

A Novel By
Joseph A. Altsheler



A Knight of
Philadelphia

Precursor to
"In Hostile Red"

Richard M. Woodward, Publisher

A Knight of Philadelphia

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Publication History

This book was first published in 1897.

It was revised later through the addition of nineteen chapters and republished in 1900 as “In Hostile Red.” This shorter version has been published for the serious student of Mr. Altsheler’s writing style.



1 In Hostile Red

“Captain the Honorable Charles Montague, eldest son and heir of Lord George Montague, of Bridgewater Hall, Yorkshire, England,” said Marcel, reading the letters, “and Lieutenant Arthur Melville, son of 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. But I wished to hide it nevertheless, as I felt 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 very apparent that beneath this cloak they were sore troubled in mind, as 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, and then 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, descanting 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 is true,—and it is not for me to criticise the veracity of the writers,—one of our prisoners must be an Alexander at least, and the other a Hannibal.”

Marcel had a sprightly humor, and one could never tell how it was going to show itself. But he was not given to malice, so 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 pets of fortune. They are rich, of high station, and they come to join a powerful army which has all the resources of war. 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 even make the best of it we can.”

“Perhaps,” said 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 the unlucky capture of us that you have effected will prevent us from making any very soon.”

“It was a mere chance, 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 latter I take to be a very unpleasant fate.”

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 took 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 to me. Behold those officers! Their brave clothes and well-rounded figures, which indicate a fine and abundant diet, arouse much envy in me, and because of it I have taken a resolution. Now look at me.”

He rose and bowed low to me.

“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 its ancient and honorable distinction. Perhaps my own may fairly make some pretensions of a similar character. Lieutenant Melville, permit me to introduce myself. I am Captain the Honorable Charles Montague, eldest son of 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 will only preserve a little coolness and tact. I am tired of skulking about like a half-starved hound, and I want an adventure. Moreover, think what valuable information we can acquire in Philadelphia, and what a great service we might render to our commander-in-chief. But if you are afraid to go with me I will go alone.”

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 moreover I never would take a dare from Marcel.

“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

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.

“Sergeant Pritchard,” I said, “look well to the prisoners, and see that they do not escape before 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.”

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

One can become intoxicated without drinking, and the air was so brilliant and so buoyant that day 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 long and weary months. We galloped along 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.”

“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 are a most imposing and warlike figure. May these perverse rebels soon give us both a chance to prove our valor and our 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 park, while my lands will roll back for miles.”

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

Then we threw our heads back and laughed like two boys on a frolic, which I suspect was not far from being the exact state of the case.

“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 and four privates in the rebel service, and two young British officers who had just been captured by the aforesaid rebels. Such are the chances of war; but 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.

We had but slight idea of our future course. It was our intent to take matters as they came.

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

"That is easy," 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."

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 exceeding 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 most amazingly hungry, and I have heard that the rations of the British officers are a noble 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 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 chicken 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 larger 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 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.

It was lucky for us that the foragers were well loaded up with spoil and their movements and their aim thus impeded. Otherwise I think we would 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?"

"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.”

But 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 a half-hour passed, and they showed no signs of stopping.

“We have our pistols,” said Marcel. “We might use them.”

“We cannot fire on our own countrymen,” I said.

“No,” he replied, “but we can fire over their heads, and it may reduce the infernal eagerness they show in this 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 were not 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 strong 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 they were outnumbered, turned about and took to their heels with great precipitation. The next moment we galloped into the middle of the British troop, and, a curious faintness overcoming me, I slid from my horse to the ground.

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 ever tasted. It put the life back into me, and I was able to stand upon my feet without assistance.

A half-dozen of the British had stopped with

the officer who gave me the whiskey, but the others had continued the pursuit. This officer, 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.”

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

“Why, it was nothing much, only a trifle,” said 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 save you,” 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 see the nature of his wound.”

The wound 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 adventure. 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 like their impudence to pursue you here. But it was very bold of you, gentlemen, to undertake a journey from New York to Philadelphia across a rebel-infested country.”

“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 tact. 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 friends aforesaid 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.



