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James Otis

The Minute Boys of York Town

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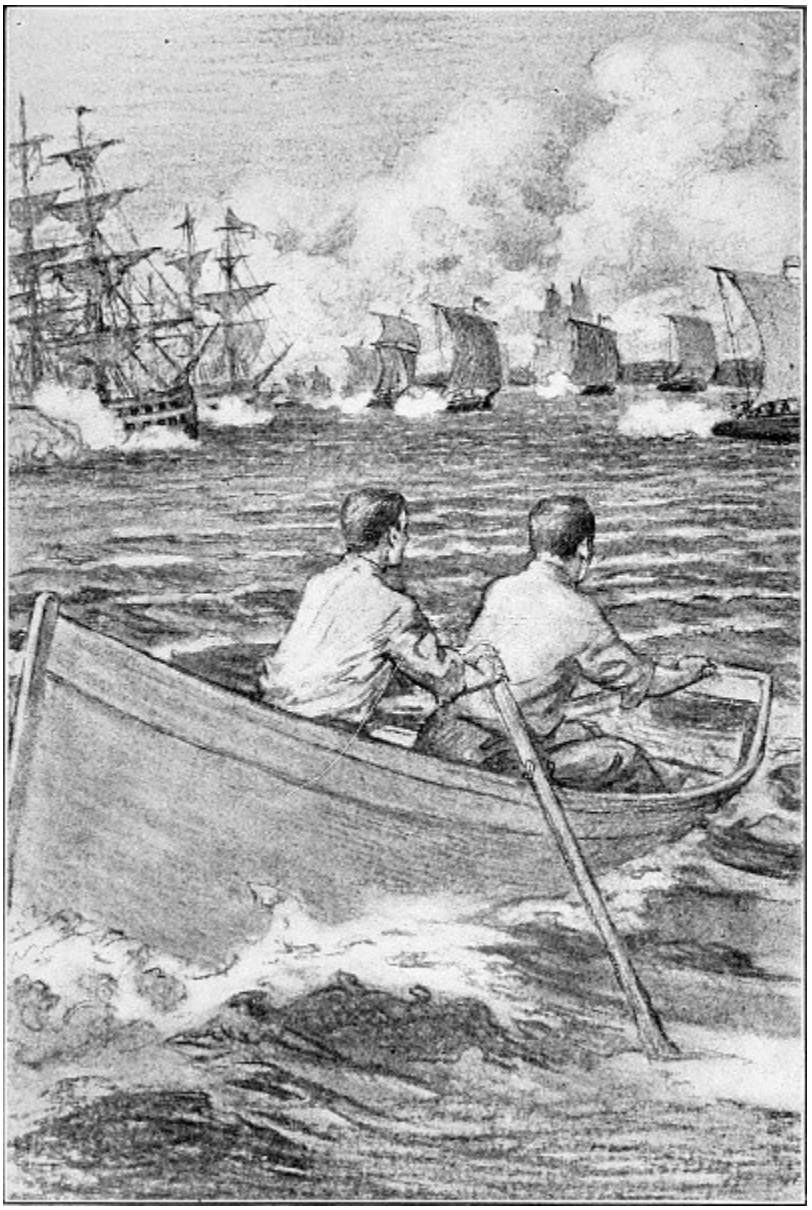

"IT WAS A SIGHT WELL CALCULATED TO STIR THE BLOOD OF A BOY FROM VIRGINIA."

THE MINUTE BOYS OF YORK TOWN

JAMES OTIS

Author of "The Minute Boys of Long Island," The "Minute Boys of Wyoming Valley," "Boys of '98," "Teddy and Carrots," "Boys of Fort Schuyler," "Under the Liberty Tree," etc., etc.

Illustrated by

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THE MINUTE BOYS OF YORK TOWN

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THE MINUTE BOYS OF YORK TOWN

CHAPTER I

TWO YOUNG VIRGINIANS

When Uncle 'Rasmus loses his temper because of some prank which we lads of James Town may have played upon him, he always says that no good can ever come of that in which "chillun an' women are mixed."

It had never entered my mind that there was in such a remark any cause for anger on my part, until that day when Saul Ogden repeated it, shaking his head dolefully as Uncle 'Rasmus always did, and speaking in the negro dialect so faithfully that one, not seeing him, might well have supposed his skin was black.

Of course you remember the engagement at Spencer's Ordinary, which place is the same as if I had said Spencer's Tavern, on the 26th of June in the year of Grace 1781, when Lieutenant-Colonel Simcoe of the Queen's Rangers, and Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton with his Legion of Horse, began to "prance" around here, as Uncle 'Rasmus would put it, and we Virginians were disturbed in more ways than one.

There were a number of our people who would have been loyal to the king if Governor Dunmore had not written himself down such a consummate ass, and many even at this time whose sympathies were all with the struggling colonists, but who yet hoped matters could be settled without loss of honor to either side, meaning that the so-called rebels and his majesty might come together in friendship once more.

But when this "prancing" began; when Colonel Tarleton rode rough-shod over our people of Virginia without seeming to understand the meaning of the word "humanity," then it was that even those who had hoped against hope that the colonies might remain in peace and harmony with the mother country, began to realize it was no longer possible.

It had required five long, weary years, during which our Americans in the North had borne nearly all the brunt of this struggle against the king, and I dare not say how much of friendship, to persuade those few in Virginia who strove to hold some shred of loyalty to the king, that the time had come when they must take sides with those who had the best interests of the country at heart, no longer looking to royalty for relief.

Saul Ogden is my cousin, being but three days younger than I, who was, in August of 1781, just turned fifteen, and although it may seem strange to the lads of New England that we two Virginians knew so little concerning what was being done in this America of ours, it is true that until the engagement at Spencer's Ordinary there had never been a thought in our minds that we might be called upon, or that it would be possible for us to take any part in the bloody struggle which had been prolonged until it seemed of a verity that the people of New York and Boston must have come to an end of all their resources, so far as struggling against the king's soldiers was concerned.

It is true Saul and I had heard now and then that even boys in Massachusetts and in New York were enrolled, or had agreed among themselves, to act as Minute Boys, ready to do whatsoever they might, at any time, regardless of all things else save the proving of that Declaration of Independence to the satisfaction of the whole wide world.

It was on the day before the action at Spencer's Ordinary that I, Fitzroy Hamilton, and Saul, my cousin, met for the first time a little French lad by name of Pierre Laurens, who had come up from New Orleans with his widowed mother to visit at my home, after having spent a summer in Boston.

A companionable sort of a lad was this little French boy who waved his hands and shrugged his shoulders when he talked, as if they were in some way connected with his tongue; one who was able to tell many an entertaining story, and who had seen so much of this land of America that it was to Saul and me as if he was some great traveler, while we were only two country louts, never having strayed a dozen miles from home.

It is not of Pierre whom I have set myself down to tell; but it was necessary I should refer to him in order that you might understand how we two lads of James Town, who seldom went away from the plantation save to ride into the settlement, and whose longest journey had been from the James to the York river across that neck where one may best arrive at York Town, came to know that we might serve the Cause as Minute Boys.

It was little Frenchie who took it upon himself to tell us what he knew, he having met several lads in Boston who called themselves Minute Boys. He held up before Saul and me pictures of the duty we owed our homes, as if we Virginians needed to be taught our duty, and painted in glowing colors the honor and glory which was to be won by those lads who stood ever ready to perform the work of Minute Boys, until we were quite aflame with the idea.

I doubt much, however, whether anything would have come of it had it not been for that same engagement at Spencer's Ordinary, when Lieutenant-Colonel Simcoe, counting to ride over the Pennsylvania men under Colonel Butler as he had

ridden over us Virginians, found much to his displeasure that it was not always possible for his high mightiness to do exactly as he wished.

Do not get the idea that I intend to make it appear as if the king's troops were worsted at Spencer's Tavern; but it was a drawn battle, as I have heard even those who really loved the king, admit, and it must have been a startling surprise to the swaggering Simcoe to have received even a check.

It was only natural that after this engagement Saul and I, egged on by Pierre, should talk quite seriously of forming a company of Minute Boys; but no sooner would we begin, and I strive to point out how we might do this thing or that which would advantage our colony of Virginia, than Saul would break in with the saying of Uncle 'Rasmus's, that where "chillun an' women were mixed" matters went awry.

Yet despite my cousin's seeming scorn, Pierre continued to urge that we enroll ourselves as Minute Boys, and when Saul asked irritably whether he believed any good would come to the Cause if only three lads were banded together, agreeing to do whatsoever they might, thereby, as you can see, throwing cold water on the scheme, Pierre, his hands waving and his shoulders shrugged nearly to his ears, would insist again and again that if no more than three should set themselves about striving to do something in aid of those who were battling against the king, much of good might be accomplished.

Then Saul, without really meaning to be unkind, would cry out that Colonel Simcoe had better have a care when our company of three Virginia Minute Boys set out on the war-path, and while his friendly scorn fretted me now and then, it did not distress Pierre in the least.

I say it did not distress him, and yet I may be mistaken, for after Saul had repeated Uncle 'Rasmus's maxim, and spoken sneeringly of the fear which a company of Minute Boys numbering three might produce throughout the colony, little Frenchie said, waving his hands as if to brush my cousin aside:

"Oh, well, if you are afraid, then it would not be of avail even though you had a company of twenty."

"Afraid!" Saul cried, the red blood flushing his face as he advanced almost threateningly toward the little fellow from New Orleans. "Do you dare come here and tell a Virginian that he is afraid of any person who walks this earth even though he wear a crown?"

"I did not say you *were* afraid," Pierre replied sweetly, still shrugging his shoulders and waving his hands. "I said *if* you were afraid, then it would not do for you to talk of being a Minute Boy. It is only those lads in the colonies who dare do this or dare do that, who could be of value to the Cause."

Now it is just possible little Frenchie was irritated when he made this reply; but however it came about, certain it is from that moment Saul ceased to throw cold water upon the plan of raising a company of Minute Boys, and no longer quoted Uncle 'Rasmus, or spoke scornfully of what might be accomplished, yet at the same time he was not enthusiastic about it until after that sixth of July, when at Green Spring plantation the British under my Lord Cornwallis met the Americans commanded by General Lafayette, the king's troops getting much the best of the battle.

I had thought Saul might strive to get even with Pierre by pointing out that the young French general was defeated where an American might have been victorious; but no, he held his peace concerning the nationality of the commander of the army, and seemed all afire with a desire to do something with his own hands that should be of benefit to the Cause.

He insisted we form ourselves into a company of Minute Boys at once, even though there were but three of us, claiming even as little Frenchie had claimed days and days before, that it might be possible even for so small a number to accomplish considerable of good, and promising that as the time went by we would be able to add to our numbers.

And thus it was that Saul and I, two Virginia lads, joined with Pierre, a Frenchie, to form a company of Minute Boys in aid of the Cause of Liberty, and even went so far, after agreeing among ourselves that we were to stand by each other so long as life should last, to write a letter to Master Patrick Henry telling him of what we had done and offering our services, much the same as if they might be of great value.

The strangest part of all, as it seemed to me, was that Master Henry did actually answer the letter which Saul wrote; did really speak of us as if it might be possible that we do somewhat of good to the Cause, and commending us for coming together in such a fashion. It was much as if he believed he was writing to three men of importance in Virginia, who could do this, or do that, according to their will, instead of three lads who had hardly ever, with the exception of Pierre, ventured off the Hamilton plantation.

I questioned seriously whether Master Henry really understood Saul's letter; if he was aware of the fact that we were

lads only just turned fifteen, and argued that he must have read the missive so hurriedly that he thought three influential planters, if you please, who may formerly have been luke-warm to the Cause, were now turned about ready to do whatsoever they might.

Had Saul and I been alone I could have convinced my cousin that I was in the right; but little Frenchie must needs start up, insisting that Master Henry knew to whom he was writing; that a great man like Master Patrick Henry would not read a letter which, if it had come from men, was of importance, so hurriedly as not to understand who had written it. He argued from all this, that our calling ourselves Minute Boys, even though we might not succeed in doing much that would advantage the colony, was of moment even in the eyes of so able a man as he who had been governor of Virginia.

I must say this for Pierre, that when he starts out to convince you of a matter there is in his manner and his voice such winning qualities, that even though at the outset you were positive he was in the wrong, before many minutes had passed you were saying to yourself that all his words were true, all his beliefs noble, and all that he would do exactly right.

It was one thing to call ourselves Minute Boys; to write to Governor Henry and to be praised by him, and quite another matter to be able to do anything whatsoever in aid of the Cause.

It is true that we did not go far afield in search of opportunities, and for the very good reason that we knew not where to go. Between our town of James and the village of York we knew our way as well as we did through the pantry to that jar of cake which Aunt Dinah always kept so well filled; but beyond that it was all a strange world to us, so strange that we doubted whether we might make our way even so far as Baltimore without writing ourselves down as the veriest country louts.

Then came that day when my Lord Cornwallis led his red-coated men into James Town itself, and we found ourselves not only surrounded by these soldiers of the king, but literally over-run by them. So high and mighty was his majesty's officer that he quartered his soldiers here, there, or in the other place, at whatsoever house pleased his fancy, insisting that we Virginians who claimed we had the right to break off from the mother country, should take care of those who had come to shoot us down.

Then of a verity did it seem to me the time had come when we Minute Boys might do something, and I said as much to Saul and Pierre.

My cousin held his peace, looking around eagerly as if striving to see here or there some opportunity, while little Frenchie shrugged his shoulders as if the matter was of little consequence to him, and I, irritated by his movements, taunted him with being a coward, saying it was all very well for him, while the British soldiers were at a distance, to talk loudly about forming a company of Minute Boys, but instantly the enemy were come within reach he was well content to lie down at their feet.

