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MISTRESS MADCAP

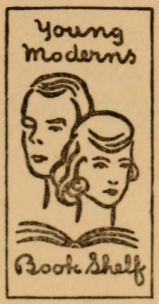
"There be no use talking o' holidays this year," said Mehitable bitterly.

YOUNG MODERNS BOOKSHELF

MISTRESS MADCAP

BY

EDITH BISHOP SHERMAN



THE SUN DIAL PRESS, INC.
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TO

MY OWN LITTLE MAIDS

ELISABETH AND BARBARA

CONTENTS

MISTRESS MADCAP

CHAPTER I

TWO LITTLE COLONIAL MAIDS AT HOME

"THERE be no use talking o' holidays this year!" said Mehitable rather bitterly, the swift—a wooden apparatus for winding yarn, fastened to the edge of the table with a thumbscrew—turning rapidly as she spoke. For this was the time of the Revolution and the American soldiers must be clad.

"I suppose not," agreed Charity, looking up from her seam with a sigh as she reached over to change the cloth in the beak of her sewing bird.

It was dusk in the big kitchen, with only the firelight leaping and flaring in its great cavern of a fireplace, where Charity, who was thirteen years old, could stand erect and where the immense back-log had been dragged into its place by one of the farm horses on a certain autumn day. Now the shadows of the two girls, sitting upon their three-legged stools at each end of the old mahogany table, danced on the mud-plastered walls behind them.

"But I really do not see why we cannot think o' them," continued Charity after awhile. "One might get much pleasure that way, Hitty."

Mehitable shook her head. "It leads on to nothing," she said sagely. "And you know our mother said we were not to plan at all, with war upon us and provender growing so scarce. 'Tis now a problem to feed us, she said."

"This dreadful war!" exclaimed Charity. She dropped her sewing. "When, think you, 'twill end, Hitty?" she asked, clasping her hands.

"Indeed, I know not, Charity. No one does!" Again Mehitable shook her head gloomily. "Already it has been a weary twenty months since the British fired upon our men at Lexington."

"And almost seventeen months since we saw John!" murmured Charity. Both girls sighed at this, for their big, handsome brother's enlistment as a surgeon under General Washington had made a sorry change in their lives. No more were sly gifts of lollipops or bits of bright ribbon forthcoming from New York, where John Condit had been studying medicine up to the time of the war, with a certain famous surgeon, Doctor Carter.

"I think I be the one to miss John most," observed Mehitable, after a long silence. She glanced up at a silhouette hanging over the chimney shelf, and two bright tears shone for an instant in her black eyes.

"Nay, sister, I do!" protested Charity quickly.

"Do what?" asked a fresh voice, as the heavy outer door behind the girls was pushed open and a comely woman of forty-five entered. "Come, Hitty, help me close the door! It has commenced to pour, and ye gale be terrible!"

It needed all the strength of mother and daughter to battle against the force of that wind. With a last howl, a last flurry of wind-swept sand across the kitchen floor, a final sputtering of the fire from the unexpected draught, the great door was swung to and the heavy, hand-wrought bolt shot.

"There!" gasped Mistress Condit, standing still to recover her breath. "Such a tramp as I've had from Mistress Briggs's! The storm seemed to drive me, sheltered though I was by ye mountain! What it must be in the open places on this night!"

She paused in the act of removing her long cardinal and stood staring into space, with the look the girls had begun to dread in her eyes. They glanced at each other uneasily; then Mehitable took the dripping garment from her and led her gently to the settle beside the fire.

"There, Mother, I know ye be thinking o' John!" she exclaimed briskly. "But I'll warrant, and you could see him, he would be sitting beside just such a fire as this!"

"Mayhap!" assented her mother, gratefully relaxing upon the warm seat for the moment. "But always I have that fear he is out and in danger! Hark, see who it is, Charity, pounding so impatiently upon yon door!"

Charity ran to the door and applied her eye to its peep-hole. "'Tis Father!" she cried. And amidst the ensuing bustle of admitting the big, jolly-looking man of the house, the storm without was soon forgotten.

The kitchen began to fill with appetizing odors from

the iron skillets and kettles that hung by their bails from the long crane swung over the fire; Mehitable, dragging the table nearer the warmth of it, began supper preparations by spreading the red tablecloth, while Charity ran back and forth upon countless errands. Once, fetching her father's bootjack from upstairs, she came back almost weeping from the cold, her small nose like a red berry. Dropping the bootjack, she rubbed her aching hands.

"Cold, Cherry lass?" mumbled the Squire sympathetically, purple-faced as he struggled with his boot.

"Oh, Father, I do dread the thought o' bed! 'Tis bitter cold upstairs. Do you suppose there ever will be a time when people have a fireplace in every room?"

Mehitable laughed loudly.

"But will there?" persisted Charity, glancing at her sister. "There be nothing funny in that, Hitty," she added with dignity.

"A fireplace in every room, indeed! Ho! Ho!" And Mehitable redoubled her laughter. "Why, think o' the chimneys needed!"

"But in city houses there be a fireplace very often in every room," remarked Squire Condit, leaning back with a grunt of relief and sticking his stockinged feet toward the blaze.

Both girls turned to him eagerly, and Charity ran to clasp his arm, her cheeks crimsoning.

"Truly, Father?" She paused for an awed moment. "Warm in *every* room!" she exclaimed; then, "Think o't, Hitty!"

"'Twould be heavenly!" sighed Mehitable. "And now it seems to me 'twas so at Cousin Eliza's great house at Trenton! Oh, Father, let us move to the city!"

"But what would become of the farm and the stock?" protested the Squire laughingly.

"Amos and Judd could care for them. Why not, Father?" urged Mehitable. Already, in imagination, she could see herself sweeping down narrow, winding city stairs into a warm firelit room, bright from the light of many sconces, the sheen of her satin ball gown reflecting their light. . . . She started.

"What, art dreaming again, Hitty?" smiled her father, pinching her round cheek.

"Supper!" announced Mistress Condit. And they, with the two farm men who had previously silently entered, drew up to partake of the hot soup and the Indian pudding, with healthy appetites.

"We will wait for the morrow to wash the dishes," said Mistress Condit when they had finished and Amos and Judd had vanished, "if you will promise to do them without grumbling, girls."

"Indeed, Mother," they both began and their mother nodded.

"And do let us roast apples and chestnuts, Mother," begged Charity, "while Father tells us about when he was a little lad in England."

"And warm some cider, too," continued Mehitable.

"All this for one evening!" protested Mistress Condit. "Nay, then, what about to-morrow night?"

"'Twill keep, to-morrow night will!" answered

Mehitable recklessly, running to the door of the lean-to where the vegetables had been stored, while Charity, a-tiptoe, took down the candle from the high chimney shelf and lighted it from the blazing logs. "May we, Mother?"

Mistress Condit laughed helplessly. "What can I do, young mischiefs!" She surrendered, and the two girls disappeared.

As soon as they were gone, Mistress Condit walked quickly over to where her husband was puffing his pipe in placid comfort.

"Samuel, I be worried!" she began in a hasty whisper.

"What now, Mary?" He looked up at her in surprise, for all the trying last months had failed to mar her serene brow.

"Well, you know Squire Briggs be most partial to the King and, like many o' our neighbors, is in constant communication with the Caldwelltown Tories. Tonight, while I was there, he came in most bitter, for it seems that a sally of Americans, being in desperate straits, helped themselves in passing to several fine porkers he had intended selling to Sir Henry Clinton's commissary chief. In his rage, he unintentionally let out the information that those farms set apart by Hessian spies and Tory sympathizers as being partial to General Washington are marked with the letter R for rebel and are to be raided by the Hessian foragers sent over to New Jersey by Sir Henry for that purpose. And, Samuel"—Mistress Condit's voice faltered—"though it stormed so as I came through our gate, I saw most plainly the letter R upon the gatepost!"

"But, and that be so, Mary, we will erase it!" ejaculated the Squire.

"'Twill do no good, I fear!" His wife shook her head. "We are doubtless marked in other ways, besides. But, hush! Not a word to the girls! They must not be worried, for life is dark enow for them, poor chicks!"

To glance at them, however, as they came giggling back into the kitchen, no one would ever think that life was gloomy for them. Mehitable's dark curls had slipped from beneath her cap as she stumbled merrily forward, her arms around a great wooden bowlful of apples and chestnuts. Charity followed more sedately with the cider jug and the candle; but her usually sober little face was gay.

"And now, Father, the story!" commanded Mehitable, when at last they were all seated before the fire, Charity upon her father's knee, her sister cross-legged at his feet to watch the chestnuts and the cider brewing beside some embers, while the mother, whose hands were never idle, knitted upon the opposite settle.

Squire Condit took several puffs at his pipe before he removed it from his mouth and held it so that its glowing contents would not spill.

"It was when I was a wee lad," he commenced obediently. And the girls exchanged delighted glances. Father, as a lad, was a most satisfying young hero!

"A rainy, windy day it was, I mind," he continued, "that the stagecoach drew up at the wharf and my mother got out of her inside seat, while I slid down from the box, and my father, already laden with some of our luggage, including Mother's precious bonnet box,

stood staring at the great sailing vessel that was to carry us to our new home in America. You may well believe I was excited! Not only was I clad in my brave black satin suit and my shoes with ye silver buckles; but I, too, was carrying luggage in the way of Poll, our parrot."

"Father, are those the silver shoe buckles John wears now?" interrupted Charity.

"Aye, lass—why?" The Squire took a hasty puff at his pipe.

"Nothing—she means nothing!" exclaimed Mehitable nervously, frowning at her sister. "Do let Father go on, Cherry!"

Mistress Condit, glancing up curiously, saw that warning glance and resolved to question Mehitable later; but as events turned out, the incident was forgotten in more exciting ones.

"Well, let's see. Where was I?" The Squire puffed contemplatively.

"The parrot, Father!" prompted both girls eagerly.

"Oh yes. I verily believe you know this tale better than I!" he laughed. "Well, I had pressed forward most anxiously after my father when 'Polly wants a cracker!' said the bird, and 'Polly wants a cracker!' imitated a pert voice behind me. I turned around indignantly to see a little girl with very red hair staring at me saucily from behind her mother's skirts."

"Oh, Samuel, not *very* red hair!" protested Mistress Condit with a furtive pat at the auburn curls that peeped beneath her cap.

"Oh, yes, *very* red hair!" insisted the Squire im-

perturbably; but with a mischievous side glance at his wife, who tossed her head and laughed. "I was minded to speak reproof to the saucy wench; but her mother had already done so, and with a jerk, the little red-haired girl was led up the gangplank of the very ship my father and I had been gazing at, and I knew that she, too, was to venture across the water with us.

"It was a long voyage, that one to America; but as the days passed, I grew very fond of that little girl, whose name was Mary."

"Why, that's Mother's name!" exclaimed Charity, sitting up to stare at her mother.

"So it is!" agreed Squire Condit in solemn surprise.

"Of course it is, silly!" burst out Mehitable. "And the little red-haired girl *was* Mother, wasn't she, Father?"

"Now, that," said the Squire judicially, "is the question. Howbeit, to finish my tale before the apples burn." He glanced significantly at the row of scorching Jonathans which Mehitable promptly turned. "One day little Mary appeared with drooping face. 'My head doth ache!' quoth she, and she coughed, though it was a clear, warm day.

"Her mother bundled her down the ship's cabin, but not before I had stolen a kiss, for by that time I loved little Mary as dearly as ten years can love eight years. Then it was announced that little Mary had the measles!"

"Oh dear!" exclaimed tender-hearted Charity. "Did she really, Father?"

"Yes," nodded her father, "really, Cherry! For

long days, then, I hung around the berth where lay Mary, until, one morning, I, too, woke with a headache and a cough.

"'Alas, Samuel, you have the measles! I wonder how ye caught them!' cried my mother. And so I did have them! I was a pretty sight, for measles are not beauteous! I was very ill, for the measles 'struck in,' and with them my love"—and here the Squire stole another look at his wife's curls—"for red-haired girls!"

"Oh, me!" sighed Charity, as her father stopped and puffed violently at his pipe. "What became o' the parrot, Father?"

"Why, I gave Poll to little Mary when she got well again."

"And she cherished her for years, until Poll died of old age," finished Mistress Condit, smiling and gathering up her knitting. "But come, girls!"

"Aye, 'tis late, lassies!" said the Squire.

"But our apples! We must have our apples!" And two pairs of wide-awake eyes were studying the apples calculatingly to see how long they could be made to last when through the merry chatter came a wild, long drawn out cry.

"Wolves!" Mistress Condit's hands flew to press against her heart as she gazed, terror-stricken, at her husband. Pausing, pipe in hand, he stood listening until above the crackle of the fire came again the cry. Then he shook his head.

"Nay, I think not! But we shall soon see!" And striding forward, he flung open the door.

Only the crazy howling of wind and storm came

to the listeners' ears. Silence reigned except for the gale.

"Nothing there, Samuel?" queried Mistress Condit tremblingly, at last.

From behind her voluminous skirts peered the frightened faces of the girls. Strange, dark war-times these were, when they never could be sure whether it was friend or foe or wild animal approaching!

"No one there, Father?" repeated Charity's sweet voice anxiously.

"Nay, I think not!" shouted back the Squire, moving forward to the edge of the doorstep, where he stood peering through the curtain of rain and sleet that beat upon him. "No one here——Stay! *What is that out by yon tree!*"

And without another word, unarmed, he plunged off the doorstep to disappear into the teeth of the storm!

CHAPTER II

THE STRANGE GUEST

FOR long minutes the two girls and their mother stood there, minutes that seemed like months, that seemed like years. Then Squire Condit's voice hailed them from the dooryard and soon, as Mistress Condit took the candle that Mehitable had brought her and held it aloft, they saw him staggering toward them half-carrying, half-dragging a human form.

"Wine, Mary, for this poor fellow!" he gasped, stumbling past her into the kitchen.

As the firelight flashed upon the still figure their father had placed upon the floor, the two girls drew back with exclamations of fear.

"An Indian, Father?" faltered Mehitable.

"Aye—an Indian! But a human being like you or me, Hitty, and as such, subject to death as we!" answered her father reprovingly.

"Poor Indian!" said Charity immediately, in her gentle voice. Then she shrank back, for at that instant the Indian's eyes flew open and he stared at her with the uncanny alertness of a wild wood-thing caught in a trap.

"Here, take a sip of this, my man," said Squire Condit, raising the Indian's head to the pewter mug

Mistress Condit had handed him. "I'll warrant ye that will put new life into your veins!" he added half jokingly.

But the Indian's eyes searched the room, stared at the little group of householders around him with no abatement of tension in their depths, and at last, giving a sudden spring, he regained his feet and stood, tall and straight, before them.

"Ugh! I go now!" he grunted, turning toward the door. But the Squire seized him by the arm.

"What—out into that storm!" he exclaimed. "Nay, 'twould be sure death and that—Indian or no Indian—I'll see no man go to! So stay ye here before the fire. To-morrow ye may go." And he commenced laboriously to pantomime the act of going to sleep before the fire, Charity and Mehitable watching him with breathless interest.

The Indian, however, for the first time allowed a gleam of wintry amusement to flit across his face as he watched the exaggerated antics his host was performing to make his meaning perfectly clear.

"Spik English," he offered at last, when the Squire, worn out by his efforts, had dropped in exhaustion upon the fireside settle.

"Speak English! Well, gadzooks, why didn't ye say so!" roared the Squire indignantly. "Did ye ever hear the like, Mary?" he complained to his wife. "And I tiring myself out to give him understanding!"

Mistress Condit smiled. "Nay, he meant no harm, Samuel," she answered soothingly. "Let us to bed, now. It waxes late. The Indian may place the black

bearskin beneath him and wrap in that buffalo robe, an he likes. Charity, the warming pan!"

Charity, obediently taking down the brass warming pan and filling it with embers from the fire, was turning away when the Indian touched her lightly upon the arm. She shot a glance of half terror at him and then an imploring one at her parents and sister at the other end of the kitchen; but they were busily conversing and she stopped, tremblingly.

The Indian turned and pointed to the silhouette hanging over the chimney shelf.

"Him—John?" he muttered, in so low a tone that Charity had to incline her ear toward him to catch his words. She started back in astonishment.

"You know John?" Unconsciously she, too, whispered it.

She was wheeling toward her parents to acquaint them with this amazing fact when the Indian's swift fingers lightly touched her lips and glancing up at him she saw him give a slight, imperative shake of his head. Mistress Condit, turning soon afterward, stared in displeasure.

"What! Loitering, Charity!" she frowned. And Charity, with a little shiver of excitement, stepped past the strange guest toward the narrow stairs that led to the loft rooms above.

Upstairs there was no loitering. Swiftly the beds were warmed by means of the warming pan inserted between the icy sheets and moved up and down over the smooth surface of the lower one. Night attire, including snugly fitting nightcaps, was donned, and

stepping up the queer little wooden steps into their high four-posted bed, Mehitable and Charity sank almost out of sight in the feather mattress and were soon fast asleep.

But down below, lying upon the hearth with his eyes focussed upon the silhouette of young Dr. John Condit, the Indian lay for a long time awake, while the storm beat and howled at the door and the wolves upon the Newark mountain above him howled, too.

It was early the next morning that Squire Condit, entering the kitchen unexpectedly, caught the Indian in the act of stealing a silver candlestick holder, a cherished heirloom brought over from England which occupied the position of honor on the dresser. The Squire's bushy eyebrows met in displeasure over angry eyes and, with an agility beyond his years, he leaped for and secured his flintlock from its hook near the door before the Indian could turn.

"Hands up!" he ordered then, sternly. The Indian, his lips tightening to a single narrow line, carefully replaced the candlestick holder in its place before raising his hands.

"Ye thievin' varmint!" ejaculated the Squire. "Not an honest hair to your head! Here I give ye shelter from last night's storm and this is your gratitude. *Gratitude!*" He repeated it contemptuously. "Charity!" he called, raising his voice.

"Yes, Father." Charity came running down the stairs to stop and stare in puzzled wonder at her father with his aimed gun.

"Fetch me that rawhide from the wall!"

A spasm of resentment gleamed in the red man's eyes, but his face maintained its stoical expression and his hands high above his proud head did not waver. Charity brought the evil-looking strap to her father and held it out tremblingly.

"Now take this flintlock and aim at the rascal's heart. I'll have no thievin' on my premises and I'm going to teach this fellow a lesson!"

But Charity, instead of doing as her father directed, suddenly clasped her hands and burst into tears.

"Ah, no, Father—please!" she sobbed.

The Squire, who it must be confessed was already repenting his rash threat, lowered his gun promptly.

"Ye hear that?" he asked the Indian fiercely. "Go, then, ingrate, and know ye owe your escape to the tender pleading of this little lass!"

The Indian turned with one movement of his lithe body and, without a look of gratitude at anyone, stalked to the door Charity had run to open for him and passed silently out into the November dawn.

"I thought I heard voices, Samuel," said Mistress Condit, entering at this point and going over to the fireplace to begin her breakfast preparations.

"I hope Amos is through his chores ere now, though I doubt it! This rheumatism—if only John were home to cure it, so I could be out attending things myself!" The Squire hobbled toward the door, where he turned to glance at his wife. "So ye did hear voices, Mary! That thievin' varmint! Tell your mother, Charity," he bade his young daughter.

"My silver candlestick holder!" exclaimed Mistress

Condit, when, the Squire having disappeared in the direction of the stock barns, Charity gave her mother a hasty account of what had happened. Mistress Condit's thin cheeks flushed with anger. "And why did ye stop your father, since the scoundrel so well deserved his beating!"

Charity bit her lip at this reproof.

"I don't know why I did, Mother, in truth," she answered, a catch in her breath. "Except that—oh, he looked like a trapped beast of the woods here, to me —helpless—caught—I could not bear to have him hurt!"

"Humph! Remember, Charity, that these same wild things burn folks' houses i' the West and scalp women and children and dance their horrid war dances around the ruins," returned Mistress Condit grimly. "It were not wise to show too much sympathy for Indians!"

"But perhaps—he is a good Indian!" ventured Charity.

"There are no good Indians," answered her mother in a tone of finality. And with that the subject was closed.

The November days passed. Discouraging, indeed, was the war news that filtered across from the enemy, entrenched in New York City under Sir Henry Clinton, to the Newark Mountains, at the foot of which the Condit farm was situated. There were very few roads, or even paths, between the "Town by the River," as Newark was called then, and the outlying farms and plantations of the First and the Second

mountains. Swamps and woodland separated these meagre hamlets.

General Washington, John Condit had written his father, after his successful siege and capture of Boston in the early spring of 1776, had passed a summer that, except for Colonel Moultrie's fine victory at Charleston, South Carolina, in which the British had lost and had sailed for New York, and the Declaration of Independence which had been adopted by Congress, was rather a discouraging one. The Americans had suffered a heavy loss on Long Island, thereby losing New York, so that since September Washington had been slowly but steadily retreating in an effort to hold some of New Jersey. Rumor had started vague tales of the Battle of White Plains in New York; but as yet no definite word had come from Dr. John Condit to his anxious family.

The two girls, however, were almost too busy to note the passing of the eventful days. Their time was completely filled, now, from morning, when they rose by candlelight, to bedtime, with all of those laborious household tasks which even the very young girls had to share. There were candle-dripping, soap-making, spinning, weaving, cooking—and even the simple operation of dish-washing became an intricate one when the water had to be brought by the well sweep—a long pole so weighted at one end that a slight pressure brought up the bucket attached to the other end—from the well, carried into the house, heated more or less slowly over the open fire and dipped from its heavy iron pot into the dishpan. The dishes were rarely of

china—those were prized and saved. Trenchers of wood, perhaps beautifully turned and polished, gourds and pewter mugs, spoons and two-tined forks of pewter were the ordinary household essentials. But I am sure that the roasted meats served on the wooden trencher tasted exactly as savory as those now served on china or silver platters, and that the well water or icy spring water was fully as sweet as that now drawn from faucets.

One day, as it was growing dusk, Mistress Condit retired to the fireside settle and fell into a heavy, feverish sleep. The two girls had been invited to a sewing bee at Miranda Briggs's and had spent three happy hours there. But approaching their own home, what was their amazement to find the kitchen dark and still as they pushed open the door.

"Oh, Cherry, what do you suppose——" Mehitable was beginning, when the blurred figure of her mother stirred in the shadows.

"Hitty?" asked Mistress Condit, in a hoarse voice.

Mehitable threw off her long cape to run over and stand beside her mother. "Yes, Mother, what is it? What is the matter?" she asked anxiously.

"I don't know," answered Mistress Condit vaguely. "I must have caught cold yesterday while out salting the pork and working around the smokehouse, for my head aches and my throat is sore—'tis doubtless a touch of chills and fever. Oh, how I wish your brother John were here!" She uttered a sudden exclamation of dismay. "Why the fire is out! However did that happen! And your father took the flint and steel with him to the north pasture to burn some stumps there!"

Charity was kneeling before the dark fireplace, tentatively poking among the dead embers.

"Why, even the back-log is out!" she said in a puzzled voice. "Whatever could have happened, Mother?"

"I remember now!" Mistress Condit dragged herself erect with a groan. "The soup upset, the bail slipped upon the crane—and such a hissing as took place!" She sat in rueful thought for a moment. "Well," she resumed, rousing herself with a sigh, "there is but one thing to do, Mehitable. We cannot wait until your father comes home—we must borrow some live coals from the Briggses. Take you the kettle and hurry, for I do dislike supper to be tardy when your father comes in from foddering the stock. You will not be afraid, Mehitable?"

"Why, Mother, indeed I am almost fifteen," answered Mehitable in a hurt voice. Her honest black eyes gazed at her mother in reproach. "But it won't take more than half an hour, I know. Sure, Miranda will be surprised to see me again so soon!" she finished, with an irrepressible twinkle.

Charity ran to get the iron bucket which was preserved for just such energencies, while Mehitable once more donned her heavy cape and pulled its hood well over her head.

"Don't you think I had better go, too?" asked the younger sister anxiously. "Won't you be afraid, Hitty? 'Tis monstrous dark outside and the path through the woods is a lonely one."

"Nonsense!" returned Mehitable sturdily, catching up the iron bucket. "Have I not trod that same path

a hundred times in daylight! Why should I be afraid of shadows, Charity?"

"But perhaps—that Indian, you know!" began Charity.

"Silly child!" And Mehitable laughed with the superiority of fifteen years. "Father says he was doubtless an Indian runner for the British Army. I'm sure he's far away by now."

"Do not put foolish notions into your sister's head, Charity," interrupted Mistress Condit. She laid her own head back against the settle with a weary little sigh of pain.

"You must stay with Mother, Charity" whispered Mehitable. "Better cover her with the buffalo robe; it grows cold in here without the fire. Good-bye, Mother," she added aloud cheerfully. "I shall not be gone long."

"Promise me to go by the lower road and not by the wood path. 'Tis better!" said Mistress Condit, rousing herself with an effort.

Mehitable hesitated. The valley road, barely wide enough for an ox-cart, following the foot of the First Mountain, was a good twenty minutes longer than the wood path. But reading aright the anxiety on her mother's face, she nodded her head and slipped lightly out the door.

It was indeed lonely along the road. But at last the welcome lights of the Briggses' farmhouse revealed themselves through the gloom, and it was not long then before Mehitable was back in the kitchen she had just quitted an hour or so before.

Everything was in its usual prim order there. Every vestige of the sewing bee had disappeared and Mistress Briggs and her daughter were hastily preparing supper against the arrival of Squire Briggs. As a matter of fact, Squire Briggs, being notably close-fisted and penurious, knew nothing whatever about the sewing bee. All the party viands—the pound cake, the pumpkin pies, the tarts—had been prepared in secret by his wife, and now nothing remained to tell the tale save the happy light in Miranda's eyes and the high red spots of excitement in Mistress Briggs's cheeks.

"Why, Hitty child, what brings you back?" exclaimed the latter as the kitchen door opened and Mehitable stumbled laughingly in.

"I came after coal," explained Mehitable. "Charity and I got home to find our mother ill and the fire out."

"Your mother ill! Dear me!" said Mistress Briggs. She stooped, tongs in hand, and deftly lifted some burning embers into the iron bucket Mehitable held out. "There," she said, "those ought to last until you get home, Hitty. Let me know if your mother is not better to-morrow."

"What's this? What's this?" asked a querulous voice from the door. Everyone seemed to shrink, to become self-conscious, as a sharp, spare figure stepped across the threshold and Squire Briggs's hard eyes, beneath ill-natured brows, peered at them furtively.

"Just coals, Father! The Condits' fire is out," explained Miranda hastily, noticing her parent's gaze fixed suspiciously upon the iron bucket.

"Quite so! Quite so!" answered Squire Briggs

peevishly. "Right to lend coals; but remember, sugar and flour are high and not to be borrowed."

"Indeed, Squire Briggs," commenced Mehitable spiritedly, then finding Mistress Briggs's eyes fastened upon her imploringly, she relapsed into silence and took up the bucket from the hearth.

"Young tongues should learn meekness," said Squire Briggs with a sour smile.

Miranda followed Mehitable to the door. "You must not mind Father," she said in a hasty whisper. "He is but peculiar."

"He is," agreed Mehitable grimly. Then she suddenly laughed into the other's sober face. "But you're a dear, Randy, and thank you indeed for the coals!"

At the Briggs's gatepost she hesitated. Long and dark the road home stretched before her, while leading up and around back of the house, into the forest itself, she knew the shorter woodland path would take her but half the time.

"I promised Mother I would *come* by the road," she said to herself, "but I didn't promise I would *return* by the road."

Poor Mehitable, she did not realize that a promise half broken is nearly as bad as a promise broken all the way! But she soon learned that disobedience inevitably brings its own punishment.

It was quite dark now, as she hurried along the narrow path that familiarity helped her to pass over safely. Upon either side rose the sheer forest. The wind shook the dry leaves that rattled and sighed as

they fell. Far off a great owl hooted. But Mehitable was not in the least nervous.

She was thinking contentedly of the busy day planned for the morrow, of the happy afternoon she had just passed, hoping with the careless assurance and lack of worry of childhood that her mother would be better by the time she reached home, when all of a sudden, stepping lightly around a great boulder that centered the path, she stopped short—gasped—stiffened. A thrill of terror shot through her.

For facing her steadily, unmoving, menacing, two flaming eyes burned through the darkness, barring her pathway!

CHAPTER III

A FLIGHT INTO THE NEWARK MOUNTAINS

IT TOOK Mehitable but a moment to realize that it was an animal of some sort facing her. Then, as her vision focussed more acutely, she made out the huge, bulky outline, the grotesque haunch, and the inquisitive little head lifted more in curiosity than in threat. And almost instantly, automatically, she lifted her bucket with its fiery embers and hurled it directly into the eyes of a great black bear that barred her path not three feet from her!

With a snort of surprise and a grunt of disgust the big beast scrambled away into the dense underbrush. Mehitable, giggling half hysterically, actually stooped to retrieve the glowing embers before she, too, hurried on. Too precious were the coals to be thus wasted!

Ten minutes later found her breathlessly pounding the door to her mother's kitchen. And never had home, dark and cheerless as it was without the fire, seemed so safe and dear to her as on that November night, 1776.

And now came long, gloomy days for the two little Colonial maids, although Mistress Condit, contrary to her fears, was soon better and about her work once more. Good patriot that he was, Squire Condit had long since forwarded everything he could spare in the way of stock and food to the American Army, while

Mistress Condit's busy fingers flew, hour after hour, and her brisk step could be heard from dawn to dark at her spinning wheel. Her whole heart and soul were wrapped in the enterprise to which, uncomplainingly, she had given her only son.

Squire Condit was totally unlike his neighbor, Squire Briggs, whose parsimonious clutch refused to abandon any of his possessions without an enormous profit to himself. Indeed, it was common report that he, like the Tories in the village of Caldwell over the mountain, sold stock and grain,as well as wool, at immense profit to the British in New York. For during the winter of 1776–77 the residents of New York, as also the thousands of British troops there and on Staten Island, were in great straits for necessary supplies. Many articles of food could not be had at all, while others were so dear that even the most wealthy grew desperate. It was the Tory farmers who preyed upon these people and afterward became the first of the war profiteers. Thanksgiving Day passed quietly. Mehitable and Charity sat down silently to the corn-meal porridge and sparse slices of bacon with their parents and the men-of-all-work, Amos and Judd, trying not to think of bygone holidays when, with the brother now so far away, they had assembled around the cheerful board that had seemed to groan with all the good things Mistress Condit knew so well how to cook. They were delighted, however, by a large pumpkin pie which she produced with sparkling eyes.

"I could not bear to have the day pass without one bit of feast," she explained half apologetically to her

husband. "I saved the eggs, Samuel—old Milly has begun to lay again—and I knew such a few could do our army no good."

"But this is fine!" explained the Squire heartily. He looked as pleased as the two girls and the men-of-all-work, and Mistress Condit's throat suddenly contracted at the pathos of their pleasure, for barren, indeed, had been their board of everything but the necessities.

"I am glad art pleased," was all she said, however.

Afterward how glad she was that she had given them this pleasure, for as it turned out, even the necessities of life were almost taken from them.

They were peacefully gathered before their fire that Thanksgiving night when a voice hailed them loudly from the gatepost outside. The Squire answered the summons at once and the two girls and their mother could hear him at first exclaim; then came short, quick questions and answers. He soon returned to them, with a very grave face, while the hoof beats of the post rider's horse died away rapidly in the distance. The Squire, without enlightening his family, began to pace up and down the kitchen. Finally, Mistress Condit rose and went to him.

"What is it, Samuel?" she asked steadily, placing her hand upon his arm. At her gesture he stopped in his restless marching to glance tenderly down into her upturned face.

"It's—it's—not about John, is it?" she faltered.

It seemed a thousand years to the two watching girls before their father shook his head.

"No, no! Forgive me, Mary," he said then. "I did not mean to alarm you. No, it's not John. 'Tis this! Young Cy Jones is riding to warn the farmers. His father and family, as well as the family of Jotham Harrison, have been forced to flee to the mountains this day. There is a Hessian raid afoot and he advises us to go, too. No telling what these Hessians will do, although ostensibly they are merely after supplies. They are an uncouth, rough lot. They have already taken possession of the Harrisons' place—Jotham told the Joneses—and he said, e'en before he had left, salt hay had been brought in from the barn and spread upon the floor of the house *for the horses and their riders!*"

"Poor Mistress Harrison!" Mary Condit clasped her hands in sympathy. "And 'twas a new floor just laid by Mr. Harrison last year. I mind how monstrous proud she was of it—how polished and waxed she kept it. But go on, Samuel! I interrupt!"

"That is all, Mary." Squire Condit resumed his restless pacing with a downhearted gesture.

"But are we to flee, Father?" Mehitable, wide-eyed, crept from her corner.

Mistress Condit suddenly nodded her head decidedly.

"Aye, Hitty, we are to flee," she said.

Squire Condit paused to stare at his wife.

"Ye think it wise, Mary?" he questioned anxiously.

"One does not trust these Hessians," answered Mistress Condit grimly. And set to work at once to collect her valuables.

There ensued a busy hour. Back and forth trotted Charity and Mehitable, their arms piled high with

household valuables. At last Squire Condit, who was checking over the valuables, raised his hand abruptly.

"Not the warming pan, Charity," he said unsmilingly. "What use would that be in the mountains? And, Mary"—he turned to his wife—"I am sorry, but we cannot load ourselves with silver and such. We must take only blankets and food for two or three days at least. 'Twill not be safe to return before that."

Mistress Condit, her precious silver candlestick-holders in her arms, stood pondering anxiously.

"Where can they be hidden?" she asked.

"In sooth, I do not know," answe ed the Squire, stooping to pull some blankets hastily into a tight roll. "But we must hurry. Hark, what was that?"

A moment of strained listening, then Mistress Condit relaxed with a wan smile. "Tis only the wail of the wind. You are nervous, Samuel!"

"Aye, I am nervous! But the raiders, Mary, an they come to-night, will come soon. We must be away before many minutes more. Where can that Amos be with the horses?"

Suddenly Mehitable, who was collecting the family's wearing apparel, spoke excitedly.

"Why not store your things in the cellar-hole, Mother?" And she pointed at the trapdoor in the kitchen floor which led down to the small excavated space beneath that part of the farmhouse.

"The very place!" exclaimed Mistress Condit.

The silver, then their few precious books, and finally the feather beds, to hide the first-mentioned articles

were all stored in the little space. Just as the ladder was being drawn up, Charity came with the great family Bible, and that was lowered on to the feather beds. Then the trapdoor was clamped down, the sand spread back upon the floor in a hastily wrought pattern, and the ladder carried away to be hidden by Amos.

"Let me ride Dulcie, Father!" begged Mehitable, when they had filed out of the kitchen door and the latch had clicked behind them. "Then Judd can ride General and all the horses will be safe."

The Squire hesitated; but to his surprise his wife's voice sounded in approbation from the farmcart where, amid blankets, she and Charity were seated upon its straw-covered floor.

"Aye, let her ride Dulcie, Samuel. She can manage the horse. Make her promise to ride close beside you!"

"Very well, Hitty!"

So, with beating heart, Mehitable, placing her heel in Judd's horny palm, sprang lightly to the horse's back. No saddle was there to help her—just a blanket folded and girthed tightly in place. But many times had the girl, in less exciting moments, guided her horse along the road, and now she trotted off beside her father in fine spirits. I fear that to Mehitable this adventure was so far merely a pleasant one.

