She was not the Tory she had seemed to be, any more than I was the Briton whose uniform I had taken. Why she had assumed such a *rôle* it was not hard to guess. Well, I was glad of it. My spirits mounted to a wonderful degree, past my ability to account for such a flight. But I bothered myself little about it. Another time would serve better for such matters.

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The hoof-beats rang on the flinty road, and our horses stretched out their necks as our pace grew swifter and we fled on through the night.

"How far do we ride?" I asked.

"The American encampment is four miles beyond," she said. "The British force is coming down on the right. Pray God we may get there in time!"

"Amen!" said I. "But, if we do not, it will not be for lack of haste."

We passed a cottage close by the roadside. The clatter of our horses' hoofs aroused its owner, for in those troublous times men slept lightly. A night-capped head was thrust out of a window, and I even noted the look of wonderment on the man's face; but we swept by, and the man and his cottage were soon lost in the darkness behind us.

"It will take something more than that to stop us to-night," I cried, in the exuberance of my spirits.

Miss Desmond's face was bent low over her horses neck, and she answered me not; but she raised her head and gave me a look that showed the courage a true woman sometimes has.

We were upon level ground now, and I thought it wise to check our speed, for Miss Desmond had ridden far and fast, and her horse was panting.

"We will not spare the horse," she said. "The lives of the patriots are more precious."

"But by sparing the former we have more chance of saving the latter," I said; and to that argument only would she yield. The advantage of it was soon seen, for when we increased our speed again the horses lengthened their stride and their breath came easier.

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"Have you heard the sound of arms?" she asked. "Surely if any attack had been made we could hear it, even as far as this, in the night."

"I have heard nothing," I replied, "save the noise made by the galloping of our own horses. We are not yet too late."

"No, and we will not be too late at any time," she said, with sudden energy. "We cannot—we must not be too late!"

"How strong is the American force?" I asked.

"Strong enough to save itself, if only warned in time," she replied.

We came to a shallow brook which trickled peacefully across the road. Our horses dashed into it, and their flying hoofs sent the water up in showers. But almost before the drops could fall back into their native element we were gone, and our horses' hoofs were again ringing over the stony road.

Before us stretched a strip of forest, through the centre of which the road ran. In a few moments we were among the trees. The boughs overhung the way and shut out half of the moon's light. Beyond, we could see the open country again, but before we reached it a horseman spurred from the wood and cried to us to halt, flourishing his naked sword before him.

We were almost upon him, but on the instant I knew Belfort, and he knew me.

"Out of the way!" I cried. "On your life, out of the way!"

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"You traitor! You damned traitor!" he shouted, and rode directly at me.

He made a furious sweep at my head with his sabre, but I bent low, and the blade circled over me, whistling as it passed. The next moment, with full weight and at full speed, my horse struck his, and Belfort's went down, the shriek from the man and the terrified neigh from the horse, mingling as they fell.

With a snort of triumph, my horse leaped clear of the fallen and struggling mass, and then we were out of the forest, Mary Desmond still riding by my side, her head bent over her horse's neck as if she were straining her eyes for a sight of the patriots who were still two miles and more away.

"You do not ask me who it was," I said.

"I know," she replied; "and I heard also what he called you."

"'Tis true, he called me that," I replied. "But he is in the dust now, and I still ride!"

We heard musket-shots behind us, and a bullet whizzed uncomfortably near. So Belfort had not been alone. In the shock of our rapid collision I had not had the time to see; but these shots admitted of no doubt.

"We will be pursued," I said.

"Then the greater the need of haste," she replied. "We cannot spare our horses now. There is a straight road before us."

No more shots were fired at us just then. Our pursuers must have emptied their muskets; but the clatter of the horses' hoofs told us that they were hot on the chase. Our own horses were not fresh, but they were of high mettle, and responded nobly to our renewed calls upon them. Once I took an anxious look behind me, and saw that our pursuers numbered a dozen or so. They were riding hard, belaboring their mounts, with hands and feet, and I rejoiced at the sight, for I knew the great rush at the start would tell quickly upon them.

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"Will they overtake us?" asked Mary Desmond.

"It is a matter of luck and speed," I replied, "and I will answer your question in a quarter of an

hour. But remember that, come what may, I keep my word to you. I am your servant to-night."

"Even if your self-sought slavery takes you into the American lines?" she asked.

"Even so," I replied. "I told you my mission, though you seemed to believe it not."

With this the time for conversation passed, and I put my whole attention upon our flight. My loaded pistol was still in my belt, and if our pursuers came too near, a bullet whistling among them might retard their speed. But I held that for the last resort.

So far as I could see, the men were making no attempt to reload their muskets, evidently expecting to overtake us without the aid of bullets. I inferred from this circumstance that Belfort, whom I had disabled, had been the only officer among them. Otherwise they would have taken better measures to stop us. Nevertheless they pursued with patience and seemingly without fear. By and by they fell to shouting. They called upon us to stop and yield ourselves prisoners. Then I heard one of them say very distinctly that he did not want to shoot a woman. Mary Desmond heard it too, for she said,—

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"I ask no favor because I am a woman. If they should shoot me, ride on with my message."

I did not think it wise to reply to this, but spoke encouragingly to her horse. He was panting again, and his stride was shortening, but his courage was still high. He was a good horse and true, and deserved to bear so noble a burden.

Presently the girl's head fell lower upon the horse's neck, and I called hastily to her, for I feared that she was fainting.

"'Twas only a passing weakness," she said, raising her head again. "I have ridden far to-night; but I can ride farther."

The road again led through woods, and for a moment I thought of turning aside into the forest; but reflection showed me that in all likelihood we would become entangled among the trees, and then our capture would be easy. So we galloped straight ahead, and soon passed the strip of wood, which was but narrow. Then I looked back again, and saw that our pursuers had gained. They were within easy musket-range now, and one of the men, who had shown more forethought than the others and reloaded his piece, fired at us. But the bullet touched neither horse nor rider, and I laughed at the wildness of his aim. A little farther on a second shot was fired at us, but, like the other, it failed of its mission.

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Now I noted that the road was beginning to ascend slightly and that farther on rose greater heights. This was matter of discouragement; but Miss Desmond said briefly that beyond the hill-top the American encampment lay. If we could keep our distance but a little while now, her message would be delivered. Even in the hurry of our flight I rejoiced that the sound of no fire-arms save those of our pursuers had yet been heard, which was proof that the attack upon the Americans had not yet been made.

The road curved a little now and became much steeper. Our pursuers set up a cry of triumph. They were near enough now for us to hear them encouraging each other, I could measure the distance very well, and I saw that they were gaining faster than before. The crest of the hill was still far ahead. These men must be reminded not to come too near, and I drew my pistol from my belt.

As the men came into better view around the curve, I fired at the leader. It chanced that my bullet missed him, but, what was a better thing for us, struck his horse full in the head and killed him. The stricken animal plunged forward, throwing his rider over his head. Two or three other horsemen stumbled against him, and the entire troop was thrown into confusion. I struck Miss Desmond's horse across the flank with my empty pistol, and then treated my own in like fashion. If we were wise, we would profit by the momentary check of our enemies, and I wished to neglect no opportunity. Our good steeds answered to the call as well as their failing strength would permit. The crest of the hill lay not far before us now, and I felt sure that if we could but reach it, the British would pursue us no farther.

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But when I thought that triumph was almost achieved, Miss Desmond's horse began to reel from side to side. He seemed about to fall from weakness, for, of a truth, he had galloped far that night, and had done his duty as well as the best horse that ever lived, be it Alexander's Bucephalus or any other. Even now he strove painfully, and looked up the hill with distended eyes, as if he knew where the goal lay. His rider seemed smitten with an equal weakness, but she summoned up a little remaining strength against it, and raised herself up for the final struggle.

"Remember," she said again to me, "if I fail, as most like I will, you are to ride on with my message."

"I have been called a traitor to-night," I said, "but I will not be called the name I would deserve if I were to do that."

"It is for the cause," she said. "Ride and leave me."

"I will not leave you," I cried, thrilling with enthusiasm. "We will yet deliver the message together."

She said no more, but sought to encourage her horse. The troopers had recovered from their confusion, and, with their fresher mounts, were gaining upon us in the most alarming manner. I turned and threatened them with my empty pistol, and they drew back a little; but second thought must have assured them that the weapon was not loaded, for they laughed derisively and again pressed their horses to the utmost.

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"Do as I say," cried Miss Desmond, her eyes flashing upon me. "Leave me and ride on. There is naught else to do."

But my thought was to turn my horse in the path and lay about me with the sword. I could hold the troopers while she made her escape with the message that she had borne so far already. I drew the blade from the scabbard and put a restraining hand upon my horse's rein.

"What would you do?" cried Miss Desmond.

"The only thing that is left for me to do," I replied.

"Not that!" she cried; "not that!" and made as if she would stop me. But, even while her voice was yet ringing in my ears, a dozen rifles flashed from the hill-top, a loud voice was heard encouraging men to speedy action, and a troop came galloping forward to meet us. In an instant the Englishmen who were not down had turned and were fleeing in a panic of terror down the hill and over the plain.

"You are just in time, captain," cried Miss Desmond, as the leader of the rescuing band, a large, dark man, came up. Then she reeled, and would have fallen from her horse to the ground had not I sprung down and caught her.

CHAPTER TWENTY—*The Night Combat*

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But Miss Desmond was the victim only of a passing weakness, and I was permitted to hold her in my arms but for a moment. Then she demanded to be placed upon the ground, saying that her strength had returned. I complied of necessity; and turning to the American captain, who was looking curiously at us, she inquired,—

"Captain, the American force, is it safe?" "Yes, Miss Desmond," he replied; and I wondered how he knew her. "It is just over the hill there. The night had been quiet until you came galloping up the hill with the Englishmen after you."

"Then we are in time!" she cried, in a voice of exultation. "Lose not a moment, captain. A British force much exceeding our own in strength is even now stealing upon you."

The message caused much perturbation, as well it might, and a half-dozen messengers were sent galloping over the hill. Then the captain said,—

"Miss Desmond, you have done much for the cause, but more to-night than ever before."

But she did not hear him, for she fell over in a faint.

"Water!" I cried. "Some water! She may be dying!"

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"Never mind about water," said the captain, dryly. "Here is something that is much better for woman, as well as for man, in such cases."

He produced a flask, and, raising Miss Desmond's head, poured some fiery liquid in her mouth. It made her cough, and presently she revived and sat up. She was very pale, but there was much animation in her eye.

"You have sent the warning, captain, have you not?" she asked, her mind still dwelling upon the object for which she had come.

"Do not fear, Miss Desmond," said the leader, gravely. "Our people know now, and they will be ready for the enemy when they come, thanks to your courage and endurance."

Then he beckoned to me, and we walked a bit up the hill-side, leaving Miss Desmond sitting on the turf and leaning against a tree.

"A noble woman," said the captain, looking back at her.

"Yes," said I, fervently.

"It was a lucky fortune that gave you such companionship to-night," he continued.

"Yes," replied I, still with fervor.

"Lieutenant Chester," he said, "that is not the only particular in which fortune has been kind to you to-night."

"No," I replied, with much astonishment at the patness with which he spoke my true name.

"I have said," he continued, with the utmost gravity, "that fortune has been very kind to-night to Lieutenant Robert Chester, of the American army. I may add that it has been of equal kindness to Lieutenant Melville, of the British army."

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"Who are you, and what are you?" I cried, facing about, "and why do you speak in such strange fashion?"

"I do not think it is strange at all," he said, a light smile breaking over his face. "So far as I am concerned, it is a matter of indifference, Lieutenant Chester or Lieutenant Melville: which shall it be?"

I saw that it was useless for me to pretend more. He knew me, and was not to be persuaded that he did not. So I said,—

"Let it be Lieutenant Robert Chester, of the American army. The name and the title belong to me, and I feel easier with them than with the others. I have not denied myself. Now, who are you, and why do you know so much about me?"

"Nor will I deny myself, either," he said, a quiet smile dwelling upon his face. "I am William Wildfoot, captain of rangers in the American army."

"What! are you the man who has been incessantly buzzing like a wasp around the British?" I cried.

"I have done my humble best," he said, modestly; "I even chased you and your friend Lieutenant Marcel into Philadelphia. For which I must crave your forgiveness. Your uniforms deceived me; but since then we have become better acquainted with each other."

"How? I do not understand," I said, still in a maze.

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"Perhaps you would know me better if I were to put on a red wig," he said. "Do not think, Lieutenant Chester, that you and Lieutenant Marcel are the only personages endowed with a double identity."

I looked at him closely, and I began to have some glimmering of the truth.

"Yes," he said, when he saw the light of recognition beginning to appear upon my face, "I am Waters. Strange what a difference a red wig makes in one's appearance. But I have tried to serve you and your friend well, and I hope I have atoned for my rudeness in putting you and Lieutenant Marcel to such hurry when I first saw you. It is true that I have had a little sport with you. I thought that you deserved it for your rashness, but I have not neglected your interests. I warned Alloway in the jail not to know you, and I helped him to escape. I learned about you from Pritchard, but no one else knows. I bound you, too, in Sir William Howe's room, but I leave it to you yourself that it was necessary."

His quiet laugh was full of good nature, though there was in it a slight tinge of pardonable vanity. Evidently this was a man much superior to the ordinary partisan chieftain.

"Then you too have placed your neck in the noose?" I said.

"Often," he replied. "And I have never yet failed to withdraw it with ease."

"I have withdrawn mine," I said, "and it shall remain withdrawn."

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"Not so," he replied. "Miss Desmond must return to her father and Philadelphia. It is not fit that she should go alone, and no one but you can accompany her."

I had believed that nothing could induce me to take up the character of Lieutenant Melville of the British army again, but I had not thought of this. I could *not* leave Miss Desmond to return alone through such dangers to the city.

"Very well," I said, "I will go back."

"I thought so," returned Wildfoot, with a quick glance at me that brought the red blood to my face. "But I would advise you to bring Miss Desmond to the crest of the hill and wait for a while. I must hurry away, for my presence is needed elsewhere."

The partisan was like a war-horse sniffing the battle; and, leaving Miss Desmond, myself, and two good, fresh horses on the hill-top, he hastened away. I was not averse to waiting, for I expected that a sharp skirmish would occur. I had little fear for the Americans now, for in a night battle, where the assaulted are on their guard, an assailing force is seldom successful, even though its superiority in arms and numbers be great.

From the hill-top we saw a landscape of alternate wood and field, amid which many lights twinkled. A hum and murmur came up to us and told me that the Americans were profiting by their warning and would be ready for the enemy.

"You can now behold the result of your ride," I said to Miss Desmond, who stood by my side, gazing with intent eyes upon the scene below, which was but half hidden by the night. She was completely recovered, or at least seemed to be so, for she stood up, straight, tall, and self-reliant.

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"We were just in time," she said.

"But in good time," I added.

"I suppose we shall see a battle," she said. "I confess it has a strange attraction for me. Perhaps it is because I am not near enough to mark its repellent phases."

She made no comment upon my British uniform and my apparent British character. She did not appear to remark anything incongruous in my appearance there, and it was not a subject that I cared to raise.

"See, the fighting must have begun," she said, pointing to a strip of wood barely visible in the night.

Some streaks of flame had leaped up, and we heard a distant rattle which I knew must be the small arms at work. Then there was a lull for a moment, followed by a louder and a longer crackle, and a line of fire, flaming up and then sinking in part, ran along the edge of the woods and across the fields. Through this crackle came a steady rub-a-dub, rub-a-dub.

"That is the beat of the drums," I said to Miss Desmond, who turned an inquiring face to me. "The drum is the soldier's conscience, I suppose, for it is always calling upon him to go forward and fight."