I was ashamed of myself even as I spoke, and looked to see Pierre fly into a rage; but, instead, he shrugged his little shoulders yet higher, advising that I go back into the stable yard where Uncle 'Rasmus, with the hounds around him, was sunning himself, and there take advice from the old negro who claimed that where "chillun an' women were mixed" no good could come.

"And to what end should I take advice from Uncle 'Rasmus?" I cried in a rage, whereupon Pierre, waving his hands with the palms uppermost, said in a most friendly way:

"To the end, my dear Fitz, that you may come to understand there is a time for work and a time for remaining idle; that he who would accomplish something does not set out upon a task which, even before beginning it, he knows to be impossible."

"All of which means what?" Saul demanded, and I understood that the lad's heart was heavy, for within the hour he had been crowded against the wall, and a red-coated captain of the Foot had shaken him soundly because he did not give way to the swaggerers who had come into Virginia to teach us manners.

"All of which means that the time will come when we shall be able to do something to please even your Governor Henry," Pierre said sulkily, and then turned away, himself to take counsel of Uncle 'Rasmus, leaving Saul and me gazing into each other's faces like a couple of simples, until my cousin said with a mirthless laugh:

"I am beginning to believe, Fitz, that little Frenchie has more in his head than ever you or I can hope to find in ours."

It was the first time I had ever heard him suggest that Pierre was wise beyond his years. In fact, he had always looked upon the little fellow as a pleasant companion, and I had believed that I was more than his equal when it came to such

tasks as Minute Boys should do. I had set it down in my mind that when the time for real work arrived, if it ever did, it would be Saul and I who would do credit to our town of James.

My Lord Cornwallis did not linger at James Town; but continued on down the river until he was come to Portsmouth, having stopped meanwhile on the way to "give Lafayette a lesson," as some of our Tory neighbors suggested.

Then, as you very well know, it began to appear as if this valiant officer, who represented the king in Virginia, was beginning to get uneasy because the young French general was pressing him rather warmly, and continued what was well nigh a retreat until that first day of September in the year of Grace 1781, when he entered York Town, and immediately began to fortify the settlements of York and Gloucester as if counting to make there a permanent abiding place.

It never occurred to me that my Lord Cornwallis had really beaten a retreat before the Americans, and was now come to where he must have aid from New York or from overseas in order to get out from what was much like a trap, until Uncle 'Rasmus, when we lads were gathered about him in the stable-yard, said, shaking his grey head as he chewed meditatively on a straw:

"It kind 'er 'pears to me, chillun, like as ef dat yere Britisher what's flutterin' 'roun' ober York way wid his hosses, an' his guns, an' his shinin' sword, was heapin' up a sight ob misery for hisself."

"But surely, Uncle 'Rasmus, after the engagement at Green Spring, you can't believe it would be possible for the French general to do him any harm?" Saul cried, surprised by the old negro's words, which seemed much like a prophecy.

"I ain' sayin', chile, dat de French gin'ral is gwine for to hurt de Britishers so berry much; but it kind'er 'pears to me dis erway: You see dey's come down yere to de jumpin'-off place, an' dere ain' much chance for 'em to get away 'cept dey goes by water. Now I'se done hear dat dere's a power ob French vessels hangin' 'roun' off de Capes, des like as if dey was waitin' to swaller up de red-coated gen'men."

"If he can't get away by water he'll go back by land," Saul suggested, and Uncle 'Rasmus shook his head mournfully, as if it pained him to believe that my Lord Cornwallis had come into a veritable trap.

"What 'bout dat yere Virginia gen'man dey's got up Norf--what 'bout Gin'ral Washington? Do you count, chillun, de's gwine for ter lay stock still when he's got de chance ob nabbin' all dis yere stuff what dey 'lows b'longs to de king? Ef it was some ob yere po' wuffless Northern trash what was runnin' dis yere war for de people ob America, den it might be dat Lord Cornwallis was gwine to turn 'roun' slap when he done got ready. But mark you, chillun, it's one ob our Virginia gen'men dats lookin' after tings. He knows de lan' 'roun' erbout; kase why? Kase he's bin here, chillun; he's bin right on dis yere plantation, an' he knows dat when you strikes de town ob York you'se got to be sumfin like a flea, able to hop a mighty big hop."

"Even suppose my Lord Cornwallis does beat back the Americans who are led by one of my countrymen; he might find it very difficult to break through their ranks, if he wanted to go back toward Richmond by the same way he came," Pierre said with a wave of the hand which I never hope to fully describe, for there was ever much of feeling in his gestures.

We remained there in the stable yard until the sun was low in the western sky, discussing the situation with Uncle 'Rasmus as our oracle. It is true we lads could not speak intelligently upon military matters, and as I look back now upon that day, I realize how much of folly there was in our words; but our hearts were nigh to bursting with the desire to do something toward ridding our colony of Virginia of those swaggering, insolent, red-coated men, all of whom we believed to be quite as brutal as Colonel Tarleton and his followers.

The result of that afternoon's conversation with Uncle 'Rasmus, if such it can be called, was that we three lads decided to go over to York Town, and see for ourselves how the Britishers were disposed there, and what they had done in the way of throwing up fortifications, for word had come through the negroes that not only the town of York, but Gloucester also, was being fortified thoroughly well.

It is not above eight miles from our plantation to the town of York, and we counted to ride there and back before the next noon, until Uncle 'Rasmus, as if terrified by such a proposition, insisted that we ought never even think of trusting the horses so near the British encampment. He told us what we very speedily came to know was true, that these servants of the king would not hesitate to despoil us Virginians who might be accused of what they were pleased to term disloyalty, even to the extent of taking from us our lives.

I could not then believe the old negro was talking other than veriest nonsense; but before another week had passed I came to understand all too well that we of Virginia who were called rebels, had no rights which these red-coated gentry were bound to respect.

It seemed fortunate that Uncle 'Rasmus succeeded in convincing us it would be in the highest degree dangerous to ride good saddle horses, and there were none other on the Hamilton plantation, within the British lines at York Town, and finally we agreed among ourselves, so eager had we grown to know what was being done by my Lord Cornwallis, to walk there and back. It would not be a severe journey, for we might count on going and returning between sunrise and sunset, and yet not exert ourselves overly much.

It is not necessary I should set down anything concerning our movements from the time we parted with Uncle 'Rasmus, until next morning, an hour after sunrise, when we were come within view of York Town, having walked at a rapid pace, for even though it was yet early in September, there was a bit of frost in the air which induced one to move rapidly lest he become chilled.

It was when we were come so near the end of our journey, that we saw ahead of us, less than a quarter of a mile away, Horry Sims, who lived on the old Livingston plantation, three miles above my home, and he appeared to be talking earnestly with a mounted officer who was in command of mayhap a dozen men.

Now Horry Sims was a lad who might fairly have been called a friend of mine, because we had had no angry words together such as could not readily be wiped out; but since two or three years neither Saul nor I chummed very much with the lad. It was believed, and with good cause, that his father yet remained loyal to the king, and was not only ready to make a display of love for his majesty; but appeared so willing to show disloyalty to his neighbors that it almost amounted to eagerness.

Uncle 'Rasmus declared again and again that Master Sims had had a hand in whatsoever of mischief had been done in Virginia, and perhaps Saul and I might have believed the old negro had he not set down so much of evil to the account of Horry's father that it was impossible one man could have compassed it all.

Certain it is, however, we had come to look upon Master Sims as a rank Tory, and, fancying his son might hold the views of his father, we two lads, meaning Saul and me, had kept away from him, not in the way of enmity, but rather to avoid the lad, although we treated him fairly when he came where we were.

After all we believed we knew, it should not have seemed strange to us that Horry Sims was talking in an apparently friendly fashion with this officer in his majesty's service, yet we were surprised, for now was come the time, if he felt so disposed, when it was possible for him to do much of harm to his neighbors, and on the instant I stepped aside from the highway that I might be screened by the bushes, beckoning my companions to do the same.

We had thus hidden ourselves from view of those who were ahead of us, as I believed, before they came to know that we were in the vicinity, and Saul, thinking that now was the time when we might do Minute-Boy duty, whispered to me:

"Shall we creep among the shrubbery until we are come where it is possible to hear the conversation of those beyond?"

Before I could make reply, little Frenchie, shrugging his shoulders, whispered:

"How far think you, it would be possible to go without being overheard by some of those who wear red coats? If it was night, or if yonder men were deaf, then might you do it."

"It is certain they would hear you before you were where it could be possible to distinguish a word of the conversation," I said in reply to Saul's suggestion, and he was seemingly satisfied that such would be the case, for instead of making any attempt at an argument, he crept more closely to my side, pulling Pierre with him until we three, in order to hold in view that group of red, in the midst of which was Horry Sims, were forced to part the foliage with our hands that we might peer between the leaves.

Perhaps our suspicions of the lad prompted us to see more than really was presented; but certain it is I fancied that the officer, who was mounted, plied Horry with questions, to which the lad replied as if it gave him pleasure to impart information. I also suspected they were saying somewhat concerning our plantation, for now and again Horry pointed in the direction of my home, and the foot soldiers looked back as if fancying they might see the buildings in the distance, all of which was the more real to me because betwixt where we stood and the Hamilton plantation there was no other dwelling.

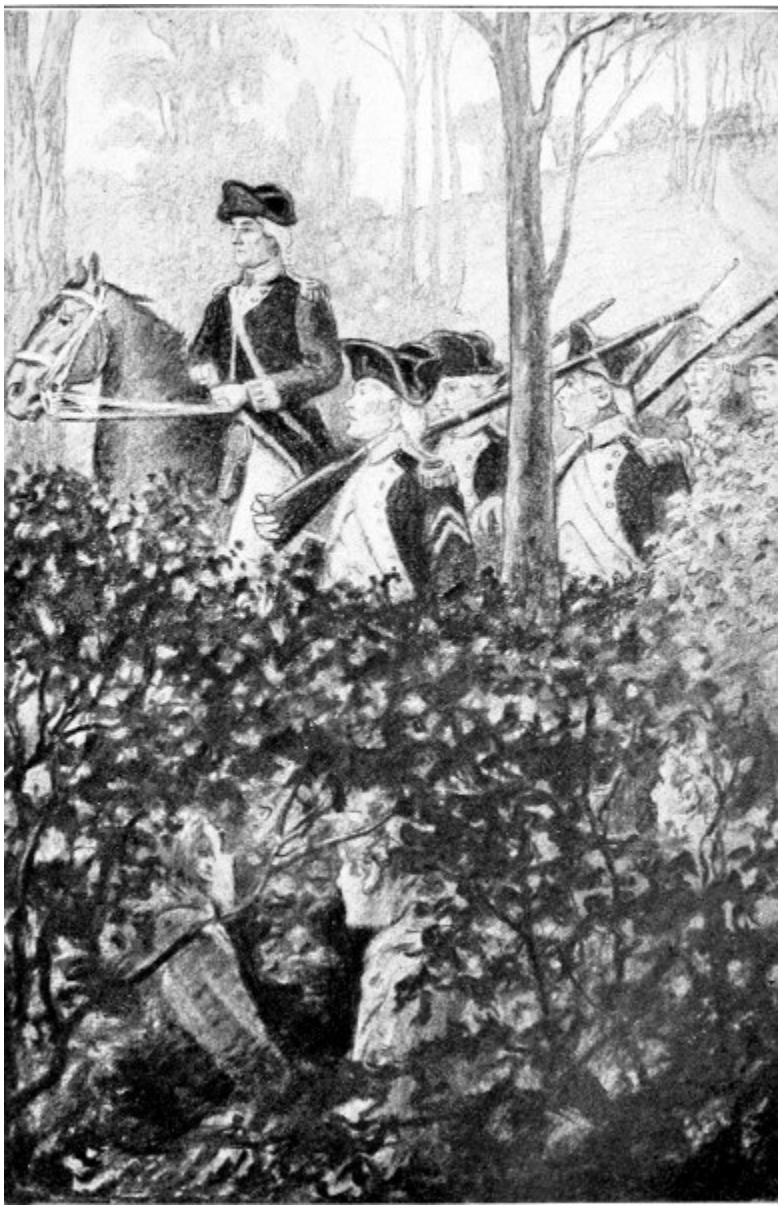
We remained there in hiding a full half hour, and then it appeared to me as if the officer and Horry Sims parted in friendly fashion, the lad to continue on toward York Town, and the officer and his men to march in our direction, as if counting to follow back on our trail.

As a matter of course there was nothing we lads could do save remain in hiding, trusting that our whereabouts would not be discovered, for, although we had been doing no harm, if a servant of his majesty should come to understand

that we three lads were striving to keep out of sight, he might take it into his thick head to fancy we were bent on mischief.

In those days it was only needed that an officer in the service of the king should have a suspicion, in order to straightway plunge into difficulties that person toward whom the suspicions were directed.

We held ourselves in cover, therefore, and I confess to a sense of most profound relief when the squad continued on without giving heed to the possibility that there had been witnesses to the meeting with Horry Sims.



"THAT WE MIGHT PEER BETWEEN THE LEAVES."

"Now it is only for us to know where those gentlemen with the red coats may be going," little Frenchie said, shrugging his shoulders as we came out from the bushes and turned our faces in the direction from which we had just come, whereupon Saul asked hotly:

"Are you not for York Town? Have your legs grown weary with walking three or four miles?"