The cart, with its escort, swerved to the right off toward the north, to gain the mountain pass that led over the First Mountain through Pleasant Valley and over the Second Mountain to Northfield. All solemn and still were the woods this night, upon either side,

as the horses began to mount higher. Once the gleaming eyes of a catamount struck fire from a neighboring tree branch as they passed, and once the distant howl of a wolf caused the horse, Dulcie, to shy a little and quiver beneath Mehitable. But for the most part only the sound of rolling stones cast aside by the hoofs of the horses and the creak and lurch of the cart broke the somber silence.

At last Squire Condit halted, in a low murmur, the little band of refugees.

"'Tis about here," he said, looking keenly at the giant pine trees that stood sentinel upon the very ridge of the mountain, which they had now reached. "'Tis just beyond these great pines that Parson Chapman told me he had fashioned a rude hut which, in case of alarm, we were to use. Yes, see!" He leaped from his horse to stride forward and pace a rough twenty feet from one of the pine trees. "Here is the opening to the forest depths!"

He parted the thick underbrush to disclose a narrow path.

"Think ye the cart can get through that opening, Samuel?" asked Mistress Condit, peering at it doubtfully as it stood revealed beneath the bright starlight.

"'Tis only an ambush, cleverly contrived by Parson Chapman," answered the Squire triumphantly. With one sweep of his arm he pushed aside the sticks and bushes which had been placed there to hide the path.

So the cart passed joltingly upon its way along the mountain ridge where, had it been daylight, New York

town itself might have been seen thirteen miles away, far beyond the swamps and woodland, beyond the shining strip of Hudson River.

Then, at last, there was another pause while Squire Condit rode forward alone toward the dim outline of a low cabin. Mehitable, waiting upon her horse, felt a little shiver of excitement, of apprehension go over her. Suppose the cabin could not be used? What could they do? Suppose some other refugee family were already encamped there? All sorts of fears and worries ran through her active young mind now. In the cart Charity's little hand stole into her mother's firm, comforting grasp. It seemed so strange to be up here on this forlorn, wind-swept mountain top instead of snuggling down into her own cozy bed at home!

Then the Squire and Amos who had dismounted also, came back.

"It is a better shelter than I had anticipated," announced the Squire cheerfully. "A right snug cabin with hard dirt floor and bunks already bedded with fresh leaves. In faith, if I did not know the Parson had 'listed, I'd swear him to have been up here this afternoon, so spick and span is it inside. However, come, Mary! Come, Charity! We'll soon have candlelight and perhaps a wee fire in the fireplace."

The girls, entering the little hut, stared around them curiously as soon as their father had lighted the candle Mistress Condit had provided so thoughtfully. Makeshift, indeed, were the furnishings, even the fireplace having been rudely constructed from small boulders

set in clay. The four bunks against the walls were filled, as the Squire had reported, with freshly gathered leaves. In the center of the room, upon which Amos and Judd were unloading the contents of the cart, was a roughly built table.

"'Twill not be long before we shall all be sleeping soundly," observed Mistress Condit brightly, noting with motherly eyes the pathetic little droop of Charity's mouth and the strained pallor of Mehitable. And soon, as she had promised, the girls were climbing gigglingly into their bunks, where they sank into the soft bearskin and buffalo robes Amos had spread over the leaves for them.

Amos and Judd rolled themselves in some blankets, and stoically lying down upon the earthen floor before the fire they had kindled, soon snored in loud duet. Mistress Condit and the Squire were also asleep in no time.

But for many minutes Charity's eyes gazed dreamily at the scene before her. The firelight rose and fell, sputtered and died away, causing the shadows of various articles upon the table to dance grotesquely upon the mud-plastered walls behind them. It was just as her tired eyelids were drooping sleepily for the last time that a slight noise at the unbarred door drove all slumber from her brain.

Tense alertness settled over her recumbent form, the sort of tension that can only come at night when one listens in the dark or the half dark. How glad she was that her bunk was in the shadows, with the firelight, which had flared up momentarily, throwing the door

into full relief so that she might watch it undetected by any one entering.

With creeping horror, as she watched, she saw the door begin to swing open to the night, saw then a stealthy hand slide across it to steady it so that it would not creak. There was a pause. Nothing moved. Only Charity had the feeling that just without that door was someone, something, watching and waiting!

Suddenly Amos snored. Charity had an hysterical desire to laugh, but fought the inclination, and conquering it, lay in deathly quiet for an interminable period.

At last, just as she thought she must move, must get relief from the strain of not moving, without a sound, an Indian in full war paint stepped into view!

As he stood absolutely immobile, the girl had time to stare at him. Just so, she thought shudderingly to her self, must the painted warriors have looked who had come to set fire to the frontier cabins her mother had told her of. Just as helpless, just as much at their mercy, were they at the mercy of this Indian, she and Mehitable and her father and mother. For now she knew that Mehitable, too, was asleep, worn out by excitement, and that only she, alone, was awake to realize the horror and the utter helplessness of their position.

As the Indian continued to stand there, continued to peer into the firelit cabin interior, the girl's heart beat against her breast. His eyes, terrible beneath the war paint, moved past Mistress Condit's bunk, dropped lightly to study the two men sleeping before the fire, glanced at Squire Condit's unconscious figure

flung across his bunk, leaped to Mehitable's bunk and at last, as the watching girl had dreaded, came to rest upon Charity's face with its great, staring, frightened eyes.

But as their eyes met and clashed a strange thing happened. The fierceness died in the savage gaze, and it seemed to the terrified girl that something kindly entered the cabin at that moment. The fear which had been beating at her heart, which had held her paralyzed, disappeared. For the Indian, she recognized, was the Indian whom her father had threatened and whom she had supplicated not to have punished. And she seemed to feel, as he stood there for a moment longer, protection!

Then he turned and vanished into the silent night. The door swung shut. And Charity, a smile upon her face now, fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV

MEHITABLE'S SECRET

THE next morning the two girls, feeling stiff and lame, took their share of corn bread outside the hut to eat. Charity perched herself upon a great rock that stood outside the door; but Mehitable strode back and forth briskly as she ate.

"Better walk, too, Cherry," she said. "Best to get the blood a-going!"

"Nay, I feel warm enough in this thick cape. But I am so thirsty, Hitty! And I would like to wash my hands and face."

"Your wish will soon be granted, Daughter," said the Squire's voice, as he joined them. "Judd has gone to Rock Spring for water."

His keen glance swept the underbrush around them as he spoke. Suddenly he started and bent forward to scrutinize the ground more closely.

"It grew warmer in the night; the frost has melted from the ground and here are tracks—Indian tracks!" he exclaimed.

He straightened up and at that moment Charity spoke, as though to herself.

"Then it wasn't a dream!"

Squire Condit and Mehitable turned to look at her.

"What wasn't a dream, Charity?" asked Mehitable curiously.

"The Indian!" answered Charity, her eyes upon the tell-tale tracks. "You were all asleep, Father," she hurried on before the Squire could speak. "I saw the door pushed open and—and—that Indian whose life you saved in the last storm—he stepped in. But he only stayed a moment and did no harm——"

"Did no harm!" echoed the Squire. "But, gadzooks, girl, he might have come back with some of ye drunken Hessians and done us harm as we slept!"

"Oh, no, Father!" interrupted Charity with a little shake of her head. "He isn't that sort at all, I'm sure. He is a good Indian!"

"There are no good Indians," said the Squire shortly, exactly as his wife had said. He, too, could tell of Indian raids upon white men's outposts, tales of barbaric cruelty.

Mistress Condit, who had appeared in the doorway in time to hear them conversing, nodded her head at her husband's last remark.

"'Tis true, Samuel," she said. Then her face paled. "Think you he will return to-night?" she asked.

Squire Condit looked grave, but shook his head.

"'Tis doubtful," he answered, "knowing that we are warned. But Amos shall build us a stout bar for the door to-night."

"Then we can have no fire to-night?" inquired Mehitable dismally, who foresaw a series of cold meals stretching drearily away into the future.

"'Twere better not," returned her father. "An Indian

—not counting this one who knows our whereabouts—scents wood smoke where a white man notices nothing, and our fire might attract some British runner."

"Oh, suz!" sighed Mehitable. "That means horrid old cold corn bread again!"

Her parents laughed, for Mehitable's healthy young appetite was ever a source of amusement to them.

"'Twill not hurt you, this cold, plain fare," said her mother sensibly. "Perhaps ye will not grumble at hot porridge upon our return, Hitty."

But their alarm was for nothing, for the Indian did not return that night, nor any following nights, and on the third day Young Cy's cheerful face beamed at them from behind the great rock as he approached them up the narrow path.

"The Hessians have departed," he announced. "My parents have already started for home from the Heddens' farm, where they had fled—over in Pleasant Valley, you know, Squire. But, alas, such a mess as they made of things, the dirty Hessian pigs! And nothing left of stores at all!"

Mistress Condit groaned. "All of my preserves, doubtless!" she said in dismay. "I had meant to send them on to our men at headquarters, denying ourselves for that purpose!"

"I fear 'tis in vain you saved them, mistress," answered Young Cy sympathetically, "if your storeroom has fared as my mother's. I peeped in to make sure no tardy Hessian had lingered behind, and it is an empty cupboard and store closet my poor mother will confront shortly."

The tears stood in Mistress Condit's eyes.

"Ah, Samuel," she exclaimed piteously, turning to her husband, "if they are all gone! I have been denying you and the poor girls everything, hoping to get these supplies to John's company and perchance to General Washington himself!"

"Ah, well, Mary, do not cross bridges until they are reached," answered the Squire consolingly.

"Perhaps the Hessians did not reach our place," offered Charity, whose tender little heart was wrung at sight of her mother's agitation.

"If only I had stayed and—and—rawhided the brutes!" exploded Mehitable, doubling her fists, her cheeks turning scarlet.

Young Cy paused to chuckle at her warlike attitude. Then he turned to Mistress Condit.

"'Tis useless to hope the Hessians did not reach your house," he said, pity in his manly young voice. "I passed there on my way up here."

"And how was it?" asked the Squire eagerly.

"Wait and see. I cannot do more than warn ye," answered Young Cy evasively, plainly fearing tears upon the part of Mistress Condit.

So they hurriedly packed the cart, and with Charity and her mother again riding and Mehitable once more astride Dulcie, with the others mounted as before, they descended from their mountain retreat.

Desolate silence reigned as they involuntarily stopped when their home first came into sight. Then Charity hid her face in her mother's shoulder and commenced to weep quietly.

The house was indeed a sorry sight. Precious windowpanes had been wantonly smashed, every door hung dubiously ajar or was entirely wrenched away from its hinges, even the very stepping stones which had led through the orderly garden and around to the kitchen door had been torn up and strewn in wild abandon.

"Those—those——" stammered Mehitable, after a while. She was too angry to be coherent and her furious words died away in a sputter.

"Well," said the Squire, after a silence during which they had all stared forlornly at their once neat, well-kept home, "better get in and set to work. Sooner started sooner mended."

His sorry little attempt at jocularity deceived no one. It was in utter spiritlessness that his family and servants followed at his heels into the erstwhile clean, bright kitchen. Now it seemed to greet them sadly, a monument of reproach to the uncouth enemy who had recently inhabited it.

Mehitable soon uttered an exclamation.

"Oh, Mother, they must have found the silver!" She pointed to the trapdoor which stood open in the center of the kitchen floor.

"Ah!" Mistress Condit drew a sharp breath and, running over to the hole, peered into its depths.

"The ladder, Amos!" she ordered.

But the men, leaving the kitchen to the womenfolk, had tramped off to the stock barns, although they had turned the stock loose before their flight. They were eager to see what damage the enemy had wrought there.

It was Mehitable who presently came, dragging the stout little ladder in from its hiding place outdoors.

Mistress Condit hastily descended the ladder; but at its foot the girls could hear her exclaim in a low voice, and soon she had climbed up with a puzzled face.

"Everything seems intact; but the beasts have emptied the dye pot down there," she announced. Her gaze flew to the fireside corner where the dye pot, that necessary adjunct to colonial life, had been wont to stand. But the corner was empty. "Everything is covered with dye—the feather beds and the big Bible—alack, I doubt we shall ever be able to read from it again!"

Mehitable, who had climbed down into the cellar as soon as her mother was out of the way, now returned carrying the big book.

"'Tis true, Mother," she cried, holding out the Bible, still damp from the dye. "But I think the inside pages have escaped! 'Tis my belief the Hessians became angry at not finding more valuable articles and thought to make these things we had hidden, which they were doubtless too lazy to carry up, useless to us by emptying the dye pot's contents upon them."

"And all that good dye wasted!" mourned Mistress Condit. "But mind, not a word to your father of this to-day! Poor man, he has enough to worry over now!"

Thus bravely did the good wives and daughters of that time endure the fortunes and ravages of their war-stricken country.

When Squire Condit returned, however, he was not as cast down as might have been expected.

"The stock barns were untouched," he said in answer to his wife's anxious question. "The Hessians seemed to wreak their wantoness solely upon the house. Most of the stock is safe, too, having wandered away, fortunately for us, toward the woods. Amos and Judd are rounding them up, now."

"If only I had moved our vegetables and preserves to the cellar when you advised me thus, Samuel," said Mistress Condit sorrowfully when she returned from her empty storeroom. "Everything is gone!"

"Ah, well, we will manage somehow. Be thankful our lives are spared, Mary, and the roof over our heads is still intact," returned the Squire. His great barns safe, the rest of the havoc the marauders had created seemed not so irremediable. "'Twill not take Amos and me long to mend the house."

"Well, I am glad that we had that pie for Thanksgiving, anyway," remarked Mistress Condit, satisfaction in her voice. "And that the silver is safe," she added.

Squire Condit kept his word, even sending Amos across the swamps to Newark to get new window glass to replace that broken by the raiders. Upon his return Amos reported that no serious damage beyond theft and petty wrecking had been done the countryside by the Hessians.

"Though every cupboard do be as bare as our'n," he added ruefully, "and stores, now, are as skerce as they say they are in New York Town."

"Ah," sighed Mistress Condit, "how long will this wretched warfare last! If only General Washington

could have bottled up the enemy in New York and starved them out!"

But General Washington was already commencing his dreary retreat through New Jersey. And one exciting day Mehitable burst into her mother's kitchen, which now stood as clean and neat as ever.

"Mother! Charity!" she called hysterically. "Yonder comes riding up the road General Washington and his staff!"

Charity came tumbling down the stairs from the loft bedroom, and the mother, pale faced, appeared in the doorway of the lean-to.

"Oh, Hitty, how do you know?" squealed Charity.

"One of the officers—a fine-looking man—came riding ahead," stammered Mehitable. And as if in verification, a tall young man in buff-and-blue uniform appeared that moment in the doorway behind her.

He smiled a little at the expressions upon the faces before him—Mehitable's triumph, Charity's awe, their mother's surprise—before he swept off his tri-cornered hat and made a low bow.

"General Washington's compliments," he said ceremoniously, "and he desires to know if he and his staff may rest here awhile, with perchance a bite to eat?"

"My compliments to General Washington," returned Mistress Condit, in such a stately manner that her daughters' gaze flew, amazed, to her. "And I shall be most honored to entertain him and his staff in my home."

The young officer smilingly bowed again and withdrew.

"But weren't you frighted at all, Mother?" whispered Mehitable, as she hurried to "blaze" the fire and start dinner preparations.

"Why should I be?" returned her mother composedly. "Go you to the barn, Charity," she directed calmly, "and acquaint your father with this unexpected honor. Also tell him to have Judd bring in the rib chops from that porker he slew. I fear we can only give them fried pork and the cabbage which is on boiling. If only the Hessians had not taken all our fowls!" she added regretfully.

Then she turned with a start to curtsey deeply as the heavy door swung open and a group of officers in buff and blue, led by a tall, noble figure, entered her kitchen.

They were handsome men who stopped there that day, but inevitably the gaze was caught and held by the stern majestic face of the commander-in-chief, so that the others' countenances faded into mediocrity.

"I assure you we are indeed grateful, madam," said General Washington, removing his hat with a flourish and returning his hostess's curtsey with a bow.

He then walked toward the fireside settle. "May I be seated? We have been riding since this morn across swamps from Cranetown."

He sank down upon the settle with a weary sigh at his hostess's quickly bestowed permission; but he soon smiled at Mehitable, who was watching him across the table she was laying.

"Come here, little maid," he said, for he ever loved young folk, "and tell me your name."

Mehitable, with a frightened glance at her mother

who, assisted by a group of laughing officers, was preparing the usual corn-meal bread from meal they had been forced to buy from Squire Briggs, moved over to stand before the great man.

"My—my—name is—Mehitable," she stammered huskily. Her voice came only with an effort.

"Mehitable," repeated His Excellency. "A strong, sensible name."

"But I hate it!" said Mehitable unexpectedly. She spoke in a fierce little whisper. "Why couldn't my mother have named me Angeline or Janice or even P-Polly!" Then she stopped in confusion. Oh, what would her mother say to her speaking thus to a stranger and such a famous stranger! Whatever had possessed her to blurt out that which she had never breathed before, even to Charity—her secret dislike of her "strong, sensible name."

She stood silent, then, with downcast eyes, while the scarlet flooded her cheeks, waiting for the words which, in all justice, should rebuke her. But instead, there was a pause, and at last she raised her eyes.

"Ah, my child," said General Washington, then, and his eyes twinkled above his grave mouth, "lean forward while I whisper thee a secret!"

Mehitable obediently turned her pink ear toward him.

"I do dislike my name, too!" whispered His Excellency, chuckling.

She started back in surprise; but General Washington shook his head.

"'Tis a secret between you and me," he said gently.

"A secret!" said a laughing voice behind them, and

one of the young officers stood smiling there. "May not the rest of us share this amusing secret with Your Excellency and the young lady?"

"Nay, 'tis only for little Mistress Mehitable and me!" protested the General, also smiling, now, and the young man surrendered at once with a quick, polite little bow.

Mehitable, in after years, loved to tell of her mother's famous dinner, of how the men gathered eagerly about the long, hospitable board, of how they enjoyed each and every appetizing dish placed before them, of how at last the gallant company had mounted their horses to ride away with doffed hats and waving hands.

General Washington had not offered to pay for the sincere hospitality; but had accepted it with the graciousness of the truly great-hearted. A few days later, however, a soldier galloped up the the Condits' gatepost and hailed Charity, who was chasing a kitten around the winter-blasted garden.

"Squire Condit's?" he inquired. And upon Charity's replying in the affirmative, he dismounted and handed her three packages—a bulky one addressed to Mistress Condit, a smaller one for Charity herself, and one for Mehitable. She ran excitedly indoors with them.

"And what is yours, Charity?" asked Mistress Condit, when she had opened her gift and rejoiced over the welcome additions to the food she had been lately forced to purchase.

"A bit of bright ribbon for my cap, perhaps from Lady Washington's own store. Who knows!" said Charity happily.

"And mine is a silver chain! Is it not lovely!"

exulted Mehitable. She held the dainty piece of jewelry out for her mother's and sister's admiring inspection. But she did not show the little note which had accompanied it, for that was a secret. Written upon the white card was, "For the little maid who would be named Angeline!"

CHAPTER V

DOWN THE CISTERN

THE first part of December found snow upon the ground around the Condit farm. There had been that early-season gale of rain and sleet, with subsequent freezing, on the night the Squire had rescued the Indian; but the frost had soon melted and for days thereafter the weather had been crisp and bright. Now, however, after two days and nights of steady snowing, the sun came up one morning to slant glaringly across an earth blanket of dazzling snow.

Mehitable, who was a true out-of-doors girl, revelled in the depths of the drifts.

"Why, 'tis as high as the fence along the road by the north pasture," she was saying excitedly, unwinding her long woolen tippet and shaking her homespun skirt. She leaned over to pull from her feet an old pair of boots,which had belonged to her brother John.

"B-r-r!" shivered Charity, looking up from her knitting as she sat huddled by the fire. "I don't see how you can like it so well, Hitty! 'Tis most uncomfortable, I think, to be out in the snow!"

"'Tis monstrous pretty, the snow is," returned her sister, moving over to the fireplace to warm her cold hands before the blaze. "It sparkles so, and the shadows cast by the pines are as blue as can be!"

"'Tis monstrous cruel!" retorted Charity, with unwonted spirit. "The snow would smother you, freeze you, kill you, an it could!"

"Why, Charity!" observed Mehitable, her eyes widening. "I never heard you speak thus of the snow before!"

"I do dislike it!" muttered Charity, with another shiver. "I wish it were summer again!"

She started nervously as a shutter banged against the house somewhere.

"Well, I like it," answered Mehitable decidedly, "and I——"

Her voice stopped suddenly. Charity, who was counting the stitches in her knitting, glanced up curiously after a while and found her sister staring at something over her shoulder. She turned immediately and at that instant a cold draught struck her. Thereafter, the sand in the quaint hourglass must have run through its tiny hole a full minute before either girl moved. For through the crack of the door two eyes were looking at them!

Then Mehitable, whose natural courage never long forsook her, recovered from her fright and strode forward indignantly to fling the door open.

"Why do you not knock or come in?" she demanded irritably.

The Indian who had been standing outside stepped across the threshold with unruffled dignity and looked around the room inquiringly.

"Father?" he asked.

"Father is out foddering the stock, I suppose,"

answered Mehitable shortly. She looked at the tall, straight figure contemptuously, for her father had told her of his trying to steal her mother's candlestick holders. But Charity, whose quiet eyes were more observant, uttered a little cry.

"Why, you are hurt!"

The Indian swayed a little; but shook his head in denial.

"But you are!" insisted Charity. "See, there is blood upon the floor!"

Mehitable's slower gaze had just verified this fact when the Indian, as though at the end of his endurance, staggered and slowly sagged into the chair the girls were quick-witted enough to push toward him.

"Ugh, hurt!" he acknowledged, then. His blanket fell away at that instant and Charity gave another pitiful cry, for the Indian's brightly beaded hunting shirt was rapidly crimsoning beneath his heart.

"Oh, Hitty, what shall we do?"

Mehitable's round cheeks were pale as she gazed; but not for nothing was she a pioneer's daughter.

"Do!" she repeated scornfully. "Why, bind it up, of course!"

"Can't—can't we wait for Mother? She will be back in another hour," stammered Charity, shrinking. But Mehitable shook her head sturdily.

It was only when the hard task was finished, the open wound washed and dressed, that the Indian, who had sat in stoical silence all through the operation, spoke again.

"Hessians," he announced. "Signal fires—mountaintain top—me hurt! You go?"

Mehitable, who had been on her knees before him, about to lift the basin of warm water she had been using, set it down again and sank back upon her knees to stare at him open-mouthed. It was as amazing as though the brass warming pan, hanging innocently upon its hook beside the fireplace, had spoken.

The younger girl crept to her sister.

"What does he mean?" she whispered.

"Signal fire!" repeated the Indian impatiently, in his guttural voice.

"You mean those great heaps of branches and leaves on top of the First Mountain?" asked Mehitable slowly. "You mind the ones Father told us Parson Chapman had arranged for signals across Pleasant Valley to the Second Mountain, Charity?" turning to her sister.

The Indian nodded.

"Are you with General Washington's army?" asked Mehitable shrewdly. "How can I tell whether you are truthful or not?"

With a quick gesture, the Indian now held out an object that glittered and sparkled in his hand. Mehitable took it from him with a little cry.

"John's silver shoe buckle, Charity!"

The two girls bent over the shining thing with bated breath. It was as though their brother had spoken to them from far away! Then Mehitable raised her head to gaze searchingly at the strange visitor.

"How do I know that you did not steal this?" she asked sternly.

The Indian's eyes met hers unflinchingly.

"No!" he said. And in his voice rang the truth.

"I believe him, Hitty," said Charity suddenly, as the older girl still hesitated. "I am quite sure that the time has come when we must do as John wished, as we promised, for this is surely the sign that he must have our help. The buckle has come back to us, as we agreed!"

"But how can we reach the mountain top through this snow?" Mehitable now got slowly to her feet to carry away the basin. "'Tis growing dark," she went on worriedly. "And 'tis too late to get Young Cy to help us!"

The Indian's eyes watched her anxiously as she paced up and down the kitchen in unconscious imitation of her father.

"Go away down to the meeting house and back for Young Cy!" It was now Charity who had suddenly assumed the lead.

"No good—too late!" The Indian shook his head.

"He is right! We must be the ones to go!" As she spoke, the little sister caught up her cape, and fifteen minutes later found the two girls well upon their way.

It was settling into early dusk, as Mehitable had said, with the still cold of deep snow cutting into their cheeks and biting their nostrils until they felt as though they were breathing pepper! It was almost impossible walking, too, for the drifts were very deep, and once off

from the road they would have floundered to their waists. They had chosen the wood path, which was shorter and apt to be more protected from the snowfall.

As they neared the Briggs's farm, which they had to skirt, Mehitable suddenly spoke.

"Charity, think you we are nearing that old cistern behind the Briggs house?"

"Oh, Hitty!" Charity stopped short to look around her fearfully. "We are in the pasture north of their house, where Grandfather Briggs's house once stood, and that is where the cistern is. However did we get off from the path!"

"The snow is so deep," said Mehitable, stopping, too, to gaze around her with troubled eyes. "I am sure it is just about here! And the last time we passed throught the pasture, I remember—'twas last Fall—the hole was *uncovered*. Miranda was vexed and said how her father begrudged both the time and the wood to cover it. He said that any one trespassing deserved to fall down into it!"

"How could he be so mean!" Charity spoke with unusual bitterness; but she was thoroughly frightened at their plight.

"Well, 'tis no use to stand here. We must go on, Charity! The only way to get out of the pasture and on to the path again is to walk out!"

So saying, Mehitable started forward in her usual impetuous way and was laughing triumphantly as she neared the edge of the snow-covered field when a strangled cry sounded behind her and she turned around to see two upflung arms disappearing through

the snow. Then what appeared to be a great blot of ink showed against the white of the snow. And silence reigned!

Too stunned at what had befallen to move at first Mehitable stood motionless with horror for a moment. Then she turned and stumbled back through the snow, moaning as she ran.

"Charity, Charity, are you killed?"

At last a weak voice came wavering up to her.

"No, but I'm pretty nearly killed!"

Mehitable stopped upon the edge of the hole just in time, for the treacherous snow began at once to cave in beneath her weight. She stood there sobbing frantically.

"What shall I do! What shall I do!"

Then her common sense reasserted itself and some inner voice seemed to speak to her.

"Get help! Run for help!"

She leaned forward and tried to steady her tones, her heart torn by the faint, pitiful whimpers that came up to her from the cistern's depths.

"Art listening, Cherry? I am going for help! Keep up your courage—it will not take me long!"

"Oh, Hitty, hurry! It is so cold down here in the water. And—and—I told you the snow was cruel!"

"I will hurry!" promised Mehitable, her lips white with fear. She turned and ran toward the Briggs's dwelling.

It was a hard struggle and one that Mehitable did not soon forget, that plunging and rising and falling again and again through the heavy snow. But finally

she was leaning weakly against the Briggs's kitchen door, almost too exhausted to knock. Miranda soon appeared.

"Why, Hitty," she began in delight. "Art come to spend the afternoon with me? I am alone!" Then she stopped short at sight of the other girl's face. "What is the matter?" she faltered in sudden terror.

"Cherry—oh, Randy!—Cherry——" gasped Mehitable.

"Yes, what about Cherry?"

"Cherry—down—your father's cistern!" And Mehitable reeled against the other girl.

Miranda uttered an exclamation of horror. Then she shook her visitor roughly. "I will get Father's rope. Stand up, Hitty! We must get Cherry out ourselves, for no one is home but me. Stay, however—I'll call to make sure." She stepped back into the kitchen and sent her clear, frightened young voice ringing through the house. "Father! Fath-er! Help!"

But only the echoes of her own fright came back to her, and soon she had rejoined Mehitable upon the doorstep, a thick rope coiled over her arm.

When they arrived at the edge of the cistern Mehitable strove to call. But from sheer terror her voice would not come and she looked piteously at Miranda.

"Cherry! Cherry! Art still there?" called Miranda in unconscious irony, answering the appeal in her friend's eyes. To their joy, a faint little voice answered from the cistern and the two girls could hear the terrible chill in it.

"Ooh—I am so-o-o co-old!"

"Now, Hitty," said Miranda, assuming charge of the rescue as she recognized Mehitable's frantic state, "I am going to try to tie this rope around that big boulder which I know is near here, then we will lower the other end to Cherry, holding the tied end so that it cannot possibly slip. Do you understand?"

"Ye-es. But suppose she is too weak to climb the rope," faltered Mehitable, cheered, in spite of herself, however, by Miranda's assured manner.

"She can climb!" repeated Miranda inexorably. And advancing as near as she dared to the edge of the hole, she called down her instructions to the imprisoned girl in a short, imperative voice. This manner and her precise instructions had the effect she sought, doing much toward restoring poor Charity who, in spite of her constant shivering from having stood in icy water to her boot tops for so long, managed to wrap her feet around the rope and commence to climb.

Perhaps a city girl of that time, with her false idea of a lady's delicacy, could not have achieved this remarkable feat of climbing a rope from the cistern's depths; but as Miranda had said, Charity could climb, for the three girls had practised this stunt many times in secret. And now their country training came in good stead. After an agonizing period of suspense, Charity's head appeared at the edge of the hole, and the other two, bidding her hold on tightly, managed to drag her across the soft snow toward them to firm ground. And soon Mehitable's arms were wrapped thankfully around the shivering, weeping little figure.

"Run, Charity!" Miranda, noting anxiously the other's blue lips and chattering teeth, gave her a little push in the direction of the house. But Charity tarried a moment and spoke through her tears.

"Oh, Hitty, you must go on alone! See, it grows darker even now! And we promised!"

"But I cannot leave you, Charity! Mother would never forgive me an anything happened to you. You must have hot blankets and something warm to drink!" Mehitable looked at her in misery and indecision.

"'Randy will help us, won't you, 'Randy?" Charity shook her head.

"Where is she to go?" asked Miranda in astonishment. "I thought you were on your way to spend the rest of the afternoon with me!" Then, as the two sisters looked at her, she suddenly flushed. "I know, you were on your way to do something for the patriots," she concluded keenly. She lifted her head proudly. "Well, you can trust me, for I am a patriot, too! Do you think just because my father is—is—what he is that my mother and I do not know what is right!" And the hot tears stood in her eyes.

Instantly both girls embraced her. Then Charity started to run toward the house and Mehitable, feeling the tinder box in her pocket, swung resolutely in the other direction, knowing that Miranda would give her sister all needful attention

And now how cold it was! And how the wind sighed and moaned in the bare branches of every forest tree! Rapidly, too, it grew dark, so that mounting steadily

in much the same direction she and her family had fled not so long ago, Mehitable could scarcely make out, through the openings of the woods, the valley below.

But her face and her heart were turned upward, ever upward, toward that goal to which she had been sped by the simple pleading of an Indian's eyes and the memory of her promise to her big brother.

She reached, at last, the great sentinel pines upon the mountain ridge, underneath which had been prepared the signal mounds of brush and logs. But arrived there, she gazed in acute dismay at the snow which covered them until each mound looked like miniature mountains of snow. However, she set to work grimly to drag away the wet branches and pile the drier brush on top.

Then how her fingers ached with the cold as she knelt and patiently worked with flint and steel in her tinder box to get a spark, the one little spark necessary to complete this great task she had undertaken.

Lonely and solemn it seemed up there in that vast, white, still world of ice and snow. Not a living creature stirred, not even the ever-active jack rabbit. Night settled down, and star by star the heavens above began to be illuminated. And now she had to stumble to her feet and stride up and down to get the blood once more circulating in her chilled veins. Then back at her discouraging task again, striking, striking, to get that vital spark.

At last it came. The tinder caught! Swiftly, but not too swiftly, she applied it to the dry brush she had arranged. It caught, in turn! A little tongue

of flame curled around a brittle leaf, another flame shot across to a second leaf and finally the great pile of brush was flaring, roaring toward the silent sky.

Mehitable stepped back and watched anxiously. And drew a quick breath after a while. For, far across Pleasant Valley, from the Second Mountain flamed the answering signal!

CHAPTER VI

THE LOST PASSPORT

IT WAS Saturday morning and a gray, dismal day as to weather. But inside the Condits' big kitchen Mehitable's clear voice could be heard singing cheerily from the buttery where she was churning, the huge fire crackled and hissed in the fireplace, the tea-kettle bubbled joyfully beneath its crane, and even Charity, much as she disliked the lesson task her mother had set her, smiled every now and then to herself as though she had a delightful secret. Charity must needs learn to read and write and acquire the simple rudiments of arithmetic at home, for the nearest school was far across the swamps, in Newark, and that only for boys. Dame schools had not as yet come into existence in many of the New Jersey colonies.

Finally Mehitable's singing stopped abruptly and she spoke through the buttery door, which stood ajar, above the clop-clop of her churn.

"What, think you, Cherry, ever became of that wounded Indian that day? 'Twas so strange that when Father and Mother came home at dusk there should be not a trace of him!"

"It was indeed strange, Hitty!" Charity looked up gravely from her book. Her eyes became dreamy.

"But what, think you, was the meaning of the signal fire you had set upon the mountain?"

"In sooth, I do not know. I would I did!" answered Mehitable regretfully, whom curiosity had tormented since that twilight she had climbed the First Mountain to set ablaze the great signal mound prepared by their fighting parson, the Reverend Jedediah Chapman, one of the three signal stations so prepared by him and such of his parishioners as were Whigs.

"The signal, whatever it was for, was flashed on toward the military station at Morristown," went on Mehitable, after a short pause. "Young Cy who was out hunting beyond the Second Mountain, over toward the Short Hills, told me he saw another flame far away through the night answering that flame, which was kindled in response to mine on the First Mountain. So much," and Mehitable stopped to chuckle, "so much have we learned from the barbarous Indians—the art of signaling long distances, I mean."

"'Tis true," agreed Charity, absently. But it was plain to be seen that her thoughts were neither upon the subject under discussion nor upon her lessons. After a while she leaned forward to glance cautiously at the door leading to the loft stairs; then she called Mehitable in a low voice.

"Yes?" Mehitable craned her neck to peer through the buttery door at her sister, although her stout little arms did not cease their manipulation of the churn dasher. "What is it, Charity?" she repeated, her eyes resting with some astonishment upon the other's sparkling face.

Charity gave another cautious glance at the stair door before she answered.

"Knowst aught of a trip to Trenton, Hitty?" she asked, then.

Mehitable's gaze widened. "A trip to Trenton!" she cried incredulously.

"Hush!" Charity frowned in quick alarm. "Yes, I heard Mother and Father talking of it," she went on in a low voice. "Cousin Eliza's letter came a day or so ago. And, Hitty, she wants us to come to Trenton to spend the holidays with her!"

"La! La!" Mehitable's butter activities almost ceased in her delighted and surprised acceptance of this piece of news. "And what did they decide, Cherry—Mother and Father, I mean?"

For this was before the days when young people were allowed their own opinions upon projects, even when those same plans intimately concerned themselves.

"They had not yet decided," Charity answered. "Mother said it would take a monstrous lot of thought, deciding to let us go to a very hotbed of Hessians, e'en though we should be under the protection and care of so rich a lady as Cousin Eliza."

"And what did Father say?" asked Mehitable eagerly.

"Father said that a trip to Trenton——"

"And who talks of a trip to Trenton, I should like to know?" said an unexpected voice abruptly as Mistress Condit entered the kitchen. She smothered a smile at Mehitable's hasty disappearance around the

edge of the buttery door and Charity's quickly assumed air of studiousness. Not for nothing had she been the mother of those two little maids for a number of years. "Come, come," she repeated sternly, "who speaks of Trenton?"