I spoke my thoughts truly, for the drum has always seemed to me to be a more remorseless war-god than the cannon. With its steady and tireless thump, thump, it calls upon you, with a voice that will not be hushed, to devote yourself to death. "Come on! Come on! Up to the cannon! Up to the cannon!" it says. It taunts you and reviles you. Give this drum to a ragamuffin of a little boy, and he catches its spirit, and he goes straight forward with it and commands you to follow him. It was so at Long Island when the Maryland brigade sacrificed itself and held back the immense numbers of the enemy until our own army could escape. A scrap of a boy stood on a hillock and beat a drum as tall as himself, calling upon the Maryland men to stand firm and die, until a British cannon-ball smashed his drum, and a British grenadier hoisted him over his shoulder with one hand and carried him away. There is a league between the drum and the cannon. The drum lures the men up to the cannon, and then the monster devours them.

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Above the crackle rose the louder notes of the field-pieces, and then I thought I heard the sound of cheering, but I was not sure. We could see naught of this dim and distant battle but the flame of its gunpowder. The night was too heavy for any human figure to appear in its just outline; and I saw that I would have to judge of its progress by the shifting of the line of fire. The British attack was delivered from the left, and the blaze of the musketry extended along a line about a half-mile in length. Though while the light was leaping high at one place it might be sinking low at another, yet this line was always clearly defined, and we could follow its movements well enough.

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The line was stationary for full fifteen minutes, and from that circumstance we could tell that the Americans had profited well by the warning and were ready to receive the attack. Still, the action was sharper and contested with more vigor than I had expected. Having made the attack, the British seemed disposed to persist in it for a while at least. But presently the line of fire began to bend back towards the west at the far end.

"The British are retreating!" exclaimed Miss Desmond.

"At one point, so it would seem," I said.

"Yes, and at other points too," she cried. "See, the centre of the fiery line bends back also."

This was true, for the centre soon bent back so far that the whole line was curved like a bow. Then the eastern end yielded also, and soon was almost hidden in some woods, where it made but a faint quivering among the trees. In truth, along the whole line the fire was dying. The sputter of the musketry was but feeble and scarce heard, and even the drum seemed to lose spirit and call but languidly for slaughter.

"The battle is nearly over, is it not?" asked Miss Desmond.

"Yes," I replied, "though we could scarce call it a battle. Skirmish is a better name. I think that line of fire across there will soon fade out altogether."

I chanced to be a good prophet in this instance, for in five minutes the last flash had gone out and there was naught left but a few echoes. It was clear that the British had suffered repulse and had withdrawn, and it was not likely that the Americans would follow far, for such an undertaking would expose them to destruction.

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I now suggested to Miss Desmond that it would be the part of wisdom for us to begin our return to Philadelphia, and we were preparing for departure, when we heard the approach of horsemen, and in a moment or two Wildfoot and three of his men approached. "It was not a long affair," said the leader, "though there was some smart skirmishing for a while. When they found that we were ready, and rather more than willing, they soon drew off, and they are now on the march for Philadelphia. I tell you again, Miss Desmond, that you have ridden bravely to-night, and this portion of the American army owes its salvation to you."

"My ride was nothing more than every American woman owes to her country," replied Miss Desmond.

"True," replied Wildfoot, "though few would have had the courage to pay the debt. But I have come back mainly to say that some of my scouts have brought in Lieutenant Belfort, sorely bruised, but not grievously hurt, and that he will have no opportunity to tell the English of your ride to-night, Miss Desmond, at least not until he is exchanged."

I had forgotten all about Belfort, and his capture was a lucky chance for both of us. As for the other Englishmen who had pursued us, I had no fear that they would recognize me, even if they saw me in the daylight, and they had seen me but dimly in a hot and flurried pursuit.

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Captain Wildfoot raised his hat to us with all the courtesy of a European nobleman and rode away with his men, while we turned our horses towards Philadelphia, and were soon far from the hill on which we had stood and witnessed the battle's flare. Miss Desmond knew the way much better than I did, and I followed her guidance, though we rode side by side.

"You do not ask me to keep this matter a secret," I said, at length, when we had ridden a mile or more in silence.

"Is not your own safety as much concerned as mine?" she asked, looking with much meaning at my gay British uniform.

"Is that the only reason you do not ask me to speak of it?" I said, still bent upon going deeper into the matter.

"Will you speak of it when I ask you not to do so?" she said.

I did not expect such a question, but I replied in the negative with much haste. But presently I said, thinking to compliment her, that, however my own sympathies might be placed, I must admit that she had done a very brave deed, and that I could not withhold my admiration. But she replied with some curtness that Captain Wildfoot had said that first,—which was true enough, though I had thought it as early as he. Had it been any other woman, I would have inferred from her reply that her vanity was offended. But it was not possible to think such a thing of Mary Desmond on that night.

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"Have you any heart for this task?" she asked me, with much suddenness, a few minutes later.

"What task?" I replied, surprised.

"The task that the king has set for his army,—the attempt to crush the Colonies," she replied.

There was much embarrassment in the question for me, and I sought to take refuge in compliment.

"That you are enlisted upon the other side, Miss Desmond," I replied, "is enough to weaken the attachment of any one to the king's service."

"This is not a drawing-room," she replied, looking at me with clear eyes, "nor has the business which we have been about to-night any savor of the drawing-room. Let us then drop such manner of speech."

She was holding me at arm's length, but I made some rambling, ambiguous reply, to the effect that a soldier should have no opinions, but should do what he is told to do,—which, though a very good argument, does not always appease one's conscience. But she did not press the question further,—which was a relief to me.

When we became silent again, my thoughts turned back to our successful ride. On the whole, I had cause for lightness of feeling. Aided by chance or luck, I had come out of difficulties wondrous well. Within a very short space I had seen our people twice triumph over the British, and I exulted much because of it.

I think I had good reason for my exultation aside from the gain to our cause from these two encounters. While accusing us of being boasters, the British had quite equalled us at anything of that kind. I think it was their constant assumption of superiority, rather more than the tea at the bottom of Boston Harbor, that caused the war. Then they came over and said we could not fight. They are much better informed on that point now, though I will admit that they showed their own courage and endurance too.

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Our return journey was not prolific of events. The night seemed to have exhausted its fruitfulness before that time. When we were within a short distance of the British lines, Miss Desmond pointed to a low farmhouse almost hidden by some trees.

"That is my retreat for the present," she said. "It was from that house I started, and I will return to it. For many reasons, I cannot be seen riding into Philadelphia with you at this hour."

"But are the inhabitants of that house friends of yours?" I asked, in some protest.

"They can be trusted to the uttermost," she replied briefly. "They have proved it. You must not come any farther with me. I have a pass and I can come into the city when I wish without troublesome explanations."

"Then I will leave you," I replied, "since I leave you in safety; but I hope you will not forget that we have been friends and allies on this expedition."

"I will not forget it," she said. Then she thanked me and rode away, as strong and upright and brave as ever. I watched her until she entered the trees around the house and disappeared. Then, although I might have fled to the American camp, I turned towards Philadelphia, a much wiser man than I was earlier in the night.

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Some of the stragglers were coming into the city already, and it was not difficult for me, with my recent practice in lying, to make satisfactory explanation concerning myself. I told a brave tale about being captured by the rebels in the rush, my escape afterwards, and my futile attempts to rejoin the army. Then I passed on to my quarters.

In the course of the day the entire detachment, save those who had been killed or wounded in the skirmish, returned, and I learned that Sir William was much mortified at the complete failure of the expedition. He could not understand why the rebels were in such a state of readiness. I was very uneasy about Marcel, but he rejoined me unharmed, although he admitted that he had been in much trepidation several times in the course of the night.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE—*Keeping up Appearances*

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I wished to hold further conversation with Marcel that morning on a matter of high interest to both of us, but I did not find the opportunity, for we were sent on immediate duty into different parts of the suburbs. Mine was soon finished, and I returned to the heart of the city. I noticed at once that the invading army had suffered a further relaxation of discipline. Evidently, after his failure of the preceding night, Sir William took no further interest in the war, and but little in the army, for that matter, except where his personal friends were concerned. But most afflicting was

the condition of mind into which the Tories had fallen. Philadelphia, like New York, abounded in these gentry, and a right royal time they had been having, basking in the sunshine of British favor, and tickling themselves with visions of honors and titles, and even expecting shares in the confiscated estates of their patriot brethren.

Now they were in sore distress, and but little of my pity had they. Among the rumors was one, and most persistent it was too, that a consequence of the French alliance would be the speedy evacuation of Philadelphia by the British, who would in all probability seek to concentrate their strength at New York. This was a misfortune that the wretched Tories had never foreseen. What! the British ever give up anything they had once laid their hands upon! The descendants of the conquerors of Crecy, Poitiers, and Agincourt, the grandsons of the men who had humbled Louis the Great at Blenheim and Malplaquet, to be beaten by untrained, half-armed, and starving farmers! The thing was impossible. And Tory and Briton vied with each other in crying to all the winds of heaven that it could not be. The British were most arrogant towards us in those days, for which reason we always took much satisfaction in beating them, admitting at the same time that they were brave men, and we never cared much about our victories over the Hessians, who, to tell the truth, were very fierce in the pursuit of a beaten enemy, but not quite so enduring in the main contention as the British.

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But I had ever had more animosity against the Tories than the British, and I felt much secret delight at their manifest and troublous state of mind. Some, who had their affairs well in hand, were preparing to depart with their beloved British, who little wanted such burdens. Others were mourning for their houses and goods which they had expected to see wrenched from them as they would have wrenched theirs from the patriots. All seemed to expect that the American army would be upon them immediately, such were their agitation and terror. Curses, too, were now heard against King George for deserting his faithful servants after making so many great promises to them. Well, it is not for those who shake the dice and lose, to complain. We, too, had had our sufferings.

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Nevertheless, the British, as is their wont, put a good face upon the matter. That very night, many of the officers were at a reception given with great splendor at the house of a rich Tory, and they talked of past triumphs and of others soon to be won. I also was there, for I had contrived to secure an invitation, having special reasons for going.

As I had expected, Miss Desmond was present. She seemed to neglect none of the fashionable gayeties of the city, and to me she looked handsomer and statelier than ever. I wished for some look, some suggestion that we had been companions in danger, and that we were rather better friends than the others present; but she was cold and proud, and there was nothing in her manner to show that we had ever met, save in the formal atmosphere of the drawing-room.

"I hear, Lieutenant Melville," she said, "that you were in the unfortunate attack last night and fell into the hands of the rebels."

"Yes, Miss Desmond," I replied, "but good fortune succeeded bad fortune. I escaped from them in the darkness and the confusion, and am back in Philadelphia to lay my sword at your feet."

Such was the polite language of the time; but she received it with small relish, for she replied, with asperity,—

"You have barely escaped laying your sword at the feet of the rebels. Is not that enough of such exercise?"

Then some British officers, who heard her, laughed as if the gibe had no point for them.

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I had no further opportunity for conversation with her until much later in the evening. The rooms were buzzing with the gossip of great events soon to occur; and though I sought not the part of a spy, and had no intent to put myself in such a position, I listened eagerly to the fragments of news that were sent about. This was not a matter of difficulty, for all were willing, even eager, to talk, and one could not but listen, without drawing comment and giving offence.

"'Tis reported," said Symington, a colonel, to me, "that the French king will despatch an army in great haste to America. But we shall not care for that—shall we, Melville? I, for one, am tired of playing hide-and-seek with the old fox, Mr. Washington, and should like to meet our ancient foes the French regulars in the open field. Then the fighting would be according to the rules as practised by the experts in Europe for many generations."

I thought to throw cold water upon him, and said I feared the Americans and the French allied might prove too strong for us; and as for the ancient rules of war, campaigns must be adapted to their circumstances and the nature of the country in which they are conducted. If the Americans alone, and that too when at least one-third of them were loyal to our cause, had been able to confine us to two or three cities practically in a state of besiegement, what were we to expect when the full might of the King of France arrived to help them?

But he would have naught of my argument. He was full of the idea that glory was to be found fighting the French regulars in the open field according to the rules of Luxembourg and Marlborough. But I have no right to complain, for it was such folly as his that was of great help to us throughout the war, and contributed to the final victory over the greatest power and the best soldiers of Europe.

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Although much interested in such talk as it was continued by one or another through the evening, I watched Miss Desmond. Now, since I knew her so well, or at least thought I did, she had for me a most marvellous attraction. At no time did she betray any weakness in the part she played, and though more than once she found my eyes resting upon her, there was no answering gleam. But I

was patient, and a time when I could speak to her alone again came at last. She had gone for air into the small flower-garden which adjoined the house after the fashion of the English places, and I, noting that no one else had observed her, followed. She sat in a rustic chair, and, seeing me coming, waited for me calmly, and in such manner that I could not tell whether I came as one welcome or repugnant. But I stood by her side nevertheless.

"You have heard all the talk to-night, Lieutenant Melville, have you not?" she asked.

"I suppose that you have in mind the new alliance with the French that the rebels have made?" I said.

"Yes," she said. "That has been the burden of our talk."

"I could not escape it," I replied. "It is a very promising matter for the rebels, and for that reason a very unpromising one for us." [Pg 250]

"The French," she said, "would consider it a glorious revenge upon us for our many victories at their expense, if they could help the rebels to certain triumph over us. It would shear off the right arm of England."

I looked with wonder at this woman who could thus preserve her false part with me when she knew I knew so well that it was false. I thought she might never again refer to our night ride, our companionship in danger. It was not anything that I wished to forget. In truth, I did not wish to forget any part of it. Yet if I had reflected, I should have seen that she had reason to forget that night's ride, since she must distrust me. Evidently Wildfoot had not told her who I was, and while I must be a friend in some way or the ranger would not have let me go, she could not guess the whole truth.

"Do you think, Lieutenant Melville," she asked, turning a very thoughtful face towards me, "that this alliance will crush the English, or will the French intervention incite them to more strenuous efforts?"

"I think, Miss Desmond," I replied, piqued and suddenly determining to play my part as well as she, "that we will defeat Americans and French combined. You know we are accustomed to victory over the French."

"It is as you say," she said; "but when one reads French histories one finds French victories over the English also."

Which is very true, for it is a great gain to the glory of any country to have expert historians. [Pg 251]

"We will underrate the French," I said, "for that would depreciate such triumphs as we have achieved in conflict with them."

"You make very little of Americans," she said. "Do you not think that you will also have to reckon with my misguided countrymen?"

"Mere louts," I said, thinking that at last I had found away to provoke her into an expression of her real opinions. "Perchance they might do something if they were trained and properly armed. But, as they are, they cannot withstand the British bayonet."

She looked at me with some curiosity, at which I was gratified, but, in imitation of her own previous example, I had discharged expression from my face.

"I had thought sometimes, Lieutenant Melville," she said, "that you had been moved to sympathy for these people, these rebels."

"Then you are much mistaken, Miss Desmond," I said, "although I hope I am not hard of heart. I am most loyal to the king, and hope for his complete triumph. How could I be otherwise, when you, who are American-born, set me such a noble example?"

"That is but the language of compliment, Lieutenant Melville," she said, "the courtly speech that you have learned in London drawing-rooms, and—pardon me for saying it—means nothing."

"It might mean nothing with other men," I said, losing somewhat of my self-possession, "but it does mean something with me."

"I do not understand you, Lieutenant Melville," she said, turning upon me an inquiring look. "You seem to speak in metaphors to-night." [Pg 252]

"If so," I replied, "I may again plead your noble example. I do not understand you at all to-night, Miss Desmond."

"Our conversation has been of a military character," she replied, smiling for the first time. "So gallant an officer as you, Lieutenant Melville, should understand that, while all of it may well be a puzzle to me, a woman, whom the sound of a trumpet frightens, it is easy enough for you to comprehend it."