"The town of York will remain where it is yet many a day, and I dare venture to say my Lord Cornwallis will not take his departure suddenly, therefore shall we have plenty of time in which to look at the British encampment," Pierre replied, retracing his steps as if he had no care whether we followed.

"But why go back?" I cried impatiently. "Of what avail for us to follow that squad, who are most likely out foraging?"

"I have seen soldiers nearabout New Orleans, therefore do I know that when foragers go out they take with them huge

wagons to bring back such as may be found. Those who have just passed are empty-handed, save for muskets, and never one of them carried his full complement of accoutrements."

"Well, suppose he doesn't?" Saul asked sulkily, but yet following little Frenchie nevertheless, for there was something about the lad which caused you to do that which pleased him whether it was to your liking or not.

"Then it must be they are out on some special duty," Pierre continued, "and I am of the mind that we shall find more amusement in watching them, than if we follow on the heels of your Tory friend who seems also to count on visiting York Town."

Whether Pierre had any suspicions of what might be afoot, I cannot say; but certain it is he pressed forward, striving to accommodate his pace with that of the soldiers, so that he might not come directly on their heels, and Saul and I, inwardly angry with ourselves for thus copying the movements of the little lad from New Orleans, kept well alongside him till we had covered a distance of mayhap a mile, when my cousin suddenly halted, saying almost angrily:

"We are showing ourselves simples in thus turning back simply because a squad of British soldiers have gone ahead!"

"Yet those same gentlemen who wear red coats are marching in the direction of the Hamilton plantation," little Frenchie said with another shrug of his shoulders and a wave of his hands, as if to intimate that there was very much more which he might say, and I, understanding somewhat of the gesture, cried out impatiently:

"Why do you say that? What have they to do on the Hamilton plantation?"

"It is that which I would learn," Pierre replied. "It is what I believe it would be better for us to see than if we wandered through the British encampment at York Town."

Until that instant I had never fancied my father's property might be in any danger from the king's men. True it is that he was known as one devoted to the cause of liberty; but thus far the war had been at such a distance from us that we had seen little of its horrors, and for the first time I began to realize there might be somewhat of mischief afoot, therefore pressed forward hotly, Pierre holding me back from time to time lest we overtake the soldiers.

The Britishers must have walked more rapidly than we fancied, for when finally we were come within view of my home, we saw riding out from the stable-yard, each man mounted and more than one with a led-horse by his side, all the company that had passed us on the road, and the animals which they rode and led were horses belonging to my father! Yea, among them Saul's mare and my own favorite colt, which I cherished as the dearest thing on earth next to my mother!

"What does it mean?" I cried, speaking with difficulty because of that seeming lump in my throat, and little Frenchie, shrugging his shoulders in a manner that set every nerve in my body aquiver, replied as if it was a matter of small moment:

"They have been to the Hamilton plantation in order to get mounts for the officers of my Lord Cornwallis's army, and from this on your colt will carry a burly Englishman bedecked with gilt lace and red cloth, instead of the lad who loves her so dearly."

CHAPTER II

SILVER HEELS

It was for a moment as if I could scarcely credit my senses. The idea that any one, even those belonging to the plantation, should bestride my own colt, my little Silver Heels, as I had named her!

She had been given to me when a baby, and no hand save mine had touched her, except when some of the negroes would rub her coat to silken glossiness in order to curry favor with me. Now she was being ridden and roughly handled by a red-faced private of Simcoe's Queen's Rangers!

When my surprise had given way to anger, which it did within a very few seconds, I would have run swiftly forward, claiming my own Silver Heels, and defying, if needs be, all that company of red-coats, for the rage in my heart was so great that I had no thought of prudence nor of my inability to cope even with a single one of those Rangers; but that Pierre, seizing me firmly by the arm, actually dragged me amid the foliage where we might be screened from view, for the men--the thieves, I should say, were by this time riding directly toward us.

"Have you lost your wits entirely?" Pierre whispered angrily, and forgetting to shrug his shoulders. "Of what avail for you to demand your Silver Heels when the king's officers would have her for their own? Do you count on being carried to the guard-house at York Town as a malcontent, or even worse, a dangerous rebel?"

"I care not where they carry me, so I take Silver Heels from yon brute that is bestride her!"

"And how will you take her?" little Frenchie whispered, this time shrugging his shoulders and waving his hands, I having so far obeyed him as to be standing by his side beneath the shelter of leaves. "Do you fancy that after Colonel Simcoe's men have seized a likely lot of horse-flesh, a lad such as you may wrest from them their spoils?"

"But Silver Heels is my own, my very own! No one, not even the king himself, has the right to take her!" I cried in my folly.

"But some one has taken her, and he is stronger than you, my friend Fitz," Pierre said, stroking the sleeve of my coat as he would the back of an angry cat. "It is no less than Colonel Simcoe of the Queen's Rangers, a trusted officer of my Lord Cornwallis, who thus gathers in mounts for his men that they may the better punish the rebels of Virginia, among whom may be counted your father, and even you, lad, since you are pleased to call yourself a Minute Boy. Will you not listen to reason?" little Frenchie continued in a coaxing tone. "Did you not see Horry Sims talking with these very men, and pointing in the direction of the Hamilton plantation? Do you not know he was telling them that a rank rebel owned the place--one whose stables were filled with the best horse-flesh in Virginia? Before those men took your Silver Heels they knew right well to what plantation she belonged, and even though you had had by your side a dozen neighbors and friends, the result would have been the same. Now what would it avail that you should pour out your unreasoning wrath? Simply to the end that they might abuse, or, perhaps, imprison?"

Even before Pierre had ceased speaking did I come to understand how useless it would be for me to make any attempt at taking poor little Silver Heels from those who had stolen her, and I crouched yet further among the foliage as the horsemen approached, for there had come into my mind on the instant a certain thought, call it plan if you will, the carrying out of which depended upon holding myself free.

Then, like a great wave upon the seashore, there flowed into my heart the memory that it was Horry Sims who had directed these men where to go--Horry Sims who had ever envied me the possession of Silver Heels, and who, most like knowing that these red-coated minions of the king were looking for horse-flesh, pointed out the Hamilton plantation, counting that I would lose my colt. He, the son of the rankest Tory in Virginia, without cause for enmity against me, had laid train for the cruelest blow that could be struck at my heart!

During all this while Saul had not spoken; but now it was, even as the horsemen were well abreast our hiding place, he turned fiercely upon me, clutching both shoulders of my coat as if I were an enemy whom he would bring face to face with himself, and whispered in hoarse anger:

"It is well you formed your company of Minute Boys just as you did, Fitz Hamilton, for now has come the time when they shall see service! Are we, simply because of being lads, to remain idle while our own horses are being stolen?"

On the instant my heart went out in sympathy to Saul, for I knew full well that he loved his mare even as I did my own colt Silver Heels, and, harking back to the thought which had come into my mind a few seconds before, I said to him stoutly, shaking my fist in the direction of that popinjay of an officer who was riding so proudly in advance of his

squad of thieves:

"We will make them pay for this day's work, Saul Ogden, and while we are casting up the reckoning with those who wear red coats, there is one not far away who must also be held accountable for that which has just been done!"

"Meaning Horry Sims!" Saul cried, actually trembling in his impotent rage.

"Meaning that worse than Tory, for it was with no idea of serving the king, or aiding the king's cause, that the miserable scoundrel pointed out to those horse thieves where your mare and my colt might be found!"

"He shall have cause to regret that he saw this day's sun rise," Saul said in a low tone, his voice aquiver with anger, and then, the horsemen having passed, he stepped out into the road, turning his face toward York Town.

"Where would you go?" Pierre cried excitedly, following the lad to seize him by the skirt of his coat. "Would you venture into the British encampment at a time when your heart is so filled with anger that it is not possible you could hold it in check?"

"Ay, that is exactly where I count on going. You need have no fear, Pierre Laurens, that I shall do aught which may deprive me of my liberty, for I will hold myself in the presence of those who wear red coats as gentle as any dame in silken skirts, until I have got back my mare, or shot her with my own hand to spare the poor creature the abuse that would come from such handling! If, however, in the meanwhile I should come across Horry Sims where were none of his kidney who could fall upon me with too great force, then is it certain you would see whether a Minute Boy, and of late I'm beginning to be proud of that title--you would see whether a Virginian, a member of a company of Minute Boys, even though they number only three, could do anything toward paying off his just and lawful debts."

To have argued with Saul at that time would have been worse than useless, as I knew full well, for when the cloud of anger was upon him he would not listen to prayers or to arguments, and in good truth I was more than willing he should go his way, counting to make it my own, for at that time I believe it would have been actually impossible for me to have turned my back on poor little Silver Heels, even though by going into the British encampment at York Town I could do her no good.

Pierre soon realized that he could not hope to turn Saul from the path he had set out on, and he showed himself the dear little comrade I have ever since known him to be, by ranging alongside first of Saul and then of me as we went in single file, knowing full well that we might encounter great danger, and yet holding himself ready to bear full share of it.

We were not in the mood for conversation, Saul and I, as we pressed forward on the way to York Town, giving no heed to anything around us, and little Frenchie soon came to understand this, for after striving to speak first with one and then the other in a friendly fashion and receiving no reply, he held his peace, but now and again taking us by the hand as if to show his friendliness and loyalty to his friendships.

I was burning with the desire to come up with Horry Sims, who it was reasonable to believe had gone into the town of York and to that end quickened my pace, although knowing full well it was best I did not speak with the viper that day.

There was yet before us, if we both lived, plenty of time in which to settle the debt, and if I attempted to wipe off the score before having done that which was in my mind, then might it be that I sacrificed Silver Heels herself simply to gratify my desire for revenge.

That which I had in my mind! It was as wild a scheme as ever entered a boy's brain, I am willing to confess, and yet it was neither more nor less than the following of poor little Silver Heels until I could see where she was quartered, after which, devoting all my time and my energy to her rescue, for it was to me almost as if she was a human being in the hands of a vengeful enemy.

All this may seem wild or witless when spoken by a lad of fifteen, but I had the will and determination of a man who had grown grey-headed, and knew that I lacked not the courage once my anger had been aroused.

In cold blood I could be as timorous as any girl; but once the fever of rage beset me, I lost sight of all the odds that might be against me, which, mayhap, is much the same as saying that at heart I was a coward, and when I showed any token of bravery, if indeed I ever did, it was the madness of anger, rather than true courage.

Be that as it may, I am not more disposed at this day to discuss such a question than I was on that morning when, with the blood seemingly boiling in my veins, I trod on the heels of Saul as we plodded our way toward York Town in moody, angry silence, while little Frenchie ran by the side of first one and then the other, mutely striving to show the wealth of friendship which was in his heart.

It was well for us that the miles were long and reasonably many on the road to the town of York, else might we have

blundered into the British encampment to our sorrow, for we had no plan save that of following our horses, and it was not until we were come within sight of the village, having met neither man, woman nor child on our way, that Pierre said, shrugging his shoulders and waving his hands as he ran swiftly ahead to turn and face us:

"Are you members of the Minute-Boy company intent on blundering into the very midst of our Lord Cornwallis's army without knowing what it is you count on doing?"

"We count on finding our horses!" Saul exclaimed, sturdily striving to push little Frenchie aside, but failing because the lad stood firm.

"Ay, that is your desire, my dear friend; but tell me how you would compass it? By pressing on in sulky fashion and telling every red-coated soldier you meet that you are here to force the British troops into giving up your property?"

Both Saul and I came to a sudden halt, astonished by the quick change in Pierre's manner, for now his voice was filled with scorn, and one might have said he was chiding us as an elder chides a child.

"There is little need of telling why we have come," I replied, impatient because the lad would thus delay us. "Surely we may wander at will through the town of York."

"In New Orleans I have been among soldiers who were encamped and did not find it possible to wander at will," Pierre said, again shrugging his shoulders in that peculiar manner which set my nerves atingling. "It will be strange indeed if my Lord Cornwallis allows the rabble to enter his lines at pleasure."

"Rabble?" Saul cried in anger. "Do you call us of Hamilton plantation a rabble?"

"I am not the one who would thus misname you," and Pierre held out his hands deprecatingly; "but unless I am much mistaken in these red-coated followers of the king, they will give even worse names to those who are suspected of being friendly to the Cause which the colonists have thus far upheld so nobly. It might be, mayhap, that if you were of the rabble you would be permitted to enter the enemy's lines simply because of your curiosity; but I doubt me much whether a Minute Boy would be allowed to inspect the encampment lest he give information to General Lafayette."

"We are not known as Minute Boys!" Saul cried fiercely, striving to wave Pierre aside, but the little Frenchie held his ground as he said with a peculiar laugh:

"Ay, but you are known as worse, my lad; you are known as coming from the Hamilton plantation--from a place which General Cornwallis and Colonel Simcoe have set down as a nest of rebels, otherwise they would not have made such a wholesale seizure of horse-flesh without having given some notice. Once let you be recognized, and I question whether you may not have some trouble to return at will."

"Who knows--" Saul began, and then stopped abruptly because, as I understood full well, he realized that Horry Sims was somewhere nearabout York Town, perhaps within the British encampment, and he must have stood fairly well with a certain portion of Simcoe's Rangers after giving such information as he did concerning the Hamilton plantation.

If we were seen loitering about the works, it was certain Horry would point us out as having a leaning toward the Cause. As much as this last did he know for a fact, because many a time since General Cornwallis had come into Virginia had we lads discussed the situation, when neither Saul nor I were backward in saying that it would give us greatest pleasure if we were of age to be taken into the ranks of the American army as soldiers.