"Indeed, Mother, I did not mean to——" began Charity. Then her sharp eyes detected the smile that lurked in her mother's dark ones and she broke off excitedly.

"Yes, 'tis true, Charity, as I know from your sharp gaze you have guessed," nodded Mistress Condit, laughing. "Your father and I have decided to let you and Mehitable accept Cousin Eliza's invitation, and I have been upstairs looking over your wardrobes—and scant enough they be!"

"Oh, Mother!" both girls exclaimed simultaneously. Mehitable stuck her head around the buttery door again, and now her arms paused in their task. But at Mistress Condit's sharp reproof she defended herself.

"Indeed, the butter has come, Mother." And set to work, forthwith, like the expert little dairymaid she was, to lift the pale, smooth mixture from the churn, wash it, salt it, and pat it into shape.

How the time flew then to that eventful day of departure. What mending of shabby gowns! It seemed hardly any time before the exciting moment was actually upon them when they were seated, snugly wrapped against the bitter wind, beside their father on the farm cart. What a number of last-minute errands then ensued! Mistress Condit must run down the garden path numberless times with forgotten

articles—Charity's squirrel muff, the foot warmer, even the lunch all nicely wrapped in one of the best napkins. But at last they were off, with the girls waving to their mother until they were out of sight around the bend in the road.

Over the First Mountain they went and across Pleasant Valley to the beautiful brookside road that wound beneath the lee of the Second Mountain. Then through the little village of Millburn and south to the Morristown road, where they were to meet the stagecoach and continue the rest of their journey in that.

The girls' hearts thumped when, sitting in the cart, waiting, far off in the distance they descried the great lumbering coach with its four galloping horses.

"Quick, Father!" cried Mehitable, beginning to scramble down from her seat and reaching for her many bundles.

"Nay, Hitty, do not hurry, lass! There's time a-plenty!" And the Squire laughed at this extremely inexperienced traveler. "The stage will wait! Besides, 'tis yet some distance away!"

He turned to lift the rugged little cowhide trunk, the very same which had come over from England with his mother's clothes in it so many years ago, when his eyes rested upon an unexpected sight. It was an Indian watching from behind a tree! But the Squire went quietly on with his task of carrying the trunk over to the side of the road, and when he stole another look, the savage had vanished.

And now the stagecoach was near. The two little Colonial maids grew pale as the enormous thing, drawn

by its four prancing steeds, rumbled and swayed down the road toward them, to stop with a tremendous jerk and clatter directly in front of them. A postilion swung himself down to come over for the trunk, while the coachman, a fat, jolly-looking man in greatcoat and raccoon cap, nodded to the Squire from the box.

"Take good care of these young ladies, Dan!" shouted Squire Condit jovially, when, the fares having been paid, the girls had settled themselves inside the coach with much bustling and many farewell kisses. "They are prize possessions of mine!"

"I'll warrant ye! I'll deliver 'em safe and sound, never fear!" The girls heard the driver answer with a deep laugh. Then, with a shout to the horses, a crack of the whip, they were off. And the Squire, in the middle of the road, was left staring rather disconsolately after them.

Mehitable and Charity, however, were all of a flutter as the stagecoach whirled them away from their father. First they had to settle all of their various small belongings, which had been piled pell-mell upon the seats beside them, the trunk having been swung on top of the stage. Then they had to take stock of their fellow passengers, of whom there were three—a rather fussy old lady seated in the center of the coach and much disturbed about draughts, and two men facing each other at opposite windows. Charity, who did not mind riding backward faced her sister at the other end of the coach so that they each had a window, too.

For a while their natural shyness kept them silent and ill at ease; but finally, discovering that no one paid

them the least attention, the two men conversing in low tones, the old lady continuously readjusting her voluminous skirts and nodding occasionally in the depths of her poke bonnet that completely hid her face, the two girls began to lay happy plans.

"Think you Cousin Eliza will give us a party?" began Mehitable.

Charity gave an excited little bounce in her seat. "Oh, I do hope so! Don't you, Hitty?" she exclaimed vivaciously.

"Yes, if only John might be there to dance the minuet with me," sighed Mehitable.

"'Tis no use a-wishing," answered Charity sensibly.

"Well, I wish so, anyway." Mehitable looked out gloomily at the passing landscape. But not for long could her spirits droop amid such an adventure. She was soon laughing and chatting again with her sister, so that it seemed no time at all before, with a great rattling and clattering, they swung aside from the post road into an inn yard and everyone except themselves and the old lady descended for dinner.

"Oh, Hitty!" Charity, who was peering into the depths of the napkin Mistress Condit had wrapped their lunch in, gave a cry of delight. "Here is white bread to eat with our cheese. How, think you, Mother could have gotten the flour? She must have bought it the last time she went to Newark! And here—oh, Hitty!—here are some cherry tarts!"

"Truly, Charity?" And Mehitable's dark curls brushed her sister's cheeks as they bent together over the enticing dainties Mistress Condit had prepared

for them with such loving care. Neither of them, as it happened, saw the expression upon the old lady's face as she watched them from the depths of her poke bonnet. But Charity, glancing up a moment later, noticed that the former's hands, in their mitts, were lying idle in her lap and that she had no sign of a lunch parcel with her. She nudged her sister, whose quick glance took in that same fact.

"Will you not share our lunch, mistress?" asked Mehitable respectfully, offering her some of the bread and cheese.

The old lady, nodding her gray curls, murmured, "Thank'ee," and ate the offered viands hungrily. The girls then divided the cherry tarts, of which there were six and gave their fellow passenger two—an act of real self-denial on their part, for the tarts were small and each could have eaten three as easily as two. But their little act of kindness was accepted as a matter of course by the old lady who, after devouring the tarts almost at one gulp each, settled herself back in her seat and went to sleep.

Her chin was, in fact, drooping upon her chest so that her face was entirely hidden under her bonnet when the remaining two travelers came out of the inn and clambered back into their seats.

"Well, our ancient friend has gone a-nodding," remarked one man in a low voice, with a keen glance at the bobbing old head. "Continue, Hawtree."

"Hush!" And the man named Hawtree shot a suspicious look at the two girls and the old lady. "Even the trees seem to have ears these days!"

"Eh? Nonsense, nonsense!" And the first traveler, who was in high spirits after his delicious warm dinner at the inn, laughed hilariously. After the coach had started he drew a little map from his pocket.

"Let us go over these points once more," he said briskly. "You say that the White residence in Trenton is occupied by Von Wagner while Colonel Rahl is located here?"

The man addressed as Hawtree, after another surly, suspicious stare at his unconscious companions—the two girls were engaged in an engrossing conversation of their own, now, and the old lady was actually snoring—reluctantly nodded his head. But he need not have worried for, though the edge of a scarlet uniform showed once in a while beneath his greatcoat, neither the two girls nor the sleepy old lady appeared to notice it.

So the afternoon passed and at last they began to draw near the Hessian outposts stationed around Trenton.

"You have our papers, Hitty?" asked Charity nervously, as the coach stopped and a bewhiskered face appeared in the window beside the man named Hawtree. An examination of the two men's papers brought a quick salute from the sentinel, which caused a sullen frown to show upon Hawtree's face, while he looked furtively at the others.

Then the sentinel appeared upon the girls' side of the coach and Mehitable handed him their passports. These, to Charity's obvious relief, were found to be in order, and the soldier, handing them back to Mehitable, looked inquiringly at the old lady.

But the old lady was sound asleep. Not only was she sound asleep, but she was still snoring.

"Huh?" the Hessian grunted. And then, reaching a long arm past Mehitable, he plucked at the old lady's cape. "Passpor'," he shouted in a loud voice.

The old lady awoke with a great start and stared at him in fright. Impatiently he repeated his question and the old lady turned to Mehitable inquiringly.

"Passport! He wants your passport," explained the girl, showing hers and Charity's in an effort to lend understanding.

Then the old lady nodded and drew out her reticule, while the sentinel watched in visible disgust and sighed in mock patience.

But the old lady's passport was not in her reticule. Incredulously she reached in again, groping around and pulling out a kerchief, a pair of white mitts, a few coins and three peppermints. In a sudden flurry, she commenced feeling in other pockets of her gown. At last, in dismay, she stumbled to her feet and started toward the coach door.

"*Nein, nein!*" grunted the soldier at that, barring her exit. "Where you go, huh?"

"I must have room!" returned the old lady in a high, excited voice. "I must have room to search for the passport. I cannot reach all of the pockets of my gown in this small space. Let me pass, sir!"

The Hessian, at this, looked suddenly and unaccountably at the man named Hawtree, who gave an imperceptible nod. Whereupon the sentinel stepped aside from the coach door and the old lady crowded past

Mehitable and Charity with no apology at all. Then a strange thing happened!

No sooner were that old lady's feet firmly planted on terra firma than she gave the sentinel a powerful shove that sent him sprawling backward into the road and lifting her skirts high, she set off at a gallop up the road.

For an instant, so swiftly had this taken place, everyone sat appalled. Then the man named Hawtree gave an angry shout and struggled to open the coach door at his side, while the other man, drawing his pistol, leaned far out of his window and fired it after the astonishing old lady.

It did not stop her, however. She only lifted her skirts higher in order that she might run faster and at last she disappeared into the woods that lined the road at this point.

Hawtree held up his hand. "Go on," he ordered the coachman furiously and slammed shut the coach door.

"Didst see?" whispered Mehitable to Charity, as they sat staring at each other. "Didst see? That old lady was a *man!*"

CHAPTER VII

MEHITABLE WALKS INTO A TRAP

CHARITY nooded speechlessly.

A long silence ensued during which the traveler who had been the more jovial bit his finger nails and cast chagrined glances at his morose companion.

"Deuce take it, Hawtree!" he exclaimed, after a while. "Don't take it so bitterly. No one was exactly to blame!"

The man named Hawtree turned around and stared angrily.

"I told you even the trees had ears these days!" he thundered fiercely. "Yet you must needs give the enemy full details of our private affairs!"

The other man relapsed into silence at that and the rest of the journey was finished in absolute speechlessness upon the part of everyone, the girls hardly daring to breathe lest they bring the ire of their unpleasant companion upon their heads. They were more than relieved when they finally rumbled into the inn yard at Trenton and the others were deposited there.

Then the coach continued upon its way, out through the town along the banks of the lovely Delaware River that even the bleakness of December could not rob of

its charm. The fine estate and the mansion belonging to the girls' Cousin Eliza was situated rather upon the outskirts of Trenton, with a beautiful view up and down the river from the great garden behind the house.

"I am so glad our journey is ended. Aren't you, Hitty?" yawned Charity, as they approached the house itself. It was almost midnight, and they were tired and hungry.

"Delivered safely!" shouted Driver Dan drawing up with a flourish. And the two girls, laughing, got out and saw their Cousin Eliza upon her front steps.

"Well, little travelers!" she exclaimed, smiling "'Tis good to see your bright faces once more!"

She drew them within doors, whither two colored footmen were carrying the little cowhide trunk.

Mehitable, after greeting her cousin, stared around her in astonishment. Every sconce was lighted, there was a sound of music from the parlors, gay voices laughed and sang snatches of song, while from the dining room on the other side of the wide center hall came the sound of silver clinking against china.

"Why, are you giving a party?" she asked in innocent wonder.

Her Cousin Eliza laughed rather bitterly, then motioned to the girls to follow her. They turned obediently as she began to ascend the stairs, and mounted after her in embarrassed silence. Why had she laughed so queerly?

Not at the first landing did their hostess pause; but on they went, up to where of old the servants' quarters had been. There Cousin Eliza led the way into a little

low-ceilinged room and, sitting down in a low chair, gazed at them sadly.

"A party, you asked, Mehitable?" she said sorrowfully. "I would to Heaven it were a party of my own I was giving to-night! No, girls, the party is that of my *guests*'"—she stressed the word "guests" scornfully—"of my guests' giving! 'Tis not I who am mistress in my own home any more!"

"Poor cousin!" Charity went to her and softly stroked the other's white arm. "But this is a nice little room—as nice as ours at home," she went on, looking around her cheerfully. "'Tis as spotless as can be!"

"Dear child!" Cousin Eliza bent to kiss her affectionately, "I, too, room up here on this same floor, crowded out of my own apartments. The servants are in quarters outside, now. But come, when you have washed some of the stains of travel away, descend, I pray you, and meet—some of my *guests!*"

The girls stood for a little while in silence when her slow footsteps had died away upon the stairs. Then Charity moved over to her sister.

"Think you Mother would have let us come, Hitty, had she known the Hessians were actually encamped in Cousin Eliza's own house?" she whispered.

"Nay!" Mehitable shook her head. "But now that we are here, I, for one, am going to enjoy myself!" she added with youthful relish.

Later, however, the two little maids paused in agonized bashfulness at the foot of the stairs in the big hall. But their Cousin Eliza spied them at once and

hastened toward them, escorted across the shining waxed floor by a young man in a Hessian uniform.

Mehitable, glancing up at him, could scarcely repress an exclamation. Save that he had yellow hair, lightly powdered, and wore not the buff and blue, he might have been the young aide-de-camp who had stopped that day weeks ago to beg hospitality for his Chief, General Washington.

"Mehitable," said Cousin Eliza formally, "may I present Lieutenant von Garten?"

The young Hessian officer clicked his polished boots together and, bowing low in a rather foreign fashion, lifted Mehitable's little brown hand to his lips.

"Mistress Mehitable!" he smiled amiably, with not the slightest hint of recognition. And the girl, chiding herself for her too-powerful imagination, curtseyed in return. Then Charity was introduced and the young officer escorted the three ladies into the parlors.

But in spite of the brilliant gathering of Hessian officers and a few of their stout German wives and many American belles, the girls were too weary from their journey to enjoy the festivities and soon asked permission of their cousin to retire.

Then how the days flew by! The invaders of Trenton were a pleasure-loving crew who planned parties, drives, and calls galore, who filled every waking moment with some sort of good time. Mehitable, being older and really fond of every sort of outdoor sport, was in great demand. Charity, more retiring and quiet, was left more to the company of her cousin who, like many of the ladies of that time, did not relish the hardy

sports of hunting and tramping that the Germans loved.

Upon the whole, despite Cousin Eliza's natural resentment, the enemy, beyond their excessive eating and drinking, were not unkind to the townspeople of Trenton. And the time passed all too quickly for Mehitable, who much preferred this present life to the quiet, work-filled one upon her father's farm, no matter how much better the latter was for her. It was Charity who sighed often in secret for her mother and father and her beloved kitten, and who would go up, unnoticed, to her little attic room and there weep a few homesick tears in private.

But Christmas afternoon found even Charity's face sparkling with smiles as she stood behind her sister, staring into the little mirror hung over the white-draped dressing table.

"Oh, Cherry, aren't we beautiful!" sighed Mehitable at last.

"You are, Hitty," murmured Charity, gazing at her sister in honest admiration.

"And you are, too!" cried Mehitable, whirling around. "Oh, wasn't it wonderful of Cousin Eliza to give us these dresses for our Christmas gifts!"

Mehitable was truly splendid in a white satin gown with crimson satin overskirt. She looked like a gorgeous autumn leaf as she stood there playing with the big fan of crimson ostrich plumes, gazing down at her tiny crimson satin slippers. For Cousin Eliza's foot was the same size and her gifts of two dresses from her own fine wardrobe made over for the girls by her maid

had been indeed complete. Charity looked like a demure garden pink in a similar costume of pink and white satin, while the aforementioned maid had dressed their hair high in the prevailing mode, lightly powdering the dark and yellow curls until they both looked alike.

"It was indeed good of Cousin Eliza to give us these dresses," returned Charity, answering her sister's excited exclamation. "But think you, Hitty, she expects us to take them home with us?"

"Of course, silly one," said Mehitable carelessly, holding her fan this way and that as she gazed at herself in the mirror. "Dost think that people take back their Christmas gifts after once bestowing them?"

"No," hesitated Charity. "But these were Cousin Eliza'a own dresses."

"But she wanted us to have them, she said, since she could buy us nothing of value for Christmas," answered Mehitable briskly. "And she had Felice cut them down to fit us, which ruins them for her wearing again, Cherry."

"But wherever shall we be able to wear them again, Hitty?" persisted Charity seriously. "To meeting?" She paused to giggle. "Imagine Parson Chapman's face an we were to walk into meeting attired thus some Sunday."

Mehitable laughed, then turned to rebuke the other. "It is not seemly, Charity, to mock our good parson when he is away in danger with the American Army!"

"I know!" Tender-hearted Charity looked self-reproachful at once. "It is because I am nervous

that I jest, forsooth," she confided apologetically. "You are used to parties, of course, having visited Cousin Eliza before, Hitty; but this is my first real ball, you know."

"H'm, yes," said Mehitable doubtfully. She did not think it necessary to mention the fact that her knowledge of previous balls at Cousin Eliza's had been gleaned from what she could see through the banisters, her hostess having sensibly considered her, four years before, entirely too young to be allowed to join the holiday revels.

But the two pretty figures which hesitated at the foot of the stairs that gay Christmas afternoon seemed alike in self-consciousness a little later. The young Hessian lieutenant, Von Garten, soon spied them and led them to seats in the parlor, where they were surrounded in a little while by an admiring group, and Cousin Eliza, in her corner, looked well pleased at the happiness her gifts had bestowed upon her little relatives. When the music began each girl was led out for the stately minuet.

How quaint and lovely that group would look to us, now, with their slow steps and stately curtseys and bowings. But to the two young country girls it was the height of gayety and fun, that minuet, and their eyes sparkled with pleasure.

Although it was not long after the midday Christmas feast, with broad daylight shut out of the rooms by the heavy shutters to aid the softer, more festive candlelight, numbers of Hessian officers were already gathered around the steaming punch bowl toasting themselves

and their own success in their guttural language. Only the younger, more sprightly of them were dancing.

At last the music stopped, the fiddler laying down his instrument and the musician at the spinet rising with him to partake of the egg-nogg a servant was offering them. And before they had resumed playing, Mehitable had been led away by young Von Garten and Charity had been solicited for the minuet by a fat, fussy old officer who proved to be exceptionally light upon his feet.

Fortunately for them, both girls had been painstakingly and carefully taught the minuet and some of the quadrilles popular at that time by their brother John, who had learned this fol-de-rol, as his father called it, in New York. But dancing among these gay revelers with real music was far different from dancing out in the big empty hayloft with the only music supplied breathlessly by John's whistling.

"Why, how easy it is!" gasped Mehitable. She glanced up at Von Garten as he held her hand in the air for her to circle around him.

He smiled down at her. "You speak as though surprised. Why?" he asked idly.

But Mehitable, a sudden quick memory of the little girl in homespun frock hopping up and down in the big barn, of John's sharp "Don't bob when you curtsey! Go down slowly to the floor—so! And now up again slowly—so! Slowly! Slowly!" overwhelming her, merely shook her head and smiled with aching throat. Oh, to see John again! To hear once more his brief brotherly praise, "Well done, little Hitty!"

The dance ended, they moved over to the single window which had been left uncovered. This window commanded a view of the driveway and of the gate and an oblique view of the Delaware River. Christmas morning had found the ground white, to everyone's pleasure, and now the rays of the setting sun slanted across the dazzling expanse of white and sent gleaming ripples dancing and scurrying across the river between the masses of floating ice.

Von Garten began the conversation.

"They say the American Army is becoming more ragged and hungry every day," he commenced, glancing slyly at her.

Mehitable did not answer.

"'Tis too bad they do not know when they are beaten," went on the young man teasingly. "What a lot of time and trouble 'twould save them an their general surrendered to Lord Cornwallis, who is waiting at New Brunswick so kindly and patiently for them to do so."

Mehitable tossed her head. "An General Washington wished, I doubt not he could turn the tables even now and capture all these Hessian boobies," she answered tartly.

A quick gleam appeared in Von Garten's eyes. He opened his mouth as though to speak, but before he could do so the girl had leaned forward and was studying two horsemen approaching through the open gate. The last flitting beams of the sun shone full in her eyes, however, and it was not until the riders were passing directly beneath the window she was staring through

that she caught a good look at them. Then, in acute anazement, she stumbled back.

"Why, 'tis Squire Briggs!" she ejaculated. "And that man Hawtree!"

"You know them?" asked Von Garten curiously.

"Squire Briggs is a neighbor of ours," answered Mehitable. "And Hawtree came up in the coach from Millburn with us. I did not like him."

Von Garten studied her flushed young face.

"I wonder," murmured Mehitable absently," I wonder what Squire Briggs is doing up here?"

Somehow the spare, furtive, rather sneaking face of her father's neighbor boded no good, she felt.

"You do not like him, either?" asked Von Garten softly.

But Mehitable glanced up suddenly, keenly. This, she all at once remembered, was an enemy to her country, and as such, no matter how frank and attractive she found him to be personally, she must be upon her guard against. So she relapsed into a silence she would not break, watching over her shoulder, uneasily, the door by which the two unpleasant visitors must enter.

At last she saw them, saw the thin, stoop-shouldered figure of Squire Briggs bend awkwardly over Cousin Eliza's hand as the man Hawtree briefly introduced him, saw them immediately look her way and, with a heart that suddenly throbbed, realized that with their hostess they were turning toward her.

"Oh," she said, under her breath, "isn't there some place I can hide?

But Von Garten laughed, thinking her joking, and

when the two men had reached her and were introduced to her by Cousin Eliza, he bowed and left her alone with the other men, for their hostess had been called away at that moment.

"And now, Mehitable," said Squire Briggs, smiling unpleasantly, "we wish very much to see you alone." He paused and then added softly, "On business."

But Mehitable parried this. "I do not know of any business you could have with me, Squire Briggs," she answered coolly.

"No?" asked Squire Briggs, while Hawtree muttered impatiently. "I suppose you are not interested in that rascal brother o' yours, either?"

Mehitable's cheeks flamed, but her voice, when she answered, was steady.

"John a rascal, Squire Briggs?" she returned proudly. "Had you not better look closer to home, sir?"

A pale red now burned in the Squire's sallow cheeks. "Then I take it you are not interested in you brother's welfare?" he snarled.

The girl hesitated. This, she felt, was a plot. What its object was she could not tell, save that the two men seemed anxious to see her alone. But on the other hand, John might be in real danger and these two men sent to parley with her. Suddenly, impetuously, she made up her mind.

"There is under the stair landing a little room. We shall be alone there, an you wish."

It so happened, as they left the room, that no one noticed their departure. The hall, too, was momentarily deserted.

"And now, sirs," said Mehitable, facing the two men in the cold little room she had designated, "what do you wish?"

But instead of speaking at once the man named Hawtree did a strange thing. Fixing his eyes upon her—and she shuddered at those sinister eyes—he slowly drew from his pocket two long leather thongs. Then he stepped to the door and, suddenly snapping it shut, turned the key in the lock and pocketed the key, while over in the corner by the cheerless fireplace sounded Squire Briggs's cackle of laughter, taunting, unbelievably cruel.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TABLES ARE TURNED

BUT Mehitable faced the two men undaunted. There was no doubt whatever in her mind now that their intentions were unfair. But she meant, before crying for help, to attempt to find out what, if anything, they knew concerning her brother John.

"I suppose you are afraid that I will run away, gentlemen," she said, with scornful accent upon the last word, alluding to the locked door.

"Nay, but we take no chances," growled Squire Briggs, from whom all pretense at friendliness had dropped. He faced her scowlingly across the little table which separated them. "Sit down!"

"I had rather stand!" returned Mehitable stubbornly.

"Sit down!" roared Hawtree. And surrendering proudly, Mehitable walked to a big chair beside the fireplace and seated herself.

The two men pulled chairs forward and seated themselves directly opposite the girl.

"Now, Mehitable," began Squire Briggs, rubbing his hands together and glancing covertly at her from beneath bent brows, "we want to know why, on a certain night best known to you, in early December,

you made your way to the top of the mountain above your house and there kindled a signal fire?"

"Why, how did you know?" blurted out Mehitable. Then she stopped and bit her lip angrily, while the Squire gave a low cackle of satisfaction.

"Never mind how he knew," interrupted Hawtree roughly.

"I'll tell ye! I'll tell ye!" gloated Squire Briggs. "I watched ye!"

"Then you *were* home that day!" accused Mehitable instantly. "You *were* home and you did not come to help us get Charity out of your cistern!"

The Squire reddened at her indignant accusation. "I had other fish to fry," he muttered sullenly. "You should not have trespassed upon my land!"

But he did not forget to the end of his days the long, contemptuous look Mehitable gave him. He knew she had read his mean little soul aright! And liked her accordingly!

"Come, come, that's neither here nor there," growled Hawtree. "Answer the question, mistress, or 'twill be the worse for you!"

"I do not know the reason for the signal fire; but if I did, I would not tell you," answered Mehitable instantly.

The two men stared at her threateningly, and Hawtree made a movement toward the leather thongs upon the table top. But Squire Briggs raised his hand.

"Give her but another chance," he said, scowling again. "I am sure she will remember in a moment, sir."

But Mehitable shook her head obstinately. At the end of a brief pause the man Hawtree jumped to his feet, and before Mehitable realized what he was doing, he had whipped out his kerchief and had gagged her. Next, in a businesslike manner, he tied her two hands behind her and her ankles together. Then he stepped back to survey his work.

"Now, Mehitable," said Squire Briggs, moving toward the door, "perhaps a long, cold wait in here will loosen your tongue so that you will be willing to tell us what you know about the signals set that night."

"Wait a moment," muttered Hawtree. And the other paused while he moved a leather screen between the door and Mehitable's chair so that she would be hidden from any one entering there. At last the two men left the room and Mehitable could hear the key turned in the lock. She was left alone to her own upbraidings.

Well she knew that it was her own impulsiveness which had placed her in her position. But that was small comfort, now. At first she merely suffered mentally, reproaching herself for having become such an easy victim to the two unscrupulous villains. But soon the piercing cold of the little room entered her, for she was clad but thinly in her satin party gown and the empty fireplace seemed merely to taunt her. She looked desperately around her. Only two narrow windows set high in the thick walls lighted the room, which was beautifully wainscoted in oak. And the heavy door remained closed. No sound of revelry in the other part of the house reached her, and she knew,

even though she were not gagged, she would call in vain for help.

It grew darker and darker. Long shadows crept from table to chair, from fireplace to table. And at last she was in total darkness. But her eyes became accustomed to the dense gloom because it came so gradually, and she found that she could see despite the shadows.

Now her arms began to ache, strained back as they were in their unnatural position, and her ankles felt as though fiery flames were commencing to gnaw at them instead of the leather thong binding them. She lost all track of time. A daze of misery enveloped her.

Then the sound of the key turning in its lock roused her and she turned her head eagerly as the door swung a little open and a strip of yellow light shot across the floor.

"There, you ridiculous child, canst see the room is empty, as Mr. Hawtree said?" she heard her Cousin Eliza remark lightly, as a group of people, judging from the shadows cast, paused in the doorway.

"I but wanted to make sure," said Charity's voice timidly. "'Tis so unlike Hitty to disappear thus!"

"Of course!" said the villain Hawtree suavely. "I wanted Mistress Charity to know that she was mistaken in having thought we had come in here!"

"La, Charity," continued Cousin Eliza, in a careless tone, "I am sure you will find Hitty upstaits in her room, primping for to-night!"

And then, to the imprisoned girl's bitter disappointment, the door again swung shut and she was left alone

once more. She noticed dully that the key was not turned in its lock this time, Hawtree, not daring to do so in the presence of the mistress of the house, and evidently planning to return later.

So another long period of waiting passed. One by one Mehitable's fingers and toes seemed to die, which was more bearable, though, than the intense pain which preceded the numbness. She sat perfectly motionless, for it did no good to struggle.

Then the faint sound of an opening door came to her, and she felt a cold draught of air; but to her surprise there was no sign of light as there had been before. Silence reigned, which also was queer. At first she wondered vaguely if she had imagined that sound of a door opening, that faint click. But as she sat there, she became aware of someone's presence in the room in that indefinable way which utter stillness sometimes conveys. And she turned her head.

In vain, however, for she could not see far behind her —only a portion of the fireplace on one side and the table and screen on the other, while directly in front of her was the wall with its two high windows, now long since curtained by night.

She struggled against her gag and strove to call. No murmur of sound came from her swollen lips. A chill, vague fear took possession of her. Whoever had entered, if any one had, was evidently most unwilling to be seen, and the girl wondered how he had gained admittance since the door from the hall had not been opened. Then she started nervously as an icy hand brushed against her cheeks from behind her chair. But

a moment later she gave a great sob of joy, for the gag slipped from her mouth.

And now the same hand was working at that leather thong which bound her wrists, which soon came loose. At last her ankles were unbound, too, and Mehitable twisted in her chair to see her liberator. But whoever it was remained crouched behind the tall back of the chair, so that she respected his wishes and strove, instead, to stand. But at that she uttered a cry of pain and sank back upon her chair again, for her weight brought almost unbearable agony to her feet, while the blood surging back into her wrists made them ache, too.

She sat there rubbing her ankles, then she tried to walk again and this time she succeeded in reaching the door. She clutched at it with futile fingers, then her hand curled around the latch and with a little sob of suspense she lifted it and the door opened.

But e'er she stepped through to freedom she sent a little fugitive glance over her shoulder. Was it an Indian face shrinking back into the darkness of that little room? She did not know. She only knew, as she reeled into the wide hall outside, that she was free and safe once more!

For a long moment she stood clutching the wall beside her. It seemed strangely silent there, and beyond, all the parlors were deserted, too. Then she realized, from the sounds coming from the dining room, that the jovial enemy were still celebrating Christmas and that all the Hessian officers were once more gathered around the well-laden board of their reluctant hostess.

Mehitable limped to a chair that was pushed against the wall near her. And there Charity, who was coming anxiously down the stairs, saw her. Charity gave a little shriek of joy and, running the rest of the way, threw herself upon her knees beside her sister.

"Oh, Hitty, wherever have you been? How worried I have felt!" she half sobbed.

Quickly, in a low voice, Mehitable told her what had happened, and the younger girl's sweet face flushed with anger.

"Why, how did Squire Briggs dare!" she exclaimed, with flashing eyes.

"Hush!" answered Mehitable faintly. "'Tis war, Cherry!" She leaned back with closed eyes.

The little sister stood studying her anxiously.

"I know, Hitty," she said at last, brightening. "An you could walk as far as the kitchen you could get warm, and Aunt Tivvy will give you some supper."

Mehitable stumbled to her feet and with Charity's help entered the great kitchen, which was in a rear wing. There a scene of utmost activity was taking place. Before the fire three spits, on which were roasting turkeys, were being turned and watched by a grinning Negro lad. Other servants were coming and going in the direction of the dining room, while Aunt Tivvy, a fat, smiling-faced old negress, kept watchful eyes upon the heavily laden trays which were being constantly carried to the company within.

"Ki, honey, what's de mattah?" exclaimed Aunt Tivvy in concern, as she caught sight of Mehitable's pale face. Charity explained in a few swift words and,

muttering angrily, the old woman soon had a cup of warm broth for the victim. Afterward she set to work slicing with reckless knife juicy bits from a turkey's breast, so that the two sisters, at the end of the kitchen table, fared quite as well as the most honored guest in the dining room.

It was at the end of her meal, which soon restored her customary vigor, that Mehitable looked up.

"Dost know what time it is, Aunt Tivvy?" she asked. "I lost all count as I sat 'prisoned."

"'Bout one o'clock—I know 'twas midnight quite awhile ago," answered the old cook respectfully.

"One o'clock! I was indeed in there a long time! It was but dusk when I entered that little room, Aunt Tivvy. By the way, dost know aught of any little secret door into that little room?"

"Dat little room undah de staiahs?"

Eagerly both girls nodded.

"Laws, yes'm, honey!" answered Aunt Tivvy promptly. She lowered her voice. "I spects no one knows 'bout it 'cept jes' me—I was dustin' dat wainscotin' one day and my hand struck a spring an' bing! a li'l' door flew open. I shut it quick and didn't say nuffin'!"

"Well, where does the door lead to, Aunt Tivvy?" asked Mehitable breathlessly.

"Outside," said the old negress. "It's a li'l' door jes' outside by the chimney whar no one'd never notice it!"

"Outside?" repeated Mehitable. The mystery was still a mystery!

The girls soon finished their meal, and warmly thanking the old cook, with whom they were prime favorites, they left the kitchen to find the company streaming back into the parlors again, although many of the officers were still at the table, especially the older and portlier ones.

By the kitchen door Charity suddenly clutched her sister's arm and shrank back.

"What will you do an that terrible man, Hawtree, sees you?"

"I am not afraid," said Mehitable sturdily. "I will not be so trapped again, Charity, rest assured of that. And you see to it you are not!"

But the man Hawtree had not yet come from the dining room, and before the two girls could move from their position at the rear of the broad hall, facing the front door, it was flung wide open.

"What——" began Hitty. Then she stopped in amazement. For a file of American soldiers were advancing into the house and at their head was Von Garten, shorn of his yellow wig and clad in the buff and blue of the American Army.

The gay company stood as though paralyzed. Not a man moved to oppose the entry of the Americans.

"Gentlemen," said Von Garten in a cold, metallic voice and his eyes were like steel. "Gentlemen, you are our prisoners!"

The Hessians acted as though they were stunned, as though this were some terrible nightmare from which presently they must awaken to find everything as serenely safe and secure as before, when they had had

this amazing enemy baffled and fuming across the Delaware River.

Now they gave up their swords meekly and wordlessly and went to stand in a forlorn company at one end of the parlors, as Von Garten directed, with the Americans forming guard upon each side of them.

Some of the fat German fraus wept, but silently, as though they realized that they had been definitely outwitted. It was only when Hawtree appeared on the dining-room threshold and stared in amazement that any commotion was created. He caught one glimpse of the grim-faced young commander and pointed a shaking finger at him.

"You traitor!" he hissed. "You traitor, Von Garten!"

The other looked at him contemptuously.

"I never pleaded allegiance to your flag," he answered coolly. "And I never—tortured an innocent girl!"

Mehitable started as much as Hawtree who, when his eyes fell upon her, uttered an exclamation.

"You!" he cried hoarsely.

But Von Garten strode toward him and pushed him into the line of prisoners. "Enough!" he ordered. And Hawtree relapsed into fuming, furious silence, though Mehitable shuddered at the terrible looks he cast at her and the young man.

As the guard and their prisoners were moving toward the doorway there was a sound of a loud crash from the dining room. Presently a soldier came dragging in a limp, miserable figure and threw it down with a thud before Von Garten.

"Poor boobie didn't know as how the house was surrounded," explained the soldier laconically. "He tried to 'scape through the window."

Mehitable recognized the spare, mean figure and started forward. A swift memory of the hot tears in her friend's eyes, of her words, "Well, you can just trust me, for I am a patriot, too," came to her mind. And at that moment Von Garten raised his eyes to meet her pleading glance.

"He shall be your prisoner, Mistress Mehitable," he said promptly.

"Oh, please, let him go!" she murmured. And at once Von Garten bent and lifted the cowardly little man to his feet, speeding him upon his way, however, out through the front door by the toe of his boot. Then he fell back and saluted, for up the steps strode a tall, commanding figure, followed by a company of officers in American uniform.

"How now, Lieutenant Freeman?"

"I beg leave to report, Your Excellency, that all the enemy has been captured," began the erstwhile Von Garten, saluting again. When suddenly he was interrupted by a loud cry of "John!" and two flying figures passed him to throw themselves into the arms of a tall young man directly behind the Commander-in-Chief. General Washington looked around with a frown. Then his face cleared and he gazed kindly at the embarrassed young man, who, though joyfully returning two frantic hugs tried to look dignified and cool.