"It is this time I who ask the pardon, Miss Desmond," I replied, "if I say that is the language of compliment, of the drawing-room."

She made no reply, but bent forward to inhale the odor of a flower that blossomed near her. I too was silent, for I knew not whether she wished me to go or stay, or cared naught for either. From the drawing-room came the sound of music, but she made no movement to go.

"I have had thoughts about you, too, Miss Desmond," I said, at length, after some minutes of embarrassment, for me at least.

"I trust that such thoughts have been of a pleasant nature, Lieutenant Melville," she said, turning

her deep eyes upon me again.

"I have thought," I continued, "that you too felt a certain sympathy for the rebels, your misguided countrymen."

"What reasons have I furnished for such a supposition?" she replied, coldly. "Are you in the habit, Lieutenant Melville, of attributing treasonable thoughts to the best friends of the king's cause." [Pg 253]

This I thought was carrying the matter to a very extreme point, but it was not for me, who called myself a gentleman, to say so aloud.

"I would not speak of it as treason," I said; "it seems to me to be in accord with nature that you, who are an American, should feel sympathy for the Americans."

"Then," she replied, "it is you who have treasonable thoughts, and not I."

"I trust I may never falter in doing my duty," I said.

"I trust I may not do so either," she said.

"Then," I exclaimed, flinging away reserve and caution, "why play this part any longer?"

"What part?" she asked, her eyes still unfathomable.

"This pretence of Toryism," I cried. "This pretence which we both know to be so unreal. Do I not know that you are a patriot, the noblest of patriots? Do I not honor you for it? Do I not remember every second of our desperate ride together, and glory in the remembrance?"

I paused, for I am not accustomed to making high speeches, even when under the influence of strong emotion.

Her eyes wavered, for the first time, and the red flush swept over her face. But she recovered herself quickly.

"Then say nothing about it, if you would serve me," she said, and rising abruptly she went into the house.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO—*A Full Confession*

[Pg 254]

Marcel and I had some leisure the next morning at our quarters.

"Marcel," said I, "I wish to talk to you on a matter of serious import."

"It must be of very high import, in truth," said Marcel, "if I may judge of its nature from the solemn look that clothes your face like a shroud."

"It is no matter of jest," I replied, "and it is of close concern to us both."

"Very well," replied Marcel, carelessly, flinging himself into a chair. "Then let it be kept a secret no longer."

"It is this, Marcel," I replied, and I was in deep earnest. "I am tired of the false characters we have taken upon ourselves. The parts are awkward. We do not fit in them. We have been required to serve against our own people. Only luck, undeserved luck, has saved us from the rope. I want to reassume my own character and my own name, to be myself again."

I spoke with some heat and volubility. I was about to add that I was sorry ever to have gone into such a foolish enterprise, but the thought of a fair woman's face recalled the words. And this brought me another thought—that I was unwilling to continue this false *rôle* with Mary Desmond's eyes upon me. [Pg 255]

"Is that all?" asked Marcel, beginning to whistle a gay dancing-tune which some newly arrived officers had brought over from London.

"No, it is not," I replied. "I said I wished to be myself again, and that I mean to be."

"I think I shall do likewise," said Marcel, cutting off his tune in the beginning. "I am tired of this piece of stage-play myself, but I wanted you to say so first."

"It is time to leave it off," I added, "and go back to our duty."

"You speak truly," said Marcel. "It would not be pleasant to be killed by American bullets, or be forced to fire upon our old comrades. And yet the adventure has not been without interest. Moreover, let it not be forgotten that we have had plenty to eat, a good luck which we knew not for two years before."

He said the last in such a whimsical tone of regret that I laughed despite myself.

"There is no need to laugh," said Marcel. "A good dinner is a great item to a starving man, and, as you know, I am not without experience in the matter of starvation."

Wherein Marcel spoke the truth, for during our long campaigns hunger often vexed us more sorely than the battle.

"I shall be glad to see our comrades and to serve with them again. When will we have a chance to leave?" he asked.

"I do not know," I said; "and I do not see that it matters. I am not going."

[Pg 256]

"Then will his lordship condescend to explain himself?" said Marcel. "You speak in riddles."

"We have come into this town, Marcel," I said, "in the guise of Englishmen and as the friends of the English. We have eaten and drank with them, and they have treated us as comrades. If I were to steal away, I would think that I had played the part of a mere spy."

"What then?" asked Marcel.

"I mean to take what I consider to be the honorable course," I said. "I mean to go to Sir William Howe, tell him what I am and what I have done, and yield myself his prisoner."

"You need not look so confoundedly virtuous about it," said Marcel. "I shall go with you and tell what I am and what I have done, and yield myself his prisoner in precisely the same manner that you will. Again I wanted you to say the thing first."

I never doubted that Marcel would do what was right, despite his habitual levity of manner, and his companionship strengthened me in my resolution.

"When shall we go to Sir William?" asked Marcel.

"To-day,—within the hour," I said.

"Do you think he will hang us as spies?" asked Marcel, gruesomely.

"I do not know," I said. "I think there is some chance that he will."

In truth, this was a matter that weighed much upon me. Do not think that I was willing to be a martyr, or wanted to die under any circumstances. Nothing was further from my desires. [Pg 257]

"He is like enough to be in a very bad humor," said Marcel, "over his failures and his removal from the chief command. I wish for our sakes he felt better."

By representing to an aide that our business was of the most pressing importance, we secured admission to Sir William Howe. I think we came into the room before he expected us, for when we entered the doorway he was standing at the window with the grayest look of melancholy I ever saw on any man's face. In that moment I felt both sorrow and pity for him, for we had received naught but kindness at his hands. I stumbled purposely, that I might warn him of our coming, and he turned to meet us, his face assuming a calm aspect.

"You sent word that your business is pressing," he said. "But I hope that Lieutenant Melville and Captain Montague are in good health."

"We know not the bodily condition of Lieutenant Melville and Captain Montague," I said, "but we trust that both are well."

"What sort of jesting is this?" he said, frowning. "Remember that, though my successor has been appointed, I am yet commander-in-chief."

"It is no jest," I replied. "We speak in the utmost respect to you. I am not Lieutenant Melville of the British army, nor is my friend Captain Montague. Those officers are prisoners in the hands of the Americans."

"Then who are you?" he asked. [Pg 258]

"We are American officers," I replied, "who, in a moment of rashness and folly, took the places of Captain Montague and Lieutenant Melville."

"Is this truth or insanity?" he asked, sharply.

"I think it is both," I replied, soberly.

He smiled somewhat, and then asked more questions, whereupon I told the whole story from first to last, furnishing such proofs that he could not doubt what I said. For a while he sat in a kind of maze. Then he said,—

"Are you aware, gentlemen, that the most natural thing for me to do is to hang you both as spies?"

We admitted with the greatest reluctance that the laws of war would permit it.

"Still, it was but a mad prank," said Sir William, "and you have given yourselves up when you might have gone away. I cannot see of what avail it would be to the British cause, to me, or to any one to hang you. I like you both, and you, Lieutenant Chester, as you call yourself, and as I suppose you are, threw that Hessian colonel into the street for me so handsomely that I must ever be in your debt, and I don't suppose that you had anything to do with the attempt of that villain, Wildfoot; moreover, it seems that you are quite capable of hanging yourselves in due time. I will spare the gallows. But I wish you were Englishmen, and not Americans."

I felt as if the rope were slipping off our necks when Sir William spoke these words, and my spirits rose with most astonishing swiftness. I must say that Sir William Howe, though a slothful man and a poor general, was kind of heart sometimes, and I have never liked to hear people speak ill of him. [Pg 259]

"Your case," he said, "is likely to be a source of mighty gossip in this town; but I shall not leave you here long to enjoy your honors. We exchange for Lieutenant Belfort and some prisoners who are in the hands of the rebels. You will be included in the exchange, and you will leave Philadelphia soon. You need not thank me. In truth, I ought to hang you as spies; but I am curious to know what act of folly you will commit next."

I am confident that Sir William in reality liked us greatly, for he was fond of adventure. Perhaps

that was the reason he was not a better general.

"I shall have to place you under guard," said Sir William, calling an aide, "and if ever this war ends and we are alive then, I should like to see you both in England, and show you off as the finest pair of rascals that ever deserved to be hanged and were not."

"It appears to me that we came out of that matter easily," said Marcel, as we left the room.

We remained for a while in Philadelphia as prisoners of the British, and, to our great amazement and equal pleasure, found ourselves heroes with the men who had been our comrades there for a brief space. They considered it the finest and boldest adventure of which they had heard, and Marcel's new cousin, Rupert Harding, was not last in his appreciation.

"I think that I shall prefer you to the real cousin, when I see him," said Harding to Marcel, "and I shall always claim the kinship." [Pg 260]

We parted from them with sincere regret when Sir Henry Clinton, who, succeeding Sir William Howe in the chief command, saw no reason to change the latter's plan in this matter, sent us to the American army in exchange for Belfort and others.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE—*George Washington's Mercy*

[Pg 261]

"Bob," said Marcel, as we rode under escort towards the American army, "the British have dealt handsomely with us,—we have no right to complain of Sir William Howe,—but how about the Americans?"

"The Americans are our countrymen."

"Which proves nothing. When I am at fault, I would rather receive the sentence of my official enemy than that of my official friend."

"Don't talk of it," I replied. "We have fared so well in the first four acts of this play that our luck cannot change consistently in the fifth and last."

"Yet I would there were no fifth," he grumbled. I said nothing more, wishing to dismiss the subject from my mind. But I had been thinking of it before Marcel spoke, and his words chimed so well with my own thoughts that my apprehensions grew. The subject would not depart merely because I ordered it to do so. We had left our army without leave. Practically, we were deserters, and General Washington, as all the world knows, was a severe man where a question of military discipline was concerned.

"But I am not sorry I went," I said aloud. I was thinking of Mary Desmond and that thrilling night ride of ours when the hoof-beats of my horse rang side by side with the hoof-beats of hers. I remembered the flush on her face and the light in her eye. [Pg 262]

"I am not sorry either," said Marcel, aloud. Of what he was thinking I do not know. Perhaps that same wild strain in his blood which had led us into the adventure was speaking. Yet I should, and shall be, the last man in the world to blame him for it.

It was a glorious day. The wind blew, the grass waved, and the sun shone. A young man could not remain unhappy long over misfortunes yet unfelt. My memories were pleasant and so were my comrades. A half dozen other American officers, to be exchanged for an equal number of the enemy, accompanied us, and the two British officers in charge of the escort, of whom Catron was one, were men of wit, manners, and friendly temper. We made a lively party and found one another agreeable. We had always possessed the liking of Catron, but in truth we now seemed to have his unbounded admiration as well.

"Ta-ra-ra, ta-ra-ra," rang the British bugle through the forest, announcing our approach to the American army. The journey had been all too fast. I never thought that I would part from an enemy with so much reluctance, and I became grave again when the first American sentinel stopped us.

Our mission was explained, and an officer came and attended to the exchange. We bade our friends the British, good-bye, and then, according to orders, walked towards headquarters for instructions. As we passed down one of the camp streets we heard a cry of surprise, and looking about saw Sergeant Pritchard to whom we had once bade a good-bye that he thought would be eternal. [Pg 263]

We dropped back a little behind the others.

"Sergeant Pritchard," said Marcel, "you owe me a dinner, but as provisions are scarce in the American camp I will not collect it."

This was generous of Marcel, but I suspect that the true cause was his unwillingness to dine in state with a sergeant.

"I reported that you had taken the places of the Englishmen and gone to Philadelphia," replied the good sergeant. "He made no comment in my presence, and I know not what he said to the general about it. Nor do I know what will come of the matter."

Then he shook his head gloomily.

"General Washington should behave as handsomely as Sir William Howe," said Marcel, and I was

quite sure that it was General Washington's duty to do so.

I acted as spokesman, and laid the case before our colonel, concealing nothing save my ride with Mary Desmond. He was a middle-aged man, amiable, and he liked us. In truth, both us had been fortunate enough to receive his praise for good service in action, but he could see no mitigating circumstances.

"There is nothing to do but report the case to the commander-in-chief," he said. "I am sorry, for I esteem you two boys, and you have been of value." [Pg 264]

His solemn, even despondent tone depressed us. We began to feel afraid of the future and to wonder what General Washington would say to us. Our period of suspense was not long, as within two hours we were summoned to appear before the commander-in-chief.

An aide led us to his headquarters, a small square log-house such as frontiersmen build for themselves. A sentinel was watching at the door, but we passed in and stood before the general, who was alone writing at a table.

The aide withdrew to the further end of the room and left us standing there, watching the goose quill, held in the large muscular hand, as it travelled over the paper, writing perhaps the instructions for our own execution as deserters. I shall never forget the few minutes that we stood in that room hearing only the scratch of the quill on the paper. I have dreamed of them often, and have awakened to hear the rustle of the quill in my ears.

No one could feel frivolous or flippant in the presence of General Washington. The air was never very warm about him, and I have noticed that it is usually so with men of great mental powers and great responsibilities.

On went the goose quill. Scratch! Scratch! I hate the sound of a goose quill to this day. I looked at the silent aide, but his face gave no encouragement. I looked at Marcel, but he was looking at me for the same purpose, and neither was able to be a help to the other. [Pg 265]

The general wiped the goose quill and put it away. Then he turned to us, and his face was as stern as any into which I ever looked. I saw no ray of mercy in those severe, blue eyes.

"Lieutenant Robert Chester?" he said to me. I bowed, and then Marcel bowed when his name, too, was called.

"You deserted, according to your own confession, to the enemy, and Sir William Howe, not thinking you of sufficient value, has sent you back to me."

I flushed at both the charge and the irony, and protested that we were not deserters, and had never meant to be. Moreover, we had sent word by Sergeant Pritchard of our intention. Then I begged him to let me repeat the whole story. He bowed slightly, and told me to proceed. I fear that I was disturbed somewhat by the steady gaze of those cold, blue eyes, which never left me, and I limped more than once in my narrative. Whenever I did so, he made me go back and take up the loose thread. It was his way to be exact in all things.

"A likely tale! A likely tale!" he said, when I finished, "and does credit to your powers of narration. I shall not enter into a discussion of its truth or falsity; but even if true, you left without permission, the army to which you belonged and masqueraded as officers of the enemy. It seems to me that you have succeeded in being false to both Americans and British, and I do not see how anything could be more serious, though you young gentlemen may choose to call it an adventure or a jest or a whim. Sirs, a great war is a deadly matter, and it is not to be won with jests!" [Pg 266]

The blue eyes grew colder and sterner than ever. I wished to say something, but I could think of nothing that would avail, and I was silent. I fear that my lips trembled, not from fright, but at the rebuke. I know my comrade's did, and Philip Marcel, the gay and irrepressible cavalier, was wordless for once in his life.

"Take them to the guard-house, Mordaunt," said the commander-in-chief to the aide, "and we will have them disposed of to-morrow. See that they have no chance to escape. Nor shall they be permitted to send messages to any one."

Then he turned his cold face away, and began to write again. I think that the shock of this sudden and terrible sentence was taken from me by the flame of indignation that leaped up in my heart. We were no deserters, however foolish we had been, and however great the liberty we had taken! I felt that we did not deserve such a punishment. Both Marcel and I had served our country well, and to put us to death for this adventure, although it might come within the military law, was harsh, beyond all measure. I considered ourselves martyrs.

"Do not be afraid that we will try to escape," I burst out, "and if this is to be the reward of men who serve their country, no wonder that our cause is in such straits!"

He did not appear to notice us, but wrote calmly on, and the deadly scratching of the goose quill was unbroken. The aide beckoned to us, and we followed him from the room. [Pg 267]

"I am sorry, very sorry," said Mordaunt, when we were outside, "and, in truth, I think that your sentence is far too severe."