"Perhaps you who have seen so much of military encampments can tell us what we ought to do," Saul said sneeringly, and a deep flush came over Pierre's face as he understood the meaning of my cousin's tone; but like the true little comrade that he was, he gave due heed to the grief in Saul's heart and seemingly paid no attention to the sneer, as he replied in a friendly tone:

"I am not setting myself up as having more of wisdom than either you or Fitz; but I truly believe it is within my power to give good advice to two lads who are yet so angry as to have lost sight of prudence. You have due reason to believe that Horry Sims, who has already this morning done you grievous wrong, is in York Town, and if there was enough of vileness in his heart for him to point out to those soldiers of the king your horses that he might strike a heavy blow, then would he do yet worse on seeing you within the encampment. I have never met the lad but once. He has no cause for enmity against me; I am so poor in this world's goods that it is beyond his power to deprive me of anything save liberty, and on seeing me alone I dare venture to say he would have no thought that I might have been your comrade this morning; but--"

"Yet he knows that you and your mother are guests at the Hamilton plantation," Saul added sharply.

"My mother and I are French, who have lately come from New Orleans, and he can not point us out as having said a

word of disrespect against the king."

For my part it was needless for Pierre to argue. I had come to understand before he was done with speaking that it would be better for him to reconnoitre the ground; that he could learn as much, if not more, than the three of us, meanwhile running comparatively no risk, and when Saul would have argued I cried out impatiently:

"Can you not see that it is better Pierre go alone? Do you not realize that, however eager we may be, it is not possible we could gain possession of the horses within any very short time, and all we are needing now is to know where they are quartered? Let Pierre do as he suggests, and learn so much as he can. Then, when we are minded to venture our heads within the lion's jaws, it will seemingly be the first visit to the town of York instead of the second. Thereby shall we stand less risk of being suspected of an intent to do harm."

Saul soon gave way, although he was burning to venture so far as might be possible inside the British lines, because running into real danger was as a balm to his heart while he yet smarted under the loss of his mare.

Therefore it was I told little Frenchie to go his way, taking due care to his own safety, and endeavor to find out where the stolen horses had been quartered, pressing upon him, although there was no necessity of so doing, that we were more eager to learn where Silver Heels and Saul's mare were, than to know the whereabouts of the other horses.

"And do you poor lads believe it may be possible for you to wrest from the grasp of these red-coated soldiers that which they have laid hands upon?" Pierre asked in a tone of sadness, and I replied, striving in vain to repress the tone of irritation:

"We shall at least make an attempt, Pierre Laurens, even though there is little hope of success. I could not find it in my heart to remain idle while Silver Heels is in the possession of a Britisher, no matter how much of danger I might be sticking my nose into. Now go, and if so be your visit is vain, then will I take the chances myself, although I have come to believe with you, that Saul and I should not be seen loitering around the village this morning of all others, because it would easily be guessed why we had come."

Pierre made as if to speak, and then, most like realizing the uselessness of attempting, while we were in such angry frame of mind, to combat any plans we had formed, he turned on his heel and strode off in the direction of the town from whence we could hear now and then the beating of drums, the hum of voices, and noises which betokened the digging up of earth.

Saul had thrown himself face downward amid the bushes, striving, as I understood from the pain in my own heart, to prevent giving noisy token to his grief, and I was in no mood to exchange words with him, therefore we two lads lay concealed by the side of the road, giving no heed to what might happen to our disadvantage; but dwelling only upon the loss which had come to us.

To some it may seem veriest folly that we should so mourn over the loss of our horses; but let him who laughs once have companionship with such a colt as Silver Heels, as I have had, and then if he can have mirth in his heart when she has been taken away from him, most like to be abused as are horses in the army, then will I say that he has not within him the instincts of a true man.

Silver Heels had come to know me as I knew her; at my faintest call she would gallop to my side however tempting the grass when she was hungry, and no dumb animal could have given greater proof of joy at being with me, than did she time and time again when we scampered here or there, bent only on pleasure.

I could not have said how long little Frenchie remained absent, for neither Saul nor I took heed to the passage of time as we lay there amid the foliage eating our hearts out with sorrow.

Certain it is, however, that the afternoon was well spent before we saw him coming up the road, and our surprise can well be imagined when we learned that he had with him as companion none other than Horry Sims.

"He has taken up with that snake of a Tory brood simply because of believing that those on the Sims plantation stand higher in favor with the red-coated soldiers than do we of the Hamilton plantation!" Saul cried angrily, and so incautiously loud that I pressed my hand over his mouth as I whispered in reproof:

"You have no right, Saul Ogden, to cast aught of discredit upon Pierre, even though you have known him so short a time. He has shown himself a good friend, and, to my satisfaction at least, has proved that he would not turn traitor, more especially when it might be simply to his own advantage."

Now little Frenchie knew full well where he had left us by the roadside, for I saw him mark the dead cottonwood tree 'neath the foot of which we were lying, and yet he went on his way past us, giving no heed, but talking busily, and, as it seemed, interestedly with Horry Sims.

I must admit that just for the instant there came into my heart a great fear lest that which Saul had said might be true, and then I thrust it from me, saying in my mind that I would not so wrong a lad who had all the marks of gentlemanly breeding. Surely, even though he might at some other time be willing to play us false, he would not do so while we were in such deep sorrow.

"If he is playing fair with us, why should he at this minute be hand in glove with that Tory scoundrel?" Saul whispered hoarsely, as he sat up to gaze after the two who were walking rapidly down the road in the direction of our home. "Why did he not have speech with us? Surely he knows where we are."

"To have spoken when he passed would have been to tell Horry Sims that we were lying in hiding while he went into York Town to pick up such information as might be possible. The chances are the lad met the young Tory--came across him by accident, of course, and could do no less than show a friendly front, unless he was minded to much the same as tell him we were counting on making reprisals because of the loss of our horses."

Although this was the reasonable, and, to my mind, the only explanation of little Frenchie's behavior, Saul would not at first admit it; but insisted that there must be treachery somewhere else than in Horry Sims's heart, and thus he argued until I verily believe he convinced himself that our little comrade from New Orleans could have done no different. Then came the question as to whether we should remain where we were, or start homeward, for now it was too late for us to make any venture into the town of York even though we had been so minded.

Saul was for pushing on hurriedly, and, overtaking the young Tory, flog him within an inch of his life. It was all I could do to hold him back sufficiently long to repeat again and again that a flogging was all too poor a punishment for the crime he had committed, and that if we should lay hand against him now we might, and very likely would, put a stumbling block in our way, for until the moment came when we could repay the debt in full, it was absolutely necessary we seem to hold ourselves friendly with this fellow who had dealt us such a cruel blow.

I forced Saul to listen to me so long that it would have been useless to set out in pursuit, and after that again came the question as to whether we ought to go on our way homeward, or wait where we were.

It was fortunate we spent so much time in such discussion; fortunate that Saul differed from me as to what we had best do, for while we lay there disputing we heard a crashing of the underbrush where the growth was thick, and a moment later little Frenchie, looking heated and so nearly breathless that for a full minute he could not speak so we might understand, came into view.

Panting, and with the perspiration streaming down his face, he threw himself headlong on the ground beside me, breathing like one who had been running a race, until it was possible to have control over his voice, when he said hurriedly, as if eager we should understand all the reasons for his movements without loss of time:

"I was forced to go a certain distance with that young villain, else would he have mistrusted that you might be near about."

"How did you get rid of him?" I asked. "Why might he not suspect something when you broke away instead of continuing on so far as his home, which lay directly in your path, if you were heading for the Hamilton plantation?"

"I made out that I knew of a short way through the woods, which would take me directly out of his path, and when we were come to that trail which leads off toward the York river I left him, although he was mightily surprised at hearing that such a course would bring me to your home more directly than if I continued on the road."

"Where did you pick him up?" Saul asked impatiently. "Why did you waste time on the scoundrel? It would seem to me that after all he has done it was your business to flog, rather than make friends with him."

By this time Pierre had so far recovered his breath that it was possible for him to speak distinctly, and without undue effort. Rising to his feet and shrugging his shoulders as he spread his hands palm outward, he said in his mild voice, and with that peculiar accent:

"To have done so, my friend, would have been to show myself an enemy to you. While I was striving to make my way inside the British lines, pretending that I was simply bent on curiosity, he came up, seemingly having a right of way everywhere within the encampment, and when he greeted me civilly, evidently wondering why I was there alone, I could do no less than treat him as I would have done yesterday, in the hope that something might drop from his lips which would aid me in my search."

"And did it?" I asked eagerly, for now I began to understand that by bearing himself friendly toward Horry Sims, Pierre had succeeded where otherwise the chances were he must have failed.

"Indeed it did," the lad said in a tone of triumph. "It was far better than if I had indulged in a game of fisticuffs with him,

because his red-coated friends would speedily have come to his relief."

"What did you learn?" Saul demanded fiercely.

"Where your mare and Fitzroy's Silver Heels are stabled," was the quiet reply, whereupon I sprang up as if within my body was a stout steel spring which had lately been released.

"You learned where they were stabled?" I cried excitedly.

"Ay, that I did," Pierre replied with a shrug of the shoulders, "and without any great labor, for Horry Sims led me at once, and meeting with no interference from the soldiers, to where all the horses which had been taken from the Hamilton plantation were quartered, showing them to me as if it caused him great pain in the heart because such an injury had been done a neighbor."

"What did he say about it?" Saul demanded.

"He told me that he was walking along bent only on coming into that town of York in order to see the British encampment, when a squad of Rangers rode past him leading your mare and Fitzroy's Silver Heels. Then I asked if he had no suspicion such a thing might have been thought upon by the Britishers, and he replied that until he was come this time to York Town he had never seen the Rangers. In fact, had not believed they were with my Lord Cornwallis's army, all of which went to prove that he, the snakey Tory, told the red-coated soldiers where they might find the largest and best supply of saddle beasts."

"Did he explain how it chanced he could wander at will inside the encampment, and also take with him a companion?" I asked.

"He told me he had come upon a lieutenant of Tarleton's Legion, who, when Cornwallis was in James Town, had been quartered at the Sims plantation, and that this officer had made the way plain for him, saying he might visit the encampment at will."

If there had been any question in our minds up to this time as to the guilt of Horry Sims, no doubt now remained. We knew, because of having seen the scoundrel, that he had had speech with Simcoe's Rangers before the horses were seized, and his story that one of Tarleton's officers had been quartered at the Sims plantation during Cornwallis's short stay in James Town I knew to be absolutely false. He had played the traitor deliberately, and as the price of his treachery gained admission to the encampment, most like vouched for by the officer who had met him on the road that morning.

"The hope is," Pierre said after a short pause and with that indescribable gesture, "that the Tory Horry will not suspect I took the trail to York river for any other purpose than that of gaining the Hamilton plantation as quickly as might be."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because it is not well he should know I have been in your company this day, else he might suspect that we know of his treachery. It is in my mind that we must keep him to the belief that we know nothing whatsoever concerning his misdeeds of this day."

"But how can we come at the scoundrel save he does know that same thing?" Saul cried, he ever being hot-headed and not inclined to listen to any plans or arguments when he was burning for revenge, or excited by the desire for pleasure.

"I have in mind," Pierre said, waving his hands in that odd fashion, "that which I believe will give the Tory lad into our keeping, where we may do by him without fear of interference--"

"What is it?" I asked eagerly, for all that time we had been awaiting the lad's return from the town of York I had turned over and over in my mind without avail, plans for laying the Tory villain by the heels.

"It may not be that I shall explain everything now," little Frenchie said as he shrugged his shoulders, "and for the very reason that it is not as yet plain in my own mind. I have a plan which, if it can be worked out, will not only give him to our hands; but also gain possession of at least the mare and Silver Heels despite the fact that they are within the British encampment."

CHAPTER III

UNCLE 'RASMUS'S ADVICE

Plead though I might, little Frenchie would give us no hint as to the plan of which he had spoken; but when we were on our homeward way, walking well within the cover of the foliage lest we inadvertently come upon Horry Sims, he turned the conversation upon such of the fortifications of the town of York as he had seen, and both by his tone and by his manner did I understand that he would give us no inkling whatsoever of that which he had in mind concerning Silver Heels and Saul's mare.

The lad must have seen more of military movements than we had fancied, for he knew full well all the names of the different kinds of fortification, and could explain their construction, speaking at times almost as a veteran soldier might have spoken.

Although Saul and I knew nothing whatsoever concerning such matters, we understood from Pierre's speech that he had not only taken note of each half-completed redoubt or bastion; but knew full well what part each might be called to play in the defences of the town, if so be our American army made an attack.

He told us that the British line extended on an irregular course from the river to the sloping grounds in the rear of the village near what is known as the Pigeon Quarter, and was seemingly intended, when completed, to entirely surround York Town. Across the peninsula of Gloucester and just in the rear of that settlement, he said that another line of entrenchments was being thrown up.

From what he had seen of the completed work, as well as that which was half finished, or but just begun, he announced that there would be seven redoubts and six batteries on the land side, all to be connected by entrenchments, and that on the river bank preparations were making for a line of batteries, the largest, or grand battery, being near the church.

As for outworks, Pierre said there would be three redoubts on the margin of the ravine to the southwest of the town, another a little eastward of the road to Hampton, two on the extreme right near the river, and the Fusileer's redoubt on the left.

He also told us that my Lord Cornwallis had made his headquarters at Governor Nelson's house, for it can well be understood that our governor of Virginia, noted for more than a leaning toward the cause of liberty, would not remain within the limits of York Town, or anywhere that it was likely the Britishers could get hold of him, while General Cornwallis was occupying this portion of our state of Virginia.