2 Two Feeling the Way

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, some rumor of our adventures had preceded us, and, since it is not the habit of rumor to diminish the importance of things, it had made notable heroes of Marcel and me. Some part of the rumor 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.”

“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 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, 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 very strongly with the simplicity of our own commander-in-chief's tent, and I, who had not slept under a roof in a year, felt oppressed, as if the air was 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."

But 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. Sir William 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, for 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, for 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”

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

“Why do you look sad, 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 said.

“Speak out! Tell me what it is. Would you rather not come? If so, have no hesitation in saying it,” replied 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,” said 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 a banquet now, also. 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 banquet, but that was too much for our endurance.”

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 narrations 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 is too heavy a weight for a regimental cook to bear.”

It was evident that the cook had faced such emergencies before, for he was most 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 fresh vegetables, and a

flagon of wine before us.

“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 that either Marcel or I had said 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 head-quarters 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?” said 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 head-quarters, for 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.”

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

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

“But,” 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 don’t give us a chance to 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 Melville’s arrival, are even now fleeing into the wilderness across the Allegheny 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 trailed out behind him like a streamer, and finally, a puff of wind catching it, 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.”

“But 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 outcasts, and therefore should admit their inborn and permanent inferiority.”

“And so they are such,” 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 told 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 said, 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 armies 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 become the present.”

“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 Sir William.”

“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 moneylender 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.”

Now, I had heard not of the daughter before, but the name of the father was not strange to me. Secret assistance of money had come into 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. 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 is not 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."

"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 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, for we were in truth quite tired. 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, stepped forward.

"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 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 they are 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,” said Waters, humbly. “I heard that they had pursued you and your friend there almost into the city itself.”

“Well, at any rate,” replied 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.

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,” I replied.

“They are the worst of all,” said Marcel.

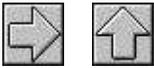
But presently we took a more cheerful view of the matter. We reasoned that, situated as we were, the slightest sort of incident was like to breed suspicion in our minds.

“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.”

“Nor upon mine,” I said.

“That being the case,” said Marcel, “we’d better go to sleep.” Which we did.



3 Sir William's Revel

I had heard that Sir William Howe was of a sybaritic temperament. What we had seen on the occasion of our first interview with him indicated the truth of this report, and what 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 by the sight.

“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 sumptuously 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 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 of 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 trick us in precisely the same way again.

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 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. But I wished to keep my head cool, and refused 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,—for 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 as these, 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 handsomest 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 which I so much admire. The slight look of annoyance that had appeared at first in her eyes passed away. I suppose it was my look of admiration that had 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 that she is not pleased by evident admiration. A half-dozen brilliantly uniformed officers were around her, and one of them—Catron it was—stepped forward.

“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.

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 all 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, for 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?”

“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 his 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 had arrived. The largest room in the house had been set apart for the feasting, and upon the great table which ran almost its full length was 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?

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. I guessed at once that he was John Desmond, and soon found that I was right. 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, for 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, for 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.

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 a guest, and replied but curtly to the questions that were 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 blunt and bold 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, which I deemed to be a most ungallant thing, for 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? For 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.

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,” said 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.”

“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 stand-point 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 that 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. What is more, they got away without a scratch.”

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 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 may 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 serious light that I did, and that reconciled me to it somewhat. But as I swallowed the wine I changed the toast, and I said to myself,—

“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 heart-felt expressions

for our king and country, but they have all come from Britons. Our king 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.”

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 drunken seized him and threw him not lightly back into his seat. Sir William turned furiously upon the old man and exclaimed,—

“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 always.

“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, “reflect 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. “Remember 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.”

It was even as Blake said. Sir William hesitated. Moreover, I am not loath to say 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, for 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. As 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.

“Lieutenant Melville,” said Miss Desmond, “you are but 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 this evening.”

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

“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.”



4 On A New Service

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 this man, although there was nothing particular upon which I could rest such suspicions, 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 drink in the morning is a necessity after a revel the night before. Moreover, in a talkative way he volunteered us much information about 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 might be afoot.

“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 cooperate 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 we were, 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 still 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.

“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,” said 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 could see some farmers going about their business.

They noticed us but little, for 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 formed the desired junction.

“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 hillside 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.”