His face showed deep concern.

"Don't be afraid that we will repeat your opinion to your hurt in the general's good graces," said Marcel, with a laugh that was pathetic. "We won't have many opportunities in the next twenty-four hours, and after that—well, the best story in the world will not interest us."

We were put in a one-room house of logs, and we sat there in silence for many hours watching the day fade. I was still hot with indignation. We deserved punishment, it was true, I repeated, but not death, an ignominious death such as that decreed for us. What good end could be served by such a deed?

But with the fading of the day my anger faded also. Then I thought of Mary Desmond, the curve of her cheek, the blue of her eye, and the sunshine in her hair. She did not hate me I knew. "O Mary," I said under my breath, "I shall never see you again!" and I covered my face with my hands.

"Bob," said Marcel, presently, holding out his hand, "forgive me."

"Forgive you, for what?"

"For leading you into that wild adventure. It was I who dared you to do it, who provoked you into joining me."

I could not accept any such assertion, and I told him so, adding that I did not wholly regret our excursion into Philadelphia. [Pg 268]

"Miss Desmond!" said Marcel, understandingly, "she is worth any man's winning, and you might have won her if—if—"

Then he stopped abruptly and stared blankly at me, unwilling to finish the sentence. The night came presently, and they brought us food, which we scarcely touched. There was no light in our prison, but through the single iron window we could see flickering camp-fires outside. The low murmur of the army came to us.

We sat on our stools for a long time in silence. I was trying to prepare myself for the future, and I suppose that Marcel was occupied with a similar task. It must have been past 10 o'clock when the door of the prison was opened and our colonel came in. Sincere sorrow was written plainly on the good man's face.

"I have heard about you," he said, "and I went to him at once, and pleaded with him. I urged your previous good service and your youth, but I could not shake him a particle. There have been too many desertions lately, and the army is at a low ebb. You are officers, and your fate will be an example for all."

"Our case is past mending," said Marcel. "We thank you for your good wishes and your efforts, but I don't think that anything can be done."

"That is so," said the colonel. "The next life is what you must now consider."

Our colonel was a good man and a good soldier, but he was never noted for tact. Somehow he could not get off the subject of our execution, and when he left with tears in his eyes, and an expressed hope that he might deliver our last messages for us, he took with him our few remaining grains of courage, and we felt that death was very, very near. [Pg 269]

Bye and bye, two more officers whom we knew well came to bid us good-bye. They had obtained permission from the general, they said, and they too had interceded for us, but fruitlessly; they could offer us no hope whatever. They were frank in condemning the severity of General Washington, and this knowledge that our friends regarded our punishment as far out of proportion to our crime, made it all the more bitter to us.

"General Washington may be a great man and a fine commander," said Marcel, after they had gone; "but he will never get forgiveness for this."

I pressed my dry lips together and said nothing. In an hour three more officers came, and one by one bidding us farewell went out again. Their gloomy manner depressed us still further.

"Curse it!" exclaimed Marcel. "I wish they wouldn't come here with their solemn faces, and their parting sermons! They make me afraid of death!"

He expressed my state of mind exactly, but there were more farewells. It was about midnight when the last of them came, a major who had been a minister once, and was never known to laugh. He talked to us so dolefully about the future, and the duty of all men to be prepared for the worst, that my nerves were jumping, and I could scarce restrain myself from insulting him. We were glad to see him go, and if ever I was thoroughly unprepared for death it was when the major left us. [Pg 270]

The long night dragged wearily on, every minute an hour. Once I laughed aloud in my bitterness, when I thought of Mary Desmond hearing the news of my death.

We slept by snatches, a few minutes at a time; but we were wide-eyed when the day came. I saw black lines under Marcel's eyes, and I knew that my own face was haggard too. The sentinel brought us breakfast; but did not retire as we ate, and when I looked at him inquiringly, he said, —

"Your escort is waiting outside."

The food choked me, and I could eat no more. "Come," I said to Marcel, "let's get it over."

We arose, and, walking out at the door, met soldiers who fell in before and behind us. The camp, or at least nearly all of it, was yet slumbering. Only a few fires were burning. Over the forests and fields the new-risen sun shone with a clear light.

They marched us to a little grove, and there General Washington and a half-dozen officers, our colonel among them, met us.

"I think that he might have stayed away," said Marcel, when he saw the commander-in-chief.

But General Washington, looking closely at us, said: "You do not appear to have slept well."

"Our time was so short that I thought we could not afford to waste any of it in sleep," I replied, with a sad attempt at a jest.

"General, kindly shoot us at once and have done with it!" exclaimed Marcel, who was ever an impatient man and now, expecting death, felt awe of nobody. [Pg 271]

"Who said that I was going to have you shot?" asked General Washington, regarding us intently.

"Did you not tell us so yesterday?" I exclaimed.

"Not at all," he replied, his grim face relaxing. "I merely said that I would dispose of you to-day. I said nothing about shooting. That is an assumption of your own, although it is what you had a right to expect, and perhaps my words indicated such action. At any rate you seem to have had a fore-taste of what you expected."

The officers, all high in rank, our colonel among them, laughed aloud. At another time I would have been deeply mortified, but not now. I began to see. I understood that our punishment was not to be death; but we had already paid the price, the night's expectation of it.

"Fortune loves us," whispered Marcel to me.

"What did you say?" asked the commander-in-chief, seeing the motion of his lips.

"I was telling Lieutenant Chester how thankful we should be that our understanding of your words was a misunderstanding," replied Marcel, promptly, and with that smile of his which few people could resist.

"Call it a jest. Do you imagine that you are the only jesters in this camp?" said the general, laughing a little. "I thought that you needed punishment, and you were too brave and useful to be shot. So I decided upon another plan, and I think it has been successful." [Pg 272]

This, they say, was the only jest of General Washington's life, but I thank God that he made the exception. Marcel joins me.

"Moreover, some pleas have been made in your favor," continued the general. "Sir William Howe himself, before leaving, took the trouble to write to me and ask that you be treated gently. You are lads whom he loves, he said. Certainly I could afford to do so small a favor for the man who has made it necessary for his successor to give up to me the city of Philadelphia. And there is a young lady, too, who speaks well of you."

"A young lady!" I cried, suspecting.

"Yes, a young lady, Miss Mary Desmond, to whom we owe much, and who has just added to our debt, because last night when you were preparing so well for your future life, she was riding to us with the news that the British were about to depart from Philadelphia. She has told too, Mr. Chester, how she met you that night you were on the way to warn us of the British attack, and how you rode on together. The circumstance was much in your favor. Yonder she is. You might speak to her, and then make ready for duty, like the valiant and loyal officers that you have been always—that is nearly always."

He smiled in kindly fashion, and patted us both on the shoulder. We thanked him with deep and fervent sincerity, and then I hurried away to Mary Desmond.

She stood under the boughs of one of the trees, holding her horse by the bridle. [Pg 273]

"I am glad to see you, Lieutenant Chester, in your own proper guise," she said.

I took her warm little hand in mine, as I replied: "And I to see you again in yours." Then I added: "You have brought the news that the British are leaving Philadelphia?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Then may I come to see you there, still in my own proper guise?"

"If General Washington gives you time," she replied. "But to tell you the truth, I don't think you will stay long in Philadelphia. Now, good-bye."

I helped her upon her horse, and she gave me her hand again. Perhaps I held it a second or two longer than custom demands, but of that I shall say nothing more.

I watched her as she rode away, the morning sunshine rippling on her hair, a slender figure, yet so strong and brave. There, I knew, beat a dauntless heart. Her spirit and courage led me on to love her from the first, and then the mystery about her, the strange, magnetic charm had drawn me too. She might take my love and tread upon it if she would, but it was hers, and no woman could ever dispossess her.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR—*In the City Again*

[Pg 274]

A detachment of our army entered Philadelphia the next day, hot upon the heels of the retreating British, and Marcel and I were among the first dozen Americans who rode into the city, Wildfoot, the ranger, commanding the little band which had the honor of taking the lead. Seldom have

happier horsemen galloped to the music of triumph.

"See, Lieutenant Chester!" said Wildfoot to me, pointing across the fields.

I followed his long forefinger with my eyes, and saw the tips of Philadelphia's spires, a most stimulating sight. Philadelphia was then our largest, richest, and most important city. The great Declaration had been made there, and in a way we considered it our capital. It had been a heavy blow to us, when we were forced to yield it to Howe, and now when his successor, Clinton, felt himself obliged to give it back to us, our spirits, so long depressed, sprang up with a bound.

"Aye, it's Philadelphia," said Wildfoot, "and we've worked and waited long to get it back again."

I thought I saw a mist appear in the eyes of the strong backwoodsman, and I knew that he was deeply moved. Certainly no one had worked more than he, and perhaps none other had taken such great risks. He was entitled to the honor of leading the vanguard.

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We expected to find skirmishers and bands of the British prepared to make our way troublesome; but we met no foe and galloped, unopposed, into the city, from which the British had gone but a few hours, and from which more than three thousand Tories, too, had fled. The departure of the enemy had been so abrupt, and we were so close behind, that several British officers, either laggards or late risers, were captured by our men, and our little troop, scattering, galloped about the streets, hoping to take more such trophies.

Marcel and I turned into one of the cross streets, and saw a hundred yards ahead of us two officers in red-coats, riding at a great rate.

"British!" cried Marcel.

"So they are!" I replied, "and they must be ours!" We were wild with enthusiasm, and even with General Washington's lesson fresh in our memories, we thought little of consequences while in that state of mind.

We shouted to our horses, and followed the Englishmen at full speed, eager to make the capture. They heard the clattering of hoofs, and, seeing us, fled at a greater speed. We were but two, and no doubt they would have turned and fought us; but they knew the American army to be at our back, and there was nothing for them to do but gallop.

On they sped, lashing their horses, and after them came Marcel and I, also lashing our horses. The dust flew from the street, and pedestrians scuttled to safety.

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"It will be something for us to talk of if we take them!" said Marcel.

"It must be done!" I replied, as I sought to draw more speed from my panting horse. The distance between us was decreasing, slowly it is true, but yet at a rate that could be noticed. I called Marcel's attention to our gain, and his face flushed with the hope of triumph.

"We shall take them to the general himself," he said, "and it will help us in his eyes."

The horses of the fugitives began to stagger, and I noticed it with exultation. Obviously, they could not escape us now. We soon gained rapidly, and I shouted to them to halt. One of the men whirled about quickly and fired a pistol. The bullet whizzed between Marcel and me, and its only result was to add anger to the motives that drew us on. We gained yet more rapidly, and cried anew to them to halt. A second pistol bullet was the reply, but, like its predecessor, it went wide of the target. We galloped on, and each of them fired at us again, and missed.

"We have them now!" cried Marcel. "Their pistols are empty, and they cannot reload them while going at this pace!"

In truth they were doomed apparently to be our prisoners and that, too, speedily. Our horses were the swifter and stronger, and our loaded pistols were in our belts. The fugitives seemed helpless.

"Stop or we fire!" we shouted.

They looked back as if studying their chances, and I saw their faces clearly. When they had fired their pistols, the glimpse had been too fleeting, but I knew them now. They were Vivian and Belfort.

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My heart thrilled with various emotions. Vivian was our good friend, a man of whom we had the most pleasant memories. We could not fire upon him. Belfort was my enemy, yet I believed that I had triumphed over him, and surely one can afford to forgive the enemy from whom he has taken the victory. I could not fire upon him, in such a situation, any more than I could fire upon Vivian.

"Lower your pistol!" I cried to Marcel. "Do you not see who they are?"

"I do see, and you are right," said Marcel, as he replaced his weapon in its holster. We gradually checked the speed of our horses, and in a few moments the fugitives began to draw away from us. Five minutes later they galloped across the fields and to the safety of their own army. Whether they recognized us or not, I do not know.

As we turned and rode back through the suburbs, a woman on horseback met us. It was Mary Desmond.

"Why did you let them go?" she asked, speaking to me, rather than to Marcel.

"They were Vivian and Belfort," I replied. "Surely you would not have had us to fire upon either?"

"I should not have forgiven you, if you had," she replied.

She said that she had come out to meet the American force, and she had seen part of our pursuit. She, too, bore the flush of triumph upon her face, and in truth it was a great day for her as well as for us. She had done a man's work, and more than a man's work in the cause of her country.

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"Yes, I am glad you let them go," she repeated as we rode back together. "It is not likely that we shall ever see either again."

We rode with her to her father's house, and then went to quarters. Just about sunset a colored man came to us with a note from John Desmond, asking us to dinner at his house that night. No excuse would be accepted, he said, and as for leave, that had been granted already by our colonel. There was no probability that either Marcel or I would seek an excuse to stay away from John Desmond's house, and as soon as we could put our toilets in proper trim we went to his residence, a great square brick building, lighted with many lights. Some carriages stood in the street in front, yet we were badly prepared for a company of the extent and rank that we found assembled there, with General Washington himself at its head. In truth, we were somewhat abashed, thinking ourselves out of place with generals and colonels; but the commander-in-chief shook our hands, and seemed to be in a gay humor, uncommon for him.

"Mr. Desmond and his daughter were bound to have you," he said. "They told me that they met you first at a banquet under embarrassing circumstances, and it is only fair to have you now at a dinner where everybody appears as what he is."

Mary Desmond came in presently, and never before had I seen a woman so shine as she did that night. She had dressed herself as for a triumph, and jewels glittered on her neck and in her hair. Her face was illumed by a great joy, all her reserve was gone, but the charm which had first drawn me to her cast a more potent spell than ever. If I had not already been deep in love with her, I should have become so then. I wondered why every man present was not eager to lay his heart at her feet. Perhaps I was not the only one present who was!

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Our dinner was brief, for the generals could linger only a little when an enemy must be pursued. In truth, the main army was already in pursuit, and it was known to only a few that General Washington was at John Desmond's house. His was but a flying visit. Yet the dinner was joyous. All believed that this return to Philadelphia marked the swift rise of our fortunes. Presently wine-glasses were filled, and General Washington stood up.

"I have heard of a toast that some drank in the presence of Sir William Howe," he said, "and I wish to return it. Let us drink to the health of John Desmond, one of our truest and most useful patriots."

We drank, and the old man flushed deep with gratified pride.

"And now," resumed the general, "let us drink to the best patriot of all, the daring messenger and horsewoman, Miss Mary Desmond. Happy the country that can claim her, and happy the man! To Miss Mary Desmond!"

No toast was ever drunk with a better will.

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The commander-in-chief and the generals went away in a few minutes, but Marcel and I stayed a little longer.

"We pursue the enemy to-morrow," I said to Mary Desmond as I bade her good-night, "and there will soon be a battle."

She looked steadily into my eyes, but in a moment a light flush swept over her beautiful face.

"May you come back safely, Lieutenant Chester," she said.

"Will you care?" I asked.

"I do care," she replied. I thought I felt her fingers quiver as she gave me her hand, but she withdrew it in an instant, and I came away.

Our vanguard under Wildfoot, with Marcel and me by his side, began the pursuit of the British the next day.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE—*The Widow's Might*

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The troop, led by Wildfoot, numbered not more than fifty horsemen, but all were strong and wiry, and bore themselves in the easy alert manner that betokens experience, and much of it. Moreover, they were well mounted, a point of extreme importance. Marcel and I deemed ourselves fortunate to be included in such a band, and that we were high in the partisan chief's favor, we had good evidence, because before we started he brought us two exceptionally fine horses and bade us exchange our mounts for them, temporarily.

"You must do it, as you are likely to need their speed and strength," he said, when we showed reluctance, for good cavalry horses were worth their weight in silver, at least in those days, and we did not like to take the responsibility of their possible loss.

"Then you mean to give us some work, I take it," said Marcel.