"Nay, let them embrace you, my lad! 'Tis long

since they had opportunity, I'm sure," said His Excellency.

He turned to Mehitable who, her first joyful transports over, now stood blushing.

"Why 'tis my little friend who would be called Angeline!" he said softly. And bowing in the most courtly fashion he kissed her hand before turning upon his heel and preparing to leave the house with his staff.

"Oh, John, must you go?" Charity half sobbed it, but the keen ears of the great general catching the words, he turned back momentarily.

"Why, stay, lad. 'Tis a bloodless victory and no work for you to-night."

So John Condit was drawn in before Cousin Eliza's fire, there to sit with Charity upon his knee and Mehitable unashamedly hanging on to his hand.

"And now tell us everything, John," said the latter, with a long sigh.

"Nay, 'twould take months. And I would rather hear about our mother and father."

"They are well," returned Mehitable hastily. "But oh, John, you must explain some things! The meaning of the signal fire? And did you truly send your silver shoe buckle and——"

"Stay!" cried John laughing and holding up his hand in mock supplication. "Give me time to breathe, at least, Hitty! I did, indeed send the silver shoe buckle, as we had agreed, you remember. And well you answered my appeal for help, little sisters!" And here the big brother's face grew very tender as he glanced

at the little maids. "Probably your signal fire paved the very way to this night's victory!"

Cousin Eliza clapped her hands triumphantly. "'Tis the women who are ever behind the victories!" she cried mischievously.

"Even so," nodded John. "But, Hitty, why do you not tell me of the queer old lady of your stagecoach trip?" he asked, looking down quizzically into Mehitable's happy face.

Both girls stared at him with open mouths.

"Why, John, how didst know about her?" exclaimed Charity.

"Because"—and here John Condit stopped to chuckle—"why, because, little sister, *I was the old lady!*"

CHAPTER IX

THE CABIN IN THE SWAMP

MEHITABLE was worried. Early that morning Mistress Condit, reluctantly, for the girls had been home from Trenton only a week, had gone to the farm of Matthias Dodd, whither she had been called to take care of Mistress Dodd, who had fallen and injured herself. Mehitable, left in charge, had been appealed to by Charity and by Young Cy, who had come for that purpose, for permission for the former to accompany the latter to the Town by the River. Against her better judgment, the older sister had yielded, though as soon as the other two started off gaily she regretted it. Now it was dusk and though Young Cy had promised to have his little charge back in the early afternoon, there was no sign of them upon the cart road before the Condit farmhouse.

"If only my father were home instead of off to Millburn!" sighed Mehitable to herself anxiously. "Or Mother! Indeed, I fear what they will say to me for letting Charity go with Young Cy! And perhaps I was foolish, though Charity did beg so! And Young Cy, too!"

At last, just as she thought she could bear being alone no longer, Amos, one of the men-of-all-work, entered the kitchen abruptly. He wore a grave face.

"The master not back, yet?" he asked.

"Nay. Be there anything the matter?"

"Nothing serious," he answered slowly. "'Tis this—three o' our horses be sick; methinks they act like they've been poisoned, and indeed, I would not put it above the Tories!—and Judd and I will have to work o'er them this night. Mayhap ye will give me a bit o' bread and cheese so that we can sup in the barn, Mistress Hitty?"

Agreeing, Mehitable told him of her anxiety concerning Charity, adding that she would take one of the well horses and ride as far as the Joneses'.

Amos protested; but Mehitable was perverse and less than half an hour later she was pounding at the Joneses' front door. Jemima, Young Cy's sister, appeared, but seeing Mehitable she burst into tears, and the latter, her heart sinking, discovered that Jemima's parents had also, like good neighbors, hastened to the Dodd farm, that the young girl and her old grandmother and a little brother were alone and greatly worried by Young Cy's inexplicable tarrying.

"Nay, keep thy courage," murmured Mehitable, her own lips trembling. "I will ride toward Newark to meet them. Doubtless they are delayed."

So saying, she rode off once more. When she reached the meeting house she was surprised to see a number of horses tethered to posts before it and still more surprised to hear a loud voice issuing in tirade from within it.

"I tell ye, gentlemen," said the voice grimly, "these Whig sentiments must be stamped out. Disloyalty

to our king must be punished—aye, even by death! And——"

A tumult of conversation interrupted the speaker for a moment; then he continued.

"There are certain men in ye Newark mountains neighborhood who not only have gi'en their sons to the rebel army, but have otherwise supported this pernicious cause. These men should be driven forth. Among them are Jones, Dodd, Baldwin, Aaron Harrison, Samuel Condit——"

Here Mehitable drew a sharp breath as she now realized what it was she was overhearing. A Tory meeting in patriotic Parson Chapman's own meeting house! It was the essence of irony!

She looked indignantly around her. Night had fallen, with bright moonlight to soften its murk. If only she could warn those men who were so calmly being sentenced to death or exile by their erstwhile neighbors. She had recognized the speaker as being one Josiah Felton, a bitter partisan of the king and long a person to be avoided. But only silence, with the occasional stamping of horses' hoofs, answered her until—a strange feeling made her glance at the meeting-house door. There, staring at her vindictively, was the man she had thought safe in some patriot prison camp—Hawtree! And as she gazed in horror another figure joined him. It was Squire Briggs!

A sharp cut of her whip sent her horse flying down the road; but her brave little attempt at escape ended in sorry failure. Her steed stumbled and fell to his

knees and before she could resume her flight upon foot the two men were beside her.

"How now, mistress?" sneered Hawtree. "Art caught again?"

"Let me go!" commanded the girl furiously, as his fingers caught her wrist in a rough grasp. But paying no attention to her, the rascal dragged her to one side of the road, where he consulted with his shifty-eyed companion.

"I know of a cabin," Mehitable heard Squire Briggs say. "'Twill do until——"

His voice sank. Mehitable, standing hopeless now, felt her heart contract. Until—what? she asked herself. Her mind refused to believe the conclusion to that question, despite what she had overheard in in front of the meeting house. Then the Tories turned toward her and, each grasping an arm, they half led, half carried her into the swamp bordering the road.

Afterward she reproached herself for not fighting bitterly every step of the way, making her captors pay in the way of scratches and bites from her sharp teeth. Dazed, however by her sudden misfortune, she stumbled along meekly enough until Hawtree, noticing her head turning frantically in an effort to see the path they were following into the depths of the swamp, laughed tauntingly.

"Ye know now how I felt Christmas morn when that jackanapes traitor, Von Garten, took me prisoner for the while," he mocked.

"He was no traitor, sir!" burst out Mehitable, forgetful of her sorry plight.

"He wore the Hessian uniform. He was a spy and traitor, mistress!" repeated Hawtree angrily.

"Spy, perhaps, for his country; but no traitor to your miserable king!" cried Mehitable. And scarce had spoken the words when she staggered beneath the other's cowardly blow. She would have fallen but for Squire Briggs's grasp. He stopped and faced the other with snarling lips.

"Fool!" was all he said, however.

At last, after long tramping, during which Mehitable's heart and head ached alike, they reached a tiny hut. Desolate and alone it stood, surrounded by black, partly frozen water and accessible only by one path leading to the door in its front.

But once across the threshold Mehitable stopped in sheer amazement. The interior of the cabin, in contrast to its wild and lonely surroundings, was comfortable, even luxurious for those days. A fire burned cozily upon the hearth, skins of various animals lay here and there upon the hard dirt floor, and a bunk built into one corner was piled high with blankets, with even a pillow for its occupant's head. Chairs and a table completed the room's furnishings save for some shelves with a scanty array of pewter dishes upon them. Except that stout bars across each of the two windows were visible, it might have been the home of some young Colonial farmer and his bride.

Thrusting her into a chair, the two men again consulted together. Her weary ears caught such scraps

of conversation as "not safe—she must have overheard," "knows too much," and again that ominous "until." She could have wept from terror and the pain in her head.

At last Squire Briggs turned toward her. "An ye try not to escape, Mehitable," he said briefly, careful not to meet her eyes, "we will let ye have the freedom o' this cabin. If not ——"

He paused significantly and Hawtree finished his sentence with an evil laugh.

"If not—ye had a taste before, mistress," he said nastily.

Mehitable looking at them silently, they took it for assent and withdrew, when she staggered wearily over to the bunk and fell asleep, with the knowledge that Charity and her parents were in danger and she could not warn them!

Morning, like an ancient hag, showed a worn and gray face as it crept past the wooden bars. Squire Briggs was early with her plain, cold breakfast and, somewhat to the girl's surprise, allowed her to go outside to make her toilet. As she stooped to dash the icy water over her hands and face, Mehitable thought of making a wild attempt to escape; but one glance around her showed how hopeless would be that attempt. The swamp seemed impenetrable, even in the daylight.

That day passed and the next. There had been a plentiful supply of logs upon the hearth. But now it was the last log! And already the piercing cold of a freezing night was beginning to creep in at every chink.

Finally the log was consumed. And poor Mehitable

had to walk up and down the narrow space of the cabin, swinging her arms to keep warm. She curled up in the bunk after a while and pulled the blankets around her. Her relief was enormous when the door opened and Squire Briggs appeared with her supper and a fresh supply of logs.

Casting them down upon the hearth, he kindled the fire once more and spoke into the shadows.

"I know not why ye cannot be a good girl like my 'Randy, 'stead o' traipsing around the country hearing things ye should not!" he burst out irritably.

Mehitable had to laugh at this and, offended, the Squire slammed down the trenchers he held upon the hearth and stalked from the cabin.

The girl waited until the fire blazed high, then jumped from the bunk and approached the trenchers which held her supper. But hungry as she was, she snatched back her hand without touching them and sprang to her feet. Retreating to the opposite wall she stood staring, rigid with horror. For there beside the trencher she had almost touched, with head erect, with tongue darting like a flame, with tail moving, was a large rattlesnake!

Mehitable could scarcely believe her eyes. Real country girl that she was she knew that all species of snakes retire to their holes the first cold night to sleep for months, not to waken from their torpor until the bright spring sunshine brings them forth. Yet here was this snake, not only alive but ready to attack, on one of the coldest nights of the year, with the thermometer at zero!

At last as she stood perfectly motionless, the facts of the case flashed over her. The snake must have crawled into the cabin, and the door subsequently having been closed, finding itself caught, it had found a hole in the fireplaces and had gone to sleep for the winter. The furious heat of Mehitable's fire had roused it and forth it had come in search of food. Finding the trencher, there, it had naturally resented Mehitable's unexpected appearance, and now it was ready to give battle.

She edged cautiously along the wall to the door, which she tried with trembling fingers. It held firm, though she had hoped against hope it might not, and for the first time she cried out. The utter horror of it struck her. She was alone and locked in with a rattlesnake!

But the snake did not move from its place before the fire. Gradually, it dawned upon Mehitable that as long as she remained quiet, the snake would, too.

The fire blazed up merrily. After a while the food, reheated by the leaping flames, began to send forth tantalizing odors. Mehitable looked hungrily and desperately around for a pole or something similar to try to draw the trencher toward her; but at her first movement the snake lifted its head and rattled its warning so spitefully that the girl, terrified, desisted.

Once she thought of attempting to reach her bunk which, raised from the floor, would offer her protection; but this thought was instantly followed by the memory of what her father had once told her—that snakes travel in pairs and that after killing one deadly snake,

it is always wise to hunt for the mate. Her face blanched as she realized that even now that mate might be lying hidden in the blankets of the bunk.

"I shall have to stand here all night!" she thought despairingly.

Stand there with her back to the door she did, hour after weary hour. Once or twice her head nodded in acute fatigue and she virtually went to sleep upon her feet; but each time her danger forced her awake again. The fire not being attended to, died down, and when even the embers smoldered and went out, poor Mehitable had the added horror of not being able to see her enemy.

Dawn came lagging at last. There was just the suggestion of light when the exhausted girl caught a slight sound outside the cabin, a rustling of swamp grass. She uttered a low cry of relief. Any one would have been welcome at that moment, even Hawtree!

It was not Hawtree, however, who a moment later tried the door. As the door swung slowly open, Mehitable moved so that she stood shielded behind it. But the newcomer entered so swiftly and so silently that he was bending over the hearth with his load of logs before she could utter a warning.

Her cry came too late! There was a terrible rattle, the flash of a brown body, the downward onslaught of a heavy piece of wood and then Mehitable found herself staring at an old acquaintance—the Indian! He, in turn, was staring down at the dead snake that still wriggled convulsively at his feet.

"But the snake! I—I—saw it leap at you!" panted

Mehitable, feeling suddenly very sick and queer and commencing weakly to cry.

The Indian turned at the sound of her voice and regarded her stoically.

"Ugh," he agreed. "It bite! I die!"

And to prove it he turned and displayed his shoulder, for his blanket had dropped to the floor. Already upon his smooth brown skin the fatal result of the snake bite was revealing itself!

CHAPTER X

THE TOWN BY THE RIVER

CHARITY, after her first convulsive grasp around Young Cy's waist, held on merrily as they trotted away from Squire Condit's gatepost, although she twisted around to wave a last good-bye to Mehitable.

"You little know how near I was to staying home!" she laughed. "My mother was not there and Mehitable, forsooth, had a sudden spell o' being mistress!"

Young Cy laughed in carefree enjoyment. A good horse beneath him, the brisk, cold invigoration of a bright January day, the pleasant companionship of one of his favorite friends—what more could a lad desire! So they cantered and walked by turns until they had veered away from the Second Road and, turning into the First Road, had passed Scotland Lane and the meeting house and were headed now directly for Newark.

"See that?" nodded Young Cy mysteriously, as they passed the meeting house.

"See what?" inquired Charity mischievously. "Methinks the building, if that is what you mean, looks not out of the ordinary. What about it?"

Young Cy laughed. It was so easy that happy

morning to laugh! But he sobered as he looked back over his shoulder.

"I have word that the Tories intend to hold a meeting there to-night," he said in a grim tone. "Think of it, Cherry! Holding one of their treasonable gatherings right there in the Parson's own building!"

"But Parson Chapman has, despite his own patriotism, a great many Tories among his congregation," answered Charity reasonably. "I suppose they think 'tis their right to use the meeting house an they choose."

"Well, 'tisn't," denied Young Cy vigorously. "That meeting house was built to worship God in and it isn't worshipping God to hold a Tory meeting there and—and——" He faltered and groped for words to finish his meaning.

"And worship the devil!" finished Charity with unexpected daring. "Oh, la, Young Cy!" she laughed. "Let us discuss more pleasurable things this lovely morn than Tory meetings."

As they neared the fields and meadows outlying the farms on the west of Newark an hour or so later the two young travelers gazed in pity at the meager herds of cattle and flocks of sheep grazing there. The planters who, like Squire Condit, lived back in the Newark mountains, had been more beyond the reach of the raiders who had swooped across into New Jersey—the seizures of stock and supplies had been less frequent there.

"Why, that be Matthew Crane's meadow, Young Cy," observed Charity, pointing. "I remember the enormous herd of cattle he used to have there!"

"Aye," nodded the boy soberly. "Newark has been recently occupied by ye enemy, besides. What the raiders did not take, the regulars did!"

They trotted along in silence until they began to ascend the western slope of the ridge across the summit of which were certain paths used by the young people of Newark for summer strollings and called, therefore, lovers' lanes. Below, halfway down the hill, was a lane called High Street upon which had been built one or two dwellings. This was the western boundary of the Town by the River.

"Ye know, Cherry, ye must be prepared to see desolation hereabouts," warned Young Cy. "Father said 'twas scandalous what ye enemy did after the Battle o' Trenton—they destroyed so much. The homes of Samuel Pennington and Josiah Beach were robbed o' everything, even clothes. Though the joke of it was, ye town Tories fared no better than the Whigs, for the Hessians did not spare them either."

"Those Hessians!" flashed Charity. "To think they are in this war for the money they make!"

Young Cy nodded grimly. "I have a good notion to tell ye something, Cherry," he began, glancing around him cautiously.

"I can keep a secret!" cried Charity eagerly.

"'Tis this, then. I have joined the 'Jersey Blues,' Cherry!"

"The 'Jersey Blues'?" repeated Charity, puzzled.

"Hush, not so loud!" Young Cy looked around at her frowningly. "Ye 'Jersey Blues,'" he went on softly, "are a secret organization formed of mostly

the farmers and planters hereabouts, to punish, so far as we be able, the British and Hessians for outrages committed by them. They are under the command of a wonderful man, Captain Littell, and they wear home-made blue uniforms made by the wives and the mothers of the members. Already Captain Littell has made the enemy dance to his tune!"

"'Tis wonderful!" Charity's eyes shone.

"The enemy call us 'those rebel devils,'" pursued the boy. "They hate us more than the regular American troops, for we have scored so many silent victories. The day Newark was abandoned by the British, when they marched to Elizabeth Town—the day after our Trenton victory—a detachment o' them was sent to Connecticut Farms. We knew they were bent upon mischief, so Captain Littell followed hastily—I was not along, but I have this from Hiram Taylor—and ambushed some o' his men, then appeared in front o' ye enemy with the rest o' them. The enemy, turning, found that they were being fired upon from the rear, also, and surrendered without firing a shot themselves, only to be chagrined by discovering the small numbers of their captors. The British commander ordered out a body o' Hessians to avenge the insult; but Captain Littell drove them into a swamp and forced them, too, to surrender to his inferior numbers. A troop of horse was then sent to annihilate the 'rebel devils,' but they had to seek safety in flight. I tell you, Cherry, we plain farmers, when roused and fighting for our homes, are more than a match for troops fighting for hire!"

"Oh," breathed Charity enviously, "I would I were a man!"

Young Cy laughed, then he pointed to the pretty village nestling at their feet as they paused upon the slope of the hill. Newark, at that time, consisted of about one hundred and fifty houses, a few taverns, and some little shops. Beyond the small farms which skirted its eastern boundary was the Passaic River, and still beyond that, across the swamps, was another river, the Hackensack. The Hudson River was hidden from their eyes by the heights which lay between them and Paulus Hook, as Jersey City was then called, while the shore lines of New York and Staten Island were also invisible for that same reason.

"'Tis pretty, isn't it!" said Young Cy simply, before picking up the horse's bridle he had allowed to slacken upon the beast's neck. "Get along, Tab! Father told me to go to ye tavern for dinner, Cherry, and we'd best hurry, for 'tis past noon."

Descending to the village, Young Cy rode through it. Charity gazed with interest at the town pump, placed at the intersection of what are now Broad and Market streets. This public pump, put for some reason ten or twelve feet below the street level, was always surrounded by mud in warm weather and by ice in winter, yet it was one of the centers and gathering places for the townspeople. Now one or two buxom maids were chatting there. But Young Cy hurried past to the tavern on the northeast corner of Broad and Market streets, where he dismounted stiffly and helped Charity down from her pillion.

"Go in, Cherry," he said. "I will follow as soon as I see about the nag's dinner. Ho, hostler!"

Not exactly relishing the idea of entering the tavern alone, the bitter wind soon sent Charity scurrying to cover as her escort disappeared around the corner of the house. Inside the entrance, she stood breathless a moment, her hood slipped back to reveal her soft curls, and her long cape making her appear older than she really was.

Several men lounging before the great fireplace looked at her curiously as she paused there, and one of them, a big, hulking fellow with somehow an air of the sea about him, kept his eyes fastened boldly upon her flushed cheeks. It seemed to the embarrassed little girl that she stood there a long, long time before a door at the rear of the room opened and mine host, a tray of smoking dishes held high above his head, entered from the kitchen. He caught sight of her at once and, placing his tray upon a table, came toward her.

In a voice trembling half from fright, half from anger, Charity asked him about dinner for two, carefully avoiding as she did so the unpleasant stare of the man by the fireplace.

"Aye, dinner!" nodded the host. "Well, wouldn't ye like to wait in the kitchen with my mistress? 'Tis more pleasant than here, methinks!" And he sent a keen glance in the direction of his other guests, all of whom looked away at the implied rebuke except the brazen-eyed man.

In the inn kitchen a vast hubbub of boiling pots, steaming kettles, and broiling meats was going on; but through the blue haze of smoke and steam Charity

saw a large, fair-faced woman directing several wenches. As the little girl paused again, shyly, Mistress Gifford, wife of the host, approached her.

"There—there were some men in there by the fire," murmured Charity in answer to her question as to what she wished.

"Ah, I understand!" And Mistress Gifford's sweet face flushed. "'Tis doubtless Captain Jaffray stirring up trouble! Well, we shall return to the proper room for our guests."

So saying, Mistress Gifford flung the kitchen door open and entered the taproom with sturdy tread.

"How now, sir! May I ask why you send a guest into ye kitchen?" she demanded in a high, audible voice.

"My dear," returned the tavern keeper deprecatingly, "I but did it for her own peace o' mind."

"Enough!" answered his wife sternly. "Let it be understood, forsooth, that this room is for all of our guests and that any one not behaving in a gentlemanly manner is free to leave!"

This time, before her angry glance, Captain Jaffray's eyes sought his plate and, victorious, Mistress Gifford turned away, to beckon Charity to a table in a cozy inglenook. A moment later the door opened and Young Cy entered hastily.

To Charity's surprise, however, he did not come to where she was waiting, but hurried over to the fireplace where, a moment later, to her great displeasure, she heard him greeting the man Jaffray in a loud, cordial manner. There was a laughing exchange of

words, and then Young Cy was standing beside her with Jaffray.

"Charity," said the boy awkwardly, "I wish you to meet Captain Jaffray of New York. He will share our table."

Trembling with anger, Charity scarcely looked up as she murmured her acknowledgment of the unwelcome introduction. But in no wise dismayed, Jaffray seated himself and motioned to the tow-headed servant, whom the girl instantly disliked for smiling broadly at her predicament, to bring his dinner to him.

Captain Jaffray addressed all of his conversation to Young Cy who, looking pleased and excited, responded rather boastfully, it seemed to Charity. She herself sat silent, scarcely eating. Then, when the others had finished, Jaffray, who had been speaking of his sloop, proposed that Young Cy go down to inspect it

"Aye, let us do so!" agreed Young Cy enthusiastically. It could be seen that he entertained the greatest respect and admiration for the other.

"But, Young Cy, I do not think my mother would like it an I went 'way over to ye river!" protested Charity, in genuine amazement.

Young Cy drew down his brows in a quick frown; buth is face cleared as Jaffray intervened smoothly.

"Would she mind, think you, when you are so well escorted by Master Jones here?" he suggested. "Besides," he turned to the boy, "I have that spyglass—the one I promised ye—on board."

"Aye, truly?" Young Cy's eyes sparkled. "Ah, we must go down to ye sloop, Charity," he explained

importantly. "Captain Jaffray has there a gift for me."

"Perhaps I could wait here," began Charity timidly. But Young Cy caught up her cape laughingly.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed. "What harm can befall! Best not to get separated, though, Cherry! Why, we shall be back here within the hour!"

Once within Captain Jaffray's trim, neat cabin on board his sloop, Charity wondered why she had been so timid. Only when he entered from a stateroom adjoining, whither he had repaired to fetch the spyglass, did her heart misgive her. Could an honest man's face wear such a sinister look as the one he cast upon Young Cy's back? Then, as he advanced, as his expression changed to one of simple cordiality, she reproached herself for being overly suspicious.

"There, sir," he said, as the boy turned eagerly toward him, placing the spyglass before him upon the table.

"Oh, 'tis a beauty!" breathed Young Cy. "But, sir"—he paused—"I cannot accept this as a gift; 'tis far too costly."

Replacing the glass sorrowfully upon the table he stepped back. There was a moment's silence. All were engrossed. No one glanced toward the portholes which lighted the cabin. Had they done so, two of the occupants of that cabin might have discovered a most interesting fact.

"Nay, sir," repeated Young Cy, and now there was downright renunciation in his voice, so that Charity felt sorry for him, "'tis too fine a gift to take unless I

had some way o' paying ye for it. And I—I—fear I have no way o' doing that!"

Jaffray looked at him calculatingly for a moment. "Jones," he said at last, in a pseudo-frank tone, "there *is* a way o' paying me for the trifle an ye wish."

"Truly!" Young Cy's glance, which had dropped despairingly, flashed upward in sudden hope. "I would pay anyway I might—service or grain—I have half a crop which my father let me have last fall! Speak quickly, sir!"

Again Jaffray studied him coolly. Then he seated himself and drew the boy into another chair beside him while Charity watched in surprise.

"Jones," he began quietly, "in this war with England, there are many for her, many against her. I told you a falsehood last week when I met you in Newark. I let you think me a patriot. On the contrary, I am a Loyalist."

Young Cy stiffened in his chair. "But you told—told me——" he stammered.

Jaffray nodded, his face all kindly concern.

"Let every man have his own beliefs, I say," he went on reasonably. "What matters it what I believe or what you do? The thing that matters is this spyglass which ye say ye desire. There is a small way you can pay me for it—a slight bit of information"—he shot a look at the boy's amazed expression—"information which will not hurt any one to give or me to receive. If I asked you to tell me about—the 'Jersey Blues'—what would you say, young sir?"

As Captain Jaffray's suave voice died away in the

appalled silence there was, for a tiny space of time, not a sound, not one movement. Then with a crash of his overturned chair, Young Cy sprang to his feet, his eyes blazing like angry flames in his white face.

"I'd say no, sir—a thousand times, no!"

Again absolute silence drifted over the cabin. Then the boy pointed with shaking hand at the spyglass.

"Were you trying to bribe me with that, sir?" he asked, hot scorn in his voice.

Captain Jaffray smiled and now both his young guests saw, with terror, the cruelty underlying that smile.

"Putting it crudely—perhaps," he said. Charity, shrinking back, caught his eye. Like a panther, Jaffray turned upon her. "Perhaps you," he snarled, all suavity gone forever from his voice, "perhaps you know something o' the 'Jersey Blues.'"

But Young Cy interposed bravely.

"She knows naught," he said curtly. And Jaffray, convinced, for Charity's youth and frightened face spoke more than Young Cy's words, turned toward the hatchway. But before he had paced forward more than a foot or two, Charity, whose gaze had, by chance, come to rest upon one of the portholes, uttered a horrified shriek.

"Young Cy, *the boat is moving!* See, we are being carried away! I can no longer see the dock nor the shore! He is taking us away from Newark!"

CHAPTER XI

PIONEER COURAGE

THE words, "It bite! I die!" seemed to sound through the little cabin like the echoes of a death knell. There was such terrible, significant acceptance in the Indian's voice that for an instant Mehitable had the distinct vision of him lying twisted in mortal agony at her feet. Then her natural courage reasserted itself and she started forward impetuously.

"Nay, no use to talk of dying!" she said, vigorous opposition in her voice. "There are ways of curing snake bites an they be followed at once!"

But the Indian, who had been staring somberly before him into space, lifted heavy eyes to hers and shook his head.

"I die!" he repeated simply, stubbornly.

"What dost mean?" demanded Mehitable, upon whom the reason for the certainty of his statement was dawning. "You are not able to reach the place upon your shoulder where the snake struck? And so you will die because of that?"

The Indian nodded.

"Well," but here Mehitable shuddered in spite of herself, "I can reach it! I will do—what you say!"

For the first time since he had bent over the fire to place the wood upon the hearth, hope sprang into the

red man's face. He took an eager step toward the girl.

"You cut it?" he asked in a voice not quite steady with its unexpected revulsion of feeling. "My knife—you cut it?"

"Aye," nodded the mountain girl in turn. Her round cheeks paled in anticipation of what she had to do. "I will cut it! Where is you knife?"

Without another word the Indian handed her his hunting knife and silently seated himself upon a stool, presenting his bare shoulder to the girl.

And now Mehitable had to take a firm grip upon herself indeed. With steady fingers she cut away the flesh around the snake bite upon the red man's shoulder. When she had finished, the Indian, who had not once flinched during the operation, spoke in a firm tone.

"Burn!"

Mehitable started.

"You mean—burn the wound?" she faltered.

The Indian nodded.

"Oh!" The girl's eyes dilated. "I cannot! I cannot!"

Her voice rose in a sudden wail and, dropping the knife, she clasped her hands and began to cry hysterically. Her hard night's vigil and the recent strain of the operation told upon her nerves. But the Indian, sitting passive, was indomitable. He waited until her sobs had lessened and spoke again.

"Burn!"

So Mehitable stooped and, picking up the knife, went to the fire and placed its blade directly in the hottest

part of the flames. Red man and white girl watched silently until the metal was crackling white, when the Indian nodded sharply. Mehitable tore a corner from a blanket and wrapping it around the handle of the hunting knife, carried it from the fire and laid it directly on his bleeding flesh. There was a sizzling noise, an odor of burned flesh, and Mehitable dropped the knife with another cry.

"I cannot! I cannot!" She swayed dizzily.

"All right!" said the Indian stoically, who had been perfectly motionless during this trying ordeal. Indeed, he seemed far less affected than the girl.

But just as weeks ago she had bound the Indian's wound when he had come through the snow to the Condits' farmhouse and she and Charity had been alone in the house, so now Mehitable's hardy spirit soon revived and she once more picked up the hunting knife to reheat it.

Twice, then, she carried it from hearth fire to th mutilated shoulder of the red man—twice, quite steadily, with no hint of swooning in her steps.

When the Indian held up his hand and murmured, "Enough!" Mehitable was able to tear a linen strip from her petticoat and bind his shoulder with quick, deft fingers. Then he rested awhile and the girl, too, sinking down upon a chair, relaxed.

It was fully dawn before the Indian stumbled to his feet and muttered, "Come!" Then Mehitable for the first time realized that the door had been ajar all this time, that escape was possible.

Without one look around her hateful prison, where she

had spent one of the most trying nights of her youthful life, she followed her guide out through the door.

Free! That is what every blade of dried, brown grass said to her, what every rattling leaf on well-nigh barren tree limbs proclaimed. Free! Her own eager footsteps, treading almost on the Indian's moccasined heels in her joy of escape, shouted the tidings to the silent swamp world.

The Indian did not choose a northerly path through the swamp, though Mehitable was almost sure that had been the direction whence she had been led by Hawtree and Squire Briggs and that toward the north lay the only real way out. Instead, however, her guide, this time skirting the more obvious bogs and great standing pools of skim ice, and seeming to exhibit an almost miraculous sense of direction and judgment in choosing the harder ground, led her toward the west straight through the swamp.

Once or twice a rabbit scuttled across before them, and once the girl saw the flash of some silvery-gray animal—probably a fox—as it disappeared into the grass. But no human offered resistance to their advance, and another hour saw Mehitable scrambling up the bank from the swamp into the serene safety of the Second Road.

There the Indian paused. Mehitable, above him on the road, turned in time to see his brown hand gesture a brief farewell to her before he vanished back into the gloom of the marsh. And with his vanishing, the swamp became once more as remote, as inaccessible, as dreamlike as ever. And she began to run toward home.

It seemed to her, then, that the road lengthened magically into an endless one, as if, no matter how swiftly she ran, she would never reach her destination. But at last she arrived at her father's gate and that without meeting any one. She had been terrified for fear that she would encounter Hawtree or Squire Briggs, although she had hastily formed a plan to elude them should she do so, by dropping at the side of the road into the edge of the swamp and hiding there until they had passed. Her relief was proportionate, however, when she found herself actually upon her own doorstep.

The kitchen, when she pushed open the door with eager hand, was empty.

"Mother! Father!" She called them each impatiently. But no answer came. Complete silence only answered her cries, and save for the fact that a fire was burning upon the hearth with early breakfast preparations in evidence, she would have turned and left the house again. Never before had the homely odor of frying salt pork been quite so welcome to her nostrils as that which greeted her this morning, telling her as it did, that somewhere near must be her mother.

Mehitable was just hanging her cape upon its peg when a familiar step sounded outside the door through which she had entered a moment before. It opened, and her mother entered slowly.

The girl stared aghast at her. Was this sad, old-looking woman her robust, cheerful mother? A few days of dreadful anxiety had indeed changed her. But how her face became transfigured with joy when

she looked up and saw her daughter standing unexpectedly before her!

"Hitty! Hitty!"

"Oh, Mother!"

The two cries mingled even as Mehitable flew to her mother's arms and was pressed tenderly, hungrily, to that faithful heart. It was some moments before either could speak coherently, and then each looked at the other through fast-falling tears of joy.

"Your father has been searching for you day and night," said Mistress Condit tremulously, "as have been all our friends! And for Charity, too! Oh, Hitty, is not Charity with you?"

A hard tale it was that Mehitable had to relate to her mother; but at last it was finished, and Mistress Condit sat plaiting the folds of her cape with nervous fingers, while her lips trembled and her eyes overflowed with tears. But a sudden thought struck her, and the righteous anger she felt soon dried her tears.

"That man!" she cried, referring to Squire Briggs. "He shall pay for this, Hitty—have no fear!"

At that instant Squire Condit, who had been out feeding his stock, entered the kitchen, and the joyful yet sad and anxious greetings were once more exchanged. And again Mehitable had to relate her experiences of the past two days and nights. Her father's eyes flashed more than once as he learned of his old neighbor's perfidy and treachery. When the girl stood silent, he buried his face in his hands, as he sat by the fire and groaned aloud.

"War! War! This terrible war!"

Mistress Condit rose and went to him.

"You will feel better, Samuel, for some breakfast," she said softly. "Indeed, we all will!"

Mehitable flew to help her mother with the breakfast preparations, wondering how she could have ever grumbled at household tasks. How inexpressibly dear seemed every detail of home life, of her home itself!

Soon the breakfast was upon the table, and for all their anxiety they ate hungrily. It was when they had finished that Mehitable asked about Mistress Dodd.

"She is dead, Hitty," returned her mother soberly. "Five motherless children left there because of the accident. I know not what poor Mr. Dodd will do!"

"We go to the funeral early this afternoon, Hitty," broke in Squire Condit. "From there Master Jones and I shall go on to Newark to search for Charity and Young Cy."

"Oh, my little girl!" moaned Mistress Condit. She clasped her hands, while the tears rained down her cheeks. "Where are you?"

Mehitable started up from her seat with flashing eyes. "Let me go to Newark with you, Father," she begged. "I can track down the scoundrel who 'ticed Cherry away!"

Her parents glanced at each other and Mistress Condit dried her tears, a faint smile glimmering upon her sad face. Yet in the end Mehitable won her point. After the sad services were performed and poor Mistress Dodd was laid away in the Burying Ground, Mistress Condit turned back toward home escorted only by Amos

and Judd, while Mehitable trotted off beside her father and Master Jones.

As she rode along, Mehitable was surprised and shocked to see the slow tears course down Master Jones's furrowed cheeks. She whispered her question to her father.

"Had ye not heard?" asked the Squire in surprise. "But no, I forgot ye were not home. Mistress Jones was shot down by some Tory scoundrel, laid low by the bullet aimed doubtless at her husband as she rode home behind him on a pillion from the Dodd farm yesterday. We have not yet found the assailant. She be very ill, poor woman!"

"This dreadful war!" ejaculated Mehitable, directing a pitying look at her father's friend.

Squire Condit, who had been to Newark since the enemy's evacuation, pointed out the damage wrought there, as they approached it over the hill. Master Jones, his attention but apathetic in spite of the Squire's brisk remarks, stared listlessly, but Mehitable was all vigorous denunciation.

"Those Tory beasts!" she kept crying, as they passed one blackened ruin after another, ruins which had once been happy homes.

"I doubt if Newark recovers from this invasion for years to come. All business has been almost paralyzed," remarked Squire Condit, shaking his head. "We had best go to ye Eagle Tavern, had we not, sir?" he pursued, as they trotted through the village streets.