More than this: Little Frenchie in his quiet way had learned that my Lord Cornwallis's army numbered nearabout seven thousand men, meaning that such number of British troops were encamped either at Gloucester or in the town of York.

When I questioned him as to how he had gathered all this information, which it seemed to me none save an adroit man might gain, he put me off with a laugh, declaring that while Englishmen and Frenchmen were natural enemies, these red-coated soldiers seemed to take an especial liking for a small French boy who had lived no nearer France than New Orleans.

It came into my mind more than once that mayhap Pierre had found even among the king's troops an old friend, improbable though this possibility might be; but if such was the case the lad never admitted it, and to this day it is impossible for me to say how he learned so much concerning York Town and the enemy who occupied it, in that one visit of four or five hours.

The pain in my heart caused by the theft of Silver Heels was in no degree lessened as we journeyed on, now listening to what little Frenchie had to say regarding the situation of affairs at York Town, and again, either Saul or I breaking out in some wild plan for regaining possession of our horses, which, if put into execution, would have led to our arrest, if not to our death.

Then we were arrived home, and although I might have expected it, I was thoroughly surprised at finding everything in confusion. The greatest excitement prevailed everywhere among the people, and work was seemingly at a stand-still.

As a matter of course, my father was not at home, he being with the American army somewhere in the North, and I wondered much that Dalton, the overseer, had not set matters straight, for many hours had elapsed since the visit of the red-coated thieves.

Uncle 'Rasmus was the only one among the slaves or the servants who appeared to have regained possession of his senses, and he was sitting in the stable-yard as I had seen him almost every day of my life when the sun was shining,

meditatively chewing a straw and looking straight ahead as if he could see in the distance that which was not visible to other eyes.

The old fellow was apparently unmoved by the bustle and confusion everywhere around him, and I, certain of finding in him a sympathizer, went to speak with him even before visiting my mother.

"Are all the horses gone, Uncle 'Rasmus?" I asked, seating myself by his side, while Saul and Pierre followed my example.

"All de saddle hosses, chile. De Britishers done took ebery las' hoof dat was wuff takin'."

"And Silver Heels with them," I said in a tearful voice.

"Yes, chile, Silber Heels is wid de res'. I kind'er 'lowed it was gwine ter break your heart, honey, but dere was nuffin' ole 'Rasmus could do to stop it, kase it seemed like dis yere stable-yard was plum full ob red-coats, all ob 'em swearin' an' laughin', till it seemed like dey was jes' achin' to 'buse some ob us niggers scandalous, an' I 'low dey would, ef we'd giben 'em de least little word ob back talk."

"Do you know who sent them here, Uncle 'Rasmus?" Saul asked suddenly, and the old negro nodded his head as he replied:

"I'se done gone hab my 'spicions, chile. Dere's plenty ob plantations nearer de town ob York dan dis yere, an' yet 'cordin' to what I heard de sogermen say, dey haben't been anywhere else yet. So I was 'lowin' dat some ob de folks 'roun' here, dem as claim to hab a mighty big love for us, set 'em on."

"Can't you guess who it was, Uncle 'Rasmus?" Saul continued, and the old man replied in a dreamy tone:

"I done hab my 'spicions; but in dese yere times when you don' know who's your friend more'n half de time, dere ain' any sense in talkin' right out what you'se tinkin'. I'se 'lowin' I can guess who set de red-coats aflame."

"You couldn't guess in a week," Saul interrupted, "because you're thinking it might be some one of the planters, like Master Sims, instead of which it was that worthless son of his--Horry."

Watching Uncle 'Rasmus closely, I fancied that this information was not new to him, and straightway fell awondering how it was that this old negro who seldom strayed out of the stable-yard, let alone going away from the plantation, should have an inkling of what might be done so far away as the Sims place.

"Pierre has been to York Town, Uncle 'Rasmus, and he knows where Silver Heels and Saul's mare are quartered."

"An' is dat all he knows, chile?"

"It strikes me that's finding out considerable in one day," and then I explained how it was little Frenchie was able to move about York Town as he had, after which Uncle 'Rasmus asked in a hopeful tone:

"Did he fin' out, chile, which ossifer was gwine to ride Silber Heels, an' which one laid his mark on Saul's mare?"

As a matter of course Pierre could not give the information; but he explained with great minuteness where the horses were stabled, and I was impatient with him because of wasting so many words when it could do no good.

Much to my surprise Uncle 'Rasmus drank it all in, and when little Frenchie had come to an end of his overly long story the old negro said, taking the straw from his mouth and holding it in the air as if to ascertain from which direction came the wind:

"I reckon I'se 'bleeged to be goin', chillun. For an ole man like Uncle 'Rasmus it's quite a journey from here to de town ob York, an' ef I counts on doin' it 'twixt now an' sunrise, I'd better get my ole legs amovin'."

"York Town, Uncle 'Rasmus?" I cried in surprise, and well I might, for within the past three years I had never seen the old negro go as far from the house as the cotton fields.

"Dat's what I said, chile, an' I'se 'bleeged to be amovin'."

"But why are you going there, Uncle 'Rasmus?" I cried, catching him by the arm to insure his attention, and he replied dreamily, but, as it seemed to me, with a certain air of decision:

"I 'low it's time I was lookin' arter Marse Hamilton's house down yander, whar ole Mary libed when he done set her free."

"There's no need of your looking after that old shanty, Uncle 'Rasmus," I cried. "Surely father gives no heed to it now;

it isn't worth half a dozen shillings, except for firewood."

"I know dat, honey; I'se done foun' all dat out, but sumfin's tellin' me dat it's time I was lookin' arter Marse Hamilton's property what's been lef dere in de town ob York, whar de Britishers am rampagin' an' rarin' 'roun' like dey was gone crazy."

"But you'll starve to death there, Uncle 'Rasmus. I don't fancy there are very many of old Mary's goods left in the hovel, for if I remember rightly young Dinah laid claim to the greater portion, and how will you get along for something to eat?"

"I was kind'er 'lowin', chile, as how you an' Saul, an' maybe little Pierre as you call him, would tend out on de ole man, des enough to fetch now an' den what he was needin' to hol' de soul in his body."

"But if, as Pierre says, the British entrenchments run back of the town as far as the Pigeon Quarter, then old Mary's cabin must be inside, and how would we be able to get through the lines?"

"Well, chile, I ain' got any great lub for de Britishers; but I'se 'lowin' dey ain' so hard-hearted as to hold out a couple ob chillun what wanted to feed a pore ole nigger. It kind'er seems as if dey'd be 'shamed to let your Uncle 'Rasmus starbe, eben ef he is no 'count kase ob bein' so ole, specially ef all dey'd hab to do to keep him erlong, was to let a couple or three chillun in de lines."

It was all blind to me, this sudden whim of Uncle 'Rasmus to take up his quarters in old Mary's cabin, which was hardly more than the veriest shanty, and while I stood looking at the old man, trying to get some glimmer of truth out of what was fast becoming a mystery, little Frenchie's face lighted up wondrously, as he leaped forward, seizing the old darkey by both hands while he cried joyously:

"It's a great plan, Uncle 'Rasmus, it's a great plan! I'll go with you a good part of the way so's to help along, for of course you count on carrying something."

"I spects I'se boun' to hab a blanket, chile, an' sumfin in de way ob food, kase I ain' sich a foolish ole nigger as to tink I could get trou a sogerman's lines in de night, an' so I'll be needin' sumfin for a bed ef nothin' more."

"But if you are foolish enough to go to York Town, what's the sense of starting to-night? Why not wait till morning? You say yourself you don't expect to get through the lines after dark, therefore why sleep on the ground when you could stay here in comfortable quarters?" Saul cried, whereupon Pierre, turning from Uncle 'Rasmus, said to the lad:

"Can't you understand that this old negro is paving a way for you and Fitz to get at your horses?"

"I may be a thick-head; but I surely can't see how taking up his quarters in old Mary's cabin, where we've got to carry food to him every day or two, is helping us along very fast," Saul cried angrily, and little Frenchie, throwing back his shoulders, laughed heartily, finding something so comical in Saul's words that it was a full minute before he could make reply.

Then he said, his voice all atremble with mirth:

"Don't you see that Uncle 'Rasmus is making a reasonable excuse for you to go into the town of York every day, if so be you're minded? Can't you understand that once he's in old Mary's cabin there's good reason why we should spend the night with him now and then? Suppose we carried Uncle 'Rasmus food three days running, it would become necessary to explain that the old man had been intending to come out to the plantation; but since we had lost our horses we were forced to feed him as best we might, because he was too feeble to walk home. Can't you also see," Pierre continued eagerly, "why the old man wants to get there in the night? He counts on sneaking through the lines, instead of meekly lying down on the ground, as he has said, and intends, if so be it is possible, to get into old Mary's cabin without making known to the Britishers that he has just come into the village; but rather counts on letting it be understood that he has been there ever since they entered the town."

"It's amazin' how some ob dese yere chillun can pick up an idee what oder folks am tryin' to hide," Uncle 'Rasmus said as he patted little Frenchie on the head, and then hobbled toward his cabin as if he was so feeble that only with the greatest exertion could he drag one foot after another.

Surely I was thick-headed on that afternoon, for even after Pierre had made full explanation of Uncle 'Rasmus's intended movements, it was a good five minutes before the whole scheme came plain in my mind, and then I realized that this old negro of ours was about to do more toward regaining possession of Silver Heels, if indeed she ever did come into my possession again, than all of us lads with our noisy talk.

He would take up his abode in the town of York, sneaking through the lines, if so be it was possible, to the end that the

British might not know he had just come in from the outside, and once there the way was open for all three of us lads to wander at least so far through the town as old Mary's cottage. It would be strange indeed, after the red-coats were accustomed to seeing us come and go, for there could be no question but that we would get permission to minister to the poor old negro, if we could not venture further and further inside the lines until, should fortune favor us, we might be able to go whithersoever we desired.

At all events, with Uncle 'Rasmus dwelling in the town--with Uncle 'Rasmus ill and needing our attention, we would be enabled to spend our time in York without arousing even the suspicions of that miserable snake whom people call Horry Sims.

Of course, so far as the little scoundrel was concerned, he might well wonder how it chanced that Uncle 'Rasmus had gone into the town of York, for whenever any of the lads had come around the Hamilton plantation they had been accustomed to seeing the old negro sitting in his favorite place in the stable-yard; but I could see now as the scheme came home to me, that it would be possible, in case Horry Sims made inquiries, to let it be understood that Uncle 'Rasmus had gone there some days before my Lord Cornwallis's army entered the town, being stricken so ill he could not be safely moved.

In fact, I saw nothing but brightness in the future, and all through this old negro whom I had seen sitting in the stable-yard chewing straw day after day until he had come to seem much like one of the dogs or the horses, having no mind of his own; but implicitly obeying the will of his master.

Having come to fully understand all of benefit which might accrue to us in this move of Uncle 'Rasmus, I would have aided the old negro to the best of my ability, and insisted that he wait until I go to this plantation or that where I might borrow a horse to carry him; but he would have none of it.

He was bent on entering the town of York in his own way, and alone. The only assistance he would agree to, was that we might carry his blankets and scanty store of provisions a certain portion of the distance, and when I would have insisted on bringing out some delicacies from the house, he positively refused to accept them, whereupon I urged almost angrily to be allowed to do as I pleased, until little Frenchie, whose head is ever clear, said to me laughingly:

"Can't you understand, you thick-headed Fitz, that it would be strange if Uncle 'Rasmus was disabled in old Mary's cabin with all sorts of delicacies in the way of food? If the Britishers should grow suspicious and look into the matter, wouldn't they think it odd the old man had been allowed to remain in that hovel while there were yet horses in the stables of the Hamilton plantation to bring him back where he belonged?"

Surely there was good reason why I should be called thick-headed, for this was not the only time since morning that I had shown myself to be a stupid; yet I was not so simple but I could readily understand that even though we might have the advantage of being able to go and come from the town of York to the plantation at will, we would not be so far advanced toward the recovery of the stolen horses as to be able to say that our work was in a fair way of being performed.

It was one thing, and I grant you an important one, to enter the town without giving rise to suspicions; but quite another and more serious to take from the quarters of the British army horses which would be guarded by soldiers, and get away with them through the lines of sentinels out over the entrenchments.

"Then this Minute-Boy business that you talked about Fitz, is to be dropped?" Saul asked a few moments after Uncle 'Rasmus had left us, and I turned upon him in astonishment, whereupon he, reading the question which must have been plainly written on my face, added:

"It would seem as if we were turning all our attention to getting back the mare and Silver Heels, in which case, as a matter of course, there can be no other work for us. If we should be so fortunate as to succeed, it would become necessary to scurry out of this part of the country, lest my Lord Cornwallis lay us by the heels, for I suppose they would set it down as stealing if we should reclaim our own."

"And why might it not be that you would continue the work of Minute Boys, even while striving to get back the horses which were taken from you?" little Frenchie asked as if in wonderment. "It is not to be supposed we can go into the town of York, and, without delay, take from the stables where Simcoe's Rangers keep their horses, two of the best; but many days will pass, yea *must* pass, before the work can be accomplished. In the meanwhile, if we are free to go in and out of the town, why might it not be possible for us to carry much of information to the Americans? It would seem as if our work as Minute Boys was but just beginning."