"Not much to-day," replied the partisan, "as I operate best in the dark; so shall I wait until sun-down, but I hope that we shall then get through with a fair night's work."

Wildfoot's men seem to trust him absolutely. They never asked him where they were going or what they were expected to do, but followed cheerfully wherever he led. The partisan himself continued in the great good humor that had marked him when we entered Philadelphia. He sang a bit under his breath and smiled frequently. Whether he was happy over deeds achieved or others to come, I could not tell. But I saw that our duties were to be of a scouting nature, as was indicated clearly by the character of the force under his command.

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We rode for a while in the track of the British army, a huge trail made by the passage of sixteen thousand troops, and a camp train twelve miles long. Many Tories, too, not fortunate enough to secure passage on the ships down the river, had followed the army, filled with panic and dreading retaliation from the triumphant patriots whom some of their kind had persecuted cruelly in the days when our fortunes were lower.

It was easy enough for us to overtake the British army, which was dragging itself painfully over the hills and across the fields. A body of fifteen or twenty thousand men can move but slowly in the best of times, and in the terrible heat which had suddenly settled down, the British forces merely crept towards New York. Soon we saw their red coats and shining arms through the trees, and heard the murmur of the thousands. However we bore off to one side, passing out of sight, and made a wide curve, apparently for the purpose of examining the country, and to see whether the British had sent out skirmishing or foraging parties. But we saw neither, and shortly after sunset our curve brought us back to the enemy's army, which had gone into camp for the night, their fires flaring redly against the background of the darkness. We stopped upon the crest of a little hill, from which we could see the camp very well and sat there for a few minutes, watching. Being in the darkness we were invisible, but many blazing heaps of wood shed their light over the hostile army.

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"They seem to be taking their ease," said Wildfoot. "It ought not to be allowed, but we will not disturb them for the present."

Then he withdrew our men about a mile, and, halting them in a thick wood, ordered them to eat of the food in their knapsacks. But Marcel and me he summoned to go with him on a little journey that he purposed to take.

"We shall not be gone more than an hour or two," he said, "and we will find the men waiting for us here when we come back."

We curved again as we rode away. In truth, we had been making so many curves that it was hard for me to retain any idea of direction. In a half hour we saw a light, and then the house from which it came, a low but rather large building of heavy logs, standing in a small clearing in the forest.

Wildfoot had not spoken since we left the other men, and as he seemed to be in deep thought we did not interrupt him with vain questions, merely following him as he rode quietly into the thickest part of the woods behind the house. When he slipped from his horse there, we did likewise, and waited to see what he would do next.

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"We will tie our horses here," he said. "No one will see them, and as they are old campaigners, they are too well trained to make a noise."

Again we imitated his example, and tethered our horses to the boughs of trees.

"Now," said Wildfoot, when that was done, "we will call on a lady."

The moon was shining a little, and I thought I saw a faint smile on his face. I was full of curiosity, and Marcel beside me uttered a little exclamation. The name of woman was always potent with this South Carolina Frenchman; but we said nothing, content, perforce, to be silent and wait.

"She is not so handsome as Miss Mary Desmond," continued Wildfoot, smiling again a little, and this time at me. "Few are; but as she finds no fault with it herself, none other should."

But Marcel had begun to brush his uniform with his hands, and settle the handsome sword, which was his proudest adornment, a little more rakishly by his side.

We walked to the door and knocked, and when some one within wished to know in a strong voice who was there, Wildfoot responded with a question.

"Are you alone?" he asked.

"Yes," said the voice. "Who is it?"

"Wildfoot and two friends."

The door was opened at once, and we entered, beholding a woman who seemed to be the sole occupant of the house. At least none other was visible.

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"I hope you are well, mother," said Wildfoot, and the woman nodded.

But I saw at once that she was no mother of his, although old enough. She, too, was large and powerful, almost masculine in build, but there was no similarity whatever in the features.

"Lieutenant Chester and Lieutenant Marcel of the American army, good friends of mine and trusted comrades," said Wildfoot, "and this, gentlemen," he continued to us, "is Mother Melrose, as loyal a patriot as you can find in the Thirteen Colonies, and one who has passed many a good bit of information from the British army in Philadelphia on to those who needed it most. Mother, can't you find us something to eat while we talk?"

The woman looked pleased with his praise, and speedily put upon a table substantial food, which

we attacked with the zest that comes of hard riding. Yet from the first I studied the room and the woman with curiosity and interest.

The note of Mother Melrose's manner and air was self-reliance. She walked like a grenadier, and her look said very plainly that she feared few things. She must have been at least sixty, and perhaps was never beautiful. I surmised, from the complete understanding so evidently existing between her and Wildfoot, that she helped him in his forays, warning him of hostile expeditions, sending him news of wagon trains that could be cut off, and otherwise serving the cause. There were many such brave women who gave us great aid in this war. But I wondered at a fortitude that could endure such a lonely and dangerous life.

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"Do you know that the British army is encamped near you, mother?" asked Wildfoot, as we drank a little wine that she brought from a recess, probably captured by Wildfoot himself from some wagon train.

"I know it," she replied, her old eyes lifting up, "and glory be to God, they have been forced to run away from Philadelphia at last!"

She passed presently into a rear room which seemed to be a kitchen, and Marcel said:—

"A fine patriot, but has she no sons, nobody to help her here and to protect her, maybe?"

"She can protect herself well enough," replied Wildfoot, "and there is nobody else in this house except a serving lad, who, I suspect, is in the kitchen helping himself to a little extra supper. But she has sons, three of them. They're in our business, and far away from here."

"Three for the cause," I commented. "That is doing well."

"Two fight for the Congress and one for the king," said Wildfoot. "The one who serves the king is her youngest and best beloved. Nothing can change that, although, as far as her power goes, the king has no greater opponent than she."

"Strange!" said Marcel.

But it did not seem so very strange to me.

The woman was coming back, and I looked at her with deeper respect than ever. We talked a little more, and Wildfoot's questions disclosed that his object in coming to the house was to see if she had any better information than he had been able to pick up. But she could tell him of no hostile party that he might cut off.

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Our conversation was ended suddenly by a shock of red hair thrust in at the door, and a voice, coming from somewhere behind the red hair, announcing that some one was coming. It was the serving boy who gave us the timely warning.

"It must be the enemy," said Wildfoot. "No Americans except ours are near here, and they would not come contrary to my express order. How many are they, Timothy?"

"Three men on horseback, and they are British," replied Timothy.

"You can go out the back way and escape into the forest without any trouble," said the woman.

"I don't know that we want to escape," replied Wildfoot, "especially as we are three to three. Neither are we looking for a skirmish just now; so, by your permission, mother, we will step into the next room, and wait for your new guests to disclose themselves."

Mother Melrose offered no objection, and we entered a room adjoining the one in which we had been eating. It was unlighted, but the house seemed to have been a sort of country inn in more peaceful times, and this apartment into which we had just come, was the parlor.

"Leave the door ajar an inch or two, that we may see," said Wildfoot, and the woman obeyed. A minute later there was a heavy knock, as if whoever came, came with confidence. Mother Melrose opened the door in an unconcerned manner, as if such knocks were a common occurrence at her house, and three British officers entered, that is, two were Englishmen, and the third was a Hessian. The faces of the Englishmen were young, open, and attractive, but that of the Hessian I did not like. We did not dislike the English officers in this war, who were mostly honest men serving the cause of their country; but we did hate the Hessians, who were mere mercenaries, besides being more cruel than the British, and when I say "hate," I use the word with emphasis.

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They, too, seemed to have taken the place for a sort of country inn, and sat down at the table from which Mother Melrose had hastily cleared the dishes of our own supper.

"Can't you give us something to eat, mistress?" asked one of the Englishmen. "We are tired of camp fare, and we pay gold."

"Provisions are scarce," replied Mother Melrose; "but I am willing to do my best, because you travel in such haste that I may never have another chance to serve you."

"She has pricked you very neatly, Osborne," laughed the other Englishman, "but I am free to confess that we would travel faster if the weather were not so deucedly hot. We don't have such a Tophet of a summer in England, and I'm glad of it. Any rebels about, mistress?"

It was the merest chance shot, as we were ahead of the British army rather than behind it, and we were not expected in this quarter; but Mother Melrose never flinched. "No, you are safe," she replied.

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"That's for you, Hunston," said Osborne, laughing in his turn, "but I would have you to know,

good mistress, that we are giving up Philadelphia to your great Mr. Washington out of kindness, pure kindness. He starved and froze, out there at Valley Forge, so long that we thought he needed a change and city comforts, and as there is plenty of room for all of ours in New York, we concluded,—and again I say it was out of the kindness of our souls,—to give him Philadelphia."

"Well, the Lord loveth a cheerful giver," said Mother Melrose, with unction.

Both Englishmen laughed again, and with great heartiness. Evidently they were men who knew that life was worth living, and were not prone to grieve over evils unbidden. I was sorry that I could not laugh with them. There was no smile on the face of the ill-favored Hessian. His eyes wandered about the room, but he seemed to have no suspicion. I took it that his sour temper was the result of chronic discontent.

"What ails you, Steinfeldt?" asked Osborne. "Why don't you look happy? Isn't the hospitality of the house all that you wish?"

"Haven't you any wine?" asked Steinfeldt. "I can't drink the cursed drinks of this country, cider and such stuff! faugh!"

Mother Melrose produced the same bottle from which she had poured wine for us, and filled the glasses. [Pg 290]

"That's better," said Steinfeldt. "Fill them again, can't you?" His eyes began to sparkle, and his face to flush. It was easy to tell his master passion. But Mother Melrose filled the glasses again, and then a third time, producing a second bottle. The house was better stocked than I had thought it could possibly be. Steinfeldt's temper began to improve under the influence of the liquor, and he grew talkative. Evidently Mother Melrose's taunt about the British evacuation of Philadelphia rankled in his mind, though the two Englishmen themselves had passed it off easily enough.

"We will come back," he said. "You don't imagine that we will let Mr. Washington keep Philadelphia long?"

"I don't think he will ask you about it," replied Mother Melrose.

"It's too good a country to give up," continued Steinfeldt, "and we must keep it. It is rich land, and the women are fair. The men may not want us; but the women do."

One of the Englishmen angrily bade him be silent; but the wine was in his blood.

"But the women do want us, don't they?" he repeated to Mother Melrose.

She lifted her hand, which was both large and muscular, and slapped him in the face. It was no light blow, the crack of it was like that of a pistol-shot, and Steinfeldt reeled in his chair, the blood leaping to his cheeks.

"Damnation!" he cried, springing to his feet, and snatching his sword from its scabbard. [Pg 291]

"Steinfeldt, stop!" cried Osborne, "you cannot cut down a woman."

"I wish you were a man," said the Hessian to Mother Melrose, "then you'd have to fight for that."

"Don't trouble yourself about my not being a man," said she, coolly. "I'll fight you any way."

One of the Englishmen had hung his sword and belt on the back of his chair while he ate, and, to my unbounded surprise, Mother Melrose stepped forward, took the sword, and putting herself in the attitude of a genuine fencing-master, faced the German. I was about to make a movement, but Wildfoot put a restraining hand on my shoulder. His other hand was on Marcel's shoulder.

"Madame, what do you mean?" asked Osborne.

"The gentleman seems to be angry, and I am the cause of his anger, so I offer him satisfaction," she replied. "He need not hesitate. I am probably a much better swordsman than he."

Steinfeldt's face flushed. He raised his weapon, and the two swords clashed together. But we did not intend that the matter should go farther, and we stepped into the room just as the Englishmen also moved forward to interfere.

Their surprise was intense, but they drew weapons promptly. Marcel, whose blood was hotter than mine or Wildfoot's, raised his hand as a signal to be quiet.

"Since the German gentleman wants to have satisfaction, he ought to have it," he said, "and since he has insulted the women of our country, we also want the satisfaction which we ought to have. If the quarrel is not handsomely made up, I never heard of one that was. I'll take Mother Melrose's place." [Pg 292]

The woman put the sword on the table, and stepped aside, content with the way affairs were going. The Englishmen looked dubiously at us.

"Why not?" asked Wildfoot.

His query seemed pertinent to me. According to the military law, all of us ought to fight; but since we would make a most unpleasant muss in the house it was best that a champion of each side should meet. It was proper, too, that Marcel should be our man, since he was a better swordsman than I. Wildfoot was our leader, and it was not fitting for him to take the risk.

"Why not?" continued Wildfoot. "I may tell you, gentlemen, that I have a large party near, and perhaps I could get help in time to make you prisoners, but I assure you that the affair would interfere with other and more important plans of mine. You would much better let them fight."

The Englishmen whispered together a moment or two.

"Let it be as you propose," said Osborne.

Their eyes began to sparkle, and I saw that the love of sport, inherent in all Englishmen, was aroused. Marcel and Steinfeldt faced each other and raised their swords. I was astonished at the animosity showing in the eyes of these two men who had never seen each other until a few minutes ago and who had no real cause of quarrel. Yet they seemed to me at that moment to typify their two races which, since then, and in these Napoleonic times, have come into such antagonism. Still it would not be right to say that I care more for the French than for the Germans, although Marcel, who was of French descent, was my fast friend. I have no great admiration for the faults of either race.

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Steinfeldt was the larger and apparently the stronger of the two; but Marcel was more compact and agile, and I felt confident of his success. They crossed swords, testing each other's attack and defence, and then began to fight in earnest, their eyes gleaming, their faces hot, and their breath coming short and hard. A candle on a table cast a dim light, and shadows flickered on the floor.

The German was no bad swordsman, and the influence of the wine had passed. At first he pressed Marcel back with fierce and rapid thrusts, and for a moment I was alarmed for my friend. Then I saw that Marcel's face was calm, and his figure seemed to gather strength. My eyes passed on to Mother Melrose; but she stood, impassive, against the wall, silently watching the swordsmen. A red head appeared at the kitchen door, and there was the serving lad following the contest with staring eyes. As for myself, I was uneasy. I did not like the situation; it seemed to me irregular, and we might be interrupted at any time by a force of the enemy. Yet I reasoned with myself that I should not be disturbed when Wildfoot, who was a veteran, seemed not to be, and I soon forgot my scruples in the ring of steel and the joy of combat that rose in my blood, as it had risen in that of the Englishmen.

The Hessian paused a little, seeming to feel that he had been too violent in the beginning, and I noticed that his breath had shortened. Marcel, whose back was against the wall, fainted, and followed up the feint with a thrust, quick as lightning. But the Hessian had no mean skill, and he turned aside the blade which flashed by his arm with a soft sound like scissors snipping through cloth. His coat-sleeve was laid open and the flesh grazed.

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"He guards well," said one of the Englishmen, nodding towards Steinfeldt.

The Hessian heard the remark, and it seemed to give him new strength. His sword became a beam of light, and he thrust so straight at Marcel's breast that I held my breath in fear; but my comrade was quick, and the blade, caught on his own, flashed harmlessly by.

"Well fought; well fought, by Pollux!" exclaimed the Englishman Osborne. "This is worth seeing."

The duellists were now almost in the centre of the room, and they paused a moment for breath. I knew, by the compression of their lips, that each was preparing for his greatest effort, and we were silent, awaiting the issue.

The sword play began again, and the weapons rang across each other. The heavy breathing of the combatants sounded distinctly, and the soft beat of their footsteps, as they shifted about the room, made a light, sliding noise, like the restless tread of wild animals in a cage.

The Hessian's sword passed close to Marcel's side, cutting his coat; but when Marcel's blade flashed in return, it came back with blood upon it. The keen edge had passed along the Hessian's wrist, leaving a red thread.