"Nay. Did I not tell ye that I bade Young Cy get his

dinner at the Hunters and the Hounds?" exclaimed Master Jones.

But when they reached the tavern at the corner of Market and Broad streets they met disappointment. Master Gifford and his mistress were visiting in Cranetown, now known as Montclair, and would not be back until late that night. Meanwhile, the tow-headed inn servant who answered their questions at the taproom door appeared strangely stupid and forgetful. No, he did not remember two young folk dining at the inn on the day in question. He shot a slant-eyed glance behind him as he spoke; then, finding the room empty, became louder in his protestations of ignorance. Entirely too loud! thought Mehitable, eying him sharply from behind her father's back.

As they turned away disconsolately Master Jones spoke hurriedly.

"I shall visit ye other taverns, neighbor, and will meet ye later at this place."

Squire Condit agreeing, they parted, and Mehitable and her father strolled down Broad Street. It was growing dusk, but through the shadows the swinging signs over the shop doors seemed to lure the passers-by. Many people of that day could not read or write, and so the signs, instead of advertising in printed letters the wares for sale within, had ornate paintings upon them of those same wares. The proprieter of a tool shop would have a scythe or a pitchfork upon his sign, the owner of a meat and vegetable store would have a juicy beefsteak or a pumpkin—yellower than ever nature made it—upon his sign. These shops, then,

were not called "Smith's Store" or "Brown's Market" but "At the Sign of the Scythe" or "At the Sign of the Steak."

When they came back at last to the Hunters and the Hounds inn, the Squire gave one glance into the noisy, overcrowded taproom he was about to enter and drew back.

"Ye cannot go in there, lass!" he exclaimed. "'Tis no place for you!"

He retraced his steps as far as the town pump and there paused to ponder the situation. Already, Mehitable could see, he was regretting having brought her. Partly to distract him, partly to reassure herself, she uttered an exclamation as a lady, followed at a short distance by a Negro slave, passed by.

"Father, I vow 'tis Mistress Martha Hicks!"

The lady turned involuntarily at hearing her name; but she would have hurried on had not Squire Condit started forward with outstretched hand which, in all politeness, she could not ignore. Her hand, however, fell limply away from his.

"Mistress Hicks!" exclaimed the Squire, in obvious relief. "Why, perhaps ye can help me solve my problem!"

"How may that be?" And the lady smiled rather wryly in the concealing darkness.

"I am beshrift for a temporary lodge for Hitty, here," explained the Squire, glancing at her with anxious eyes. "I would crave your hospitality for a while. The taverns are not fit places for a girl at this hour."

"Well, Squire Condit," returned Mistress Hicks,

reluctantly, after a hesitating moment, "I should be glad to offer your daughter hospitality; but——"

"That will help me truly!" answered the Squire quickly, cutting off the lady's almost-refusal. He turned to Mehitable who, after her first curtsey to Mistress Hicks, had stood silent beside him. "Go ye with Mistress Hicks, Daughter. I will call for you as soon as I see Master Gifford. Madam, I thank you!" And sweeping off his hat the Squire strode off hastily in search of Master Jones and supper.

Now Mehitable was not at all pleased at this summary way of foisting her upon such a hesitant hostess. She stood staring crossly after her father until Mistress Hicks made an impatient gesture

. "Come, child, let us not tarry longer!" She looked at the girl with thinly veiled ill will. "I should have been home long ere this!"

They formed an odd little procession, the lady first, Mehitable next, and the slave, carrying a basket, bringing up the rear as they hurried through the dark, narrow lanes. Mistress Hicks soon turned off from Market Street and wended her way south, turning in, at last, before a large, handsome house, now rather forlorn and neglected-looking, more so than the season warranted.

They went around to the rear and entered directly into the large kitchen where, before the fire, sat a very old lady in a great armchair that seemed to swallow her by its size. She looked up as the newcomers approached the fire.

"'Tis the fairy queen!" she cried, peering at them with bright eyes.

Mistress Hicks shrugged her shoulders. "Pay no attention to her," she said shortly to Mehitable, who was gazing at the old lady in amazement. "She be daft since this war came upon us!"

"Nay, Daughter, thou art the one daft," returned her old mother with unexpected clearness, "serving ye King 'stead o' Liberty!"

"Oh, hush thee!" cried Mistress Hicks rudely. "If you could but hold your tongue as successfully as you concealed our wealth, 'twould be well." She turned to Mehitable. "My mother hid all of our silver and jewelry and much o' our best clothing when she knew the British were coming to Newark, although I tried to keep her from doing so. She was all right at that time; but since the invasion she has been queer-like, and what is worse, she has completely forgotten what she did with everything!"

"Everything!" echoed the poor old lady, nodding her head wisely. "The British nor them that serve them shall get it," she added significantly, laughing at her daughter's sullen face.

Mehitable, who, although she did not know these friends of her mother well, yet remembered Mistress Hicks as a bright, happy bride and the old mother as an alert, wealthy old lady, could not help staring at them in surprise and pity. The war had indeed entered here and wrought havoc!

"Well, sit ye down," snapped Mistress Hicks at last. With the help of a Negro woman she had been arranging a few viands upon a table drawn up to the fire. She seated herself unceremoniously and did not offer to help

when, with difficulty, the Negress persuaded the old lady to rise and come to the table. Mehitable shyly found her place and supper was served.

Only once did the taciturn hostess break her silence, and that was to inquire uninterestedly for the girl's mother. At last, when the words of the old lady had penetrated, the truth burst upon Mehitable. Mistress Hicks and her absent husband must be Tories!

At this thought the girl pushed her stool from the table and stared at Mistress Hicks. That lady plied her knife and spoon steadily and did not deign to notice her.

"Art not a patriot?" asked Mehitable, swept away from all tact.

Mistress Hicks looked up sourly. Then, at sight of the girl's expression she burst into a mirthless laugh.

"What dost mean by the word, patriot?" asked she at last, coolly.

"I mean, art a Tory?" inquired Mehitable steadily.

For a moment their two glances fenced, the girl's perfectly honest, the woman's inscrutable. But honesty prevailed.

"Aye," Mistress Hicks acknowledged sullenly. "I be a Tory. My husband is with 'Skinner's Greens' on Staten Island. But," she raised her head angrily, "no one asked ye here to insult us, young mistress!"

There was a crash as Mehitable leaped from her stool. The scene was the more uncanny for the fact that the little old lady kept on eating placidly.

"Oh," choked Mehitable, "I ate your food—your Tory food!"

She stood there a moment, clasping and unclasping her hands. Then with a gesture of repulsion, she snatched up her cape, which had fallen to the floor, and darted to the door. She slipped out into the night, leaving the candle to sputter in the sudden draught of the open door and Mistress Hicks staring down stonily at her plate, while the little old lady threw back her head and laughed and laughed.

CHAPTER XII

ON BOARD THE SLOOP

FOR a paralyzing moment Young Cy stared at Captain Jaffray. Then he started forward with flashing eyes and wild words.

"Ye—ye—would d-dare to do this!" he stammered, almost beside himself with horror and rage. "Ye would dare to—to—kidnap us, to carry us away, sir!"

"Softly!" returned Captain Jaffray. He moved back a step in spite of himself, however, for the boy, tall and strong for his age, was not an unimpressive figure in his wrath. Then, his gaze fixed upon Young Cy's face, the older man called:

"Myles! Daniel!"

As though they had been expecting the summons and were in waiting, the two men appeared promptly from the deck. One was the oarsman who had rowed them out to the sloop, while the other was a great hairy fellow whose long arms and short legs gave him a grotesque, gorilla-like appearance. Charity could not help an exclamation at sight of them. They grinned.

"Bind him!" said Captain Jaffray laconically.

There was a brief, furious struggle as Young Cy threw himself upon Daniel in a futile attempt at escape; but superior numbers counted, and it was not many minutes before the boy, panting and crimson-faced from

exertion and anger, lay bound hand and foot upon the cabin floor.

To Charity the whole episode began to seem like a terrible nightmare. She wanted to scream and found that her voice was gone. She wanted to go to Young Cy's help, although she really could have been of no assistance to him, and it seemed as though her limbs had turned to stone. She could only stand there uttering little anguished cries that dwindled into stifled sobs.

Then Captain Jaffray made a curt gesture and the men disappeared obediently, stumbling up the hatch. The captain seated himself calmly.

"Now, young Master Jones," he said, a cruel twist to his lips, "perhaps ye will listen to reason a trifle more patiently than before!"

"Oh, sir!" began Charity, starting forward. But Captain Jaffray turned so ferociously upon her that she cowered back into silence.

"Now, Master Jones," continued Captain Jaffray, as though he had not been interrupted, "ye can take your choice! Either ye can tell me all ye know concerning the 'Jersey Blues' or——" he paused significantly and even innocent Charity shuddered. Faint but terrible rumors of the English prisons in New York, worse of the English prison ships where the patriots were treated and killed off like so many cattle, had reached Newark and the mountain settlement. One member of the mountain colony had already lost his life aboard one of the prison ships anchored in the East River, while another had escaped home, only to

die later. Young Cy now cast an utterly hopeless glance at Charity, appalled at the punishment he had brought upon himself and her by his rashness.

"I——" he commenced. And the captain bent forward to listen with an air of triumph.

But suprisingly, Charity stepped toward him imperatively.

"'Tis no use, Young Cy, to reveal aught of the 'Jersey Blues,'" she said quietly. "Do ye not realize this man wishes to try and find out all ye know and then treat ye as he pleases? Nay, tell him nothing!"

Captain Jaffray sprang from his chair and strode toward the little girl with uplifted hand. She had, indeed, read his purpose. She met his angry eyes, however, with such steady ones that involuntarily his hand dropped to his side and he turned sullenly away.

She went over to look wistfully out of the cabin windows. When she turned back she found that she was alone with Young Cy and flew across to kneel beside him.

"Let me untie the knots while he is gone, Young Cy!" she implored feverishly.

"Nay, Charity, 'twould do no good!" answered the boy hopelessly. "I am but one against their three and they soon would have me trussed again! Besides, I doubt an ye could untie them an ye would, these knots! That villain Daniel knows his job right well! Oh, Charity," he looked up at her with sorrowful eyes, "can ye ever forgive me for dragging ye into this terrible trap? You were wise and I the dunce, indeed!"

And the boy groaned aloud, writhing and striving

to break the rope that bound him until the veins started out on his forehead from the strain. Charity was back at the table searching vainly for a knife when heavy feet descending from the deck sent her to the cabin windows once more.

Captain Jaffray came down into the cabin. He looked at each suspiciously; but finding Young Cy still lying bound where he had left him on the floor and Charity gazing silently out at the low, marshy river banks they were passing, he said nothing, merely glowering darkly as he passed through into his stateroom and closed the door.

As though to taunt them the spyglass rolled to and fro with the motion of the boat—thumpity-thump, thumpity-thump—striking a box at one end and a pewter candlestick holder at the other end of the table. Charity seated herself upon the floor beside Young Cy, her thoughts running desperately, like a mill race, trying to think of some plan of escape. Young Cy, too, was silent, cudgeling his brain as to means toward that end. But their plight seemed absolutely hopeless. They could do nothing—at any rate, nothing until they had reached the end of this dreadful journey, for, though Young Cy could swim, had there been a chance to jump overboard and so escape from the ship that way, Charity could not swim. Besides, the river was widening into the rougher waters of Newark Bay, and even Young Cy's stout heart might quail at thought of dropping into the icy water there and fighting his way through the waves to shore.

And now, as though to make matters more dismal, the afternoon sunshine began to wane. Once the sun

commenced to drop toward the west it descended with a terrible swiftness. Soon the shadows left the corners of the cabin and came out boldly to the center. Lemon-colored dusk turned river and sky into one pale wash of that shade. And then, with the wintry abruptness of January, it was night.

When it was quite dark and he could no longer see her, Young Cy called to his silent companion.

"Charity!"

The little girl stumbled to her feet from her chair beside the table and went over to him.

"Yes, Young Cy?" she answered whisperingly.

"I think we be almost at the end of our voyage, Cherry, now. And I have been trying to plan an escape."

"I too, Young Cy!"

"Didst look upon the table for a knife or some implement whereby ye could cut this rope, Charity? I vow, I cannot bear to think of dying like a trussed fowl!"

"Aye, Young Cy, I looked for a knife; but there was none. I will feel again, however, an ye desire!"

Charity turned and groped her way back to the table in the center of the cabin. As she had said, though, there was no knife there. Her eager fingers slid along the table's smooth surface, encountering only the spyglass and the candlestick holder until she aimlessly took hold of the box. This she picked up, remembering that it was a pretty carved box of teak wood.

As she felt of it in her hands, suddenly her fingers encountered a little hidden spring and the carved lid

flew open. Of course, her curiosity caused her to explore the interior of the box. All at once, she uttered a sharp cry and almost dropped the box.

Young Cy tried to pierce the darkness with his eyes; but all he could make out was the dark smudge of Charity's figure against the lighter spot of the cabin window.

"What is it, Charity?" he asked anxiously. "What made ye cry out?"

"Something bit me," answered the girl. "Why, my finger is wet," she went on wonderingly. Then her tone changed into that of fright: "Oh, Young Cy, 'tis blood! I have cut myself!"

"Cut yourself?" The boy's voice was unbelieving.

"Aye!" Charity, feeling her bleeding finger, gained assurance. "Aye," she reiterated positively. "I have cut myself. But it does not hurt now!"

This time, more carefully, she investigated the inside of the box and at last drew forth a tiny Chinese dagger. Instantly, she was across the cabin and before Young Cy could realize what she was doing she had cut the ropes tying his hands and feet. But to her surprise, he did not move.

"Why, Young Cy," she whispered in great disappointment, "you are free! You can move!"

"Nay," he answered breathlessly. "I have just thought of a plan whereby ye can escape, I think. I must not move. Listen, now, to my plan. When the men come to fetch us off the ship, I doubt an they bind you, Charity. I feel sure that I can fool them by holding my hands and feet together as though they

were still bound. Then, when we are on deck, I can give battle and do ye run, Cherry, for the rowboat and escape in that!"

"But what about you, Young Cy?"

"I care not for myself," answered the boy impatiently. "I will always fall upon my feet like a cat, no matter how or where I am thrown. Do not worry about me, Charity. I am sure I can make an escape later. But do ye as I bid! Promise me!"

"Aye, Young Cy, I promise," faltered Charity, only half satisfied by this plan which permitted only her flight.

They relapsed into silence. Charity had at once replaced the little box, with the dagger inside, upon the table, exactly where she had found it. And now the thumpity thump of the spyglass did not sound so triumphant, so taunting, at least to Charity's imaginative ears.

It was evident that Captain Jaffray was most contemptuous concerning their attempting an escape. He did not trouble himself to watch them at all. He had, as a matter of fact, at once fallen asleep upon throwing himself upon his bunk and did not reappear until the end of their voyage.

Young Cy prayed that the captain would not light the candle lest he discover that his hands and feet were no longer tied. But he was disappointed. The first thing Captain Jaffray did upon his reappearance in the cabin was to stride to the table and there, striking flint against steel, light the candle and turn to survey them a trifle sleepily in its yellow, flickering light.

Fortunately, however, Young Cy was in the shadow of the table where he lay upon the floor, and his captor noticed nothing amiss in his attitude, especially as the boy held the rope in such a clever manner that it seemed to be still binding his wrists. It was obvious, too, that the captain had forgotten the contents of that little innocent-looking carved teak-wood box.

"Well," he said, grinning sardonically, though his prisoners knew at once that he was the better-natured for his nap, "I am here to give ye one more chance to tell me what ye know of the 'Jersey Blues,' Master Jones. I have been sent to discover what I can of them, especially of their captain, whose name we have, never fear, and whose neck shall soon feel the rope! Best tell me, for ye will be sorry an I have to deliver ye to headquarters! There, I warn ye, they do not wrap ye in lamb's wool."

Young Cy remained silent a moment after Captain Jaffray had ceased speaking. Then he said sullenly:

"I have nothing to tell ye of the 'Jersey Blues.'"

The captain shrugged his shoulders. "Very well," he said, "so be it, Master Jones. May ye not regret it!" He called aloud. "Myles! Daniel!"

As before, they appeared promptly, falling noisily down the hatch. It was plain to be seen that they held their captain in fear.

"Turn him out!" ordered Captain Jaffray briefly, pointing to Young Cy.

The two men stooped and lifted Young Cy to his feet, the latter holding them tightly together as though they were still tied.

"Can we not untie his feet till he reaches the deck?" pleaded Myles, not relishing the task of carrying the tall lad bodily up the steps.

But Captain Jaffray frowned.

"Do as I bid ye!" he ordered harshly. And with a groan and a sigh, the two men bent to their burden. Young Cy purposely and maliciously made himself as heavy and awkward as possible, falling first against one and then the other of his carriers. As long as they were in the cabin the men did not dare to retaliate; but as soon as they had reached the night air, Daniel gave the prisoner a pinch. This served but to give added force to the blow which Young Cy now delivered unexpectedly in return. Daniel, taken by surprise, fell headlong to the deck.

CHAPTER XIII

CHARITY IN NEW YORK TOWN

CHARITY had climbed silently up to the deck behind the others, followed lastly by Captain Jaffray. But now he paid for his negligence as the girl profited by it, for by the time peace was restored upon the sloop's deck and both Myles and his captain were nursing black eyes, she had vanished.

Young Cy, when he discovered such to be the case, suddenly ceased his frantic blows, delivered at random but seemingly none the less effective for that, and sat down to count his own bruises.

Charity, crouching in the rowboat into which she had dropped as it bobbed beneath the stern of the sloop fought long with the wet hemp of the towline. She could have screamed with the aggravation of that dreadful knot! She was almost certain, besides, that as soon as her flight was discovered, one of the men would be ordered into the water in pursuit. Although she could hear the noise of the fight and the groans afterward, she did not realize that if it was a short battle it was a furious one, so when she did get the towline untied she wasted no time in pulling for shore.

Captain Jaffray staggered at last to the ship's rail, but it was too late. Charity had disappeared into the darkness.

"Curse ye!" he snarled, returning to Young Cy. "'Tis well ye'll pay for this night's work. 'Tis not the Sugar House you'll be lodged in, if I have my way; but one o' our beauties on water, and the prison ship you're bound for will knock that fight out o' ye!"

Young Cy only smiled. Now that Charity had made her escape from the sloop, though she were forced to land in enemy country, he felt that he could bear whate'er might befall him.

Charity, drifting away from the sloop's stern, finally slipped her oars into the water. She found it far different from rowing in the little home-made boat on the pond at home. The North River, as it widened into New York Bay, looked as vast as the ocean to her, with its black water and the surge and ripple of its swells. It was no mean task for a young girl. Yet Charity, it must be remembered, although not as strong and lusty as Mehitable, was a country-bred girl, and the tide was with her. After a while, to her great joy she heard the grating of rocks beneath the prow of her boat and letting her oars fall as they pleased, she scrambled forward and leaped ashore.

In the darkness she could not tell where she had landed. Indeed, had it been daylight, it is doubtful whether she would have known. John had described the town which the Dutch had built upon an island; but he had dwelt more upon its manners and customs and citizens than anything else, so now Charity looked around her forlornly. Perceiving some distant lights inland, she climbed over the rocks toward them, hoping that her rowboat would drift off from the rocks and

out to sea, so that all trace of her should be lost to Captain Jaffray when the morning came.

Afterward she never had any more than the most hazy impression of her first night's adventures in New York. She remembered reaching some farmhouses built upon the point of what is now the Battery, of tramping past them until she came to a house standing in the midst of fine grounds, a pretentious place, well lighted by many sconces visible through the windows. She discovered, by almost running into him, that a sentry guarded the gate to this mansion; but watching her chance when he was at the other end of his beat, she crept like a shadow through the gate and scuttled across the wind-swept lawns toward the rear of the building and past that to some outhouses.

There she stole through the door of one and stopped, with beating heart, to listen. The odor and the occasional stamping of hoofs soon told her that she was in a stable. She groped her way forward with outstretched hands. If only she might be able to find the ladder that led to the hayloft! And at that moment she gave a gasp of incredulous joy, for almost miraculously it would seem, she had touched first the stable wall, then the ladder to the haymow, built against it.

It did not take her long to mount into the warm, sweet-smelling loft. Nor did it take long for her to cuddle down into the hay and go fast asleep!

The next day she did not dare to leave her hiding place, nor the next night, nor even the day after that. When the stable man came up into the loft to

pitch hay down to the horses below, she burrowed deeply into the stack and quite unsuspecting, the man whistled and sang at his tasks, all unconscious of his trembling, terrified little listener.

But at the end of her forty-eight hours Charity was driven forth by her dreadful hunger, though she had stolen down to drink out of the horses' watering pails quite a number of times in the dark. She felt faint and dizzy as she faltered down the ladder and through the open stable door. Then she gave a little shriek, for she walked straight into the arms of the hostler.

Fright and hunger made her reel, and for a little while she lay against him motionless, like a poor, storm-driven little bird. Perhaps her helplessness touched his heart, for the hostler carried her into the kitchen of the mansion and, after one look at her white, drawn face, bade the Negro cook fetch some food.

"Here's a lass, an I don't miss my guess, who be starvin'," he said shortly, though not ill-naturedly. "Where she comes from and where she be a-goin' to I know not; but I do know hunger when I see it!"

The cook, a fat, comfortable old negress, came over and looked down at Charity as she lay drooping upon a chair.

"Laws, yas'r, she sho' does want food!"

So, forthwith, food was set before the famished girl. But the cook was wise and allowed her only a small quantity and that mostly liquid.

"I'll gib yo some t' tote wif yo, honey," said the negress, cutting some slabs of beef and slapping them

between great hunks of bread. "But doan yo eat it f'r awhile yit! Yo is likely t'die an ye do!"

Charity thanked her gratefully. She had half a mind to ask permission to tarry in that big, warm kitchen; but a strange restlessness drove her on. Besides her anxiety for Young Cy, she was afraid that the mansion might be headquarters for the British, from its size and magnificence.

The kind-hearted stableman escorted her past the sentry, unchallenged. When they separated, Charity tried to tell him of her gratitude; but he cut her short.

"I once had a daughter like you," he told her abruptly and swung upon his heel. As he did so, Charity was both amazed and made sorry to hear him utter a short, hoarse groan. But he did not wait for sympathy, and after a moment Charity hugged her bundle of sandwiches to her and trudged away, wondering if the hostler's daughter were dead or lost, as she was now lost.

"These be such strange, queer times," she murmured to herself. She drifted into a reverie, wondering mournfully if she were ever to see her father and mother and Mehitable again. But Charity was a brave little soul and after a while she blinked the tears from her eyes and looked around her.

If John had been there he could have told her at once that she was in Broadway, that long thoroughfare which stretched out and out until eventually it led to distant places, up the Hudson River through Yonkers and Tarrytown and on until it became the postroad

to Albany. But here the houses were built closely together, forming a fine residential section. She came, then, to the stark ruins of Trinity Church, which had been burned almost to the ground some months before in the great New York fire when so many families had been made homeless that the town had had to erect tents to care for the sufferers. Now, just a few of the massive walls stood, a dark mass above the glimmering ghostliness of the old graveyard. As she gazed, an idea came to Charity. Why not hide behind those walls? They would act as windshields and protect her from enemy eyes! On the morrow something might turn up, she might find trace of Young Cy, but for to-night they would be just the place for her!

The cold and the darkness, to say nothing of the ghostly proximity of the gravestones, might well have appalled an even stouter heart than Charity's; but for all her gentleness and quiet, she had a certain grim tenacity in her make-up, partly inherited from her strong-willed parents, partly developed by these last war-filled months. She had made up her mind not to leave New York, not to try to escape to New Jersey until she could carry home tidings of poor Young Cy!

It was not as cold as she had dreaded inside the church ruins. Still, it was a dreary enough bed that she spread with her cape upon a great block of stone in one corner of the ruined church, and little sleep was forthcoming that night.

At last the darkness fled before the lantern of the sun and dawn found Charity stumbling stiffly to her feet.

"If only I could make neat my hair and wash my face!" thought the little girl longingly. She pushed back the hood to her cape and ran her fingers through her matted curls. Busily her thoughts ran on as she shook out her wrinkled clothing. "Oh, me, if I could only know where they have taken Young Cy!"

Now, doubtless, had Charity gone straight to the British commandant, Lord Howe would have been touched by her plight and so have seen to it that she reached Newark safely. But besides desiring to learn of her companion's whereabouts, Charity had heard such tales of British cruelty—much of which was only too true, for part of the British policy in this war was to terrify the Americans into submission—that she did not dare to venture forth openly. She was like a pathetic little field mouse carried away to the terrors of city attics—her whole instinct was to hide and creep forth only when the darkness protected her.

However, her curiosity became very great as the light increased. She had had no opportunity to see her surroundings the previous night, the few candle lanterns hanging outside every seventh residence in the city blocks not giving much light. She began to peek from the opening of one of the walls, darting her head back like a turtle at every sound; but the only thing visible being a farm wagon lumbering down Broadway with its driver asleep upon his seat, she grew bolder and bolder.

Thus it was that, as she stared down Wall Street, she saw a young girl walking aimlessly toward her. And as the other neared and looked up each uttered a wild

cry of joy and amazement. For the young girl was Mehitable! And Charity, her mouth full of beef sandwich, stumbled out of her hiding place with outstretched arms, feeling that the world was right again and not such a dreary place, after all.

CHAPTER XIV

A LITTLE LONE TRAVELER

FOR a breathless space of time after her frantic departure from Mistress Hicks's Tory household, Mehitable stared wildly about her, not knowing which way to turn to go back to the Hunters and the Hounds tavern. Indeed, when her first anger against her father for having placed her so blindly in such an ignominious position and against Mistress Hicks for not having informed him frankly of her sentiments had passed, Mehitable was not sure that she wanted to go back to the inn. She was, as a matter of fact, rather afraid to disobey her father in returning to the tavern. Yet, clenching her hands beneath her mother's cardinal, she swore to herself that she would not return to Mistress Hicks. So, turning, she wandered aimlessly away.

It was by mere luck that after walking up different deserted lanes she should come within sight of the few dim lights of Broad and Market streets. But it did not take her long to make her way hastily across the intersection of those lanes to the tavern. She hesitated, however, before the tavern door. Did she dare, after her father had forbidden her to enter there, actually to disobey him?

As she stood miserably hesitating, a bar of light

shot out into the gloom and she shrank back into the shadows just in time to prevent being stumbled over by three men who issued from the taproom at that moment.

Turning away and raising her cape to shield her face, Mehitable flattened herself against the side of the building. She would have escaped detection save for the fact that the stagecoach for New York drove up at that instant and the lights from its side lanterns threw her form into relief against the tavern wall.

One of the travelers, swinging around, caught sight of her and at once strode toward her.

"Gadzooks, what have we here—a ghost?" he ejaculated, seizing her by the arm and trying to peer into her face.

Mehitable's frightened eyes stared at him from the depths of her hood.

"Oh, sir!" she pleaded and stopped, puzzled. There was something vaguely familiar about the man. Although all she could see of him was his eyes, for his face was hidden by the upturned collar of his greatcoat, Mehitable was almost sure she had met him before.

"Oh, sir," she said again, in a low voice, "I do but look for my father in the tavern!"

Instantly he stepped back and removed his hat with a flourish.

"Let me not stop you, then, young mistress," he said gravely. And this time the girl was struck by the familiar tones of his deep voice. Where had she heard that voice before?

Unheeding his companions' jibing remarks, which

they flung at him as they stood beside the stagecoach, the man walked over to the tavern door and threw it open for Mehitable.

"Pray enter!" he said courteously.

It was just as she passed him that Mehitable saw him start. The light from the taproom had struck full upon her face. Then, as she walked forward into the glare and the noise of the tavern room, she recognized him in turn. It was Lieutenant Freeman in civilian attire! But when she would have whirled around she found the great door had closed behind her and her friend of the Trenton visit had gone without a word.

Bewildered by the singing and the laughter which greeted her through the smoke-laden air, she stood there, a butt for all the village wits and boobies until Mr. Gifford, catching sight of her over his counter, came hurrying toward her.

"What is it, my dear?" he asked kindly.

He drew her into the shelter of the counter end.

"Didst want to see anyone?" he pursued, as Mehitable stood silent.

"Art Mr. Gifford?" inquired the girl unsteadily.

"Aye."

"I thought you were not to return until late?"

Mr. Gifford smiled down at her. "My mistress and I came home earlier than we had planned."

"Is my father, Samuel Condit, here?" asked Mehitable hurriedly.

Mr. Gifford shook his head. "Nay, child! Your father left a full half hour ago with Mr. Jones. I know not where he went!"

Mehitable's face fell. But a second later she raised it with an eager inquiry.

"Didst have aught to tell him concerning my sister Charity and Young Cy Jones?" she asked, quivering.

"Aye," nodded Mr. Gifford.

"Oh, dost know where they be, now?" Mehitable looked at him with wild hope in her eyes.

But he shook his head. "Nay," he answered quickly, "do not raise your hopes thus! I know not where they are, now! I could but tell him that I served them—I and Sturgins here—on the day your father said they were last seen in Newark."

Mehitable's glance sought the tow-headed servant, Sturgins, and found his unpleasant gaze fixed upon her, an ugly sneer only half hidden.

"But he said——" she began and shrugged her shoulders wearily. Of what use to stir up trouble here even if the servant were a Tory! Doubtless he performed his tasks well enough, and servants, even with the bound help and the slaves, were scarce. Many days later Mehitable was to regret bitterly not having denounced Sturgins at that moment for a Tory. But now she remained silent.

"He said?" prompted Mr. Gifford encouragingly.

"Nothing." So Mehitable dismissed the subject and stood pondering anxiously. Then she turned toward the door. "I think I will go and seek my father."

"Best wait here," commenced Master Gifford. But Mehitable had already passed out once more into the darkness.

As she stood hesitating by the taproom door her

glance fell upon the stagecoach and she heard the driver exclaim to the group of travelers gathered around one of the off horses.

"Gentlemen, this is a sick horse. We shall be delayed until I can procure another beast."

As she gazed a wild plan came to Mehitable. Why not go to New York and search for Charity? And suiting the action to the word, she drifted forward from shadow to shadow until, reaching the deserted side of the coach, she climbed swiftly and surely to the top where, because of the cold, she knew that she would be unmolested the entire trip. She found someone's buffalo robe and, snuggling down into it she fell asleep.

She was awakened by the coach being rolled off from the ferry on to terra firma. Rubbing her eyes, she sleepily got to the edge of the coach and was over it. What were her fright and dismay, however, when she reached the ground, to find herself caught in a rough embrace and held prisoner.

"Ha!" gasped a hoarse voice. "What have we here, forsooth?"

A light was flashed into her face.

"A lass!" said the hoarse voice in surprise. But his grasp did not relax. Then a new voice broke into the astonished monologue of Mehitable's captor.

"What hast thou there, Jerry?" drawled the voice. And the girl, blinking at the light of the lanthorne thrust again into her face, looked up into the amused eyes of Lieutenant Freeman. To her bewilderment he began to laugh heartily and, still laughing, came toward her and

gently but firmly removed her from the clasp of the man, Jerry.

"Why, Hitty, by all that's comical and outrageous!" he cried swinging her protectingly into the curve of his left arm, though his mirth still seemed to overcome him.

The man, Jerry, stared in stupid surprise.

"What hast thou for a joke, sir?" he growled, not ill-naturedly. Indeed, an uncouth kindliness rumbled in his fogbound voice, and now that she was no longer in close proximity to him, Mehitable did not think him so terrible.

"Nay, ask—ask me not!" sputtered Lieutenant Freeman. He waved a feeble right arm, weak from laughter. "I vow 'tis the best fun o' the year!"

"Aye?" said Jerry doubtfully. "But——"

Suddenly Lieutenant Freeman sobered, though his eyes still twinkled.

"'Tis my harum-scarum little sister!" he explained merrily. "She wagered me she would follow me to New York and of course I wagered the minx she could not. Well"—he burst out laughing again—"'tis I will have to pay the madcap her wager and scurry around and find her a passport, besides, unless"—he paused suggestively—"unless means could be arranged to smuggle her in with me before the guard comes?"

"We—ell," returned Jerry hesitatingly, "if this be true about ye wager—and mind, sir, I don't doubt your word—I should think means could be arranged to save ye the bother o' getting a passport."

There was a silence, a clink of metal against metal, then Lieutenant Freeman moved away.

"We will go, I think," he observed abstractedly, "to our aunt's in Broad Street."

"Aye, sir," answered Jerry, adding quickly, "best go at once! I hear ye sentry!"

For ten minutes the young man hurried Mehitable along. Then, reaching the shelter of some houses, he stopped abruptly.

"Mistress Hitty," he said gravely, "art mad?"

Mehitable, who had been waiting impatiently for an opportunity to speak, poured out her story. But when she had finished, the other shook his head.

"I cannot see why thy father allowed thee to come," he said.

When he had grasped the fact that Squire Condit knew nothing of his impetuous daughter's adventure as yet, the young officer whistled in astonishment, though the girl was relieved to find the inevitable twinkle in his eye.

"I will say," he drawled then, "thou art not lacking in spirit, little Mistress Madcap! But come, we must be on our way!"

"Whither do we go?" asked Mehitable.

"To my aunt's, Mistress Livingston, on Broad Street."

"Be she Tory?"

"Well, she is married to an Englishman." Lieutenant Freeman smiled. If he had not been such a tease he might have explained that his aunt, in that city of enemies, was a fiery patriot, as was her daughter, Mistress Nancy, and that his uncle was a good-natured

man who cared about neither party so long as he could carry on his business.

But he realized his grave error in teasing Mehitable thus only when he reached his aunt's stoop. For when he turned around, expecting to find the girl at his heels in the little vestibule, she had disappeared.

Poor Mehitable! She spent the night, because of her principles, which would not let her accept Tory hospitality, in roaming the streets. But when morning came her patriotism was rewarded. For nearing the ruins of Trinity Church, which stood bleak and forlorn in the gray dawn, whom should she see staring out at her, from behind a ruined, tottering church wall, but Charity!

CHAPTER XV

THE "LONG ROOM"

BUT the sisters' joy was short-lived. Scarcely had Mehitable started forward to greet Charity when a hand fell heavily upon her shoulder and she whirled around to find herself in the grasp of a British soldier.

"What be a-doing?" asked the soldier in a growl.

For a moment her alarm showed plainly in the pulse that beat in her slender throat; but, regaining composure as she spoke, she answered him pertly.

"Has not a body a right to look where she will?" she queried coolly.

She did not dare to glance where Charity had stood, hoping against hope that the little sister had hidden herself once more before the sentry had seen her. But his next words shattered that hope.

"Not in war-times," he said, answering her audacious inquiry. Then he raised his voice. "Come out o' yon!" he bawled. "Hear me, wench?"

Mehitable's heart dropped. So he had seen Charity! Then her eyes filled with tears as the younger girl climbed forlornly over some débris and came slowly toward them through the churchyard.

Now had Mehitable had the good sense to remain silent at this point and let her and Charity's plight

speak for itself, all might have gone well, for the soldier could not have helped but be touched, especially when Charity raised her great blue eyes to him in piteous, silent appeal. But no, she needs must burst forth in an elaborate explanation in which she baldly contradicted herself more than once, so that at last an open sneer appeared upon the soldier's face.

"Your father brought ye to town this morning from your farm?" he asked suspiciously. "But I thought ye just said as how your father lay ill and that was why you and your sister were in town, delivering the milk?"