"What between your plans and those of Uncle 'Rasmus's, I confess to being thoroughly mixed," Saul muttered impatiently. "In the first place, even though you deem it of so much importance, I fail to see how being able to go in and

out of the town will add to the possibility of getting our horses. Unless I am much mistaken in regard to military matters, it will not be a simple affair to steal either the mare or Silver Heels from the soldiers. Then, if we are bending all our efforts to that one purpose, how are we to serve the colony? What we could learn in the town of York that would be of importance to the Americans, passes my understanding."

"We shall see," Pierre said laughingly, with a shrug of the shoulders and a wave of his hand. "It shall be for a little French boy from New Orleans, who never saw the land where his father and mother were born, to teach you Virginians how it may be possible to bear a hand in this business, which is like to grow exceeding warm when our French general closes in on Cornwallis's army, for now has come the time to hold the king's men as a strong man holds a child in his grasp, if so be your General Washington is minded to give him the authority."

"To hear you talk, Pierre, one might suppose you had served with soldiers all your short life," Saul cried irritably, and again little Frenchie laughed as he replied:

"My father was a soldier, and fought bravely. I have heard him and his comrades conversing; I have seen them draw plans for a campaign, and discuss the strength of fortifications, until it seemed to me, even though I have had no experience in such matters, that I knew much concerning them."

Then the conversation ceased, Saul seemingly giving himself up to a sulky mood, while I had so much food for reflection with dwelling upon what we might do and the possibilities of running our necks into a British noose, that I was not minded to give play to my tongue.

Uncle 'Rasmus remained within his cabin a good half hour, while we lads awaited him, having no inclination to meet our mothers just at this time lest we be ordered to keep within the bounds of the plantation, and thereby prevented from carrying out our plans, foolhardy though they might be.

When the old negro did appear among us again he was ready for the journey; that is to say, he had with him two blankets and a small bundle, or package, which I doubted not contained the store of food he was minded to carry with him to York Town. In addition to this outfit I noticed that he had his heaviest cane, which was fashioned with a handle much like a crutch, and I dimly wondered, hardly knowing that I did so, whether he had taken this particular stick just at this time as a weapon, or simply to guide his faltering steps.

"I reckon I'se done put ole 'Rasmus's business on dis yere plantation in shape, an' now, chillun, I'se gwine ter be moseyin' erlong, an' ef you'se countin' to help de ole man, it won't be out ob de way ef yer carry dese yere blankets an' de little bundle, kase I ain' been much used to totin' stuff dese las' years."

"Of course we're going to help you, Uncle 'Rasmus," I said quickly, taking the blankets from his hands. "We count on keeping right by your side from here until you come within sight of the town of York."

"I'se 'lowin', chile, dat our roads don' come together till we get to a dead cottonwood tree, whar you say you an' Saul lay hid while de little French boy went on inter de town."

"But which way are you going, Uncle?" Saul cried. "There's no other road than the nearest course from here to York."

"I'se 'lowin' your ole Uncle 'Rasmus knows better'n dat," he cried. "He's libed on dis yere plantation nigh to forty years, an' it would seem kind'er strange ef he didn't know all de rabbit an' de coon paths trou dis yere growth. Ef it won't tucker you chillun out to carry de blankets an' de bundle, an' leabe 'em at de ole cottonwood, I'll get 'em 'twixt now an' mornin'. Ef so be you'se feelin' kind'er trubbled 'bout de ole man, come to see him wheneber you gets ready. He's gwine ter be right dar in ole Mary's cabin, sure's you're bawn."

It was a surprise to me that Uncle 'Rasmus should be able to find his way anywhere between the two rivers, for I hardly remembered of seeing him stray from the bounds of the plantation; but certain it was, at least to my mind, that he should go his gait, for now had we come to put all our dependence upon him, so far as making any move toward recovering the stolen horses was concerned.

In fact it now began to seem to me, so far as proving ourselves Minute Boys, that unless we could get within the British entrenchments we could do naught of good for those men who, I doubted not, were slowly making their way toward the town of York to hold my Lord Cornwallis prisoner until the time should come when they might lay their hands heavily upon him.

Thus it was that Uncle 'Rasmus went off by himself, going down past the line of grape-vines across the creek, as I supposed, while we three struck out along the road until we had traveled perhaps a quarter of a mile, when little Frenchie suddenly halted and said as he turned upon us:

"Why is it that all three shall travel twelve miles or more this day, and repeat the same journey to-morrow forenoon?"

"You know why it is," Saul cried angrily. "You claimed to understand all that Uncle 'Rasmus had in his crazy head."

"I did understand, and it is because of seeing what we may do with his help, I am asking why the three of us should go from here to York and back this night, simply to retrace our steps to-morrow morning?"

"What else may we do?" I asked impatiently.

"Two might go on with the blankets and the bundle, and, arriving at the dead cottonwood, remain there all night, while the third, staying behind now, can set off from the plantation at break of day, bringing with him such an amount of food as will explain why we wish to visit old Mary's cabin."

"Then those who went on to-night would sleep on the ground, whereas the one who remained here would take his rest in bed," Saul said grimly, and with that shrug of the shoulders which sometimes irritated and sometimes pleased me, Pierre replied:

"Yes, that is true, and if you have not yet slept on the ground, you could be the one to stay here. It makes no difference which two of us go on; but it seems important that one remain here in order to bring fresh food in the morning, thus making a pretext for entering the British lines."

I was not so thick-headed but that I could understand what the lad was driving at and straightway said to Saul:

"Suppose you go back home? Make such excuses for Pierre and me as seems to you best. Perhaps it would be as well if you confided our secret in mother, for we must have some one on the plantation who will work with us, else we shall not be able to get provisions in sufficient quantity to keep all of us from hunger."

"And suppose she demands that you return, and I take her command to you?"

"She cannot call us back before to-morrow night in case only one stays on the plantation now," Pierre said, "and by that time we will have been able to get a look around the town--mayhap be so fortunate as to see some way by which we can work our will. At all events, it seems best that we do as I have said, although I am willing to fall in with whatsoever other plan you lads may propose."

"Turn you back, Saul. It is not well we should stand here quibbling about a trifle when there is a possibility that such sneaks as Horry Sims may come along and wonder why we are carrying blankets toward the town of York at this hour of the day."

I spoke impatiently because I was growing anxious, and had begun to fear that some one might come who would suspect that we were plotting mischief against the red-coated trespassers.

My cousin wheeled sharply around as if angry, and under other circumstances I would have held him back lest we part in unfriendly fashion; but at this moment there was so much of fear in my heart lest we be prevented from carrying out the half-formed plan, that I could not parley with my kinsman as I should have done. Rather was it a relief to me when he turned about to retrace his steps, and, clutching little Frenchie by the arm, I said curtly:

"Now step out, lad, and if so be we hear any one approaching either from the front or rear, it is for us to seek cover amid the foliage, even as rabbits do, for we must not be seen 'twixt now and the time we make ready to enter the town bearing provisions for Uncle 'Rasmus."

Pierre did as he was bidden, making no protest at my rough handling of him, and from that time until we were come to the dead cottonwood neither of us spoke. I fancy that his heart, like mine, was filled with forebodings of the future, and with questions as to whether he was not on a road which would lead to the gallows.

It was not yet dark when we arrived at our destination without having seen man or woman on the road, all of which caused me yet more anxiety, for I failed to understand why it was that on this day when the curious people of Virginia should have been going to and fro to see the king's soldiers, none save ourselves were abroad.

Pierre and I sought the same resting place as had Saul and I earlier in the day. The little French lad spread out the blankets as if making ready to spend the night, and I asked if he did not count on seeing Uncle 'Rasmus very soon, whereupon he said with a laugh and a shrug, that it made no difference to him when the old negro arrived at the rendezvous, although it would please him better did the old man come later rather than earlier; but he was intending to get what rest he could while he had at his command such an apology for a bed.

"We needn't expect him before midnight at the soonest," Pierre said as he nestled down on the blankets, motioning for me to follow his example, "and 'twixt now and then we may get a fairly good night's rest if we do not spend too much time in talking."

We were where it would be impossible for any passers-by on the highway to see us, unless peradventure they were so curiously inclined as to make their way through the underbrush, which was thick at this point, and I understood, as little Frenchie had intimated, that it was better for us to hold our peace, because the sound of our voices would carry far on the night air, and no one could say when such as Horry Sims might come sneaking around.

Excited and anxious though I was, slumber came to my eyelids within a very few moments after I had stretched myself out to rest, and I was all unconscious of what might be happening around me until a light pressure on my shoulder caused me to spring to a sitting posture very suddenly.

Then it was I could distinguish, even in the gloom of the night, Uncle 'Rasmus's form, and I cried out to know how long he had been there, whereupon the old negro put his hand upon my lips in token that I should speak with more of caution, whispering at the same time he aroused Pierre:

"I des come up, honey, an' can't 'ford to lose any mo' time. Yere po' ole uncle des hobbles 'roun' like er toad, an' it takes him a mighty long while to get ober much ob de groun'. I'se pow'ful sorry to 'sturb you chillun; but allow it's time for me to be toddlin' erlong, ef I counts on gettin' whar de Britishers are before sunrise. I'll be needin' dese yere blankets, and it sure am a pity to turn two likely babies out in de cold."

"Don't fret yourself about us, Uncle 'Rasmus," I said quickly, leaping to my feet, followed by Pierre.

Then we two lads rolled the blankets into as small a compass as possible, putting inside them the package of food, and fastening the whole upon the old man's shoulders according to his directions, in such a manner that it would not impede him in his movements.

"I'se surely gwine to 'spect you chillun 'fore anudder night-fall," the old man said after we had explained to him why Saul was not with us. "I clean forgot to tell ole Missey dat I was 'bleeged to go erway, an' am countin' on your doin' it, honey," he added, turning to me.

Before I could make reply the old man was striding off in the direction of the village, walking as spritely, so it seemed to me, as I myself might have done.

"Be careful, uncle! Don't run your woolly pate into danger when there's no necessity for it!" I cried after him, and back to me on the night air came the quavering voice:

"De ole fox allers looks arter hisself when de houn's are 'roun'; but it's de cubs what are mos' likely fo' to get inter trubble."

Then little Frenchie and I were alone. Standing within the shelter of the foliage at the foot of the dead cottonwood, and placing my hands on his shoulders, for just then I literally ached to come into close touch with a friend, I said, striving to hold my voice steady:

"It may be, Pierre, that Saul and I had no right to drag you into this mad scheme of ours, for even since Uncle 'Rasmus has set off does it come to me that it is reckless for us to risk our lives in the hope of getting back the horses. I have little faith that we shall be able to accomplish anything as Minute Boys, therefore we must set it down in all honesty to ourselves that we are pressing forward simply to recover that which has been stolen, and we have no right to lead you into danger."

"Do not think I am boasting, Fitz Hamilton," and Pierre shrugged his shoulders in a way that caused me to laugh despite the heaviness of my heart; "but yet there comes in upon me the thought that mayhap it is I, the French lad from New Orleans, who is dragging you and Saul, rather than that you are dragging him."

CHAPTER IV

THE TOWN OF YORK

I had not counted that it would be possible for us to indulge in slumber after Uncle 'Rasmus had carried off the blankets; but yet before he was well on his way toward the village both of us were wrapped in sleep as profound as even when our bed was softer.

Neither the thought of poor Silver Heels in the hands of a brutal British officer, nor the possibility that we might come to grief when, on the morrow, we ventured into the town of York, prevented me from gaining all the rest a lad needs, as may be judged by the fact that not until the sun was an hour high in the heavens, and Saul was shaking me into consciousness, did I have knowledge of my surroundings.

Then it was, with a feeling of shame, that I started to my feet, none the worse for having been stretched out so long on the bare ground; but deep down in my heart was a painful sense of having shown myself a child, by thus indulging in repose when others stood ready to aid in the task which should have been all my own.

"Have you lads given over going into the village this morning, that you sleep so late and so soundly?" Saul asked with a note of scorn in his tones, and I replied quickly, as if making apology for having been such a laggard:

"Even though we had risen as early as did you, it would not have been wise for us to go forward, yet I am free to admit that it might have been more seemly had we opened our eyes before sunrise."

"It is to my mind that we were wise to get all the sleep possible," little Frenchie said with a shrug of the shoulders. "A good soldier should be able to sleep anywhere and at any time, and it is his duty to take advantage of every opportunity to rest, in order that he may be the better able to undergo fatigue when it becomes necessary."

"But you are not a soldier," Saul said sharply, as if offended by the words; but Pierre, nothing daunted, replied cheerily:

"Yet am I in a fair way to be one, having enrolled myself as a Minute Boy. I am much the same as an apprentice, according to my way of thinking, and, being so, should copy after my elders--"

"Meaning that you ought to sleep like a laggard until the sun is high in the heavens?" Saul cried and I, growing irritated because he persisted in harping upon our indolence, said, speaking quite as sharply as had he:

"We have done no harm by being laggards. I would like for you to explain how we might have been advantaged by awakening at daybreak and sitting here waiting for you to come? It seems to me just as well that we should sleep, as sit around twiddling our thumbs."

"I was astir a full hour before daybreak, attending to the work set me, else I would not be here thus early, ready to make the venture as agreed upon."

One might have fancied Saul was eager to be praised for his early rising, and I might have said something calculated to irritate him, but that Pierre cried with a laugh:

"So you were, my brave Minute Boy; but remember that most like you crawled into bed a good two hours before Fitz and I did, and it is also reasonable to suppose you were not awakened at midnight to give up your blankets."

This remark seemed to anger Saul instead of soothing him, and, fearing we might have then and there a wordy battle between the excitable little French boy and my quick tempered cousin, I broke in by saying:

"Look you here, lads, there is no reason why you should squabble as to who turned out of bed first this morning. That is over and done with, and it strikes me we had best look forward rather than backward. Did you speak with my mother, Saul?"