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The cut was not deep, but it had a sting to it, and Steinfeldt shut his teeth hard. Marcel's sword was now making lines of light about him, and the Hessian's part in the combat soon became a defence only. He was pressed back, an inch or two at a time, but without cessation. Then I saw the great skill of my comrade. His lips were shut tight, but his eyes remained calm and confident, and the sword seemed to have become a part of himself, so truly did it obey his will.

The Hessian's face slowly darkened, and the light in his eyes, that had been the light of anger and defiance, became the light of fear. And it was the fear of death. He read nothing else in the gleaming blade and calm look of the man before him. Two or three drops of perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"Bad, bad! Steinfeldt has lost!" I heard the Englishman Osborne say under his breath.

I studied Marcel's face, but I could not discover his intentions there. That he carried the Hessian's life on the point of his sword, everyone in the room now knew, and the Hessian himself knew it best of all. But Steinfeldt had courage, I give him all credit for that, whatever else he may have been. A man must be brave to fight on, in the face of what he knows is certain death.

Back went the Hessian, closer and closer to the wall, and always before him was the calm, unsmiling face and gleaming sword that whistled so near and threatened every moment to strike a mortal blow. The suspense became unbearable. I felt like crying out: "Have done and end such a game," and I bit my lip to enforce my own silence.

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The Hessian's back suddenly touched the wall, and the sword of Marcel flashed a second time along his wrist, leaving another red thread beside the first. Then it flashed back again, and the weapon of the Hessian, drawn from his hand, fell clattering on the floor.

The defenceless man stood as if he expected a stroke; but I knew that Marcel would never give it. He thrust his own sword into its scabbard, bowed to his opponent with the easy and graceful politeness that he loved, and turned to us as if awaiting our will. I have often wondered where

Marcel got that manner of his, and I have concluded that it came from his French blood.

"Take your friend and go," said Wildfoot to the Englishmen. "He is not hurt much, and it is time for all of us to rejoin our commands."

The Englishmen hesitated, as if it were not right for official enemies, in the height of a hot campaign, to part in such a manner. In truth, it was not, but Wildfoot had a set of military rules peculiarly his own, and was not called to account for anything that he might do.

Their hesitation ceased quickly, and each taking an arm of Steinfeldt, they hurried with him out of the room, not neglecting, however, to give us a farewell salute. But they forgot to take Steinfeldt's sword, and Marcel, picking it up, said that he would keep it as a remembrance. [Pg 297]

"You must admit that Lieutenant Marcel made a good substitute for you," said Wildfoot, turning to Mother Melrose.

"None could have been better, but I might have beaten the Hessian myself," she replied sturdily. "My husband was a great swordsman and he taught me."

It was now our turn to go, and we bade this remarkable old woman good-night. She showed no signs of fear and was already wiping from the floor the drops of blood that had fallen from Steinfeldt's wrist.

We secured our horses again, and sprang upon their backs. I heard a faint sound like a laugh, and saw a broad smile on the face of Wildfoot.

"I did not expect to see such fine sport when we went to the house," he said.

The ranger obviously was enjoying himself. Events like this pleased his wild and energetic nature. I saw that he was in truth a man of the forests and the night and war, and loved danger.

"Aside from the risk of a fight with them, I did not wish to hold those Englishmen," he continued. "Although they are not likely to report the full and exact facts of our meeting, they will say, when they rejoin their army, that the American forces are in the vicinity, and that is what I wish the British to know. Unless you are planning a secret attack, it is important to keep the enemy worried, to let him think that you are everywhere, and it will exhaust his strength and patience. Growing tired, he will do something rash and costly." [Pg 298]

I understood Wildfoot's logic; but I wondered what would be his next movement, waiting, however, as usual, to let the deed disclose itself. We rejoined our men, who were resting in the wood undisturbed, and all rode on another circuit.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX—*An Average Night with Wildfoot*

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The night was bright with the moonlight, and we soon saw the blaze of the British camp-fires again. We rode slowly towards them, and at last stopped at a distance of several hundred yards.

"They should have a picket near here," said Wildfoot, "and I fancy it is over yonder in the shadow."

He pointed towards a clump of trees on our right, and Marcel, whose eyes were wonderfully keen, announced that he saw there the color of uniforms.

"Six men are in the group," said Wildfoot, a moment later, "and they appear to be resting, which is wrong. No British picket should be taking its ease in a campaign like this. We will furnish them some excuses for being on watch."

He gave word to two of his men, who lifted their rifles and fired towards the group under the trees. I heard the bullets cutting through the leaves in the few minutes of intense silence that followed. Then a great clamor arose, the noise of many voices, a drum beating, and scattered shots returning our fire. We saw soldiers leap up in the camp and run to arms.

We were far enough away to be hidden from the sight of our enemies, and we rode swiftly on, leaving the clamor behind us. It was a huge camp, spreading out for miles, and partly surrounded by woods, which always make easy the approach of a concealed foe. Yet there was not enough open space in the vicinity for the whole British army, and their commanders were not to blame. [Pg 300]

Wildfoot still led the way, appearing to know the country thoroughly. He divided our little force, presently, into three troops, naming a place at which we were to reunite some hours later. He placed trusted leaders over the first two troops, and took the third himself, Marcel and I being included in it. We rode through the deep woods, the twigs whipping our faces, but always ahead of us was the large dark figure of Wildfoot, horse and man passing on silently, like a ghostly centaur.

In a half-hour we stirred up another picket, which saw us in the moonlight and fired their bullets so close to our heads that I felt anxious. But they were only four men, and we soon sent them running back to their army. Then an entire company came out to beat up the woods for us, but we were gone again, flitting on to new mischief. Wildfoot was an expert at this business. Anybody could see it at a glance. He knew when to do a thing, and when not to do it, which comes very near to being supreme wisdom. He knew whether to attack or to wait, whether to ride on or to stay, and the entire British right flank was soon in an uproar, their musketeers returning the fire of an enemy whom they could not see, and cavalry galloping through the forests after the foe [Pg 301]

whom they could not overtake. While Wildfoot led us often into danger, he always led us out again, and we continued our circle of the British camp, all our horsemen unharmed.

"Isn't this glorious?" said Wildfoot to me presently. "Such nights as these a man remembers long."

I gazed at him in wonder, but there was no sign of affectation in his voice or eye. I knew that there was none in his heart either. But I looked at my torn clothing, felt my bruised face, where the twigs had struck like switches, stretched my muscles, sore from so much riding, and replied,

"If I were the British commander, Captain Wildfoot, and I could catch you, I would hang you to the top of the tallest tree in this forest."

"I admit that it is somewhat annoying," he replied, smiling broadly at what impressed him as a great compliment; "but, as I told you, we must not let the enemy dwell in peace. If we can disturb his sleep, impair his digestion, and upset his nerves, he won't be enthusiastic when he goes into real battle."

A half-hour later we were dashing through the woods pursued by a formidable company, entirely too large for us to oppose, but again we were unharmed. In truth, the darkness—for the moon had faded somewhat—was our protector. The enemy could not see to hit us with the musket-bullets, and presently we gathered together again in the friendly shadows, with the hostile troop left far behind.

"I wish I knew where General Clinton himself lies," said Wildfoot, who was ambitious. "I should like to send a bullet through his tent, not to hurt him, but merely to let him know that we are here."

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His face was full of longing, but there was no way for us to discover or approach General Clinton's tent, and I feared that his desire must go unfulfilled. Nevertheless, his zest and energy did not decrease, and he seemed bent upon completing the circuit of the British army with his irritating methods. I was worn to the bone, but in spite of it I caught some of Wildfoot's militant enthusiasm, and aided him to the utmost.

Clouds obscured the moon again, and the added darkness helped us. After midnight we found a company camped on a hill-side on the fringe of the army, but a little farther from the main body than usual. The tethered horses grazed on the grass near by, and I was willing to swear that I knew several of them.

"Yes," said Wildfoot, at whom I looked questioningly, "that's the company with which you rode the night you and Miss Desmond brought us the warning. I have no doubt that your friend Belfort, who was exchanged for you, and other friends of yours, too, are there. We will rouse them up a bit."

He signalled to his men, and a half-dozen bullets clipped the grass among the tents. The return fire came in an instant, and it was much fiercer than we had expected. The musket-balls whistled around us, and two men and a horse were grazed. We sent back a second volley, and the British, rushing to their horses, galloped after us, at least a hundred strong. Away we crashed through the woods, expecting to shake them off in a few minutes, as we had rid ourselves of the others, but they managed to keep us in sight and hung on to the chase.

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"We must discourage such enthusiasm," said Wildfoot, and he gave orders to our men, who had reloaded their rifles, to fire again, cautioning them to take good aim. Two troopers fell to our volley, and others seemed to be hurt. The pursuit slackened for a few minutes, but was resumed to the accompaniment of scattering rifle-shots that urged us to renewed speed. Three of our men were wounded, though slightly, and the affair was growing decidedly warm.

But the darkness of night and our knowledge of the country gave us a vast advantage, which we used to good purpose. Wildfoot ordered us to curve farther away from the British camp, and in five minutes we entered the deeper forest. Marcel and I were thankful now that Wildfoot had made us take the horses. All the men were specially well mounted, in truth, on horses trained for such work, and our pursuers began to diminish in number, the slower ones dropping off. They decreased rapidly from a hundred to fifty, and then to twenty-five, and then to less. But a small group clung persistently to us until at last Wildfoot laid a restraining hand on the rein of his horse, and said: "Not more than seven or eight men are following us now. We must show them that they are rash."

We stopped and raised our rifles, all except Marcel and I, who had none, pistols taking their place. Our pursuers were too eager and too hot with the chase to notice instantly that we were no longer fleeing, and dashed at us like knights riding down an antagonist at a tournament. The man at their head was Belfort,—I saw him plainly,—who never lacked bravery and zeal, however unlikable he may have been otherwise. I had spared his life once, and I would not fire at him now, but of course I was not responsible for what the others might do.

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Our weapons flashed, and two of the pursuing horsemen fell. One horse also went down. The unhurt, warned by this terrible volley that they had come too far, whirled about and fled—all except two.

The two who did not flee were a wounded man who had fallen from his saddle and the one whose horse had been killed. Both wore the uniform of officers.

The dismounted man might have darted among the trees and eluded us easily, but he did not run. Instead he raised up his wounded companion, who began to limp away. I saw that the latter was

Belfort, but I judged that he was not badly hurt, the blood on his coat indicating that the bullet had struck him in the shoulder. The moonlight fell on the face of the man who led him, and we saw that it was not a man at all, merely a fair-haired English boy of seventeen or eighteen years. He put his arm under Belfort's shoulder, and the two walked towards one of the horses that stood near with empty saddle.

"Surrender!" shouted Wildfoot.

The boy turned towards us, and his face showed defiance. Then he shook his fist, and walked on with his comrade towards his horse. [Pg 305]

We held the lives of both at our mercy, and the boy probably knew it, but he never flinched. We might fire or we might not; but he did not intend to desert a comrade or surrender. One of our men raised his rifle, but Wildfoot struck it down.

"There is some English mother whom we can spare!" he said.

So we sat there on our horses until the boy helped Belfort into the saddle, and climbed up behind him. Then he looked at us intently for a moment, and raised his hand. I thought he was going to shake his fist in our faces again; but the hand went to his head, and he gave us a military salute. Then, with his wounded comrade, he rode away towards the British army.

"A fine spirit and fine manners," said Wildfoot.

We, too, rode off in the forest, and I was very glad that the ranger had spared the boy. He had given me my life once, but then he knew that I was not an Englishman.

There was no cessation of the work for hours, and we continued our circuit, stirring up alarm after alarm, Wildfoot, sleepless and untiring, at our head. At last when day was bright, and our three bands had reunited, he looked at the rising sun and said, with a deep sigh of regret:—

"I'm afraid we'll have to quit and go back to General Washington's camp."

"Don't you think that we've had rather an active night?" I asked. [Pg 306]

"It's been a fair average night," he replied.

Such was the man.

When the sun was well risen, we were riding into camp.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN—*Pure Gold*

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I was so sleepy and tired that I practically fell from my horse when we reached quarters; but I had slept only three or four hours when a messenger from General Washington himself came to me, bearing instructions for me to go to John Desmond's house in Philadelphia with ten armed men and bring what he would give. I was to show Mr. Desmond a sealed order which the messenger brought.

The armed men were waiting, and I rode at their head to John Desmond's house, wondering what the nature of my errand could be. Yet my ill-humor at being awakened so early had vanished when I found where I was to go. It was Mr. Desmond's residence, not his counting-house, and I found him in the parlor, where I gave him a note. He was not alone. He sat at one side of a wide table and on the other side was a man whom I knew to be a trusted aide of General Washington. Between them lay a heap of shining gold of English and French coinage, and they were counting it. It was a fine yellow heap, one of the most luscious sights that I had beheld in a long time, and my eyes lingered over it.

"It is this that you are to take," said Mr. Desmond, with a smile, and indicating the gold, when he had read my sealed order.

"For what is it?" I could not restrain myself from asking. [Pg 308]

"For the cause," he replied. "It is the contribution of some of Philadelphia's merchants and bankers to the Continental army. They have awaited this opportunity a long time."

I suspected that his own contribution was the largest of all, and such I afterwards found to be the truth.

"It is well to be exact," continued Mr. Desmond, "and so we are counting it in order that Captain Reade here may give us a receipt for the exact amount. It will take us more than a half hour yet to finish the task, and you might walk into the garden while you are waiting."

He indicated the way, and going into the garden I found Mary Desmond there. She wore June roses on her shoulder, their pink and red gleaming against her white dress, and her face was bright. The charm of her eyes did not depart in the daylight.

"So you have come back unharmed," she said. "But you have returned early."

"We have not fought the battle yet," I replied.

"But you look worn," she said. "Have you not seen service?"

"Yes," I replied, "I have spent a night on duty with Wildfoot."

"I might have known," she replied, as she laughed. "That man never sleeps—at least not in the

night. He is always seeking to do something for our cause, which may have friends more powerful, but never better."

"I know it," I replied earnestly.

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We walked on between the flower beds. It was just such another garden as that at the Tory's house, in which we had talked at cross-purposes after our night's ride, but somehow we seemed to understand each other much better here. The atmosphere was different.

I began to tell her of our night with Wildfoot, and first of our visit to the lonely house where Mother Melrose challenged the Hessian. Her eyes filled and grew tender.

"I know her well," she said, "and she is as loyal and true as Wildfoot himself. She has been one of the links in our chain of communication with the American army, as perhaps Wildfoot told you. I have left messages there myself more than once, and sometimes I have urged her to go away to a safer place. But she seems never to be afraid in that lonely house!"

I looked with admiration at this young girl who spoke with such praise of another's bravery, but was unconscious of her own.

"But if Mrs. Melrose should be afraid there," I said, "should not you be afraid to ride alone, at night, in our service through the dangerous forests?"

"I never thought of that," she replied simply. "I had ridden all about Philadelphia before the war, and I knew the country. It seemed easy for me to go, and I was sure that none would ever suspect me, I claimed to be such an ardent Tory, and I seemed to be all that I claimed. Then we needed friends in Philadelphia."

"In truth we found the best," I replied with earnestness.

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She blushed, but did not look wholly displeased.

"You flatter like a courtier, Lieutenant Chester," she said, "and this is too grave a time for flattery."

"But were you never afraid?" I persisted.

"Once I was," she said, "when some horsemen, I know not whether they were soldiers or robbers, pursued me. They followed me five miles; but my horse was too swift, and when they saw the lights of the picket they turned back. I had a pass from Sir William Howe, but I know that my hand trembled when I showed it to the sentinels. I was too ill to leave our house the next day, but I went again a week afterward."

I looked with increasing wonder and admiration at the slender figure that could dare so much. If our women even were so brave, surely our cause could not fail!

"Why did you talk so strangely to me when we met for the first time after that night's ride together?" I asked. "Why did you seem to have forgotten it or to pretend that it had never been?"