"So he did! So I was!" declared Mehitable wildly. "I left my milk cart down Broad Street a pace while I and my sister walked up to see Trinity Church ruins and——"

"Nay, nay!" interrupted the sentry at that point, out of patience. "I be no fool, lass! Show me y'r passports!"

"I—I—lost them," faltered Mehitable, stammering.

"Lost them, eh? That is what everyone says!" ejaculated the soldier, scornfully. He smiled in a knowing manner. "More like ye had never had any! 'Tis best we go to the Debtors' Prison and there ye can do all your explaining to Provost-Marshal Cunningham!"

So tearfully and terror-stricken by this new misfortune, the two sisters found themselves walking up Broadway.

"Dost think we shall ever see Newark Mountains again?" whispered Charity tremulously.

But with a sharp "No whispering!" their guard bade

them be silent, and so they marched along, uncomfortably aware of the musket and the man behind them.

It was yet so early that the streets were quite empty, for which Mehitable was thankful. Charity, dazed by this new misfortune and still weak from her long fast and exposure, stumbled miserably along and would have fallen more than once but for her sister's quick and affectionate arm.

"Be not down-hearted, dear Cherry!" Mehitable managed to whisper half under her breath; but at sight of the speechless misery in the younger girl's eyes, her own filled with tears. She dashed them away. Not for anything would she allow the British soldier to see them!

And so they came to the "Fields." This was a stretch of land reserved as a common outdoor gathering place for the people of Colonial New York and in the days before the Revolution used as a grazing place for cattle. Immediately prior to the War of 1776, it was there that the Sons of Liberty erected their Liberty Poles as fast as the British authorities destroyed them. It was at the foot of one of these Liberty Poles that Cunningham, who was in charge at the time, received the wounds for which afterward he made every rebel prisoner unfortunate enough to come underneath his jurisdiction pay so dearly. It was to this man, noted for his brutality and cruelty thus early in the war, that the sentry marched his young prisoners now.

Crossing the "Fields" they came within sight of a nearly square, small stone building, three stories high,

with the usual Colonial public-building ornament—a belfry rising from the center. This was the New Gaol, afterwards renamed the Debtors' Prison, where so many American prisoners were tortured and sent to their death by the scoundrel, Cunningham.

Even Mehitable's stout heart quailed as they passed through its great doors into a dark hall, the entrance to which was guarded by two sentries. As for Charity, her eyes were like flames set in two great black holes, so deeply were they encircled. The elder sister's heart was torn by anguish as she looked at her.

Thrusting the two girls roughly into a guardroom, opposite to which on the right hand side of the main door, were Captain Cunningham's quarters, and clanging the grated door ominously behind him, the soldier strode across the hall and pounded loudly, imperatively. upon the marshal's door.

A peevish voice bade him enter. He was not gone long. In a very few moments he reappeared in the hall, thrust violently through the door as though ejected from behind, his face red and angry. A furious torrent of oaths and abuse followed him before the door was slammed, in which the trembling listeners behind the opposite door distinguished such ejaculations as "varlet waking me thus early!" and "teach the fool military discipline" and "Numb-skull! Dunce-head! Brainless musket bearer!"

The soldier, pausing for a second to readjust his disarrayed clothing, stalked back to inform his prisoners in a gruff, sullen voice that they would have to await Captain Cunningham's pleasure. With which curt

information he vanished, looking much like a ruffled turkey-cock.

Then, indeed, ensued a dreary wait. The city slowly awakened outside the barred windows of the guard-room, the sun slanted for an all too brief while in at the one window to lighten the old, dingy stone walls opposite it.

The two little maids drew silently together. Pitifully, Mehitable gathered Charity's slight figure within her embrace, as they sat huddled together on the rough bench near the grated door; but neither spoke. Their hearts were too full for that. Anxiety and fear and their grim surroundings held them quite speechless.

At last a sharp sound penetrated through the building. There was a stir and a clanging of iron doors, the measured tramp of approaching feet, and presently a company of soldiers, a cheerful splotch of red in their bright uniforms, came marching down the dark corridor to halt before Captain Cunningham's door. This time, when the sergeant stepped forward and rapped smartly upon the door, it opened promptly and an officer in dress uniform issued across its threshold. As he returned their salute, the officer inspected his company briefly and then, giving a curt order, he stepped forward to lead his company, as it about-faced, back to a large inner hall where he held his court. This was Captain Cunningham, the much dreaded provost marshal.

Taking his place behind a wooden table, with the guard drawn up solemnly behind him, the provost marshal summoned the prisoners before him.

It would have been laughable had it not been pa-

thetic, to any one viewing this scene. There were the soldiers with their bristling array of firearms, there was the provost marshal in all the dignity of his office, there were the great bars and bolts and high stone walls of the cavernous hall and—there were the two, slender, shrinking little figures of Mehitable and Charity being marched into court and delivered over with all due formality by their captor to Cunningham!

He looked at them sharply as their names, ages, and home were being carefully recorded in a great book. Then he waved his hand indifferently.

"The Long Room, of course," he said, hiding a yawn and rising to dismiss the guard.

Charity gave a little sob as she turned, with Mehitable, to follow the guard appointed to conduct them to their new prison. The "Long Room" sounded ominous indeed to her ears.

"Oh, Hitty!" she moaned under her breath. "Think you we are to be shot?"

Mehitable tried to laugh; but it was a sorry failure, for she, too, was dubious of their future. She had to steady her trembling lips before she could attempt an answer.

"W-why should w-we be?" she stammered, then. "What have w-we done, Cherry?"

"I know not!" wept Charity. "That awful man—Hitty, he's the one—why, he's the one Ebenezer Lamson said had Nathan Hale hung as a spy—taunted him so, Ebenezer did say—and would not let poor Mr. Hale have even a Bible before he was executed! Dost not remember? He is the tyrant, too, who tore up Nathan

Hale's last letter to his sweetheart before his very face and——"

"Silence, wenches!" thundered the guard at this point and the two girls at once relapsed into obedient speechlessness.

The Bridewell, to which they were being conducted, which also faced the "Fields" a short distance away, had been built only the previous year, in 1775, the Debtors' Prison having proved too small to accommodate all classes of prisoners. It was, as a matter of fact, still uncompleted in many respects, as to windows, through which the winter's cold swept in upon the unfortunate war-prisoners and as to numerous other comforts, besides.

It was a small gray stone building, two stories high, with a basement. On its first floor to the right of the entrance was the "Long Room," occupied by women, the white prisoners in front, the colored ones at the rear of the apartment, a partition between.

It was into this room that Mehitable and Charity were pushed by the brutal-looking keeper to whom they had been turned over by their guard.

As they instinctively paused upon the threshold, such a burst of noise greeted them that they faltered back. A shriek of crazy laughter, someone weeping, groans and cries of every description all mingled into a bedlam of noise. It seemed not to affect the prison keeper in the least. He merely grinned as he relocked the grated door.

For a little while the two girls were too frightened to move. They cowered back as sharp eyes inspected

them, as rough fingers plucked at their apparel and rude voices jeeringly bade them welcome. But soon a rougher jerk than before made Mehitable draw back and repel, with flashing eyes, the prisoner who had dared to touch her mother's cardinal. Taken aback, the woman slunk away and the others, laughing at her discomfiture, turned more respectful eyes upon the two young newcomers.

"Hist!" said a hoarse voice. "I hear ye guard returning!"

Instantly, the clamor, which had died away when the guard had disappeared, was resumed. Mehitable and Charity now realized that this was the usual procedure at every fresh opening of the door into the "Long Room."

Only one prisoner had sat apart, drawing back haughtily if any one approached her, and she it was whom the keeper ordered forth to depart with him. He was rather afraid of her for all his blustering bravado, and merely spoke to her in a surly voice, not offering to touch her.

Mehitable was sorry to see her go, especially as she did not return, for the remaining prisoners were plainly the riff-raff of the city and uncouth, sordid creatures, not political prisoners, as both she and her sister and this one other lady had been.

The day passed drearily to noontime. There was no attempt made to feed them other than the few crusts of dry bread thrown at them through the grating as though they were animals. In truth, however, some of the poor things acted as though they were,

diving wildly for the mouldy bread and fighting among themselves.

Mehitable tried to procure from the pewter ewer set upon the floor within the door a drink of water for Charity, whose flushed cheeks looked as though she had been stricken by fever. But in the noisy arguments which ensued around the water, from which the girl shrank back appalled, the ewer was upset and few were bettered for the water having been placed within the room.

Charity pulled feebly at Mehitable's arm.

"Nay, do not try to get any for me!" she whispered. "I—I—do not think it looked overly clear, Hitty. I do not think I want any!"

Mehitable gave a short, angry laugh and pointed at the pool of wasted water which was slowly spreading across the stone floor.

"I do not think ye will have a chance to want it, Cherry!" she returned dryly. "Methinks it may do this filthy floor a little good, however!"

Poor Charity's lips trembled, for her throat was parched and dry. She turned away, sick at heart.

But toward two o'clock there was another stir among the prisoners. Someone's keen ears had caught the approaching footsteps of the guard once more and as soon as this was verified, the howling and clamor arose as usual.

The guard threw open the door and shouted something; but it was lost in the noise until he threatened a few of the prisoners nearest to him with the butt of his musket and the excitement died away in a sullen murmur.

"Silence, in the King's name!" shouted the guard again. He looked at a paper which he held in his hand. "Mistress Mehitable and Charity Condit, step forth!"

Mehitable, who had held her breath, took a quick step forward. Then she turned and leaned over Charity, who was lying in a half stupor on the cold floor.

"Cherry, get up! We are sent for! Get up, dear!" She tried to rouse her.

Charity, muttering something, shifted her position a trifle.

"Mistress Mehitable and Mistress Charity, step forth," bawled the guard again. His voice grew impatient. "Come, be lively with ye! I cannot wait here until night comes!"

He pushed his way roughly through the curious group which had gathered around the two girls. Mehitable looked up with frightened eyes.

"I cannot waken her!" she cried, wringing her hands.

But the guard, leaning over in turn, jerked Charity to her feet in short order. Still holding her by the arm, as she stumbled along obediently beside him, he shoved his way back to the door where, calling his underling, he put the "Long Room" in his charge and departed from the Bridewell.

The cold air and sunshine seemed to revive Charity a little as she marched falteringly beside her sister, to whom the guard had relinquished her. Mehitable's arm was through hers to keep her from falling. She looked around her in bewilderment after a short distance paced in dreamlike silence.

"I—why, Hitty, I——" she began.

"Nay," interrupted Mehitable tenderly, with a fleeting glance over her shoulder at the grim-faced man who was following them with his musket over his shoulder. "Nay, do not bother thee, Charity! All will yet be well."

And then, as though to verify this hopeful expression, after they had reëntered the Debtors' Prison and were once more in Provost Marshal Cunningham's presence, it seemed to the girl that things would be right, indeed. For there, beside the captain's table, with a beautiful lady standing beside him, was the smiling faced, broad-shouldered friend of her Trenton visit, Lieutenant Freeman!

The lady, a saucy smile on her red lips and a twinkle in her lovely eyes, was speaking to the provost marshal as they approached with their guard. Captain Cunningham was plainly carried away by her charm and sat fumbling embarrassedly among his papers on the table as he listened to her merry banter.

"I vow, Captain," the lady was laughing, "I shall strike your name from my dance list an you imprison any more of my friends in your dreadful old Bridewell. And how do you do, Hitty, my dear!" Smilingly, she turned and saluted Mehitable familiarly by her name, as though she had known her all of her life. "And Charity, too!" For a fleeting instant, grave concern showed in her face as she noted the younger girl's feverish color and the blank look in her eyes; but she was all gay flattery and jollity as she turned back to the cruel-looking man behind the table.

"La!" she went on carelessly, "will you make out the pass for my cousins or must I really treat ye as ye deserve?"

"Nay," protested the provost marshal eagerly, "do not be unkind to me! I swear I merit not such inhuman treatment! Give me but another chance and I will make amends."

A barely perceptible glance passed between the lady and Lieutenant Freeman which Captain Cunningham, busily writing the release and passports for Mehitable and Charity did not see But she had her most coquettish smile ready for him when he rose and handed her the papers.

"And when do we meet again?" he asked imploringly.

"La, how can I tell?" the lady answered carelessly. "Perhaps to-night at Lord Howe's rout."

Turning, she motioned to Lieutenant Freeman, who at once offered his arm.

"Come, cousin, I am aweary of this dark place." She glanced back over her shoulder at the captain, who was gazing after her rather mournfully. "I should think you would feel like a great potato in the cold, dark ground in here, Captain. Ugh, 'tis a terrible hole!"

She shivered. Suddenly she seemed to remember Mehitable and Charity, who had remained passive onlookers. She stopped and glanced inquiringly at Captain Cunningham.

"They are to come with me?" she asked, though indifferently, as if, now that she had accomplished her object, she was uninterested in the result. Perhaps an

acute observer might have read aright the look in her beautiful eyes, however, the trembling of her little white hand as it lay upon Lieutenant Freeman's arm.

"Aye, Mistress Nancy. They were arrested only on suspicion for loitering. There is no other charge against them. But you understand, with the city under martial law we cannot be too careful!"

"But you could throw them into that horrible place, the 'Long Room,' among pickpockets and thieves, two little innocent maids, on such a charge as that?"

For a dangerous moment all affectation of gayety forsook her voice and honest indignation was apparent in it. The captain scowled at the rebuke and the poor little prisoners' fate hung fire as he took an involuntary step forward to snatch the passports out of her hand. Then ordinary politeness made him pause and the lady snapped her fingers mischievously in his face, changing the scene magically back into the laughing farce she intended it to be. She left the captain smiling amorously after her.

"Oh, you naughty men!" she cried, as she tripped away, followed by Mehitable and Charity, with Lieutenant Freeman bringing up the rear like a bodyguard.

But outside, on the edge of the "Fields," when they had passed beyond the range of the Debtors' Prison, she became a tender, compassionate woman, all her coquetry and flippancy vanishing before her genuine pity.

"Ah, Anthony!" she cried, stooping to place her arms around poor, sick little Charity, "'Tis so pitiful, this war, when it comes to babies like this!"

CHAPTER XVI

MIRANDA BRIGGS'S HEROISM

"PUT her down there on yon settle, Squire, where I have ye blankets piled!" beamed Mistress Livingston.

Squire Condit came slowly down the stairs carrying a very precious if a frail burden, while Mistress Condit and Mehitable followed. It was Charity's first day downstairs after an almost fatal attack of fever, induced by the hardships she had undergone in New York.

When the little invalid had been made comfortable before the fire, the others lingered for a moment. Mistress Condit turned to Mistress Nancy gratefully.

"Never will I forget how good you have been to us, Nancy," she whispered, the tears starting to her eyes.

"I know not what we should have done had ye not come to Newark that time Lieutenant Freeman brought Charity home! Not many strangers would have offered help as ye did!"

The girl blushed. "Nay, 'tis what any one would have done, dear Mistress Condit," she returned. "I was glad to come!"

They turned to hear what Squire Condit was saying to Mehitable.

"Master Jones reports that the 'Jersey Blues' have

sent a man into New York Town itself seeking Young Cy. 'Tis a hanging matter an he be caught——"

"Ahem!" Mistress Condit gave a warning cough and the blundering Squire glanced down to see Charity's wide eyes of horror fixed upon him. A moment later, however, she had drifted off into a doze and her parents hoped she had not grasped the Squire's meaning. She did not stir when, presently, the others having dispersed to their morning tasks, there came a thundering knock upon the door.

"Nancy!" called Mistress Condit softly from the table where she was kneading bread. "Canst answer the door? My hands be floury!

"Aye!" From the buttery, where she was helping Mehitable with the churning, the other came hurrying. After a little, Mistress Condit, busily thumping the great mass of dough before her, felt a draft from the open door.

"Who was it, Nancy?" she asked idly.

"Madam," began a deep voice, and Mistress Condit whirled around with a little cry to see General Washington standing there, with Mistress Nancy speechless from sheer surprise behind him. Beyond, through the open door, the rain slanted across the March-blown garden.

"Madam, I cry your pardon," began His Excellency once more, as Mistress Nancy closed the door. "I have been riding since long before dawn and recalling your hospitality of some months ago, I ventured to stop again. My welcome may be the more assured when I tell you that your son is among my escort. I came on alone while they reconnoitered the neighborhood."

"Indeed, Your Excellency needs no assurance"—Mistress Condit swept him a curtsey—"though I shall be glad to see my son!"

The general walked over to the fire, spreading his hands gratefully to its warmth. Noticing Charity asleep, he was careful to lower his voice, showing the unfailing courtesy which was characteristic of him.

"'Tis not so bitter as raw outside," he observed. "But these March gales up here in Jersey take one's vitality, methinks."

Suddenly the buttery door was thrown open impetuously and Mehitable, her dark curls tumbling from under her cap, her cheeks flushed crimson, appeared.

"Mother, who——" she commenced. Then, seeing the guest, she stopped and stared.

"'Tis General Washington," admonished Mistress Condit sharply, not well pleased at her daughter's awkwardness. But the great man held up his hand leniently, a grave smile dawning in his eyes.

"'Tis my little friend Angeline," he welcomed.

Mistress Condit had left the room, so Mehitable came forward shyly, dropping a belated curtsey. Then, as Mistress Nancy also departed and General Washington, with a weary sigh, seated himself, the young girl pointed to her sister.

"Dost see poor Cherry?" she asked in a whisper.

Nodding, with a few skillful questions, he was soon in possession of all the facts of Charity's abduction, Mehitable pouring it out in breathless, indignant words.

"And poor Young Cy—no one knows where he be imprisoned!" she finished sorrowfully. "His mother

be lying at the point o' death for lack o' news of him!"

"'Tis indeed beyond endurance!" ejaculated General Washington, with flashing eyes. "The wretches who, in the name o' war, bring wanton injury upon the innocent, ought to be and shall be punished as felons!"

Mistress Nancy returned to the kitchen just as the door opened and a party of young officers entered hurriedly to escape the downpour. For a second she and the leader of the group stared at each other, then she gave ever so slight a shrug and looked proudly past him. John Condit's ruddy face, glowing from his battle with the elements, deepened in color. He stood silent, but not for long. There was an exclamation of joy, another one, and both Mistress Condit and Mehitable had their arms around his neck.

"My son, my son!" Mistress Condit's eyes were full of joyful tears.

There was a brief interval of greetings, then John Condit turned and saluted his chief, who had risen and was waiting in grave silence.

"Your Excellency, from what we could gather, the roads are unwatched and it seems safe to move the supplies from Newark which have arrived by boat from Philadelphia."

"Very good, sir!" Washington bent his head in acquiescence. "It seems best to me, since you are familiar with this country," he continued, after a thoughtful pause, "that you be the one to ride to Newark and there notify the authorities in charge to move the supplies to Morristown as soon as possible.

Stay," he smiled kindly, "best refresh yourself first with the dinner I see your mother is preparing for us."

Mistress Nancy's clear voice, as she conversed vivaciously with the other young officers who crowded around her eagerly, faltered a moment. Her back, turned toward John, looked haughty, however, and as he saluted his general he turned sadly away.

Mehitable, who had been watching Mistress Nancy in amazement, at once joined her brother.

"What be the matter with you, John?" she whispered.

"Nay, little sister, nothing is the matter save that I am stiff from my ride. He looked down at her humorously. "I be so ancient, ye know."

"Yes, 'tis true, you are old," agreed Mehitable soberly.

John laughed. "Why, Hitty, twenty-three be not so old!" he protested.

"It seems pretty old," answered Mehitable. Twenty-three ever seems old to fifteen! And thirty! Oh dear!"

As they were eating the excellent meal Mistress Condit and Nancy had prepared, miraculously, it would seem, out of nothing, Amos entered to inform his mistress that Squire Condit had been called away. Soon afterward, John Condit left for Newark. Oddly enough, with his departure, Mistress Nancy's bright gayety vanished and she fell thoughtful. Then, while she fed Charity her dinner, she gazed often into the fire. General Washington, watching her as she sat oblivious to his presence near by, spoke at last.

"Such daydreams," he said, "can mean but one thing!"

The girl turned with a start, covered with confusion. "Why—Your Excellency—" Blushing, she popped the spoonful of milk she had been holding in mid-air into Charity's patient little mouth.

"Daydreams mean, ye know, that——" began the general teasingly. But at her imploring gesture he stopped. "Nay, I did not mean to be rude," he apologized. "'Tis my unseemly habit to like to watch people when they know it not. It is not fair to them, so I always apologize—and go on watching!"

Joining his amused chuckle, Mistress Nancy cast a cautious look over her shoulder. Mehitable, assisted by two of the officers, was washing the dishes, Mistress Condit was overseeing the task, watching her precious china rather anxiously. The rest of the general's staff were gathered about the windows, where they gazed out at the torrents of rain which blurred the panes and dripped dismally from the house roof.

"Your Excellency," said Mistress Nancy in a low voice, "think you this—this Newark mission be a—a—dangerous one?"

The general glanced at her smilingly, as though he had guessed a secret. Then, after the thoughtful pause which was habitual with him, for he was a man to weigh his statements, he answered her.

"Nay, my dear, I think not. We hold Newark, now, ye know."

"Aye, 'tis so," admitted Mistress Nancy. "Still——"

She was interrupted by a sharp exclamation from one of the officers at the window.

"Who comes there?" he cried, bending forward to

peer through the baffling curtain of rain. For a moment tense listening held everyone motionless. Even Charity held her breath as she half started up from her settle.

General Washington turned toward the door, and at that instant it was unceremoniously thrown open. A dripping, streaming figure was revealed upon the threshold. Mistress Condit, who had slipped forward, uttered an astonished cry as the newcomer threw back the wet hood which concealed her face.

"Why, Miranda, what doth bring you out this dreadful day?"

Miranda Briggs swayed forward where she stood. "I've—be—been running all the way!" she gasped. And indeed, she looked spent. "Somehow the—Tories have discovered His—Excellency's presence here. They gathered at my father's house—I overheard them—one o' them——"

She put her hands to her forehead and the others were horrified to see a great black bruise there.

"One of them struck me! They locked me up; but —I escaped—oh, hurry, Your Excellency! They come —the Tories come——"

Then, as one of the young officers sprang forward, poor Miranda fell forward into his arms, unconscious.

CHAPTER XVII

STORMS

THERE was confusion in the Condit kitchen for a short time as the young officer carried Miranda over to the settle opposite Charity, and Mistress Nancy flew for cold water with which to restore her to consciousness.

But Mehitable turned a blanched face to General Washington.

"There be no man here who knows the way over the mountain passes!" she gasped. "Ye have not time, either, to summon Amos from the barn!"

General Washington, who had been fastening the collar of his cape hastily around his neck, for his keen mind told him that the hope of the American Army must not be caught in such a trap as this, paused to regard her thoughtfully.

"'Tis true!" he admitted. "Captain Mason," he raised his voice, "know ye the short route back to Morristown over the mountains?"

"Nay, sir!" The young officer, struggling into his greatcoat, looked at him in dismay. "Only through Millburn! And that way come ye Tories!"

"Here, sip this!" Mistress Nancy's voice could be heard admonishing Miranda in the silence that followed. Mehitable wrung her hands.

"But ye must not be found here by the Tories!" she panted. "Poor Miranda's bravery must not go thus unrewarded, Your Excellency!"

The officers gathered in a close circle around their general.

"'Tis twenty against five, sir!" one of them protested earnestly. "Surely ye will decide to flee?"

General Washington glanced at him impatiently.

"Of course," he said. He strode forward.

But at the kitchen door he was met by Mehitable, wrapped in her mother's cardinal, the hood of which was drawn tightly around her determined young face.

"I know the way!" she said. "I will go with you and guide you over ye mountain pass! I know almost every inch of this country in that direction!"

"Nay, child!" General Washington started back in quick denial. "I cannot let you put yourself in such danger! 'Tis most brave of you; but I cannot permit it!"

Mistress Condit attracted by the brief argument, raising her head and seeing that her guests were about to depart, hurried across the kitchen to them.

"Your Excellency, Mehitable would be most proud an you let her guide you!" she said earnestly.

"But, madam!" The general turned to her. 'Even now 'tis growing dusk——"

He was interrupted by Mehitable.

"They come!" she exclaimed. "Ye Tories come!"

The little party of Americans wasted no more time, then. With hastily spoken farewells to the hostess, they were down the path and upon their horses' backs

which, blanketed and tethered, had been waiting patiently in the rain for just such an emergency as this. One of the young officers, however, found himself deprived of a horse, for Mehitable was in the saddle before him.

"Ride double!" she shouted at him through the storm.

Never as long as she lived, would Mehitable forget the wild ride. Straight away from the Condit farmhouse to the north, on the Second Road, they rode, then they swerved into the Northfield Road that led up over the mountains to the little settlement of Northfield. But just before they left the Second Road, they met a solitary horseman riding in the opposite direction. With his head sunk into the protection of his upturned collar and his hat pulled low over his forehead, he did not appear to see them until the party were upon him. then Mehitable wanted to laugh at the visible start he gave, as they dashed past him. Had she glanced over her shoulder, she might have seen him rein in his horse to stare after them malevolently; but she was riding low in her saddle, her face along the horse's neck, guiding him more by low-voiced commands than by the bit.

The road was mounting upward, now, through the dense forest that stood, threatening and gloom-filled in the stormy twilight, on either side. The others, not so sure of the rocky way—indeed, it had narrowed into the inevitable cart path—labored far behind, so that at last Mehitable, not to be too far in advance, halted her horse and blinked the raindrops from her eyelashes to glance around her. As she did so she had the eld

feeling of being watched! Sure enough, turning in her saddle, she caught sight of the Indian lurking behind a tree not more than ten feet away.

But this time instead of vanishing into the forest like a wood creature he stepped out of concealment and, approaching her, he raised his right hand, palm outward, in the Indian salutation.

"Go north—notch way!" he grunted, then.

"Why?" asked Mehitable, in surprise. The other road, through a deep cut in the mountain called the notch, was a much longer route.

The Indian would not tell her, however, merely repeating his command, or advice, she could not tell which, and disappearing before the others could reach them, so that she had time to debate the question with herself. Should she return to the foot of the mountain to the Second Road and follow that north to the Notch Road or should she hold to her original determination to go straight west over the mountains to Northfield?

The decision was taken out of her hands, for when General Washington arrived at her side he looked at her rather sharply.

"That was an Indian?" he asked curtly.

"Aye, Your Excellency. I have had warning to turn back! I know not what danger threatens, but I believe the warning to be sincere."

"You know this Indian, do you?"

"Not more than that he has rescued me from peril several times, Your Excellency. He was the messenger who came wounded to us that time I went up the mountain for him, to set the signal fires, last Fall."

"Could it be Great Bear?" General Washington turned to one of his staff who had arrived beside them.

"But he would have waited to salute Your Excellency," answered the other shrewdly.

"Aye, true! This Indian, methinks, seemed not overly anxious to be seen." General Washington sat with his head bowed in anxious thought. So many times during those long, hard years of warfare must he have sat thus, in sad and troubled and silent debate, for always the burden of decision rested upon his shoulders!

At last, as his horse began to dance impatiently, he looked up.

"Forward!" he ordered. And the dreary climb recommenced.

But now Mehitable rode with every sense alert, her wide gaze searching out the depths of the forest. Nothing moved, however. There was no sign of ambush by beasts or men. Not until they had left the trees behind and were rounding the path approaching the base of a great cliff of trap rock did she relax, though, and then it was but a momentary relaxation. For soon her keen country-bred ears caught an odd sound, a grinding, splintering noise that just at first she was unable to define!

But when she did she gave a scream of terror and whirled her horse.

"Back! Back! The rocks. Down the trail!"

The whole party, as one man, wheeled in the opposite direction and fled pell-mell back down the insecure path. They were none too quick, for a few seconds later there

was a tremendous crash, a thunderous sound that seemed to rend the lowering clouds themselves. And a greater part of the face of trap rock, loosened by the winter's freezing and the spring thawing, lay upon that part of the path they had been traversing, blocking the way as completely as an enemy breastworks!

For a little while Mehitable could only gasp at their narrow escape. Once again had the Indian saved her from a death too awful to contemplate, for had she or her horse been caught beneath that avalanche of rock and ice, had any of them been caught, death might have been only too slow in coming to relieve them.

The little party, beyond any danger from a further landslide, halted as by common impulse to stare back at the scene of the near-accident. Finally General Washington turned to Mehitable, a pale smile upon his haggard face.

"God is good to us," he said simply; "and Dame Nature has reversed my decision. We must take the other path over the mountains. Lead you the way, my little friend, and accept my apology for not having allowed you to decide before as to our route."

As she descended back toward Second Road, Mehitable was filled with admiration for the man who, hard-pressed by treacherous foes, fleeing for more than his life—his country's hope of ultimate victory—could yet find the time and the broad-minded ability to apologize to the little country girl for having taken the guidance out of her more competent hands. Not a word of complaint, though he and his staff had ridden fast and far since dawn that day, was heard from any of them.

Not one exclamation of dismay at their enforced return into the dangers of the lower road was uttered. Majestic though near possible defeat, courageous even though nature itself seemed to be trying to thwart their escape, the great general followed close upon Mehitable's horse and his men rode along single file behind him.

It was not until they had reached the junction of the Northfield Road with Second Road once more that General Washington spoke. Then he rode forward, abreast with Mehitable.

"Knowst whether we pass any Tory household on this road?" he queried.

"Aye, Your Excellency," answered Mehitable anxiously. "We pass the house of Amos Williams—that horseman who was riding the other way before—and he do be a very bitter partisan of the King! Though he was, without any doubt, on his way to join those Tories already gathered at Squire Briggs's, seeing us, he may have turned back or he may have met the others and may even now be lying in ambush——"

The girl's voice faltered. Oh, if she were to fail now! She set her lips tightly together. She would not fail, she told herself fiercely!

They were traveling more rapidly again. The highway, poorly constructed as it was, was far different from the uncertain, narrow mountain trail with its rolling stones and the torrents of rain washing down its gulleys on either side which ever threatened an unpleasant bath if one's horse slipped. So that it was not many more minutes before they came within sight of

Amos Williams's farmhouse. Instinctively they lagged a little, everyone trying to pierce the curtain of rain with straining eyes.

Mehitable caught her breath.

"Dost see aught, Your Excellency?" she stammered.

General Washington stared ahead of him.

"Nay, I think not," he said at last. "Forward!"

They drew closer together as they galloped on. The officers would have passed ahead to protect their general had he given them opportunity; but he did not pause.

The house stood silent and lonely at the side of the road as they neared it, but they all drew a combined breath of relief when they had actually passed it. Then suddenly, straight over the rail fence which fronted the dwelling, leaped a dark form.

As her horse swerved aside, Mehitable uttered a shriek, then another, as General Washington's mount, startled by this quick swerving, lost its footing and crashed down in a bog hole. But General Washington with an agility unbelievable in a man of his years, had leaped clear of the brute as it floundered in the mud, and throwing the bridle over its head he had jerked it to its feet and was again upon its back before the others could do more than gasp. The next instant Mehitable was laughing hysterically.

"It be only—only old Shep, Mistress Williams's watchdog!" she explained when she could speak. "He is more harmless than his master, in sooth!"

To prove it, as their horses danced and circled around one another, old Shep, reassured byMehitable's familiar voice, sneaked back rather sheepishly into his own

yard and ventured forth no more. Then once more they were off!

The road began to lead upward, now, with the steepest part of the grade almost at the foot of the mountain. This meant that their horses would be winded before they had fairly started their climb, so that, despite every nerve urging her to put as much ground between her and possible pursuit, Mehitable very sensibly set a slower pace. But no one spoke. Escape was still too unassured to permit any light conversation or repartee between the younger men, and as they neared the base of another cliff of trap rock, which farther, back from the road, did not present much danger from an avalanche or landslide, yet offered a good place for an ambush, they all moved forward more and more cautiously. But no one molested them. To the girl's infinite relief the stillness was undisturbed by anything except the sound of the rain beating against the bare tree branches and the rush of the descending torrents in the gulleys.

When they arrived upon the mountain ridge, Mehitable turned sharply to her left to recover the Northfield Road above the place where the falling trap rock had blocked their advance. And at last they reached that point where, had it been daylight, they might have seen that the road, descending, led down the western slope into the Pleasant Valley and across to the Second Mountain. There General Washington stopped her.

"There is no more need for you to guide us, now," he said kindly. "'Tis straight west, now, is it not, over yon mountain? Ah, I thought so! And then on to Whippany?"

"Aye, Your Excellency, and then on to Morristown."

"I see." He held out his hand and the young girl, guiding her horse closer to him to extend hers, he carried it to his lips in his courtly fashion.

"My dear little friend," he said in a moved voice, "I hope some day that I may have the opportunity to repay this service you have done us this night. And now, how can you get home? Had not Captain Mason better escort you?"

"Nay, Your Excellency!" protested Mehitable in horror. "'Twould be, perhaps, into the very arms of the Tories!"

And in her eagerness not to allow the young officer to be placed in any such peril for her sake, the girl touched her horse's sides with her heels and was off into the stormbound night, her long cardinal flung out behind her like a banner as the east gale caught it. The last they saw of the gallant little figure she seemed to be riding into the teeth of the storm, and as General Washington turned his horse to resume his journey he sighed.

"Much that is bravest in this war," he observed to Captain Mason who had spurred ahead of the other officers to bear his general company, "will ne'er be told, Mason."

"'Tis true, Your Excellency," the young man agreed thoughtfully.

Mehitable, meanwhile, found that, despite the climb coming up, it was far more difficult to face the full force of the wind as she had to in going down the mountain side. Besides, she was alone, no longer

upheld by the presence of others. Far from being the undaunted guide, she was merely a tired, rain-soaked little girl, wearily anxious to reach home and rest.

Crunch! Slip! Crunch! went her horse's feet. Halfway down the mountain, three quarters of the way down—all the way down! Now she was trotting the last half mile. But arrived at her own gate she drew rein abruptly. There were twelve or fifteen riderless horses tethered there.

Slipping from her own horse and remembering how General Washington and his staff had so tied their horses that they could make a hasty escape if needful, Mehitable led her weary beast across the road and secured him, in the safety of the underbrush, to a sapling.

Her anxiety carried her flying to the kitchen door; but when she opened it, the world seemed to go black at what met her eyes. There, in the grasp of his Tory neighbors, stood Squire Condit at bay, his usually ruddy face a terrible gray-white from passion, his kind eyes blazing with bitter hatred, his trembling hands tied behind him like a common felon's!

Behind him, crouching on a settle, was Mehitable's mother with her arms around Charity, who lay motionless. Miranda stood sobbing in a corner.

"Charity is dead!" thought Mehitable, her heart turning to ice.

The awfulness of that moment was etched forever upon the girl's soul!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE INN SERVANT

NO ONE, in the excitement of the moment, noticed Mehitable as she stood stricken motionless in the open door behind the group of angry men. Amos Williams was speaking.

"Ye deserve death for treason to your king," he snarled, his lips twisted in a kind of fanatical fury. "But we are merciful, Condit. We will give ye trial before your peers and pass judgment upon ye!"

"Merciful!" Mehitable started at the change in her father's heretofore friendly voice. "What do you know of mercy, those o' you who would take a neighbor's child and treat her as ye have in the name o' warfare? Why, most o' ye," and here his bitter, scornful glance rested upon Squire Briggs, "are only in this warfare for what money ye can make out of it!"

Squire Briggs turned an angry red and shuffled his feet.

"Why wait we here?" he snapped. "'Tis but a waste o' time!"