About thirty large Conestoga wagons, each drawn by four stout bullocks, were moving along slowly and in single file. We could hear the creaking of the wheels of the wagons and the cracking of the 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 half-dozen 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 concentration of 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.

“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.”

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 very 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.

“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 we heard a murmur 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.”

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 aide. “We will

show these fellows what we think of them.”

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 that 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 was 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 understand easily 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 efforts would be in vain. The long easy stride of the horses that Wildfoot and his men rode showed that they had strength in reserve.

“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, horse and man 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 burst 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, as in truth we were.

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, and the others too, I suspect. From this stupor I was aroused by the plunging of my horse, which had been wounded in the neck. I seized the reins, which had fallen from my hands in the first shock, and endeavored to draw back the frightened animal, that he might not trample upon the fallen. Even as I pulled upon the reins I had a swift comprehension of the whole matter, the ambush, the cool way in which the British had been led into it, and the completeness of it all. Then I thought how Marcel and I would deserve our fate if we were killed there by our friends. What better could we expect for venturing upon such a mad prank?

As these things were pursuing one another through my head, Marcel's face appeared in the smoke, and he shouted to me,—

“Shelter yourself behind your horse as much as you can. It is time for them to give us another volley. I wonder if Belfort is lashing the rebels

into submission just now.”

I took his advice just in time, for the withering flame flashed from the wood a second time, and our command cried out like the wounded sheep when it receives the knife again. The ambush may be very useful in war, but I like it not, whether I am ambusher or ambushed, least of all the latter.

But the British—I will give them credit for bravery and all soldierlike qualities—began to recover from their stupor. 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 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 gets into a trap must even try to get out of it. 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.

“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 crumbling 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 anvil under the hammer.

Belfort levelled his pistol point-blank at the partisan, and would have slain him then and there, but at that moment, why I shall 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 on his horse.

“Damnation!” he cried. “What are you doing?”

“How can I prevent such things in the heat of a

fierce battle?" I replied, simulating furious anger.

He was borne away in the press of the contest, and 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, for I had grown attached to him, enemy though he was.

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 the life might still be in his body, to be trampled to pieces in the next charge of the wild horsemen. Impelled by a sudden thought, I sprang from my horse, 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 could easily have done, but, to my unutterable surprise and equal 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 that was the creation of the emergency and the excitement, ran back towards the British lines, dragging poor Blake after me. I expected every moment 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 end, I reached the trees, and strong hands seized both Blake and me and dragged us into the cover.



5 The Work of Wildfoot

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 truth, 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.

"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 ever 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 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 and listened to the groans of the wounded who lay in the grass. 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 they gave no evidence that they were anywhere near us. Then a small scouting party was sent out, and presently returned with word that they were in truth gone, that all the woods were empty.

“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 the wagons 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 on the nearest wagon. 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.
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 that we saw, 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 burnt.

Barton swore with a force and fluency that I have seldom heard surpassed. 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 truth, 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, which in fact was but little distant. 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 the city some people on horseback turned and galloped towards us. As they came nearer I saw that two 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.

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 and the observance of strict discipline was not necessary to our little troop. I

judged that the officer and the ladies had been taking a ride for the sake of the air and the exercise, and such was 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 is 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."

"Then you have not captured this Mr. 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, coldly. "Do not forget, Lieutenant Belfort, that, however misguided my countrymen may be, they are able to withstand 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.

“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 but becoming redness came into her face. But in a moment she recovered her self-possession.

“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 add also 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 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,

when we were back in 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.”

“Such lessons are very dangerous to us just now,” said I.

“This one would be worth all the risk,” said he.

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



6 Great News

As neither Marcel nor I was assigned to any duty the next morning, 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 around it. 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 they 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.”

“And we have neither,” said I.

“Which merely means,” said Marcel, “not that we will 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 and 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, these men would lower their tone or cease to talk. This had not happened on any day before, and was not what we would expect 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.

“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 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 the British were beaten yesterday by Wildfoot and his men. They do say the British were trapped most finely.”

Then all of them laughed in sneering fashion.

“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, unlike most other jesters, he could endure a jest put upon himself. So we left the eating-house, and as we went out we saw the man Waters coming towards us. 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.