"I did not know who and what you were as well then as I do now; Captain Wildfoot did not tell me," she replied. "One, perforce, had to be cautious then, Lieutenant Chester."

"But were you not afraid that I would betray you after that ride we took together?"

"I was sure you would not do so."

"Why?"

She looked me directly in the eyes for a moment, and then turned her face away. But she was not so quick that I did not see the red coming into her cheeks.

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We walked on among the roses in the golden sunshine, and the time was all too short for me.

"Will you not wish me success in the coming battle?" I asked, when they called me to take the gold.

"Yes, and you may wear my colors, if they will last long enough," she said. She took one of the roses from her shoulder, and pinned it on my coat. As she bent her head over the rose, silken strands of her hair blew in my face.

I forgot myself then, but I have no excuse for it now. I bent down suddenly and kissed her. She sprang away from me, uttering a little cry, and her cheeks were flaming red.

"Mary," I said, "I don't ask any forgiveness. I kissed you because I could not help myself. You were not afraid that I would betray you after that ride to the American army, and it was because you knew that I loved you. No, I would not have betrayed you even had I been Lieutenant Melville, the British officer that I seemed to be. But much as I loved you then, I love you more now. Mary, will you marry me?"

An elusive smile came into her eyes, as she made me a pretty bow, and replied: "Lieutenant Melville of Newton-on-the-Hill, Staffordshire, England, I thank you for your offer, but I have resolved never to marry an Englishman."

Then, before I could stay her, she ran into the house. But she had left her rose with me, and I did not despair.

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I carried the gold to General Washington, and our main force pressed forward a little later in pursuit of the British army.

The British, going from Philadelphia to New York, marched on a slightly curving route, while we, almost parallel with them, were advancing in a straight line; that is, they were the bent bow and we were its cord. Therefore we held the advantage, and it was obvious that we would overtake them. Great hopes began to rise among us. The British army was the larger, composed of regular troops, and far better armed than ours; but it had just given up the chief city of the colonies, and was in retreat. It was suffering from depression, while we were elated over the French alliance and the sudden and favorable turn of our fortunes. Many of us believed that a heavy blow, well directed, might now end the war. We heard, too, that it was General Washington's own hope, and it was my fortune to discover, through personal observation, that this was so.

It was several nights after my return with the gold. Our scouts had been engaged in some skirmishing with British outposts, and just as the evening fell, Marcel and I returned with a report of it. The weather was still intensely hot, and the men, terribly tired by forced marches in such a temperature, were lying on the ground with their faces to the sky that they might feel the first coolness of the evening. The cooks were preparing supper, and fires blazed here and there; but we were too languid to show much energy, and the camp was unusually quiet.

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We made our report to the colonel; but he considered it of sufficient importance to be heard by the general-in-chief himself, and he directed me to take it to him.

"You will find him among the trees," he said, pointing to a small wood. Under the boughs of the largest tree, a fire was burning and over it swung a camp-kettle. Several men, sitting on logs in front of the fire, were talking earnestly, and now and then looking at a map. The one who held the map was large and straight-shouldered, and I knew the figure to be that of the general-in-chief. As I approached, I recognized, too, the swarthy face of Charles Lee, the foreigner who came to us with such an air of superior wisdom, and whom we put in high place, but whom the real soldiers already hated. Then I recognized Wayne, with his trim figure and fine frank eyes, Greene, the silent Rhode-Islander who afterward became so great, and others.

The council—if council it was—seemed to have developed some heat. General Washington's blue eyes plainly showed anger, and Lee was whipping his own high cavalry boots with a small switch. I approached with much embarrassment and hesitation. My Philadelphia exploits in company with Marcel were yet fresh in the memory of men, and to appear presumptuous was, of all things, the one that I wished least. I was sorry that Marcel had not been chosen to deliver the report. It was a situation that would have pleased him.

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But General Washington saw me as I came near, and delivered me from further embarrassment by calling to me in very kind tones,—

"A report for me, is it not, Lieutenant Chester?" he asked.

I said yes, and stated it briefly, while the others listened with attention. Then I stood awaiting the general's further orders.

"It is just as I told you," he said emphatically to Charles Lee, and seeming to forget my presence. "Our army will overtake theirs in three days at furthest, and we must strike with all our strength. We may be able to destroy Clinton's army, and then our cause will be won."

"But Clinton has more men than we," replied Charles Lee, in protesting tones, "and his equipment is much superior."

"He retreats, and we pursue," said the general-in-chief.

"That is true," rejoined Lee; "but I think we should be very cautious."

His words and tone did not indicate zeal. How heartily I have since cursed the traitor, and how many others have done the same.

"And why so cautious?" burst in the impetuous Wayne. "One cannot win a battle unless he fights!"

"You might have found caution a good thing, General Wayne," replied Lee, in smooth, soft tones. "Remember how they cut you up at Paoli."

Wayne flushed with anger, but he was too manly to deny his only disaster.

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"It is true," he said, "but the fault was mine. My troops did not get a chance to fight. Here they will have it."

"We shall invite our own rout," said Lee. "The Americans cannot stand the British grenadiers."

It was the feeling of an old race towards a new one that spoke in him, and this man, who proved himself a traitor to two countries, the old and new, was unwise enough to say it.

"You are mistaken," said the commander-in-chief, promptly and emphatically. "That is a delusion which the British may cherish, but not we. This war has furnished too many instances to the contrary. The attack shall be made, General Lee, and you shall lead it. We must end this war as soon as possible, and benefit two nations; for I take it that Englishmen do not love to kill Americans, any more than Americans love to kill Englishmen."

Throughout the talk Greene said nothing, sitting there upon the log, looking calm and decided. I like this quality of stanchness in the New Englanders. They stick fast, whatever else you may say about them, and that I think wins more than anything else.

I received my instructions a moment later and retired. As I walked away, I met Marcel.

"Was it a council of war?" he asked.

"I think so."

"I hope that you gave them the proper instructions."

"I did my best," I replied in the same spirit.

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"They had no right to expect more," rejoined Marcel; "but it's a great pity I was not in your place."

Perhaps he would have given them advice. Marcel had great confidence in his judgment.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE—*Under the Apple-Trees*

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We lay gasping under the apple-trees. The hottest sun that ever I felt or saw, was dissolving our muscles and pinning us to the earth, mere flaccid lumps. The heat quivered in the air, and the grass turned dry blades to the brown soil. I ran my finger along the bare edge of my sword, and the skin was scorched. My throat burned.

"What a day to fight!" said Marcel. "The red coats that the British over yonder wear blaze like fire, and I dare say are as hot. I wish I were a private and not an officer. Then I could strip myself."

He looked longingly at a huge soldier who had taken off coat and shirt, and was lying on the grass, naked to the waist, his rifle ready in his hands.

"Leave old Father Sun alone," I said: "I believe he will settle the business for both armies. At least he seems to be bent upon doing it."

I tried to look up at the sun, but His Majesty met me with so fierce a stare that I was glad to turn my eyes again, blinking, to the earth. When they recovered from the dimness, I looked along the line of panting soldiers, and saw one who had dropped his rifle on the grass and flung his arms out at ease.

"Stir up that man, there," I said; "he must keep his rifle in hand and ready."

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"If you please, sir," said the bare-waisted soldier, "he won't be stirred up."

"Won't be stirred up?" I said, with natural impatience; "why won't he?"

"Because he can't be," said the soldier.

"Can't be?" I said, not understanding such obstinacy. "What do you mean?"

"He can't be stirred up," replied the soldier; "because he's dead, sir."

I examined the man, and found that it was true. We had marched long and hard in the stifling heat before we lay down in the orchard, and the man, overpowered by it, had died so gently that his death was not known to us. We let him lie there, the dead man in the ranks with the quick.

"Doesn't the concussion of cannon and muskets cause rain sometimes?" asked Marcel.

"I have heard so," I replied. "Why?"

"Because, if it does," said Marcel, "I hope the battle will be brought on at once, and that it will be a most ferocious contention. Then it may cause a shower heavy enough to cool us off."

"Whether it brings rain or not," I said, "I think the battle will soon be upon us."

Up went the sun, redder and fiercer than ever. The heavens blazed with his light. The men panted like dogs, and their tongues hung out. The red coats of the British opposite us looked so bright that they dazzled my eyes. The leaves of the apple-trees cracked and twisted up.

"It would be funny," said Marcel, "if the British were to charge upon us and find us all lying here in a placid row, dead, killed by the sun."

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"Yes," said I, "it would be very funny."

"But not impossible," said the persistent Marcel.

We lay near the little town of Freehold in the Jersey fields, where we had overtaken the retreating British, and intended to force a battle, although we were much inferior in numbers and equipment.

I can say with truth that the men were eager for the fight. They had starved long at Valley Forge, and now with full stomachs they had come upon the heels of a flying enemy. Moreover, we had been raised up mightily by the French alliance. We did not know then how much the French were to disappoint us, and how little aid they were to give us until the final glorious campaign.

"Listen!" exclaimed a soldier near me.

"What is it, Alloway?" I asked.

"The battle! It's begun!" he replied.

The sound of a rifle-shot came through the hot air across the fields, and then many more sang together. A half mile away, under the low lines of trees, a cloud of smoke was rising, and the base of it was red with flashes. Presently a cannon boomed its deeper note, and the echo of shouts

came faintly. At last the battle had begun, and our men, panting already in the heat, grew hotter with impatience. It was hard to lie there under the burning sun while the battle swelled, without us. But we had no choice, and we pulled at the dry grass, while we watched the growing combat.

CHAPTER THIRTY—*The Defence of the Gun*

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Marcel and I, with some others, were moved presently to the outskirts with the skirmishers. We lay among some trees by the roadside, and in the road one of our cannon with its complement of men was stationed to drive back a large body of the British troops which threatened us on that wing. We did not have to wait long for the attack. The heavy red squares of the English appeared, pressing down the road. Then the gun, a beautiful bronze twelve-pounder, became active, and the men who fought it were full of zeal.

They fired for a time, working rapidly, skilfully, and without friction, like a perfect machine, only the sergeant in command speaking, his short, sharp orders snapping out like the crackling of a whip. The faces of all were impassive, save for the occasional flash of an eye when a shot beat its fellows. The gun was alive now, pouring a stream of missiles from its bronze throat, the British replying with both cannon and muskets.

Presently the men fell back a little with the gun, until they came to a hillock, and then unlimbered again just beyond the crest, where they were somewhat sheltered. They seemed to think that the new position was good, and they would fight where they were. Ross, the sergeant in command, a tall, thin Jerseyman with an impassive face, gave the order to unlimber the cannon, and the six horses dragged the limber to the proper distance in the rear. At an almost equal distance in the rear of the limber stood the caisson, also with its six horses. The chief of caisson, a short, stout man, was behind the limber ready to supply ammunition when needed, his face calm, his nerves unmoved by the roar and blaze of the combat, which rolled towards him in a flaming curve, tipped with steel.

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There were thirteen men with the gun and caisson, and the eyes of all were on Sergeant Ross, who commanded it, a man worthy of his post and fit for battle. The twelve horses stood in the rear. We were still near them among the trees by the roadside, firing our rifles, and could hear the few words that they said.

"We must stay here," resumed Sergeant Ross to the corporal, his gunner, a tall, thin Jerseyman like himself and as calm and impassive. The corporal looked at the heavy squares pressing forward as if to crush them, listened a moment to the swell of the battle, but said nothing. The men were at work already, serving in silence.

There had been no lull in the combat, and the advancing British line looked like a red wave of fire. A shell burst over the men around the gun, and a fragment struck the lead horse of the limber chest in the neck. The animal uttered a single neigh of pain, and then let his head drop, while the blood poured from his wound. His eye expressed melancholy and resignation precisely like that of a stricken veteran. He fell softly in a few moments, and died.

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The battle was coming very near, and made many threats. The reserve men cut the gear of the dead horse, dragged his body aside, and replaced him with one of the six from the caisson. They did this without comment, and the sergeant and the gunner took no notice.

"To your posts!" called Sergeant Ross.

His men sprang instantly to position. No. 7 took a charge of shot and powder from the limber chest and passed it to No. 5, who handed it to No. 2. No. 2 inserted it in the gun, while No. 1 rammed it home. The gunner took aim at the black mass of the British army, red at the crest with flame. Sergeant Ross gave the command to fire, and No. 4 obeyed. The twelve-pound shot rushed through the air, but though watching and eager to see, the men could not tell what damage it had done. The advancing line was hidden at that moment by the floating smoke and the flash of the firing. Those at the gun bent to their work. No. 1 ran his sponge into the black muzzle, swabbed out the barrel, and No. 2 inserted a fresh charge. These impassive men seemed to show no fear; they loaded and fired as if unconscious of the showers of balls and bullets.

The British army pushed on, and its line of battle converged nearer, but the men at the gun were still without emotion. This machine, whose parts were human beings, worked in a beautiful way, and we admired them. Again the cannon was alive, pouring forth its rapid stream of shot.

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"We must drive 'em back!" said Sergeant Ross.

"We'll blow 'em to hell with this twelve-pounder," said the corporal.

He patted the gun, a polished piece kept in perfect order. They fired again, and the shattered British line crumpled up before the rage of the twelve-pounder, which was pouring its fire into it, faster and faster; the rows had already become thinner at that point, the bulk of the force turning aside against the heavier Continental battalions. The hopes of the men with the gun rose.

"We'll mow 'em down," said No. 1, the sponger and rammer, a boy of twenty.

They showed feeling at last, and their faces brightened up. They were young, in fact, boys rather than men; the oldest of them was under twenty-five, and the youngest was not more than seventeen.

The battle veered a little, and thundered to right and left; but the thinner line in front of the gun was still advancing, and its muskets threatened. A battery, a little distance in its rear, threw shot over its head; but the regular and precise work of the men was not disturbed.

"Depress that gun a bit!" said Ross to the corporal, in his sharp, snapping voice. It was done. The discharge that followed swept down a row of advancing men in red. The gunner smiled, and the captain of the gun nodded approvingly. The cannoneers said nothing, but No. 7 passed another cartridge.

A shell screamed through the air, took off Sergeant Ross's head and passed on. The corporal made no comment, but joined the duties of captain of the gun to his own duties as gunner. The regularity and precision of the work was not disturbed for a moment. The gun had aroused more attention in the British lines, and it became necessary to silence it and destroy the men who served it. It was merely a small incident in the course of a great battle, but the gun had become an obstacle.

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"They know we are here," said the corporal to the new gunner, a faint smile appearing on his brown face.

"Yes, and they are throwing us bouquets," replied the gunner, as a shower of bullets flew over their heads.

There was a crash in their ears, a blaze of light like that struck by steel, and the cannon toppled over. The four men nearest it fell to the ground, three sprang up quickly; but the fourth, who was No. 5, a cannoneer, lay still and dead. A reserve man instantly took his place. The others ran anxiously to the cannon. They paid no attention to the dead man. The wounded gun was of far more importance than many men.

"The wheel's smashed! No harm beyond that!" said the corporal. Then he shouted,—

"Change wheels!"

The rubbish was dragged away, the extra wheel, provided for such cases, was brought as by another turn of the perfect machine from its place on the caisson, and fitted on the axle. No. 4, a cannoneer, was killed by a bullet while they were doing it; but the second reserve man took his place, and the battery went on with its work as well as ever.

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The gun was fired rapidly again, and the men saw that the effect was good; the red line of their enemy had been shattered once more. The corporal glanced a little to the left, and said, in an unchanged voice:

"A cavalry charge is coming; stand steady!"

The red line of infantry was suddenly blotted out, and in its place a line of horsemen rose out of the smoke. They were riding at a gallop, firing from their pistols, their sabres ready for the swinging blow when the charge was driven home, a swelling wave, edged with fire and steel. It was a glittering and magnificent sight.