A low, sullen murmur came from the crowd. The girl heard someone say impatiently, "Aye, hang him now!" Instantly it was taken up by the rest. A roar went up.

"Hang the dog! Hang him for treason!"

But Amos Williams held up his hand imperatively. "I have promised him trial!" he growled. "And trial he shall have! We are no murderers!"

At that Mehitable sprang forward to face them with flaming glance.

"But ye are worse than murderers!" she cried, pointing her finger at them. "Fifteen against one! Brave men all, are ye not! You who would murder not only a man but outrage neighborly love and old friendships. You, Eliphalet Pierson"—her relentless finger sought him out in the group—"why, I can remember when my father rode into the storm one night for the doctor when your baby lay dying! Where is that baby to-day? Not in ye Old Burial Ground, I can tell ye that, for the doctor saved his life because my father brought him to ye in time! And you, Thomas Ogden, hiding there behind the others! What about that fifteen pounds in good money my father lent ye to buy food when your children were hungry? And you, over there, Bethuel Harris, are ye forgetting that time my father spent a winter's night trying to find your lost sheep when it snowed and sleeted and he saved them all for you? Oh, you who talk o' mercy!" Her voice broke on a sob. "All of ye—all of ye—he has helped and ye treat him thus!"

The men, who at first had been too taken aback by Mehitable's unexpected appearance to interrupt her, now began to argue among themselves. But the bitter animosity of Squire Briggs and Amos Williams prevailed upon the more lenient ones.

"Peace!" snarled Amos Williams, when Mehitable

would have spoken again. "We have had enough o' thy gab, young mistress! Be thankful we do not take ye, too, for giving aid to ye enemy—I saw ye, don't forget that!"

"I am proud of it!" blazed the girl. But Squire Condit, whose passion had left him and who had stood in broken silence since, turned to her warningly.

"It but fans ye flame, Hitty, and does no good to speak!" he said gently. And Amos Williams nodded.

"Forward with ye prisoner!" he ordered briskly.

Mistress Condit, who had been sitting in stupefied terror all this time uttered a low moan as the men surrounded her husband. She laid Charity upon the settle and stumbled to her feet to run to him.

"Oh, Samuel!" she panted. "What be they going to do with you?"

He bent his head to kiss her reassuringly.

"I know not, Mary," but the quiet self-possession of his tone restored her fainting courage. "There is but One Who knows! Yet will He care for us, my love!"

Then, though his hands were tied behind him, he walked out into the storm with such a firm tread, such a look of quiet pride upon his face that his wife threw back her head to watch him, though her love and anxiety made the tears rain down her cheeks.

Mehitable, meanwhile, was bending over her little sister.

"Not dead!" She sank sobbing to her knees all at once.

Mistress Condit, who had been straining her ears for

the last sound of her husband's footsteps, turned at Mehitable's cry.

"Poor Hitty!" She came over to smooth the girl's hair with tender, motherly fingers. "Why, my dear, did ye not know 'twas but a swoon?"

"Nay!"

"The rough voices frightened her, weak as she was. Come, she must be gotten to bed!" Stooping, Mistress Condit gathered the emaciated little form into her arms. She sighed heavily. "Duties must go on!"

"Cannot Hitty and I care for Cherry?" asked Miranda, coming forward.

"Nay, Miranda, though I thank ye," answered Mistress Condit gratefully. She disappeared up the stairs.

"But where is Mistress Nancy?" asked Mehitable.

"Nay, I know not!" answered the other in surprise, looking around.

"Randy, think you she could be a Tory spy? Could she have been the one to have given warning to the Tories, think you? After all, we know naught o' her save she be Lieutenant Freeman's cousin!"

"Nay, Hitty!" Miranda shook her head. "As well think me spy!"

Mehitable looked at her friend gravely. "Miranda, ye have forever proven your loyalty to America, methinks!"

There was a little silence in the kitchen, then Mehitable moved toward the door, pulling her hood once more over her curls.

"Where art going, Hitty?" asked Miranda, quickly.

"To find where they have jailed my father," answered Mehitable. "Tell my mother—I dare not say farewell for fear she will stop me—that I go to seek him."

"But, Hitty, 'twill break your mother's heart an aught happens to you, too!" exclaimed Miranda. "Besides, the Tories have promised to give your father a fair trial!"

"Randy," Mehitable stopped short and looked at the other searchingly, "think you it will be a fair trial with your father and Amos Williams in charge o't?"

Miranda's eyes fell and she slowly shook her head.

"I—I—fear not, Hitty."

"I fear not, too," responded Mehitable grimly. "Therefore I am going."

At Master Jones's house Jemima opened the door for her.

"Nay, I know not where my father is," she said apathetically in answer to Mehitable's eager question. Jemima seemed to be living in some nightmare of her own so that she walked and talked mechanically. As Mehitable saw the change in her, remembering when Jemima Jones had been the wit and life of every gathering, before her brother's kidnapping and her mother's serious illness, she realized that war was more than deprivation, that it meant tragedy as well. All the way to Newark, after she had left the Joneses' farmhouse far behind, she seemed to see Jemima's dulled eyes, hear her hoarse voice.

When she arrived at the Hunters and the Hounds tavern, Mehitable was surprised to see the lower windows blazing with light. She opened the door full upon

a crowd of men who turned amazed eyes toward her. Master Gifford soon caught sight of her and hurried to her.

"'Tis little Mistress Mehitable Condit!" Courteously he led her away from the staring eyes into an inglenook. "Now," he went on kindly, "why are ye so far from your mountain this night? Didst have some message from your father for me?"

Tears filled Mehitable's eyes. "My father has been taken by ye Tories, Master Gifford. I—I—have come for help!"

"Alack, is't true?" The other's honest face showed his concern. He turned around and spoke to the room at large. "Samuel Condit, of Newark Mountains has been taken by Tories in his neighborhood," he announced.

An excited clamor greeted this information.

"He is to be tried for treason," continued Mehitable indignantly.

"Hear ye that! Tried for treason, no less!" exclaimed Master Gifford. Mehitable, raising her glance, suddenly encountered the crafty stare of the inn servant, Sturgins, but as she gazed he disappeared.

The taproom resounded to a great buzz of conversation. Some of the men present were in favor of riding at once to Squire Condit's rescue.

"We have enough o' fighting," cried one man, however, who, hands across his fat paunch, looked as though he had never, in his life, exerted himself for right or wrong.

"What, dost thou know aught o' fighting, Joseph

Grumfield?" sneered a scornful voice. And the fat man, to Mehitable's satisfaction, flushing, relapsed into angry silence.

"Nay, nay." Master Gifford was frowning down a too-rash suggestion of firing all the houses known to be Tory homes in the surrounding country. "That but calls for like measures by ye enemy." Then, as the kitchen door opened and there was a stir among those present, he turned in that direction with an air of relief. "What say you, Captain Littell?"

The alert, fine-looking man who now entered sent him an inquiring look.

"Have ye suggestion to make concerning Squire Condit's rescue from ye Tories?" exclaimed Master Gifford.

Captain Littell smiled and motioned to someone in the kitchen to come forward. "Ah, yes, we have been discussing the means to be taken. This lady has sought our help and the 'Jersey Blues' will be honored to help!"

And with that he stepped aside to disclose the slender figure of Mistress Nancy. Mehitable stared and thought with shame of her suspicions. As soon as the other caught sight of her she hurried to her side.

"Why, Hitty, did ye not guess I had come for help?" she asked.

Mehitable shook her head, while all the way home, following their escort of "Jersey Blues," she reproached herself for her unkind suspicions of Mistress Nancy.

At the Condit gate Captain Littell bade them a courteous farewell, assuring them that he would report any word from Squire Condit.

In the kitchen, when they entered, they were surprised to see John Condit sitting in quiet conversation with his mother. Mistress Condit soon retired and Mistress Nancy was about to follow when Mehitable, turning unexpectedly upon the stairs, was amazed at the long strange look the two young people were bestowing upon each other. John's was full of wistful appeal; but Mistress Nancy turned away with a curl of her lips. Mehitable wondered if she imagined the quick step John took after that dainty contemptuous figure, wondered if she heard aright his low-breathed, fervent "Nancy!" Such an agony of imploring, of love sounded in John's voice that the heart of the little eavesdropper gave a great throb of excited pity.

But without a word, without one backward glance, Mistress Nancy walked unheeding toward the stairs, her round chin lifted. Silently, with shoulders back, she ascended the stairs so swiftly that Mehitable, panic-stricken at being caught in her accidental spying, almost dropped her candle in her effort to reach their joint bedroom. She found it hard to get undressed without betraying her excitement at this discovery of romance beneath her very nose. It must be confessed, however, that she was almost angry with the girl who could spurn her wonderful, big, handsome brother.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RED CARDINAL

"JOHN! John!"

John Condit sat up in bed and looked bewilderedly around his little low-ceilinged room under the eaves. Again came the voice and this time he recognized it as Mehitable's.

"Why, enter, Hitty!" he called out. "The latch be not drawn!"

In answer to this the rough-hewn door was suddenly flung open and Mehitable, crimson-faced from pushing against it, bounced in.

"It be not drawn, 'tis true!" she ejaculated drolly. "'Tis not needed, with a door that sticks like that!"

She came over to gaze down at her brother who had snuggled down shiveringly beneath his coverlet upon the narrow pallet again.

"Nay, you must be out and on your way this afternoon, John!" she told him half falteringly. Ever was it hard to have her brother leave on the dangerous and uncertain missions of war! She held out an official-looking paper to him. "Here be your summons from His Excellency which but now came by messenger. You must go back to Morristown!"

John took the message and read it eagerly. "Aye!" He nodded his head. Then he looked at his sister, who

seemed inclined to linger. "An ye give me a chance, Hitty," he told her impatiently, "I will dress and join ye at breakfast presently."

Mehitable giggled irrepressibly and fled down the steep, narrow stairs to her mother's kitchen.

"See that ye do not linger overly long primping and fussing, John," she flung back with sisterly impudence. "Mistress Nancy will be too sleepy to notice your attire this early in the morn!"

Jonn Condit grinned to himself as he leaped from his bed. Ten minutes later, however, his usual immaculate self, he came down to the roaring kitchen fire and kissed his mother. Mistress Nancy, upon her way to the table with a loaf of bread, bestowed a cold smile upon him.

"Breakfast be served," she announced a moment later. And the others, with the exception of Charity, who, still an invalid, did not come down as early as this, drew up their chairs.

Mistress Condit opened the conversation with a sigh.

"I vow, John, though I shall miss ye sadly, I am glad ye are summoned back to Morristown. Every time a horseman passes upon the road my heart is in my mouth for fear he be Tory!"

"Nay, Mother, I can care for myself! But I do dislike leaving ye here with the burden of the farm upon ye and my father away," answered her son gravely.

"Why dost not ask General Washington for leave o' absence to search for our father?" asked Mehitable curiously, her mouth full of porridge.

John Condit smiled grimly. "Nay, Hitty, think you

His Excellency can make exception of me? Our family affairs loom small against those of the country!"

Mistress Nancy, coming down the stairs an hour later with Charity's breakfast tray in her hands, looked around the kitchen in obvious dismay.

"What, art alone, Hitty?" she asked, her face falling.

Mehitable, busily washing dishes, loked up with a naughty grin.

"Why, John is out in the woodshed polishing his boots, an that is what ye mean," she answered coolly. "He has not yet departed."

Setting the tray down with a little slam, Mistress Nancy bit her lips.

"Indeed, I asked not for information concerning your—your—brother!" she retorted, the color flooding her face.

Mehitable polished a pewter trencher; then, placing it upon the table, she turned and came over to her with an air of determination.

"Nancy," she said, her honest eyes looking straight into the older girl's, "I could not help seeing you and John last night. Why do you treat my brother thus? I guessed, of course, that you had met before—perhaps in New York."

Mistress Nancy drew herself up proudly. "I know not who gave you thus charge o' my affairs, Hitty. Ye know nothing about them. But come"—her face changed and coming close to Mehitable she held out a three-cornered note—"knowst aught o' this, my child?"

Mehitable, feeling snubbed, took the note silently;

but spreading it open and reading it she glanced up in surprise.

"Why, it purports to be——" she commenced.

"Exactly. It purports to be one I have written; but which I swear I never saw until your mother drew it out of my reticule, which hung in my closet. Had Mistress Condit been of suspicious nature it might have made matters vastly unpleasant. I had asked your mother to hand me my kerchief, which was in the reticule. Do not think she was prying."

Mehitable read the note aloud.

DEAR CAPTAIN:

This is to let ye know that Squire Condit has also been taken by our men. I will advise ye farther when matters progress. Signed

N. L.

"But when one looks closely it is not your handwriting, Nancy," went on Mehitable. "Why it looks more like——"

She stopped abruptly, but Mistress Nancy had not heard her, having moved over to look out of the window. Rain was falling again, the freezing winter weather having suddenly melted into the warmth of spring. It was all grayness and drabness, even the fire seeming to have lost its cheeriness as it sputtered and scolded upon the hearth. Mehitable joined the other and stared out at the rain, too.

But as she gazed she beheld an ominous sight. Around a turn in Second Road, trotting briskly from the north, was just such a party of men as had come for

Squire Condit. Indeed, in the van were two figures, the sight of which sent a spasm of fear through Mehitable.

"Squire Briggs and that man Hawtree!" she gasped. She raised her voice in a frantic cry. "John! John! The Tories!"

In hasty answer, John Condit appeared in the woodshed door. "Where is Mother?" he asked.

"Gone to the Briggs's," answered Mehitable. She pointed wildly. "But fly! The Tories have come for ye!"

Mistress Nancy, who had been standing as though frozen, now spoke.

"Cannot he go through the buttery and escape by the rear?" she asked, tremulously.

"Nay!" Mehitable shook her head despairingly. "They will at once surround the house!"

Running forward Mistress Nancy seized John by the arm. "Ye must hide, John! Quick!"

"But," John Condit shook his head stubbornly, "I be no one to run!"

"There is a chance—they might not search the house," she urged desperately. Mehitable, watching the man outside approach warily, added her pleas, so that at last John yielded. Scarcely had he and Mistress Nancy disappeared upstairs and Mehitable seated herself before her spinning wheel and set it to rotating furiously, as though she had been working there for hours, when the door was flung open and fifteen or more dripping men entered. Some came sullenly, some defiantly, but all were determined, like the usual

mob which has been swayed to violence by a bitter tongue. Hawtree approached her roughly.

"Where be thy brother?" he shouted above the whirr of the wheel.

Mehitable stopped her spinning long enough to answer. "John?" she inquired. "Oh, he has been gone since early morn."

She started her spinning wheel again; but Hawtree caught the spokes of it with brutal hand and stared down at her, his face working with hatred and passion.

"Ye lie!" he said then.

Mehitable leaped to her feet. Anger leaped to meet anger. Her eyes were fully as vindictive as Hawtree's when she snatched up a glove left upon a near by table by Mistress Nancy and, reaching a-tiptoe, slapped the cruel, malicious face before her.

Hawtree staggered back with a smothered cry. Then Mehitable felt her arm wrenched in a grip of steel and there was no telling what might have happened had not one of the men muttered protest.

"Be we here to fight petticoats?" he grumbled. And Squire Briggs's hurried voice broke in.

"Be not a fool again, Hawtree!" he snapped. "The girl be young and ye angered her. Now, look you, Hitty"—he turned to Mehitable—"we know that John is here hidden, so bid him come forth!"

"I tell ye he be gone," insisted Mehitable stonily, scarcely knowing why she was keeping up the farce, since capture seemed inevitable.

"Where be your mother?" asked Squire Briggs shortly.

Mehitable looked at him. Her mother had gone to care for Mistress Briggs, who was ill. The irony of it struck her.

"My mother!" Her voice shook with anger. "Ye dare to ask for my——"

Her voice died away into speechlessness. For at that moment the stair-door opened and Mistress Condit, attired in her long, red cardinal, with its hood drawn low over her face, entered.

Now Mehitable had seen her mother depart early that morning, she had been in the kitchen constantly since then and no one had passed through from the outside door, while the stair door was to be reached only by going through the kitchen. Mehitable blinked at the mystery and subsided upon a chair.

Advancing directly to the fire, paying no attention to the company beyond a brief, hurried curtsey, Mistress Condit knelt upon the hearth and poked briskly at the fire. Then, as the men watched her embarrassedly, she spoke in a husky whisper, keeping her back to them.

"Pardon me, gentlemen, I have such a touch of bronchitis as has robbed me o' my voice." She poked busily at the blazing logs.

"Madam," said one of the men, "we would search your house an ye give us permission!"

"But, sir," began Mistress Condit hoarsely.

"Then we search it without your permission!" exclaimed Hawtree rudely.

And he swept most of the men toward the stairs, up which they disappeared noisily. The few remaining in

the kitchen soon departed. Plainly, making war upon women was not to their liking. Mehitable saw them mount and ride away. Finally only Squire Briggs was left in the kitchen.

Mistress Condit now rose quietly, and taking a basket from the dresser she placed some food in it. Then she crossed to the outside door.

"I be going to your poor wife, Squire Briggs," she whispered. From beneath the shadows of her hood she cast an oblique glance at him. Mehitable, watching silently, saw a shamed patch of red leap to the little man's face.

"Nay, Mistress Condit, I——" he stammered awkwardly. But Mistress Condit had already slipped out of the door and was gone.

Mehitable, at the window, then saw a strange sight. She saw her mother at the gate select an unguarded horse—for now the men were all in the house, the others having ridden away—and then Mehitable gasped. Her mother, for whom a chair had to be fetched every time she mounted painfully to a pillion on a horse's back *leaped into the empty saddle and galloped away!*

Squire Briggs was brooding by the fire when Hawtree and his followers came down the stairs.

"You were dreaming when you said the man we seek was here!" snapped Hawtree ill-naturedly

"The maid spoke the truth!" growled one of the men, stamping out the door. The rest followed him in angry silence.

"How, suppose ye, our bird flew away?" muttered Squire Briggs.

"In sooth, I know not!" retorted Hawtree. "Was he ever here?"

Mehitable, smiling to herself, said nothing. But she paled when a man rushed in.

"One—one o' the horses be gone!" he announced excitedly.

Hawtree, however, looked at him indifferently. "Some boobie forgot to tie him. Doubtless he strayed!" he said sharply. And the fellow, red-faced, backed out of the room. With shrugs and grimaces of disappointment the other two soon followed.

"But, Nancy," cried Mehitable, a little later, when the two girls sat before the fire laughing and crying together, "how did ye ever think o't?"

"In truth, I scarcely know." Mistress Nancy looked into the fire with dreaming eyes. "Love will ever find a way, I think. I saw your mother's red cardinal upon her closet hook and at once the plan came to me. Enveloped in such a cloak and with pretense of cold to help him, I was sure John could escape. Did he not make a splendid woman, Hitty!"

"Aye, wonderful!" agreed the little sister.

"But I think," went on Mistress Nancy softly, "I like him better as a man!"

They were silent for a happy moment. Then Mehitable began to laugh. Mistress Nancy turned sympathetic eyes upon her.

"What be laughing at?" she asked smilingly.

"I was wondering what Squire Briggs would think —I should like to see his face!—when he reaches home and sees the *green coat* my mother really wore to his house to-day!" And Mehitable went off into such a gale of laughter that Charity was heard calling from upstairs demanding to know the joke.

CHAPTER XX

A FAIRY TALE

MISTRESS CONDIT entered the kitchen one stormy day toward the end of March to find Charity crouched beside the fire weeping bitterly.

"Why, my child!' she exclaimed, hurrying to her to draw her into her motherly embrace. "What be the matter?"

"Hitty!" sobbed Charity. "Hitty is gone!"

"Gone!" repeated Mistress Nancy, who had come running down the stairs at that moment.

"Gone!" echoed Mistress Condit. "What meanst thou, Cherry?"

Charity held out a crumpled note. "The Indian brought this," she explained brokenly. "He did not want Hitty to go with him—he was setting forth to Newark; but she would go, Mother!"

"The madcap!" ejaculated Mistress Condit; but to the others' amazement she said it resignedly. She turned to Mistress Nancy. "The Indian has ever seemed to protect her," she explained. "I believe no harm will come to her while she is with him. I know not why I think this save that it has been so before."

Mistress Nancy picked up the note and read it.

"Why, this is from that neighbor lad ye were telling me of, Mistress Condit," she said in surprise.

Charity had hushed her sobs, reassured by her mother's composure. "Aye," she interrupted eagerly. "That is why Hitty went, Mother. She thought mayhap though Young Cy wrote the note, Father would be with him. And Master Jones, too!" For Squire Condit's neighbor, not long after his own lawless abduction by the Tories, had been seized while riding home one dark night by these same men and despite the efforts, since, of the "Jersey Blues" to discover his whereabouts had disappeared.

"Perhaps 'tis true," answered Mistress Condit thoughtfully. "Read us the note, Nancy."

"'To whoever reads this,'" began Mistress Nancy obediently, "'know that the Americans who were carried to ye British prison, have been detained by one Jaffray on board ship on ye Passaic River near Newark despite his promise to carry them back to Newark and there set free.' It is signed, 'Cyrus Jones, Junior.'"

"Doubtless the note was written by Young Cy and given ye Indian to obtain help," observed Mistress Condit. She rose abruptly. "I think I shall go to Mistress Jones and tell her that her son has been heard from at last," she announced.

"But the rain!" protested Mistress Nancy.

"I am not fearful o' rain," returned the other smilingly, throwing her cape around her. "Stay you with Mistress Nancy, Cherry—I shall soon return," she admonished the little girl, who was watching her preparations for a walk through the rain with gloomy eyes.

When she had gone Charity heaved a deep sigh. Mistress Nancy, who had taken up her knitting, glanced at her sympathetically.

"Dost want to hear a fairy tale?" she asked.

The other nodded eagerly.

"But I fear it has a sad ending," warned Mistress Nancy.

"Perhaps you can make it a happy ending just this once," suggested Charity hopefully. But the other shook her head.

"However, here be the tale," she began briskly. And Charity smiled with pleasure. The story, even with a sad ending would be nice!

"Once upon a time there lived a Princess who was in love with a Prince from a distant country. The Prince was visiting her city studying medicine."

"Like John when he did go to New York Town!" Charity clapped her hands.

"Aye—like John!" Mistress Nancy's eyes were upon her knitting. "Well, they were very happy—at least, the Princess was, until another maid from Eng—from a distant country came a-visiting, and she, too, fell in love with the Prince. She was a flighty maid, given to liking many young men, so when the Princess caught the Prince smiling at this maid one day, she was very angry. She said naught, however, and so time passed until a masked ball was given by one of the fine gentlemen o' the city. The Prince told the Princess he would mask as Night, in somber garb o' black, so she went as Starlight, in gown o' silver.

"When the Princess arrived that night, she looked

eagerly around for the Prince and at last she spied him at the other end of the garden. She knew him at once, despite his mask, for he was the only one present in garb of black. But when she drew near him, she saw——"

Mistress Nancy paused abruptly. Her hands dropped into her lap and she sat staring into the fire until Charity squirmed impatiently.

"She saw?" prompted the latter. "What did she see, dear Nancy?"

Mistress Nancy started and picked up her knitting. Charity wondered vaguely if the sparkle in her eyes were tears; but her voice was cheerful.

"She saw, little maid, that the Prince was not alone. He was walking with a lady in gown o' silver, much like the Princess wore. Then, as they neared a bower——"

"What is a bower?" asked Charity's matter-of-fact little voice.

"'Tis a lovely spot in woodland or garden of roses or vines, designed for love's sweet tarrying," answered Mistress Nancy dreamily. "But when the maid and the Prince stopped within this bower, the Princess knew the maid was that one from overseas. As the Princess came close—for she had been hurrying, she was at their very heels—she saw—oh, Cherry——"

Once more Mistress Nancy's work dropped into her lap, once more her eyes sought the fire.

"But, Mistress Nancy," came Charity's plaintive voice, "always ye do stop at the very best part o' the tale!"

This time Mistress Nancy turned and caught Charity to her, so that the rest of the story came tumbling to its brief end through her curls.

"I cry your pardon, dear," said Mistress Nancy's muffled voice. "I am but a stupid teller o' tales. The Princess saw the Prince stoop and kiss the other maid and she heard him whisper, "I love you!"

"Oh!" Charity's face was shocked. She drew away to stare up at Mistress Nancy. Obviously, the story was ending very badly! "What did the poor Princess do then?"

"She crept away home like a little bird with a broken wing," said Mistress Nancy, after a pause. "So she was, Charity, for the wings o' her love were broken when she heard the Prince whisper the words to another maid that he had breathed to her."

They were sitting silent, then, when there came a cry from without. Mistress Nancy ran to the door and stood peering out at the rain. It was dusk and she could see no one at first; but at last she made out the figure of a woman running toward her from the gate. As the other neared her she gave a shocked exclamation.

"Mistress Briggs! You, ill, and out in such weather as this!"

She drew her in gently and over to the fire.

"I come for help! Miranda is being bullied by ye Tories—is, forsooth, tied to a chair by that villain Hawtree, and e'en my husband is feared to interrupt! Oh, this terrible war!" And poor Mistress Briggs dissolved into tears.

Mistress Nancy stood pondering a moment in

thought, then, with an air of decision, moved over to where her cape hung and put it on.

"Why, where be going?" asked Charity, in astonishment.

"To help Miranda. Stay you here, Charity, and keep the fire going. Canst come with me, Mistress Briggs?"

"Aye." The older woman got heavily to her feet and, during the long, anxious walk back to her home, outlined the situation as she had left it. She had not exaggerated it. A sorry sight met their eyes as they lifted the latch and entered Mistress Briggs's kitchen. Ten or more hard-faced men were lounging around, muddying the spotless floor with their dirty boots. In the center of the room, the target of their rude wit and wrath, sat Miranda, bound, as her mother had said, to a chair, while Squire Briggs, his face gray, sat intimidated upon a stool. He was protesting feebly as the two newcomers entered.

Mistress Nancy marched straight up to Hawtree and spoke to him haughtily. "Unloose the maid!" she commanded.

Hawtree, taken aback, stared at her for a moment with dropped jaw. Then, at the absurdity of this slip of a girl asserting authority over him he laughed in her face. No whit discomposed, Mistress Nancy drew out a paper from her reticule and handed it to him.

"Read that!" she directed curtly. "Then free Mistress Miranda!"

Hawtree stared from her to the paper he had taken mechanically; but as his eye fell upon the signature

at the bottom of a brief paragraph, he uttered an exclamation.

"Zounds—why, it's Lord Howe's own name here!"

Mistress Nancy said nothing, merely waited disdainfully.

"What be it?" Gathering courage Squire Briggs shuffled to his feet and crowded past the other men to Hawtree's side. Hawtree, immersed in the paper, answered him involuntarily by reading aloud.

"This gives Mistress Nancy Livingston authority to ask any courtesy of any Loyalist which, by order of Lord Howe, shall be granted her."

He looked up and, like the bully he was, cringed before the girl's challenging gaze.

"I cry your pardon, mistress!" He took off his hat, awkwardly enough. "'Tis most unfortunate this should have occurred. I hope—I hope—'twill not be carried to his lordship's ears, though," and here he lifted defiant eyes, "it seemed necessary to bind the girl in the course o' duty!"

"Making war upon women seems to be your duty, in sooth!" retorted Mistress Nancy grimly. "Unloose the girl and see that ye confine your operations to more proper ones, as befits a British officer!"

Two of the men were untying Miranda, but at that moment a sentry, posted at the door, spoke hurriedly.

"Horsemen come!" he cried. "Away!"

They were none too soon. The Tories, save Squire Briggs, had scarcely quitted the house when the door was thrown open and a keen-faced man dressed in

home-made blue uniform stood there. Beyond, in the rainy dusk, other similarly attired men waited.

Squire Briggs, cursing his stupidity in remaining when the other Tories had fled, gazed wildly around him, his narrow eyes seeking escape. Then happened a strange thing. Mistress Briggs sprang toward the fireplace and running her work-gnarled hand up and down the wall beside it seemed to press upon a spring, for there, all at once, appeared an opening.

"This way, Husband!" she screamed hysterically. "Do not let the 'Blues' take ye! Run, run!"

But Squire Briggs did not move. His frightened glance saw the futility of it. He knew he could not escape. Even while his wife sank sobbing to her knees he shook his head.

Mistress Nancy went over and helped the weeping woman to her feet, trying to persuade her to retire to her own room. But Mistress Briggs pushed her unheedingly aside and, drawing away from the kindly hands, ran to her husband.

"Ah, Elijah, why did ye not run?" she sighed, her arms around his neck and her head upon his breast. He shook her off impatiently, and Mistress Nancy mentally placed yet another bad mark after his name for so spurning affection which he little deserved.

"No one but a fool like you, Thyrza, would have thought I could escape," he sneered. "Well, Captain Littell, I doubt not ye are crowing over arresting me at last; but I warn ye, 'twill bring bitter trouble to this neighborhood an ye do harm to me."

"Bitter trouble has already been brought to this

neighborhood," answered the other gravely. "And mainly through you, Elijah Briggs. I therefore arrest ye in His Excellency's name. All right, Dodd!"

There was a dead silence as three of the men entered quietly and tied Squire Briggs's hands behind him. Even Mistress Briggs's sobs were hushed as she watched, and Mistress Nancy had to grant the little man a meager sort of dignity when he marched out in the midst of his captors, though he went without one word of farewell to his family.

When the door had closed behind them, Mistress Nancy approached Miranda, who, freed of her fetters, stood chafing her wrists with sullen face.

"I hope ye will not feel the effects o' this to-morrow," said Mistress Nancy, kindly. To her surprise and discomfort the girl vouchsafed her no thanks, merely nodding her head coldly before turning upon her heel and quitting the kitchen.

Mistress Briggs, too engrossed in her own grief to notice her daughter's inexplicable and ungrateful behavior, looked up when, murmuring a word of leave-taking, Mistress Nancy stepped toward the door.

"Nay"—she put out her hands impulsively—"do not go without our thanks, dear Mistress Nancy! Ye do not blame me for trying to help my husband?"

"Why should I?" returned Mistress Nancy. "He is your husband. I doubt not I should have done the same."

"He was not always thus. He was such a fresh-faced lad, when young, though ever prone to set too much store by moneys and land," went on Mistress Briggs,

with a sigh. "But 'tis the war has made him so hard!"

"Nay, Mother, art wrong!" exclaimed Miranda's scornful young voice from the doorway. "He was always mean! How can you delude yourself?"

"Perhaps because she loves him," answered Mistress Nancy smilingly.

"For my part, I wish he would never return!" said Miranda bitterly. But at the look upon her mother's face she suddenly broke down and ran to her, weeping, so that when Mistress Nancy departed she left them comforting each other.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BLOW

THERE was nothing about Mehitable as she trotted off through the down-pouring rain to indicate that she was any one but a plump little Colonial maid faring forth through disagreeable weather to Newark. The Indian had disappeared into the swamp, two sides of which Mehitable must skirt before her road led her up over the hills and down into the Town by the River. But she was neither surprised nor chagrined at her escort's vanishing—she had learned enough of Indian manners and methods by now to know that he would travel far and fast through the devious paths of the swamp and arrive at their joint destination long before he could, though he went by foot and she by horse.

Indeed, he had been a reluctant escort. Only her announcement, upon reading the note he had so mysteriously brought to her from Young Cy, that if he did not permit her to go with him to Newark upon a rescue mission she would follow him, had made him yield.

It must be confessed that Mehitable was enjoying herself. Save for a slight pricking of her conscience whenever she thought of Charity's sobbing, distracted little figure as the latter had tried in vain to stay her from carrying out her impetuous decision, the madcap

trotted along in high good humor. This stirring war year, despite her outbursts and railings against it whenever she felt the pinch of it, had been as breath of life to her. Nothing suited her better than to be engaged in some dubious if not actually dangerous enterprise.

At last she reached Newark. It was when she had turned and was following the lane down into the mud of Market Street that she thought suddenly of Mistress Hicks and her poor old mother. And at that moment, as though she had conjured her physically out of that strange night and stranger visit of weeks ago, she beheld the old lady herself stepping briskly along upon her pattens, utterly oblivious, apparently, to the rain and the mud through which she was laboring.

In astonishment Mehitable reined in her horse when she and the old lady met face to face in the narrow lane.

"Art not Mistress Hicks's mother?" exclaimed the girl, staring.

The old lady, brought perforce to a sudden stop, peered back at her composedly. "Aye," she nodded.

"But—but—the night be so rainy and—and——"

Mehitable's stammered words died away into puzzled silence. Everything about the old lady was different. As old, as frail as when she had last seen her in Mistress Hicks's kitchen, there were now sense and alertness in the bright old eyes that looked up at her unwaveringly. Those eyes were studying the girl as keenly, as shrewdly as any one could have done.

"What matters rain," answered the old lady contemptuously, "if one finds chances to serve one's country! Art going to the town center, child?"

"Aye, mistress." Still staring, Mehitable nodded.

"Then perhaps canst deliver a message to Master Gifford from me?" She looked swiftly, furtively around her, then came closer. "Tell him that the pewter service set be ready for him; I doubt not 'twill make very fine bullets! and he is to get word to Captain Littell that the new uniforms are ready, also, together with the silver I promised him. Canst remember all that?"

"Aye," stammered Mehitable. "But — but — I thought——"

"You thought me daft!" guessed the old lady with a chuckle. "So did many wiser than you, child. 'Tis easier to pretend daftness than to argue, forsooth, with those who love to fret and scold!"

"Art not afraid Mistress Hicks will scold you now?" Mehitable could not refrain from asking, though she did not mean to be pert.

The old lady smiled grimly, not in the least offended. "Mistress Hicks has been sent to join her husband, one o' 'Skinner's Greens,' on Staten Island, by His Excellency's orders," she returned dryly.

"And she left you alone in that big house!" exclaimed Mehitable.

"'Twas no fault o' hers!" retorted the other sharply. "Mistress Hicks be not that selfish! 'Twas I refused to go!"

Obviously, criticize her daughter as she pleased, the old lady would allow no one else that privilege. Embarrassedly, Mehitable began to apologize; but, mollified at once, the old lady waved her hand amiably.

"There, that be all right," she said briskly. She plunged her hand into her reticule swinging upon her arm and thrust three small round objects into the girl's hand.

"Nay, Mother would like it not an I accepted money," protested Mehitable uncomfortably.

"Look before ye speak, child!" retorted the old lady tartly; but she chuckled at Mehitable's expression when the latter, opening her hand, discovered that, instead of silver coins, she held three hard peppermints. Then, still chuckling, she turned upon her pattens and marched back up the lane that led to Mistress Hicks's house, while Mehitable, brightening at the delicious taste as she placed a peppermint upon her tongue, clucked to her horse and cantered on through Newark.

But drawing up before the Hunters and the Hounds tavern she paused to stare in amazement, for just as she had drawn near the taproom door had flown open and a man's meager figure, as though booted by a tremendous angry foot, fell past her into the street. A roaring voice followed the figure, and Master Gifford, red-faced and angry, stood glaring in the doorway.

"There, ye rapscallion!" he shouted. "An I ever find ye upon my land again 'twill be the hanging rope will catch ye! Get up, ye dirty even my good, wholesome mud!"

Then, as the sneaking, sordid figure righted itself and started to run, Mehitable saw that it was the inn servant, Sturgins. Before she turned back to his master, she caught a malevolent look from him.

"A bad one!" she observed, shuddering in spite of

herself. The inn master came forward to take her horse; but she shook her head.