"Ay, that I did."

"And was she opposed to our going into York?"

"I would not be willing to say quite as much as that; but certain it is her heart was troubled sorely when I told her what we counted on doing. I believe of a verity if Uncle 'Rasmus had not already left the plantation, she would have set her face against it. As it is, knowing that now most like the old negro is housed up in the cabin, unless the Britishers, suspecting intended mischief, have given the poor fellow lodgings in a guard-house, she realizes that we can do no less than continue as we have begun, although her command is that we do not run our heads into danger

unnecessarily. She says it is foolish for us to venture our liberty, and perhaps our lives, in the effort to reclaim two horses, when it is possible to buy others that would serve us equally well."

"We could never find a colt that would be as dear to me as is Silver Heels," I interrupted hotly, all the grief which had come upon me the evening previous returning to my heart, and setting my pulse beating so loudly that it seemed as if the lads might hear the blood leaping through my veins.

"What did you bring in the way of provisions?" Frenchie asked, and his question reminded me that we had gone supperless to bed.

"Enough to keep us all from hunger a full week, I believe," Saul replied with an air of pride, as if he alone should have the credit, not only for bringing, but for providing, the supplies.

Then it was he opened the sack he carried, and displayed an ample store of cold boiled ham, corn-bread, fried hominy and fried ham, saying as he did so:

"If so be we are allowed to remain with Uncle 'Rasmus, some of us should be able to catch fish enough to add to this store until it will serve as a week's rations."

Pierre and I at once set about making a hearty meal, giving no heed to the possibility that we might come to short rations later, and even sulky Saul was not averse to joining us.

Before we had satisfied our hunger my cousin was in a more pleasant frame of mind and condescended to explain to us all that had been said and done on the plantation after we left. As nearly as I could make out it seemed that my mother was willing we should go our own pace, although as a matter of course she, like any other woman, was frightened at the idea of our venturing among enemies, for surely with my father in the so-called rebel army, we could count that these red-coated gentry would be anything but friendly to those who came from the Hamilton plantation.

It heartened me wonderfully, if indeed I had needed heartening after remembering that poor little Silver Heels was awaiting my coming, to know that mother had not really set her face against what we would do, and I contented myself so far as was possible, by saying that we would let nothing stand in the way of carrying out the scheme that was afoot unless having become convinced that we were venturing on too dangerous ground.

When breakfast had been eaten and we had divided Saul's burden into two parcels for the more convenient carrying, came the question as to when we should make the attempt to gain speech with Uncle 'Rasmus in the old cabin.

Saul was for setting off at once, although the sun was no more than two hours' high, while Frenchie argued strongly that we should wait until the forenoon was half spent, when there would likely be many visitors in the village, and we would attract less attention than if we were the first comers.

This last seemed to me the wisest course, and despite Saul's grumbling, for he claimed that we were wilfully wasting time, even going so far as to hint that we were afraid to really make the trial, we remained within shelter of the foliage near by the dead cottonwood until, I should say ten o'clock in the forenoon.

"Are you ready now?" Saul cried impatiently, after having tried half a dozen times in vain to force us forward. "Will you make the venture now, or shall we turn back to the plantation, and say that our hearts failed us at the last moment?"

I looked at Pierre, who rose to his feet as if in answer to the question he saw in my eyes, and straightway we set off toward the town of York, little Frenchie insisting that we walk leisurely, as if having nothing of moment on our minds, and arguing that if we pressed forward at a rapid pace we might come upon those who would suspect we had some other aim than that of feeding an old slave.

I am free to confess that my heart beat much more rapidly than it should have done when we approached the guard stationed here and there at intervals along the entire line of entrenchments on which soldiers were working with pick and shovel.

Until that moment I had not questioned whether we might be allowed to enter the town; but now it seemed certain that whoever accosted us could read our purpose on our faces and mentally nerved myself either for disappointment or for disaster.

"Who shall do the talking?" Saul asked when we were come near to a battery in which the guns were already mounted although the entrenchments on either side were far from being completed, and I fancied the lad was eager to act as spokesman; but I dared not trust him because of his quick temper. Therefore it was I said, firmly believing I spoke the truth:

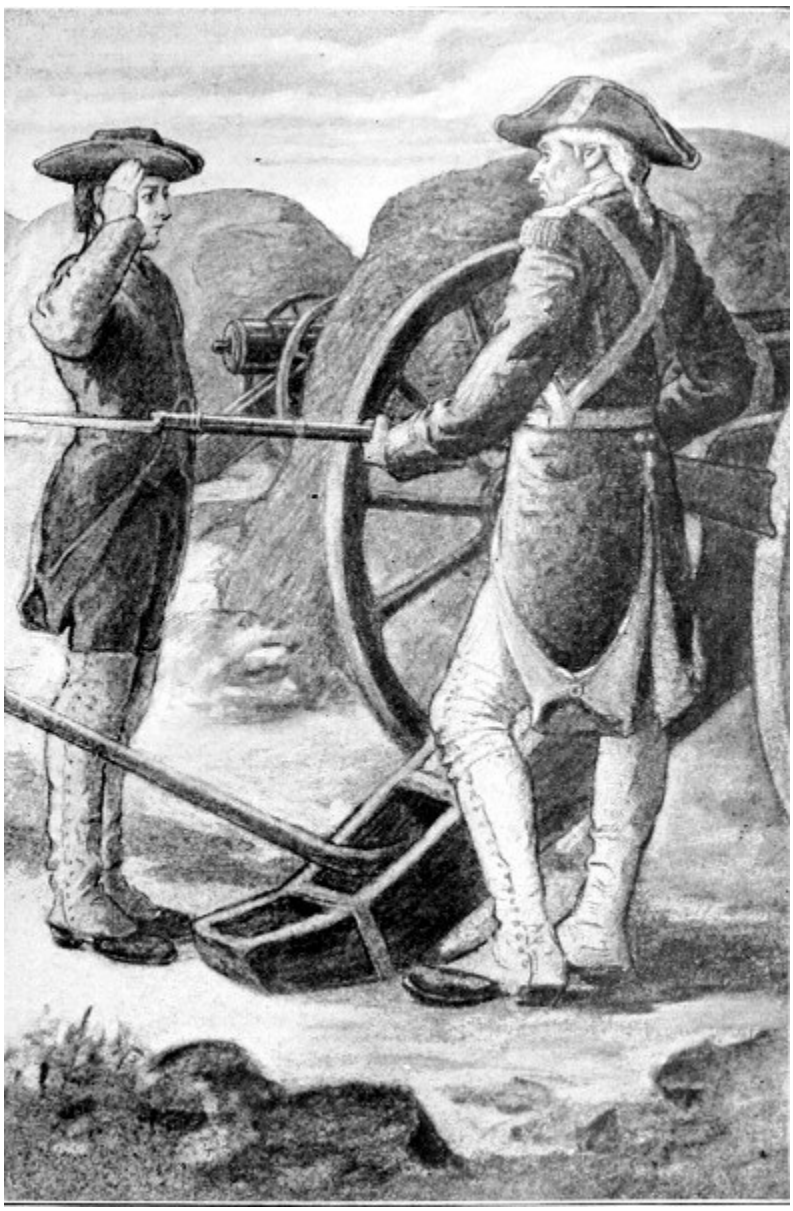
"Pierre is the one of us three who can best perform the part. If his tongue fails us, then can we make certain, Saul, that either you or I would have brought disaster. The lad has a quicker wit, knows far more about military encampments, although he boasts not, and can hold his temper in check."

I have an idea that my cousin was not well pleased at being thus put under the command, as you might say, of little Frenchie; but there was no time for him to have made protest even though he was so disposed, because we were come so near the outposts that all our conversation might have been heard by the red-coated soldier who paced to and fro with a bayonet on his musket, looking as if ready to spit or strike any of us rebels who dared approach him.

I believe none of us, except little Frenchie, could have worked the trick. He advanced within four or five paces of the sentinel, touched his hat in regular military salute, and asked if it might be possible for him to speak with the officer of the day.

This puzzled me not a little, for I had no idea whatsoever who the "officer of the day" might be, or what his duties; but it appeared that Pierre knew what he was about, for straightway the sentinel, seeming to understand that this little lad was familiar with military usages, called up the officer of the guard, and, without waiting to be questioned, Pierre addressed him, stating courteously but without too many words, that there was an old slave in the town whom we feared stood in need of food and care, therefore had we come to hunt him up.

When the officer asked where we counted on finding this slave, I had wit enough to step forward quickly and make reply, for Pierre, who had but little knowledge of the town of York, and none whatsoever as to the location of old Mary's cabin, could not have given answer.



"HE ... TOUCHED HIS HAT IN REGULAR MILITARY SALUTE."

The whole matter was far more simple than I had hoped for. Pierre's story was so straight, he was so exceeding courteous, and apparently so ready to tell everything about himself and us, that even the most suspicious person would have been disarmed, and within five minutes after requesting permission, we were allowed to pass the sentinel, with no limit set as to the time we might remain in the lines.

Saul, who I verily believed was disgruntled because little Frenchie had been allowed to act the part of leader, now took upon himself the command of our company by marching in advance, for he knew as well as did I where old Mary's cabin was located.

You may be certain we kept our ears and eyes wide open as we walked through the village toward the Pigeon Quarter, and I was greatly disappointed because our way did not lead us past where the horses of Simcoe's Rangers were stabled, although certain it is, it would have given me greatest pain to have seen Silver Heels roughly used.

There were many visitors in York on this forenoon; people from roundabout who had Tory inclinations, or who were ready to sell to the enemies of their country such of vegetables or farm produce as might bring them in a few shillings. A number from Gloucester who had been allowed to come across the river, and I even saw two lads whom I knew lived on Mobjack bay, roaming around with mouths wide open in astonishment at this vast encampment wherein, to their uneducated eyes, were soldiers enough to over-run all our colonies.

Squads of Britishers were marching here and there; officers lounged through the narrow streets, most like making their way to the entrenchments. From every direction could be heard sounds telling of pick and shovel, the shouts of teamsters as they hauled heavy guns into position, the beating of drums, the shrill cry of fifes, and, in fact, all that bustle, noise and confusion which I have since learned attends a military encampment.

As a matter of course we did not dare linger here or there, although very much was going on which it would have pleased me to observe; but we took good care to continue without hesitation toward the Pigeon Quarter, contenting ourselves with seeing what we might as we walked at a reasonably rapid pace.

Strange as it may seem, I had given no thought as to whether Uncle 'Rasmus had succeeded in entering the village during the night; but took it for granted that he must have done so, until we were come within a stone's throw of old Mary's cabin, and then it was as if my heart stood still, for there were many chances that the old negro might have been arrested while trying to pass the guard and we would find in the hovel a squad of red-coats waiting to make prisoners of those who presented themselves there.

I had so worked up my fears as to feel certain the moment had arrived when we were come to grief, that it was with difficulty I could check a cry of mingled relief and triumph on seeing Uncle 'Rasmus's black face at the window.

I had never thought there was anything of beauty in the old negro's features, and, as a matter of fact, wrinkled and black as it was, one might truly have said that at times it was almost repulsive, yet as I saw him then it was as if I had never looked upon anything more beautiful.

I ran hurriedly, excitedly, into the cabin, throwing myself into the old fellow's arms much as though welcoming him from the grave.

"Fo' de Lawd's sake, honey, wha's gettin' on to you so pow'ful bad?" the old man cried in surprise, for probably this was the first time in all my life when I had shown real affection for him. "Hab de Britishers bin cuttin' up 'roun' de plantation since I done lef'?"

"No; everything was quiet there when Saul set out this morning; but, oh, Uncle 'Rasmus! I had come to fancy you might have been taken prisoner, and that we were all in danger of being arrested for conspiring against the king."

"Ho, ho!" the old negro laughed. "Why, honey, you don' 'spects Uncle 'Rasmus is gwine ter git his brack head inter trubble arter all dese yere years, does yer?"

"But we knew you were counting on slipping through the lines, and if you'd been caught in anything of the kind--"

"Did you eber try fo' to ketch a 'possum, honey, when he kind'er had a inklin' you was arter him? I 'lows Uncle 'Rasmus is gettin' mighty ole; but he ain' so feeble yet but he kin hol' his own agin dese yere red-coated sogers. Why bress yer soul, honey, I des walked right in like I was comin' home, an' don' 'low one o' 'em knowed dat a wuffless ole nigger was anywhar nigh him."

Little Frenchie had taken the precaution to close the door immediately after our entrance, and while Uncle 'Rasmus and I were talking with no little show of excitement, the lad moved here and there, pulling a ragged curtain in front of one

window, or closing the shutter of another, so that we might not attract attention from any passers-by, although this cabin of old Mary's was in what might well be called the outskirts of the village, where was little danger many people would come our way.

"Tell us how you got in here, Uncle 'Rasmus?" I asked, for after seeing the long line of sentinels which guarded the half-formed entrenchments, it seemed to me little less than marvelous that one could have made his way through without being challenged.

"I des walked right trou, honey. Course I wasn' no ways tryin' to 'tract 'tention; but kind'er waited for a chance when dere wasn' too man sogers 'round. It was easy, chillun, an' I'd bin out ob dis yere house long ago huntin' for Silber Heels, ef it hadn' been dat I was tryin' to wait till you done come."

Then Uncle 'Rasmus insisted on knowing how my mother had received the news that we were bent on making a visit to York Town.