The boys about the gun looked anxious at the sight of the cavalry, but the corporal was calm.

"Load with grape, triple charges!" he said, and his voice cracked louder and sharper than ever.

The grape, triple charges, was rammed into the twelve-pounder, and the wonderful machine that handled the gun increased its speed. The British cavalry galloped into a stream of fire. The gun was hidden from them by the incessant blaze and smoke of its discharges, and the triple loads of grape whizzed among them, killing horses and horsemen, destroying the precision of their ordered lines, crumpling up those in front, and heaping the dead in the way of those behind. But the unslain horsemen galloped on, and always before them roared the engine of death, the gun, and always about them whistled the showers of grape. Presently they were into the flame and the smoke, and before them rose the gun and its detachment.

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"Stretch prolonge ropes!" shouted the corporal to his men.

The drivers cracked their whips over the horses, and whirled the caisson and the limber chest about, bringing them, horses and all, into line with the piece, and in a moment, heavy ropes were stretched from the cannon to the limber chest, and from the limber chest to the caisson, and the fighting men were crouching in their appointed positions between the wheels, and around the gun, holding in hand their pistols and artillery swords, short, heavy weapons with which they could slash as with axes. The cavalry company was charging upon a breastwork held by an armed force.

"Let 'em have it with the pistols!" cried the corporal to his men.

The pistols began to crack, and more holes appeared in the charging lines of horsemen. When a trooper was hit hard in the breast or shoulder, up went his hands, and he fell back from his horse; if struck in the limbs, he fell forward and rolled off. Some horses that had lost their riders kept place in the charge and galloped on. Two or three others turned to one side, and ran about, neighing with fear and alarm, but would not leave the field. All sprang aside when they came to a wounded or dead man lying on the ground.

The cavalry company was not large, and many saddles were empty before it smashed into the gun and its defenders. Then a terrible tumult arose. There was a confused mêlée of rearing horses, men leaning in the saddle, firing with pistols and slashing with sabres. Other men, brown and wiry, reaching over and bending forward among the wheels, striking upward with short heavy swords, killing horses and riders, and darting about like Indians, evading alike the hoofs of the

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horses and the slashes of the horsemen. There was a sickening whit of steel cutting through flesh, the gasp of last and hard-drawn breaths, and the sound of falls. The horses became entangled among the ropes, and stumbled over the gun and caisson, throwing their riders to the earth. The sinewy forms of their enemies slipped in and out like snakes, escaping the blows aimed from above, but steadily deepening the stains on their own red swords. Shouts, cries, and the stamp of horses' feet came from the whirling ball of fire and smoke, which began presently to throw forth men and horses. The cavalymen who still rode, galloped away, and those who were on foot now, followed. Many of the horses were riderless, and they joined others that ran up and down the field, always keeping the battle in view. Then the ball split asunder entirely, and each half began to shred off in fragments; the dying combat, and the men, the living and the dead, rose out of it. The ground over which they had fought was a soaking red mire, and the wheels of cannon, caisson, and limber were sunk deep in it. But the cavalry had been beaten; entangled in the breastwork of the gun and its equipment and the prolonge ropes, they had been unable to withstand the slashing and the thrusting of the short artillery swords, and those who lived fled to the main line of their army, knowing their defeat and not seeking to hide it. A trumpet sounded the recall, and the riderless horses, ceasing their restless race to and fro on the field, fell into line like the veterans they were, and followed the bugler back to the army which owned them.

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The men about the gun may have enjoyed their victory; but they gave no sign, and the seven who were left, four having fallen, were reloading as if nothing had happened to interrupt the regular firing of their one gun battery. No. 1, the sponger and rammer, had been killed by a pistol-shot. No. 2 had taken his place, his own place being taken in turn by No. 3, and so on, each moving up a step in the promotion of death. There was no reserve men now, and the force at the caisson was reduced. The corporal was bleeding from a sabre-cut on the head; but he took no notice of it, nor did the men comment on the appearance of his face, which was dyed red. Such things had grown common.

"We gave 'em hell that time," said the corporal.

"And we can do it again," said he who had been No. 2, but now was No. 1.

The men, though saying nothing, began to feel their victory. They were making a great fight and they knew it. Their beloved cannon was excelling itself. They patted the barrel and the wheels, and ran their hands along the shining bronze, saying, "Good old boy!" and "Well done!" The prolonge ropes were taken down, the limber chest and caisson were sent back to the rear, and the great one gun battery again went into action.

"Aim at that mass of infantry across the hill there," said the corporal, and the shot was placed in the appointed spot.

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The fires of many British guns was turned upon this cannon which had become most annoying, stinging like a wasp. The defeat of the cavalry furnished mortification too, and the necessity to silence the gun and annihilate its detachment grew more imperative. A sleet of lead and iron beat about it. A hot shot struck the limber chest, and a volcano of fire and smoke, accompanied by a terrific explosion, gushed up. Pieces of iron and steel and oaken wood whizzed through the air, and for a few moments both men and horses were blinded by the dazzling burst of flame.

The limber chest was no longer there; but a deep hole appeared in the earth where it had been, and the space about it was strewn with old iron. It had been blown up by the hot shot, and the corporal, who was taking charges from the chest, and three horses were blown up with it. The other horses, torn loose from their gear and chest, had run away, bleeding. The new driver of the caisson cracked his whip over the heads of his horses, and whirled the limber into the place of the limber destroyed. The chief of caisson proceeded to supply ammunition to the gun, which did not slacken its industry.

The main battle rolled a little further away, and the horses and the gun formed a projection of the American line extending into the British. But the nature of the ground on either side, and the occupation furnished by our army to the bulk of the British troops, protected their flanks. The danger lay directly in front of them.

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The gun was getting hot, and they were forced to let it cool a little.

The corporal watched the enemy, while his gun rested. He never turned his eyes towards his comrades, knowing they would do their duty.

"They advance slowly," he said to the new No. 1.

"They do not like the kisses of old Hammer and Tongs here," replied No. 1, patting the gun.

"Is that sponge burnt out?" asked the corporal.

No. 1 did not reply.

"Why don't you answer?" asked the corporal, a little impatiently.

"He's quit talking," said Acting No. 2.

The corporal did not ask, as he knew there could be only one reason for No. 1's inability. A bullet had passed through the man's heart, and he had died gracefully and without noise. All the men moved up another step, but both the gun and the caisson were shorthanded. They were too few now to have repulsed a second cavalry charge; but, luckily for them, the second charge was not forthcoming. Infantry and guns alone were before them.

"Begin firing!" said the corporal.

The silent Jerseyman who was chief of caisson passed the charges, and in a moment the deep note of the gun blended with the surge and roar of the battle. Shot followed shot. The machine was reduced, but no change was apparent in the quantity or quality of its work.

"The old gun can still talk good English," said the corporal, with intense satisfaction.

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A fragment of grape cut him in half. The chief of caisson was promoted to the command of the gun, and took his new office without friction or delay. Six men with such a willing and experienced cannon could yet hold eloquent converse with their enemy. Still there were disadvantages. The force at the limber was so small that the charges were handled with difficulty, and the firing speed was reduced. The hostile line of battle was pressing alarmingly near, and, moreover, it had begun at last to converge on the flanks of the gun. Although we with our rifles were protecting them as much as we could, one of the reserve men looked behind him and spoke of retreat.

"This gun is tired of retreating," said the new captain. "It stays right here, and we stay with it."

Fierce and defiant, the rapid note of the twelve-pounder boomed out.

A minute later the new wheel that had been supplied to it from the caisson was smashed like its predecessor by a round shot; to fill its place, they took off the hinder part of the caisson, leaving it a cripple, and put it on the gun, which became again as good as new.

The fire of the twelve-pounder was undiminished.

"We still hold 'em back; we've won our day's pay and perhaps a little more," remarked the new captain, rather in a tone of soliloquy than address.

The balance of pay was never collected. A whiff of grape exterminated him and the man who stood nearest him, and the gun had only four assistants in its work. Two of these four men were wounded, and they might have thought of retreat; but a shot struck the caisson, blew it up, and killed the drivers, and all the horses except two. It was no longer possible to carry away the gun, and the three men who were left would not abandon it to the enemy.

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The surviving horses hovered near, turning about in a small circle.

The man who had been No. 5, a cannoneer, was the senior, and took command. He was wounded, but he lost little blood and concealed the hurt.

"Shall we run?" asked one of his comrades.

"One more shot for good count!" he replied.

They aimed with deliberation, though the balls and bullets rained around them. The cannoneer chose the densest red of the advancing mass, and sent the shot straight to the mark. Before the smoke from the discharge sank, three British shells burst, almost simultaneously, among the last defenders, and when the smoke cleared no one was standing there. The gun, blown from its wheels and torn open at the breech, was useless forever.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE—*A Battle and An Answered Question*

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The gun and its defenders were gone, but the heavy British force had been held off our flank long enough to suit our purpose. Our line, during the interval, had extended itself in such a manner that now it could not be surrounded, and we resumed our original place in the centre, where the battle was increasing.

The columns of smoke before us rose and broadened, the flashes of fire that shot through it, increased and twinkled in thousands. The shouting came more distinctly to our ears, and the drifting smoke made the dense tremulous heat more oppressive. I knew that Charles Lee commanded our engaged division, and, having in mind the talk at the council fire, I was uneasy. If only Wayne or Greene were there!

The cloud of fire and smoke suddenly began to move towards us, and the shouting grew louder. The battle was shifting its face, and approaching us. It had but one meaning, and that was the retreat of the Americans. A universal groan arose from our ranks.

"It can't be! It can't be!" shouted Marcel, and he swore.

But it was. Across the fields came our men in full flight, with Charles Lee himself, thrice-accursed traitor, at their head. All the world knows how he ordered his own men to flee, when they were winning the victory, and it need be told to no one what such a movement would mean to an army in the height of a battle. I could have wept for despair at this lost opportunity, at this useless flight which might mean our own destruction. On streamed the fugitives, and suddenly a great man on a great horse galloped forward to meet them. Everybody in our company knew that the rider was Washington, and we uttered a mighty shout. Then we were silent, while Washington rode directly in front of Charles Lee, and stopped his horse across his path.

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We could not hear the words that were said, the words that must have burned into the man's soul; but we saw the red, wrathful face of Washington, and the white, scared face of Lee. Never was Washington so fiercely angry, and never with better cause. Branding the traitor with hot words, he sent him away under arrest, and then, among the stinging bullets, he reformed the men, who cheered their great commander, turned their faces to the enemy, and began anew the

battle that had been all but lost.

"Leftenant," said the bare-waisted man, who had been so thirsty, and who had accompanied us with the skirmishers, "ain't it about time to let us have another drink? The inside of my throat's so dry it's scalin' off."

We had filled our canteens with water before this last march; but I had allowed my men to drink but sparingly, knowing how much they would need it later. Now I pitied them as well as myself, and I gave the word to turn up the canteens; but I ordered that the drink should be a very short one.

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Up went the canteens as if they had been so many muskets raised to command. There was a deep grateful gurgle and cluck along the whole line as the water poured into the half-charred throats of the men. But Marcel and I had to draw our swords and threaten violence before they would take the canteens away from their lips.

"Leftenant," said the bare-waisted man, reproachfully, "I was right in heaven then, and you pulled me out by the legs."

"Then you may be sent back to heaven or the other place soon enough," I said, "for here come the British. Ready, men!"

"Confound the British!" growled the big man. "I don't mind them, but I hate to be baked afore my time."

The British opposite the orchard, who, like ourselves, had been waiting, were forming in line for an attack. The trumpets were blowing gayly, and the throbbing of the drums betokened the coming conflict. Presently across the fields they came, a long line of flashing bayonets and red coats, with the cavalry on either wing galloping down upon us. General Wayne himself passed along our line, and, like Putnam at Bunker Hill, told our men to be steady and hold their fire until the enemy were so close that they could not miss.

The British fired a volley at us as they rushed across the fields, and then, with many an old score to settle, we rose and poured into them, at short range, a fire that swept away their front ranks and staggered the column. But they recovered, and charged us with the bayonets, and we met them with clubbed rifles, for few of us had bayonets.

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In a moment we were in a fierce turmoil of cracking guns, flashing swords, and streaming blood and sweat. The grass was trampled into the earth; the dust arose and clogged our throats and blinded our eyes. Over us the sun, as if rejoicing in the strife and seeking to add to it, poured his fiercest rays upon us, and men fell dead without a wound upon them. A British sergeant rushed at me with drawn sword when I was engaged with another man, and I thought the road to another world was opening before me; but when the Englishman raised his sword to strike, the weapon dropped from his limp fingers to the ground, and he fell over, slain by the sun.

Had the cavalry been lucky enough to get in among us with their sabres, they might have broken our lines and thrust us out of the orchard; but we had emptied many a saddle before they could come up, and the horses that galloped about without riders did as much harm to the enemy as to us. The British showed most obstinate courage, and their leader, a fine man, Colonel Monckton, I afterwards learned his name to be, encouraged them with shouts and the waving of his sword, until a bullet killed him, and he fell between the struggling lines.

"Come on!" I shouted, under the impulse of the moment, to the men near me. "We will take off his body!"

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Then we rushed upon the British column. Some of our men seized the body of their fallen leader, and they made a fierce effort to regain it. But the British did not have raw militia to deal with this time, and, however stern they were in the charge, equally stern were we in resisting it. The colonel's body became the prize for which both of us fought; and we retained our hold upon it.

The clamor increased, and the reek of blood and sweat thickened. The pitiless sun beat upon us, and rejoiced as we slew each other. But, however they strove against us, we held fast to the colonel's body; nay, more, we gained ground. Twice the British charged us with all their strength, and each time we hurled them back. Then they gave up the struggle, as well they might, and with honor too, and fell back, leaving us our apple orchard and their colonel's body. We had no intent but to give suitable burial to the fallen chief, and a guard was formed to escort his remains to the rear.

As the broken red line gave ground, some of their men turned and fired a few farewell shots at us. I felt a smart blow on my skull, as if some one had suddenly tapped me there with a hammer. As I threw up my hands with involuntary motion to see what ailed me, black clouds passed of a sudden before my eyes, and the earth began to reel beneath me. Marcel, who was standing near, turned towards me with a look of alarm upon his face. Then the earth slid away from me, and I fell. Ere I touched the ground my senses were gone.

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When I opened my eyes again, I thought that only a few minutes had passed since I fell; for above me waved the boughs of one of the very apple-trees beneath which we had fought. Moreover, there were soldiers about, and the signs of fierce contention with arms were still visible. But when I put one of my hands to my head, which felt heavy and dull, I found that it was swathed in many bandages.

"Lie still," said a friendly voice, and the next moment the face of Marcel was bending over me. "You should thank your stars that your skull is so thick and hard, for that British bullet glanced off it and inflicted but a scalp-wound. As it is, you have nothing but good luck. The commander-in-

chief himself has been to see you, and has called you a most gallant youth. Also, you have the best nurse in America, who, moreover, takes a special interest in your case."

"But the army! The battle!" I said.

"Disturb not your mighty mind about them," said Marcel. "We failed to destroy the enemy, having to leave that for a later day; but we won the battle, and the British army is retreating towards New York. I imitate it, and now retreat before your nurse."

He went away, and then Mary Desmond stood beside me. But her face was no longer haughty and cold.

"You here!" I cried. "How did this happen?"

"When the American army followed the retreating British, we knew there would be a battle," she said. "So I came with other women to nurse the wounded, and one of them I have watched over a whole night."

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She smiled most divinely.

"Then, Mary," I cried, with an energy that no wound could lessen, "will you not marry an American?"

Her answer?

It was not in words, but I saw in her eyes the light that shines for only one, and I asked no more.

THE END

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