“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.

“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.”

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.”

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 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,” 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 high-born Britons and conquerors in the presence of sympathetic beauty. But I observed with some chagrin that neither our manners nor our appearance seemed to make much impression upon her.

“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.”

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.”

“I do not know what you mean,” I said, with frigidity.

“It does not matter,” he replied. “I know.”



7 The Silent Sentinel

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 much 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. We found an unusually large detachment gathered under the command of a general officer. Belfort, Barton, 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 of much importance.

“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. Therefore I was uneasy.

The detachment had gathered in the suburbs, and we were subjected to a long period of waiting there. I learned also that no one was allowed to

pass from the city during the day, and from the 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, three thousand strong, a thousand horse and two 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.”

“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—forest, fields, and houses—into that peculiar shimmering gray color which makes us feel as if we are dwelling in a ghost world that may dissolve in 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 night advanced, 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. Still there was no sound but the regular tread of man and beast and the occasional clank

of arms. My sense of foreboding increased. How heartily I wished that I had never come into 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, and blended into a long, continuous, swaying mass by the gray moonlight. Sometimes a moonbeam brighter than the rest 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 that we had entered at first and another valley beyond it. The latter we were now facing. I had not been a soldier two years and more for nothing, and I guessed readily we were to keep this pass clear, while the main force was to perform the larger 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.

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 will 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.

“It seems,” I said, “that we are to sit here in the woods all the night and be too hoarse with cold in the morning 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,—

“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 the 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 swift 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 into 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 fled 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.

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.

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 had 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.

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 lie 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 upon them. 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. Englishman and American 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.

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; but, with the fear of his bullet hot upon me, I sprang for the nearest tree and threw myself behind it.

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 that I took 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 upon 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

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.

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 shoot 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 the feelings.

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 grew 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.

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.

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, perhaps, was the most dangerous of all. I lay quite still for a moment or two, drawing easy breaths. Then I drew in one 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 bauds, 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.



8 A Ride for the Cause

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 been struck 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 harried 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 these 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.

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 scantier. There was sufficient light for me to see that I would soon be on cleared ground, where I could make fine speed and perchance would quickly find the object of my search.

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 of our 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.

It was shortly after this that my horse neighed and halted, and, had not my hand been firm on the reins, would have turned and looked behind him. I urged him forward again, but in a few moments he repeated the same auspicious

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 take 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.

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 I” 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.”

“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.

The hoof-beats rang on the flinty road, and our horses stretched out their necks as our pace increased 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 horse's 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.

"Have you heard the sound of arms?" she asked. "Surely if any attack had been made we could hear it, even so 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 before the drops could fall back into their native element we were gone, and our horses' hoofs again were 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 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!”

“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 they went down, the cries of despair, the shriek from the man and the 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, with 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 all 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. I took an anxious look behind me, and saw that our pursuers numbered a dozen or so. They were riding hard, belaboring their mounts, hands and feet, and I rejoiced at the sight, for I knew the great rush at the start would tell quickly upon them.

“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,—

“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.

Now I noted that the road was beginning to ascend slightly. 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 to me that the attack upon the Americans had not been made.

The road curved a little now and became much steeper. Our pursuers set up a cry of triumph, and they were near enough 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. If we could but reach it, I felt sure that the British would pursue us no farther.

But when I thought 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 done his full 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 too knew where the goal lay. His rider seemed smitten with an equal weakness, but she summoned 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.

“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 until she might escape and take 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 still 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 panic 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 seized her.



9 The Night Combat

But Miss Desmond was the victim only of a passing weakness. 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 tonight 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!”

“Never mind about water,” said the captain, dryly. “Here is something that is much better for woman, as well as 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 tonight,” he continued.

“Yes,” said 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 said, with much astonishment at the patness with which he called 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 add that it has been of equal kindness to Lieutenant Melville, of the British army.”

“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 passing 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 have even chased you and your

friend Lieutenant Marcel into Philadelphia. For that I must crave your forgiveness. Your uniforms deceived me then; but we have become better acquainted with each other since.”

“How? I do not understand,” I said, still in a maze.

“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.”

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.”