"Nay, I tarry but to leave a message with you. It is this: Mistress Hicks's mother—I know not her name—said to tell you the pewter service to melt into bullets be ready for you and that you are to get word to Captain Littell that the new uniforms, together with the silver, be ready for him. There"—Mehitable knitted her brows—"I think that was all!"

Master Gifford threw back his head to laugh. "That old lady be as smart as any! And to think she feigned daftness so well that her own daughter, a shrew if I know one, believed her to be daft!"

"Aye, a clever one, she!" agreed Mehitable. She wheeled her horse. Already the spring dusk was deepening into darkness. "But now I give ye good-night, sir!"

Before the good innkeeper could protest or offer her an escort, she had galloped off up Broad Street, past the Green with its space for military training, past the triangular plot of land given over to the farmers and known as the marketplace, to turn eastward on Bridge Street, though the bridge over the Passaic River had been missing since that November night when, in a retreat, the Americans had burned it behind them, thus gaining a few days respite in Newark before marching on to Elizabeth Town, while the British, fuming and helpless, had been forced to bivouac upon the other shore.

Arrived at the river front and pausing to gaze around at her lonely surroundings, she found the Indian un-

expectedly at her bridle. She gave a start at his appearance but had the good sense to remain silent as he led her horse along the narrow path beside the river bank. Crunch! splash! crunch! they went along. She shivered miserably as the sodden folds of her wet cape swung against her knee. Were they never going to stop!

At last the Indian came to a halt and pointed out into the darkness.

"Boat out there!" he announced.

But strain her eyes as she might Mehitable could see nothing. Only the lapping of water, the sighing of the wind could be heard.

"Art sure this be the place?" asked the girl, a little peevishly. Then she started. For the Indian, without replying, had disappeared into the dense shadows of some underbrush. Only a moment passed and he was back.

"Boat out there," he repeated. And this time there was certainty in his voice. "I go—swim," he continued simply.

Before Mehitable could protest, then, he was gone once more and she was left to her own dismal thoughts. Long minutes passed. Poor Mehitable sighed wearily, yawned, shivered, yawned again. And at her second yawn a mocking voice whispered at her elbow.

"'Tis indeed a boresome way to pass ye time, mistress! Mayhap we can show ye other ways!"

Mehitable stifled a shriek and looked down. Standing beside her horse—and how he had gotten there unnoticed was more than she ever knew!—was a tall, burly man she had never seen before, while behind

him, grinning at her insolently through the shadows, lurked the squat, shifty-eyed inn servant, Sturgins.

Instinctively she jerked at her horse's bridle, dug her sturdy little heels into his sides. It was too late! In a trice she had been torn from her saddle, smothered in some sort of a garment with her hands clasped to her sides, and borne swiftly away in strong arms—whither, she knew not! She only knew that the evil-smelling cloth was strangling her, so that when she cried out, the sound beat impotently upon its folds, while her struggles were as an infant's against the cruel strength of those arms!

It seemed to her that she must have been carried for miles before the terrifying cloth over her head was removed and she was set down roughly upon her feet. But as she stood gasping and blinking she realized in amazement that she had been carried only as far as some fir trees beside the river edge and there concealed so that no one approaching by the path or by water could see her. She looked up to find the tall, hard-faced stranger beside her and heard Sturgins carefully leading her horse to a similar hiding place.

"Now, Jaffray," began Sturgins, when he joined them, "do ye not think this bodes trouble from the ship? 'Tis well we arrived!"

"Hush ye!" growled Jaffray, fiercely. "Babbling fool!"

In the pregnant silence which followed, Mehitable stared up at her captor curiously and, it must be admitted, with a little shiver of disagreeable surprise. So this was the man who had so cruelly kidnapped

her tender little sister, who had carried away poor Young Cy, too! As she gazed fierce hatred was bred in the girl's heart. She resolved that somewhere, somehow, she would pay him back in his own coin.

But now she stood still, waiting and listening even as they waited and listened. At last the cautious dip of oars sounded, then the grating of a boat against the river bank. At the same instant, Jaffray thrust a twisted piece of cloth into her unsuspecting mouth, and before she could cry out she was powerless to do so, for she was gagged.

"Tie the wench's hands behind her!" ordered Jaffray sharply, and while he crept forward Sturgins came close and with no more feeling than if he had been tying a watch dog jerked Mehitable's hands behind her back, despite her struggles, and tied them securely.

She was sick at heart! She had been planning to call out a warning, but the two unscrupulous rascals had guessed her purpose. She watched in helpless agony when a tall, slim figure whom she recognized as Young Cy came up the bank only to be overborne by the villain Jaffray. But, unexpectedly, Young Cy, after rolling down the bank beneath the heavier man, got to his feet and succeeded in getting away. Whereupon two other men, sitting in the rowboat, were ordered ashore by the angry sloop captain, and when one of them, feeble and more slow than the other, stumbled, Jaffray clipped him upon the side of the head and he fell into the mud. Dragging him up to the path Jaffray threw him aside. When Mehitable could tear away her horrified eyes, she saw that Sturgins was tying the other man's

hands behind his back, whom she now recognized as her father. Then the victorious ones disappeared into the darkness, doubtless bent upon finding and capturing Young Cy.

The girl crept over to her father.

"Hitty, lass! You here!" Squire Condit gave a great start and then a groan. His eyes seemed to be trying to disbelieve what they saw.

"What be the matter? Why do you not speak?" Then he saw that she was gagged and his eyes flashed.

"Canst kneel behind me?" he continued. "Mayhap my hands, bound as they are, can unloosen the gag."

Just as Mehitable was about to obey, however, Sturgins appeared and with unexpected humanity told the girl roughly that he would remove the gag.

"'Twill do no hurt, now, in sooth," he said indifferently. Saying which, he cut the cloth away with his knife and vanished once more into the darkness. After he had gone, father and daughter kissed each other, and for a short time each was too overcome to do more than murmur brokenly. Then Squire Condit straightened himself determinedly.

"Best see to poor Master Jones, lass. He has been sore wounded and I fear that brute has hurt him again!"

"Nay, Squire!" The other man spoke calmly from where he lay upon the wet ground. "I did not like to interfere with your greetings. How are ye, Hitty, my dear? And how is my wife? Canst tell me if she still lives?"

Mehitable went to him. "Ah, Master Jones," she said pitifully, "if only I could loosen this hemp upon

my wrists and so help ye! Your wife lives—mayhap that news will help ye!"

"Fret not, Hitty! I can bear the pain, now!" But through his brave words the girl guessed the agony which he was bearing.

There was a crashing among the bushes and soon Jaffray burst through them, dragging Young Cy after him.

"Knave!" The boy's voice was hoarse from rage. "Ye have broken the word ye pledged Cunningham, to deliver us safe at Newark!"

Jaffray scowled. "So you, young turkey-cock, were about to escape! 'Tis lucky I decided to turn back this night!"

Mehitable ran forward. Young Cy stared at her.

"Why—why—Hitty!" he stammered. Then he turned furiously upon Jaffray. "Call thyself a man o' honor," he shouted, "and still make war upon women and children!"

Jaffray scowled again. "Wert thou the one to remove that gag, Sturgins?" he snapped.

Young Cy whirled swiftly. "So, Sturgins—you, too, eh! Ye were in league with Jaffray that day I fell gull to his trickery!"

"Why, so I was, master!" Sturgins opened his wide mouth gawkishly and grinned in the other's face. "What be going to do about it?"

"This!" Suddenly Young Cy swung his hands above his head. Too late the conspirators saw that those hands had been forgotten, that they were free. And not only free, but that a short, heavy club was in them!

Before either Jaffray or Sturgins could move, Young Cy brought the club heavily down upon the latter's head and had sprung away once more into the bushes.

"After him!" shouted Jaffray. But Sturgins lay like a log where he had fallen, and the older man, cursing, was forced to leave the other prisoners unguarded and so run after the boy. He was soon back, unsuccessful.

"Eh, fool?" he muttered, going over to Sturgins and prodding him with his foot. "Art feigning this stupor?"

Sturgins drew a shuddering breath, then, at a second kick, started up angrily.

"Nay, I be feignin' nawthin'!" he snarled, then he uttered a horrified, bewildered cry. "Oddzooks, I cannot see! Is the night so dark now?"

Jaffray glanced at him impatiently. "The night is as it was, fool!" he said shortly. "What dost mean thou cannot see?"

"I cannot see!" Sturgins was, by now, staggering around in a frantic circle with his groping hands held out before him, while the others watched him in amazement. "Oh, my sight has fled! Destruction be upon me! *I be blind!*"

"The blow!" Those groaning words burst from Master Jones.

Jaffray caught the panic-stricken figure in rude grasp.

"Stop thy silly woman talk o' blindness and stop rushing hither and yon!" he barked. "Let me look at thy eyes!" He snapped the other's head back to peer into his face. Then, with a laugh, he threw the smaller man aside. "Come, 'tis naught! Thy eyes look as

good as mine own! Art feigning this, I'll warrant, to escape taking ye prisoners back to Tolliver's place—'tis thy lazy way an work be given ye!"

"But I tell ye——" Sturgins's voice rose to a hysterical howl, so that Jaffray suddenly stepped close to him and clapped his hand over his mouth, and the howl died away into a gurgle. When he removed his hand Sturgins was mouthing gibberish which made Mehitable feel ill, so terrible were the despair and the fright it bore.

"There, enough!" But now Jaffray's tones held a tinge of uneasiness. "Enough, I say!" He repeated it sharply, for Sturgins had sunk into the mud upon his knees and was clasping Jaffray's legs. "If it be true thou art blind—then 'twas indeed the blow that did it! And that boy shall pay!"

Sturgins, however, was beyond comfort. He threw himself upon the ground and rolled around in an agony more mental than physical for, excepting the blackness which had swooped upon him so suddenly, he had no pain. He kept crying, "My eyes! My eyes!" but it was merely hysteria.

Jaffray turned toward the others ominously. "Get ye going!" he ordered. "I must e'en deliver ye to Tolliver myself, since this fool can't!"

These callous words did not reach the ears of the distracted Sturgins. He was beyond all human goading now. He was weeping and beating frantically upon the ground, not knowing what he was doing.

After a long, painful walk the sad little party reached a tumble-down farmhouse. When the door

opened at Jaffray's kick, they all passed into a sparely furnished room where upon a broken-down table gleamed a candle that vied with the firelight in giving them welcome.

"Now, Tolliver," Jaffray spoke sharply to the undersized, shrinking man who had admitted them as Master Jones sank wearily upon a chair which Mehitable got for him, "I leave these prisoners in your care for the nonce. I must return for that fool, Sturgins."

"But where is Sturgins?" objected the other timidly. "I expected his help in guarding these prisoners."

Jaffray scowled. "Guard them yourself!" he ordered crossly, slamming the door as he went out.

There was silence a moment, then Tolliver's cringing manner dropped from him. When Mehitable turned toward him, she was amazed to see that behind his steel-rimmed spectacles there dwelt a hidden, kindly twinkle.

"Wilt not come nearer to the fire, mistress?" he asked courteously.

"Why"—Mehitable's mouth remained open—"art Tory, sir, and so nice!"

Tolliver laughed quietly. "Not all Tories are moulded upon our friend Jaffray's pattern," he suggested. "Wilt have this chair?"

But Mehitable shook her head, begging him to give it to Master Jones. His attention directed to the pathetic wounded figure of the latter, Tolliver looked grim. He bent over the other, the girl watching with bated breath, not knowing what he was about to do.

"Bad work here, I fear," he muttered at last, his

fingers still poking at the blood-stained bandages binding Master Jones's thigh. The sufferer opened his eyes.

"Ye feel like a surgeon, sir," he whispered.

"Dost know the touch, eh?" Tolliver was pleased. Then he straightened himself. "With quick work here, young mistress, we may wash and dress this man's wounds before Jaffray's return!"

"But you, a Tory, to help us thus!" Mehitable gasped.

"Nay, stare not so," admonished Tolliver. With deft fingers he was already ripping the cloths from about the wound. "*Sometimes one can serve one's country best by appearing traitor to her!*"

They had no sooner gotten through their hurried task than Tolliver bent his head to listen intently. He shoved the basin of warm water and the roll of bandages he had been using into a corner then.

Mehitable and her father, who had heard nothing, looked at him doubtfully; but it was not long before they too heard the clamor Sturgins was making as he and Jaffray approached. The girl looked at her host admiringly.

"I vow, sir, ye have ears like an Indian's!" she exclaimed.

But as she gazed at him, Tolliver's expression changed suddenly and horribly. Even as she looked, the kindly smile faded from his thin face and a ferocious, cruel look took its place. She gaped at him in horror until the sound of an opening door gave her the clue and she realized that Tolliver's expression was a mask for Jaffray's benefit.

So great was the force with which the latter banged the door that a cracked windowpane loosened in its frame and fell tinkling to the floor. But a curious sound followed—a whirring, winged sound that seemed to come from the broken window. Then, as they heard it, Jaffray threw up his arms and dropped heavily to the floor.

For a moment they all stared at him stupidly, save Sturgins. Then Mehitable, glancing up, caught a glimpse of a keen dark face at the broken window and realized, with a start, that she had not reckoned with the Indian. Though even as she looked the Indian's face disappeared!

CHAPTER XXII

AT TOLLIVER'S

"IS HE dead?" asked Mehitable fearfully, when Tolliver, who had knelt to pull out the winged arrow which had struck Jaffray, looked up.

"Nay, I fear not." He got to his feet. "Come, I will see ye started for home in the farmcart which is in readiness in the barn. Jaffray's wounding has made it possible, my friends."

"But cannot you come with us?" urged Mehitable, when Master Jones had been laid upon straw in the cart and she had climbed to a seat beside her father.

"Nay." Tolliver shook his head. "I must help Jaffray. I am a surgeon."

"So we guessed." Squire Condit looked at him gratefully. "Well, let us hope we may have ye as guest some day. My name is Samuel Condit and I live——"

"Condit!" Tolliver took an eager step forward as he stood beside the farm cart. "The father o' John Condit?"

"Aye!" The Squire's voice was astonished. "Do ye know my lad?"

"Know him!" Tolliver's face shone. "He studied medicine with me!"

"But I thought he studied with Doctor Carter!"

"He did," the other returned quietly. "My name is Carter. Stripped of land and moneys by the British in New York, my family gone, I came to this outpost position, thinking I might be of more aid to Americans than with the army. This Tory headquarters is used by all the river pirates and renegades who seize upon the war as a pretext for carrying out their own bold schemes!"

"'Twould be well to report it to Captain Littell!" cried Mehitable.

"Well, Doctor Carter, we hope to have ye as guest, remember!" the Squire was saying in farewell, when all at once Sturgins came crying out of the house, begging them not to leave him.

"In sooth, I know not what to do with him," said Doctor Carter, looking perplexed. "If Jaffray's ship crew find him here, they are likely to finish him off rather than be bothered by blind baggage like him! He knows it, having seen and doubtless helped in similar cases. That is why he is afraid now to be left!"

"Oh, Father, we cannot leave him!" exclaimed Mehitable, horrified.

"An he promises absolute quiet, we will take him," said Squire Condit sternly. Sturgins promised quiveringly, and Doctor Carter helping him into the cart beside Master Jones, he sat cross-legged and bent his head upon his arms. Mehitable, glancing back more than once, was really sorry for him, though she had thought she never could be.

It was a long hard journey home. They dared not go fast, for the jolting of the farm cart over rough roads

was more than Master Jones could bear. But at last, without being stopped by Tory or friends, they reached the Jones's house where Young Cy, responding to the Squire's hailing, came running joyfully out with Jemima. As soon as they had gotten the wounded man into the house the Squire resumed his journey, but not before Mehitable, tugging at Young Cy's arm, whispered to him.

"What!" The boy's eyes opened in awful horror. "*Blind!* I made him blind, ye say, Hitty!" He turned slowly and stared at the bowed figure of Sturgins in the farm cart.

"Why, 'twas in fair combat! Of course, it is awful——" Already Mehitable was sorry for her wagging tongue.

"*Awful!*" Young Cy breathed it out slowly. "To—take—away—a—man's sight! It be more than awful, Hitty!"

Mehitable, driving away home beside her father, found his eyes fixed in rebuke upon her. "My daughter was in haste to spread evil tidings," he said sadly. And the girl hung her head.

But by the time they had turned into Second Road, with the sunrise slanting across the swamp toward them, she forgot her shame, forgot everything save that she was bringing her father home.

The next few days passed in rejoicing with the Condit family, made the more keen by the unexpected appearance of John Condit the morning of his father's arrival home, bringing with him a tall, straight figure. Mehitable had stared in amazement when, standing in the

doorway, she had spied them approaching upon horseback.

"Mother! Father!" she shrieked. "Yonder come John and an *Indian!*"

Later, she saw that he was their Indian, the one who had so often rescued them. John, greeting his father with sincere, loving grasp of his hand, swung him around to face that silent person beside him. But the Squire drew back, his eyes the color of steel. How could he forget that he had once branded him a thief, that he had threatened him a most shameful punishment!

John, however, spoke with self-possession. "Father, and you, too, my mother, this be Gray Hawk, my blood brother, who through rite and Indian ceremony has established a kinship with me which I prize highly. He it is who has watched over my loved ones with a faithfulness seldom equaled and never failing. He has risked life and limb for us. Is this not so, my brother?"

"It is so, my brother," answered the Indian courteously, in his own language, his steady eyes upon the Squire's ruddy face.

"And I must tell ye, in all justice to Gray Hawk," continued John more hurriedly, "that he did not mean to steal my mother's silver candlestick holder. He wished merely to bring me an heirloom to prove, though I had told him it was most unnecessary, that he had truly been to my home upon his first trip as a runner for our army. He did not guess at its value, and now he wishes me to cry pardon for him."

The Squire's expression now changed to its accustomed jollity.

"Is't true, indeed." He thrust out his hand to grasp the red man's and pump it up and down. "I must cry his pardon, too!"

The Indian was no whit discomposed. With the same calm and dignity he had maintained during that first painful visit to the Condit home, he met the Squire's cordiality with a smile. At last the kindly host persuaded him to go indoors and partake of some wine, and soon the others could see him pledge Gray Hawk's health with a tiny flagon of his most prized wine beside the kitchen fire.

And now John glanced around anxiously. "Mistress Nancy—is she not here?" he asked.

Mistress Condit shook her head, though she was sorry to give him the bad tidings, for she had seen and had guessed at the romance with keen motherly intuition. "Nay, my son. She was called back to New York Town by the illness o' her father. Her cousin, Lieutenant Freeman, came for her very soon after Mehitable had gone. They were sorry he had not come sooner; then my impetuous little girl might have had company to Newark."

Mehitable blushed at her mother's gentle rebuke, but John stood lost in somber thought. He raised his eyes to find his mother's understanding glance upon him, and then, perceiving that they were alone, he spoke.

"'Tis queer not to know my offense toward the maid. We knew each other in New York Town, as you have doubtless guessed, my mother, and Nancy was most kind until—until——"

"Until when?" asked Mistress Condit, trying hard not to smile as John's voice died away in moping silence. She was truly sympathetic; but the lover's quarrel appeared so trivial beside that great one between mother country and the young colonies.

John laughed shortly. "Until she wasn't kind," he responded in a grim voice. Then his gaze softened as he looked down into Charity's face. His little sister had come to stand close to him, fondling his hand as it hung by his side.

"But Mistress Nancy told me a most marvelous fairy tale!" observed she triumphantly.

"What fairy tale, little lass?" asked her brother idly.

But just at that instant Sturgins passed them, his sightless eyes turned upon them, and John's attention was distracted, so that the fairy tale, which might have enlightened him considerably as to a certain matter, did not receive a repetition in its telling.

"Why, Mother," John Condit spoke in surprise, "who is yonder fellow? I have not seen him around here before!"

"You mean Sturgins?" responded Mistress Condit inquiringly. "He is the man whom Young Cy made blind, by a blow, your father thinks, as he struggled to escape from him and from the villain Jaffray by the Passaic."

She launched into a description of the encounter as her husband had told it to her, the young doctor not removing his gaze from the blind man's pathetic, groping hands and white face.

"How came he here?" asked John absently. Mehitable, who had joined them as they stood upon the doorstep, spoke for her mother.

"We brought him home with us. Tolliver—I mean, Doctor Carter was fearful o' his life and so we brought him that Jaffray's crew might not——"

"Doctor Carter!" repeated John in vast astonishment. "Where saw ye him?"

"He it was who bound up Master Jones's wound that night. He goes under the name o' Tolliver, having 'scaped to Jersey after his wealth was confiscated by ye British in New York. He is an American spy, serving at this outpost and——"

"So my dear friend is here in Newark!" John mused. "Perhaps we may have him for house guest upon one o' my leaves of absence." His glance rested once more upon Sturgins's unconscious face. "Who knows—we may be able to restore that man's sight. 'Tis doubtless a portion o' bone pressing upon some nerve!"

"Oh, John, an ye could!" And Mehitable clapped her hands so joyously that even Sturgins looked up with a sympathetic grin, though he could see neither the blue sky above him nor the pitying faces gazing at him.

CHAPTER XXIII

ALL'S WELL

THERE was the usual hustle and bustle in the Condit home one bright Monday morning, and it seemed to Doctor Carter that everywhere he went that particular spot was already occupied by some energetic individual who was performing some household task in the most energetic manner possible. The kitchen floor was being re-sanded by Mehitable, who did not even look up as her parents' guest trod cautiously past her, casting a wistful glance as he did so at the inglenook beyond the pattern the girl was marking so laboriously with her pointed stick. The bench beside the kitchen door where he had enjoyed many quiet, happy hours with book or host since his arrival from Newark the week before was now hidden by two steaming wooden washtubs, presided over by Mistress Condit. Even the circular seat built around an old apple tree down near the gate was being used, for there Charity had spread her primer and her sewing materials and her own dainty self. No one, beyond Mistress Condit, who vouchsafed an absent smile, paid the least attention to the embarrassed doctor, who at last, book in hand, tramped off toward the great stock barn.

But even here he found a busy stir. Squire Condit, whip in hand, was admonishing Amos who, seated upon an upturned keg, was mending a bit of harness which had come apart. The plow horses, waiting patiently outside, betokened an emergency.

"I know not why ye did not do as I bid ye, Amos," the Squire was saying in an exasperated tone. "'Tis ever thus—rainy days, the time for mending harness, passed I don't know how and now, on this morn when we should be in the fields, we must stop to mend——"

His voice died away as he stopped to nod cheerfully at Doctor Carter.

"Well, well, Amos, I shall proceed out to the north field; see ye follow with the horses as soon as ever ye can. Make yourself at home, good sir—'tis clean and sweet and—quiet—up in yon haymow now." And the Squire, with a shrewd, understanding glance at the distant figure of his wife and another at their guest, departed.

"Why, 'tis the very place!" observed Doctor Carter delightedly. "I wonder I did not think o't before!"

He paused, one foot upon the ladder attached to the wall, when Amos's rumbling voice arrested him.

"That varlet Sturgins be up there," mumbled Amos. "But he be asleep, so 'twill not bother ye, sir, except he snores."

"Aye?" The good doctor's face fell. "Even here be someone?" But soon his natural kindliness came to the fore. "Eh, well, 'twill not disturb me 'less he snores too loudly, when will I give him a poke—so!" And Doctor Carter's boot toe gave an eloquent flirt

in midair before he disappeared through the square hole above Amos's head.

True enough, Sturgins lay asleep when the doctor had pulled his middle-aged figure laboriously into the hayloft, and Sturgins asleep was not a pleasant sight to look upon. His wide mouth hung open loosely, his nose twitched miserably, and he seemed most unhappy in his dreams. Doctor Carter glanced at him unfavorably as he sank down into a mound of soft hay; but soon the drowsiness of a spring morning overcame him, too, and his head nodded over the book that lay open upon his knee. So they slept, respectable surgeon and the blind rascal whom Fate had sent upon a curious eddy into this peaceful, quiet corner together.

But after a while Doctor Carter was awakened by a loud shout. He started up to gaze with amazement upon the wild figure that met his eye. It was Sturgins, standing upright, his hands flung above his head, his face contorted with fear and rage.

"Ye shall not, Jaffray! I tell ye, ye shall not!" The blind man's staring eyes gazed past the doctor, though when the latter turned instinctively, naught met his gaze. Wheeling back, his keen glance soon took in a fact which might have escaped any one else. *Sturgins was still asleep!*

"Nay, nay!" murmured Doctor Carter gently, approaching the dreaming man. "Wake up, Sturgins! Thou art asleep!"

But his words had the opposite effect from what he had intended. Sturgins, instead of awaking, uttered a final cry of terror, gave a sudden leap backward, and

before the other could move had toppled through the opening in the hayloft floor to the ground below, where he lay still and silent.

A pitying sound escaped Doctor Carter's lips as he hurriedly descended to kneel beside the injured man. They were alone in the vast, silent barn, for Amos had gone. He first assured himself that Sturgins still lived, then the doctor hurried to the farmhouse, where he informed Mistress Condit in a few terse words of what had happened. Mehitable was summoned and dispatched to the fields for help, and not much later the unfortunate Sturgins was being carried back to the little lean-to room he had occupied behind the kitchen since his arrival.

"La, la, I do protest he is the most luckless of fellows!" cried Mistress Condit, passing ahead of the motionless form to pull back the covers of his pallet.

"'Tis true, wife, to say nothing o' my being held up once again upon ye planting!" agreed the Squire, laying down his end of the burden and motioning Amos to do likewise. "Think ye he will die, sir?" he inquired, turning to the surgeon.

Doctor Carter shook his head. "Nay, I cannot tell; 'twas a most nasty fall. The fellow is built like an ox, despite his short stature, yet I like not his remaining senseless!" he replied doubtfully.

At that moment an unexpected voice spoke from the doorway.

"What, good Doctor Carter, hast secured a patient already?"

Mistress Condit uttered a little cry and, turning, found herself in her son's embrace, while Mehitable and Charity, as usual, swarmed upon him affectionately. He clasped his friend's hand eagerly then.

"Nay, less commotion!" warned John laughingly, in a low voice. "'Tis a sick-room ye be in, lasses! Come ye out into the kitchen!"

"Art home for long, Son?" asked the Squire, following the others into the kitchen before departing once more to his interrupted tasks.

"Nay, sir, for but an hour," answered the young man. "I be on my way to Newark and thereabouts, upon His Excellency's business. However," he added quickly, at sight of the look upon his mother's face, "I will return this night, I think, for I have permission to tarry a day with you." Then as Doctor Carter followed into the kitchen, he turned eagerly to him. "And now, sir, what happened to Sturgins?"

His alert young face was all aglow with professional interest as the older man recounted the accident.

"Ye will try bleeding?" he asked when the other had finished.

Mehitable and Charity, shuddering, glanced at each other. Although bleeding, or the process of taking blood from the veins of their patients, was the common practice of every physician of that day for almost every ailment, these two fortunate little maids knew nothing beyond the word.

"Aye, if he remains senseless," returned Doctor Carter.

"Then I shall try my best to return this night, for it

will be most interesting," responded John. "His case interests me much!"

"Oh, John!" breathed Mehitable in a horrified tone. "*Interesting!*"

Young Doctor Condit glanced at her mirthfully. "Art not going to help us, Hitty?" he teased. "Nay, I shall expect ye to help——"

But here Mehitable, with a little shriek of dismay, escaped his futile clutch at her plump arm and in a fit of shuddering, half pretense, half real, ran after Charity into the yard. Soon the kitchen was empty once more, the Squire and Amos tramping off to the fields, Doctor Carter returning to his patient; and then, placing various utensils upon the fire, Mistress Condit watched her son furtively as he sat, lost in grim musing, beside her upon the settle. At last she could bear it no longer, and though she well knew what troubled him, she spoke.

"How now, my boy? What be the matter?" Her tone was affectionate.

"I was thinking, Mother. Hast heard no word from Nancy?"

Mistress Condit's cheerful face fell. "Nay, no word at all, my son," she answered gently.

There was a brief silence, then, Doctor Carter entering at that moment, John turned to him, brightening.

"How is your patient now, Doctor?"

The other shook his head. "Still senseless," he answered. "'Tis hardly to be wondered at, for, in truth, the fellow must have struck his head with terrific force. 'Tis most fortunate I brought my kit with me,

since doubtless your instruments are at headquarters." And so saying, the little surgeon, with a naïve air of satisfaction, opened his surgical kit and examined his shining instruments affectionately, John watching him respectfully.

A quick knock sounding just then upon the door, Charity hastened to open it. She revealed the anxious face and tall, shambling form of Young Cy.

"I met Hitty. She told me that—that man I bl-blinded hath met with an accident, that ye were to bleed him, John?" he stammered questioningly. A look across the kitchen at the instruments laid out upon the table before Doctor Carter sent the blood from his face. "Is't true? Will he die?"

"Why, come in, Young Cy," returned John kindly. "Hitty is a madcap, she should not have so alarmed ye!" he went on in a vexed tone. "'Tis too soon to tell how he is, my lad."

The boy stood pale and silent a moment, then he sighed. "And if I had not blinded him, this would not have happened him!"

"Nay, he was as like to have died, blind or not, an he dies, for he was asleep when he walked off the haymow!" answered Doctor Carter sharply. But Young Cy looked at the floor.

"'Tis so horrible to feel that ye have taken the blue sky and the sunlight from a man!" he said. And with half a sob he dropped his chin upon his breast. Doctor Carter, watching him keenly, saw the nervous twitching of his eyelids, the trembling of his hands.

"Hast slept well lately, young sir?" he now asked.

"Hardly at all, sir," answered Young Cy, without looking up. "Nor can I eat."

"What!" said Doctor Carter contemptuously. "One would almost think thou wert a mollycoddle thus to act!"

The blood whipped into the boy's face and he sprang to his feet, his eyes flashing.

"No man shall call me mollycoddle!" he cried, taking a threatening step forward and glaring at the little doctor over John's outthrust arm.

"There, there, lad, let us not quarrel!" smiled Doctor Carter, in a friendly way. "My prescription has worked all too well."

Young Cy stared at him suspiciously until John, smiling, too, gave him a little push toward the other.

"Shake hands, lad," he said tolerantly. "He does not really think thee a mollycoddle! He called thee that but to test thy mettle. Go home, now, and eat and sleep and all will yet be well."

"Mayhap ye are right," said Young Cy shamefacedly. "I am sorry I spoke rudely to ye just now." And he shook Doctor Carter's hand apologetically. "And now I am off for home. Jemima was making a dried-apple pie!"

But before he had reached the door it was flung open and a sweet-faced lady entered hurriedly.

"Nancy!" screamed Charity happily.

"Nancy!" cried Mistress Condit.

"*Nancy!*" whispered John's heart. But he alone failed to greet her. Indeed, he did not stir until a manly form entered the room, when he tore his gaze

away and met the newcomer's quizzical glance. Then he sprang forward.

"What, Tony Freeman!" he exclaimed.

They were shaking hands heartily when Mehitable came tripping into the kitchen.

"Von Garten!" she stammered, stopping short.

"Nay, Mistress Madcap, 'tis Lieutenant Anthony Freeman, at your service!" he answered, sweeping his tri-cornered hat against his breast in a fine bow.

"Of course! How stupid I be. I offer ye my apology!" cried Mehitable, recovering her composure. "Though"—she looked at him saucily—"if ye persist in calling me—er—er—that dreadful name o' Mistress Madcap, I shall have to call ye Von Garten!"

"Nay, I cry ye quits! Name me no Hessian name, I prithee!" And with mock horror Lieutenant Freeman held out his hands imploringly. He was interrupted by Mistress Nancy who, having just greeted Squire Condit, at that moment arrived, now turned toward John with very pink cheeks.

"Quiet, an ye please!" Then, when everyone had dropped into amazed silence, she looked around her shyly.

"While apologies are being tendered, as Hitty has started them, I have ridden since early morn to offer one myself. 'Tis to you, John!" She raised her eyes bravely. "Before your—your—mother, before everyone, I wish to cry your pardon. I have just discovered how unjust I have been to you about a—a certain matter. I thought 'twas you I saw garbed as 'Night' at Mr. Drew's rout last year in New York."

"Why, did ye not know he lent his suit for that affair to his friend here, your cousin, as he was out with me upon urgent sickness!" exclaimed Doctor Carter.

"Nay, not until Tony happened to mention it most casually last night. I—you—will not understand, mayhap, John; but 'twas most important to me who had worn that suit!" blundered on Mistress Nancy.

"I know why!" said Charity, in a tone of great satisfaction.

"So now I cry your pardon, John," stammered Mistress Nancy. Suddenly, before them all, she ran across the kitchen to throw herself in his arms. "Oh, John," she whispered. "I did indeed love ye all the time!"

John said nothing; but the look upon his face was enough as he bent over the lovely head upon his breast. Across the kitchen an older pair of lovers looked at each other and smiled happily.

Before any one could speak or move, Amos, the man of all work, thrust his head in at the door. "Here be a note, Mistress Hitty, for you."

Mehitable took it eagerly. "Why, 'tis from Miranda Briggs." She read it hastily; then, looking up at Mistress Nancy, she spoke seriously. "Miranda and her mother are going to Staten Island with the Squire. And there is something about that note Mother found in your reticule, Nancy. Shall I read it?" At the other's nod she bent her eyes upon the letter which, ill-spelt, criss-crossed, looked as though many repentant tears had dropped upon it.

"Tell Mistress Nancy, that I cry her pardon for having written and secreted that note in her reticule. I did hate her so; but I do not hate her, now. For I was fearful she would steal John's love and him I did mean to marry myself some day."

"What, that young minx!" exclaimed John indignantly. The rest laughed, and poor Miranda's note was soon forgotten in the general stir which followed. All eyes were fixed inquiringly upon Doctor Carter when he returned from a brief visit to Sturgins's room.

"Better come, John; ye patient is sensible, I believe!"

As John Condit followed the older doctor, the others were following in curiosity when Squire Condit stopped them.

"A sick man needs quiet," he said authoritatively. "You, little Cherry, may go and bring us word o' ye patient."

She found John bending over the cot of the injured man. "Sturgins!" he said imperatively. As they all watched, there was a noticeable flutter of the patient's eyelids.

"Sturgins!" repeated John.

This time Charity held her breath. Yes, Sturgins was opening his eyes. He sighed, raised his hand weakly. Then, as they gazed, awed, he stared straight up into John's eyes and the young doctor, staring back, knew that he was looking into *seeing eyes!* Then, without a word, Sturgins's eyelids fluttered down wearily and he sank at once into a deep sleep. Charity flew back to the kitchen.

"He sees!" she stammered. "Sturgins can see again!"

"What!" cried all.

"Aye!" John appeared behind Charity, his face beaming. "'Tis true—a miracle has happened! There is no doubt the man sees! Doubtless some pressure has been released by this last blow he received when he landed upon his head this morning!"

At that Young Cy could contain himself no longer. With a stifled whoop he caught Mehitable's and Charity's hands and danced around for joy and relief. Before they knew it the Squire and his wife, the lovers, and Lieutenant Freeman were drawn into that magic circle, and when Doctor Carter appeared frowningly in the doorway even Amos was performing a solemn clog of his own, with a hop, skip, and shuffle.

"Misadventures we have had and madcaps we may be!" Mehitable was chanting, "but whole and sound and fine we are, though we have had no tea—thanks to ye British!" she added beneath her breath.

"Prithee, less noise!" commanded Doctor Carter, with a benign smile that took the edge from his words.

So they all seated themselves and tried to settle down. But even so, the fire crackled with mirth, the pewter pans winked, and the copper pans blinked, as though only love and happiness could reign from then on in that household and there never had been a shot fired at Lexington in 1775.

THE END