“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 so, for she stood up, straight, tall, and self-reliant

“We were just in time,” she said.

“But in good time,” I added.

“I suppose we will see a battle,” she said. “I confess it has a strange attraction for me. Perhaps it is because I am not near enough to see its repellent phases.”

She made no comment upon my British uniform and my apparent British character. She did not seem to see 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 well was the small arms at work. Then there was a lull for a moment, followed by a louder and longer crackle, and a line of fire, flaming up and then sinking in part, ran along the edge of the woods and through 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.

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 outlines; and I guessed 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.

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. It was not likely that the Americans would follow far, for such an undertaking would expose them to destruction.

I suggested to Miss Desmond that it would now be the part of wisdom for us to begin our return to Philadelphia. 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 the courage to pay the debt. But I have come back mainly to say that some of my scouts

have brought in Lieutenant Belfort, sore 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.

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, 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.

“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 the speech of the drawing-room.”

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 is a very good argument, but 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 have quite beaten 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 they continue to slander us throughout the world, for which I am sorry, for I would like to see our people and those of the old country friends again, though I fear it will never be so long as they choose to assume towards us airs of patronage and toleration.

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 farm-house 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.”

“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 rode among the trees around the house and disappeared. Then, although I might have fled to the American camp, I rode to Philadelphia, a much wiser man than I was earlier in the night.

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 miscarriage 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.



10 Keeping Up Appearances

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, as 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 they had. Among the rumors was one, and most persistent it was too, that a consequence of the French alliance would be a 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, 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. Yet we beat these British boasters many times, man for man; and afterwards, when I went south with Greene and Morgan, I saw nine hundred Americans, more than half of whom had just come from their farms and had never seen a battle before, destroy a British force of eleven hundred veterans led by their best cavalryman, Tarleton, and armed with cannon, too, while we had none. Where were the

British boasters then? Either dead or prisoners in our hands.

Perhaps I ought not to speak of these things, lest I be taken for a boaster too. But the British were most arrogant and overweening in those days, nor do they seem to have abated much of their manner now, for which reason we always took much satisfaction in beating them, admitting at the same time that they were brave men, and 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.

But I 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 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.

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 glibly 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 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.

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 for 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 array 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.

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.”

“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.

“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, deeming it wise 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.

“We will not underrate the French,” I said, “for that would depreciate such triumphs as we have achieved in conflict with them.”

“You make very little of the 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 a way 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 tonight.”

“If so,” I replied, “I may again plead your noble example. I do not understand you at all tonight, 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 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?”

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, yes, love 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.

“Well?” she said. But her eyes wavered, for the first time, and the red flush swept over her face.

“I said that I love you, Mary,” I continued. “I repeat it. Will you marry me?”

“I will never marry an Englishman,” she said. Then she rose abruptly and went into the house, leaving me to wonder what she meant.



11 A Full Confession

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

or acts which would smack of treason. 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.

“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.”

“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 drunk with them, and they have treated us as companions. If I were to steal away, I would think that I had played the

part of a mere spy.”

“What then?” said 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 will 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.

“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.

“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. It seems that you are quite capable of hanging yourselves in due time. I will spare the gallows. But I do 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.

“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 other prisoners who are in the hands of the rebels. You will be included in the exchange, and you will leave Philadelphia to-morrow. 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, 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.



12 Under the Apple-Trees

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 had 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.”

“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. You can hear it now across those fields.”

The rattle of musketry was quite fierce, but I had become too much of a veteran to pay much attention to it. I reserved all my energies for our own time of conflict

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.”

“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. The British under Sir Henry Clinton had fled from Philadelphia for New York, and we had given chase, although we were far inferior in numbers and equipment. Nevertheless it was pleasant to us to pursue, and we fancied that the British liked flight but little. At last we had overtaken them, and the battle was a certainty.

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.

“Leftenant,” said the bare-waisted man, “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.

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 were forming in line for an attack upon us. 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.

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. 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!”

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 when 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.

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 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.”

She smiled most divinely.

“Then, Mary,” I cried, with an energy that no wound could lessen, “will you not marry an

American?”

Her answer?

Everybody knows that my daughter is the greatest heiress in Philadelphia.