When Saul had told him all that had been said and done on the plantation after his departure, the old negro suggested that we lounge around the village, following the example of the curious visitors, lest some one note the fact that we were apparently taking council together, and it would not seem reasonable we would willingly remain with an old negro shut up in such a wretched cabin, when there was so much to be seen on the outside.

In view of all that occurred before this day was come to a close, it may be well that I describe the hovel which we called old Mary's cabin, even though there was nothing in or around it worthy of particular notice under ordinary circumstances. The fact that later it served us much as a citadel in the midst of our enemies, who were in turn surrounded by their foes, renders it necessary I go into detail concerning it for the better understanding of what happened later.

An ordinary hut built of logs, perhaps twenty feet square, with a door made of puncheon planks, by which I mean planks that have been hewn out of the log with an axe rather than cut by a saw, and two windows, in one of which four panes of glass were broken, but both protected by shutters which swung from the outside. The building consisted of one room on the floor where the occupants were supposed to eat, sleep and live, while above was a loft formed by the roof, and approached through a scuttle situated directly opposite the door, at the rear of the hovel.

To gain access to this scuttle one was forced to climb a sort of ladder which had been formed by nailing strips of wood against the logs, and, as I learned before we were come to an end of using this cabin as a place of refuge, it was by no means a simple task to ascend, even for lads who were accustomed to swarming up trees, or shinning the slender masts of our river craft.

The loft was, as I have said, formed by the roof, and its floor, like the one below, was made of puncheon planks, yet not so closely laid together but that there were crevices through which one's foot might slip if he walked carelessly. At either end small holes had been cut between the logs, perhaps four or five inches square, which served as windows, although there was nothing to prevent the wind or the rain from entering.

I judged that when old Mary lived in the place these apertures were closed, most like with boards, or perhaps with cloth, but now they stood naked, and the wind, coming in across the river, found direct vent through the attic, thus insuring good ventilation if not comfort.

On the outside, and at the rear, was a chimney built of sticks and clay, with a hole cut through the logs near the floor of the lower room, where was a fireplace of stones laid up with mortar, and the inside of this rude chimney was plentifully bedaubed with mud to the depth of two or three inches, as a safeguard against fire.

Just outside the front door, not more than ten feet away, was a small well, which had once been stoned up properly, but was now fallen into such a state of decay that I questioned whether the water in it could be wholesome. At the time this seemed of but little moment, for it would not be a great task to bring from the river all the water one would need to drink, and I failed to give heed to the fact that if we were ever to use this cabin as a place of refuge the hour might come when we would suffer from thirst.

After Uncle 'Rasmus had taken care of the provisions we brought, by stowing them in a poor apology for a cupboard near the side of the fireplace, he insisted that we lads go out and look about the town, claiming that the time might come when it would be much to our advantage to know where this regiment or that legion was quartered, and insisting also that we must show ourselves as curious, rather than hugging the hovel so closely.

I was eager to make my way toward that part of the village where the horses of Simcoe's Rangers were stabled, hoping I might get a glimpse of poor little Silver Heels, and, therefore, not averse to following the old negro's advice.

Uncle 'Rasmus announced that it was his intention to remain close within the building, as if it was not possible for him to move around, and this was necessary if we lads counted on making his helplessness an excuse for coming frequently to the town of York.

It was as if Saul had determined on this day to be as disagreeable as possible. As I have already set down, he reproached us with indolence when he first came up in the early morning, and grumbled as we came toward the village because little Frenchie insisted on walking leisurely, lest suspicion might be aroused. While we remained in old Mary's cabin with Uncle 'Rasmus, he cried out loudly at our wasting time when we might accomplish something, although the lad knew full well that much time must be spent, and many plans made, before we could hope even to set about our purpose.

He was the first to leave the cabin when Uncle 'Rasmus insisted that we play the part of curious ones, and pressed on ahead as if he would go his own way, leaving us behind, until Pierre said to me in a whisper:

"It is not well that we separate--at least, not until we have made some agreement as to a rendezvous later."

Then it was that I quickened my pace to overtake Saul, who had just disappeared around the corner of that shop wherein a man named Bemis, who had lately come from Baltimore, displayed stuffs for dresses and gewgaws of all kinds intended to attract the attention of the women and girls.

I was for going directly to where the Rangers were quartered, and therefore felt not a bit hurt that my cousin should start off by himself without giving heed to our wishes, and, finding it was impossible to overtake him at any ordinary pace, I quickened to a run. In consequence I turned the corner of the shop rapidly, coming directly upon, and almost over-running, a lad who had halted Saul, and was engaged with him in angry altercation.

While one might have counted ten I was too nearly dazed with having come into violent contact with the fellow, to fully realize the situation, and then a cry of mingled surprise and dismay burst from my lips, for I found myself clutching and being clutched by none other than Horry Sims.

Even then no great harm might have been done had it not been for Saul's ill temper. Little Frenchie, seeing that we had thus inadvertently come upon the lad whom we knew to be an enemy to us as well as a traitor to his country, would have treated the matter as a pleasing incident, and began by saying with a friendly shrug of his shoulders and a wave of the hands, that he was glad we had found a friend in the town because we were feeling like cats in a strange garret, when Saul interrupted him as he cried angrily:

"There is no reason, Pierre Laurens, why you should put on a false face. You know full well, after all that happened yesterday when this little villain sent the Britishers to take Fitzroy's horse and mine, that we are not pleased at seeing him, and that we count on dealing out to him the punishment he deserves."

I was well nigh paralyzed at thus hearing my cousin make public that which we had agreed should be held a secret. It alarmed me more than I can well say, for I had come to believe it was in the highest degree necessary, if we would succeed in regaining possession of the horses, to prevent this Tory scoundrel from suspecting we knew of all his villainy, and I held up my hand warningly, whereat Saul cried hoarsely, being unable to keep the slightest check over his temper:

"It is not for you, Fitzroy Hamilton, to play a double part! After what I saw on the road yester morning, we know all this little scoundrel has done, and have already agreed that he shall pay the penalty for his treachery."

There was no longer opportunity to check my cousin. The cat was out of the bag, so to speak. We had, at the very moment when we were counting on beginning our work, shown Horry Sims that we knew of his treachery, and thereby made of him an open enemy, one who would do all he might against us, which promised to be no little, for after having given information as to where the best horses in the vicinity could be found, it was reasonable to suppose he stood on friendly terms with the king's officers.

"Who says I told where the soldiers could find your horses?" Horry asked with a pretense of ignorance, and Saul cried fiercely:

"No one says so. All three of us lads saw you on the road when you halted the squad of Rangers, and pointed out the direction of the Hamilton plantation, after which they rode straight away there and took possession of the horses, as you know full well."

"If you are so wise as to what happened yesterday, why was it you treated me in friendly fashion last night?" Horry screamed, growing angry now that his surprise at being thus accused had passed away in a measure, and no doubt feeling safe in his position because he was surrounded by those whom he believed would stand his friends, and who

were all powerful in that town of York.

"It was because we counted on using you to serve our own ends," Saul replied, seizing Horry Sims by the coat-collar, as if fancying the young Tory was eager to make his escape. "It was a foolish scheme, hatched by Fitz and Pierre; but I will have none of it! When a lad proves himself an enemy to me, as you have since yesterday morning, I count on standing up manfully, accusing him of his crime instead of crawling around like a red Indian, hiding my own feelings with the hope of getting the advantage of him in some way."

"Well, now that you have stood up, as you call it, what do you count on doing?" Horry asked with a sneer, and Saul, shaking him vigorously, replied threateningly:

"I count on flogging you until it is a question whether you can leave this town without assistance."

"It may not be safe to venture anything of the kind," and Horry looked around in the hope that some of the Britishers might be near at hand. "Of course when there are three to one, I cannot expect to hold my ground; but let me warn you of this, Saul Ogden: Whatever you do to me while the odds are in your favor, shall be paid back an hundred fold before you are outside these lines! Now I know why that little French sneak claimed that there was a short cut through the woods from the York road to the Hamilton plantation. You fellows were hiding somewhere nearabout, and he counted on joining you without my knowledge."

"Well, is it necessary we shall explain to you what we do, or where we are going?" Saul shrieked, anger now having so far gotten the better of him that he was hardly responsible for the words which came from his mouth.

Pierre and I looked at each other in dismay which amounted almost to fear. We had but just succeeded in paving a way for ourselves to enter the town at will, and through Saul's hasty temper all the fat was in the fire!

I could see no other course than to warn Uncle 'Rasmus as soon as might be possible. Then take to our heels, trusting to the poor chance that we might gain the plantation without being laid by the heels, and all through an unthinking lad who had agreed, equally with us, that we must not let Horry Sims know we were aware of his treachery.

"It's a case of getting away from here as soon as may be," I whispered to Pierre, while Saul stood shaking Horry Sims and uttering threats which might have been heard fifty yards away. "My cousin must pay the penalty for thus losing his temper and destroying all our chances of regaining the horses, for in order to save Uncle 'Rasmus, as well as ourselves, we must leave him here to fight his battles with the Tory."

"I am not so certain that we should leave either of them," little Frenchie said thoughtfully, and seemingly forgetting to shrug his shoulders. "It is true the fat is all in the fire so far as our playing friendly with Horry Sims is concerned; but it seems to me possible that we can yet prevent that scoundrel from upsetting all our plans, even though it may be a dangerous venture."

"Of what are you talking?" I cried in amazement. "The mischief has already been done. It is no longer possible for us to hold the lad in check, because he will go straight away to such officers as he knows, giving information that we are here. Once it is learned we claimed that Uncle 'Rasmus had been held in the cabin through his helplessness, and we were come to aid him, all our scheming will be made public, and we called upon to pay the penalty, whatever it may be."

"But Horry Sims has not yet laid information," Pierre whispered hurriedly. "If it be possible for you to call Saul off and make him understand now, on the instant, before any come nearer, that he must hold himself in check, we, meaning you and I, may be able to deal with the Tory by such methods that he can not do us one whit of harm until we are ready to give him the opportunity."

I looked at the little French lad in amazement, too much bewildered to be able to make reply, for it seemed to me he was talking veriest folly, and yet there was on his face an expression of determination in which I could see no token of fear, or even uneasiness of mind.

CHAPTER V

OUR PRISONER

Even as I gazed at little Frenchie in what was very like bewilderment, I noted that the lad was looking here and there furtively, as if to make certain there were no eavesdroppers near, and on the instant the haze of perplexity was cleared from my mind, allowing me to realize that the French lad had some plan on foot whereby the mischief wrought through Saul might be counteracted.

Although the situation seemed to me so desperate, and the possibility of extricating ourselves from the difficulties into which we had been suddenly thrown was so slight that I could see no ray of light, yet had I come to have such great faith in Pierre Laurens's quick wit and cool-headedness, that straightway much of the trouble was taken from my mind, and I laid my hand on his shoulder as if to say I depended upon him to draw us out from this slough into which my cousin's ill temper had plunged us.

Meanwhile Saul was giving no heed to anything save the desire to flog Horry Sims for what he had done to our harm, and Pierre whispered to me sharply and quickly:

"Is there no place near by where we can remain in hiding for a time?"

During an instant I failed to remember anything whatsoever concerning this shop of Master Bemis's, although it was familiar to me, owing to my having visited it a dozen times or more. Then I suddenly recalled to mind that just around the corner, in the rear, was an old shed sometimes used for the stabling of horses, which had frequently been half-filled with rubbish of such sort as empty cases, lumber or straw.

This much I explained to Pierre in the fewest words possible, and a look of relief came over little Frenchie's face as he went directly up to Saul, laying one hand on my cousin's shoulder, and with the other clutching the Tory sneak by the coat-collar.

Mayhap not more than thirty seconds had passed from the time my cousin announced his intention of paying off the score we held against Horry Sims, until Pierre said in a low, sharp tone to Saul, and conveying much of reproof:

"You have forgotten that by giving way to anger you not only endanger yourself, but Fitz and me, to say nothing of Uncle 'Rasmus. Now pull yourself up with a sharp turn; check that ill temper of yours if you would keep yourself at liberty--mayhap if you would hold the breath of life in your body."

As he spoke it seemed to me that Horry Sims had a dim understanding of what was about to come upon him, for he lunged quickly here and there like some trapped animal, and I fancied he was about to raise his voice in a cry for help, when I sprang forward and clapped my hand over his mouth.

"What are you about now?" Saul asked angrily. "What right have you to interfere when I count on dealing with this Tory villain even as he deserves?"

"I have every right," and now Pierre spoke in a sharper tone than I had ever before heard him use. "Even though there be no other reason, I shall protect myself, and it would seem, if you keep on at this pace, Saul Ogden, that Fitz and I must consider you equal enemy with this Tory. We are undone from this moment, and can count surely on being thrust into the guard-house as malcontents and rebels, unless you find strength of will enough in that hulking body of yours to behave in a decent fashion."

"I SPRANG FORWARD!"

Nothing in the way of argument could have moved Saul so quickly as did reproof from the little French lad, who until this moment he had most like considered a child as compared with himself. Now, however, that the boy was talking in manly fashion, and with sound doctrine, my cousin gave way before him on the instant, becoming as meek and docile as any lamb.

"What would you have me do? I had no right to give rein to my temper, and yet I swear to both of you that I could not have held it in check."

"This is no time for making excuses," Pierre said, still speaking in a commanding tone. "The wonder of it is that we have had so many minutes allowed us, and now it stands us in hand to get this fellow out of sight."

"Out of sight? Where?" and Saul was in as thick a cloud of bewilderment as I had been, whereupon, pushing Horry Sims forward, with my hand still pressed over his mouth, I said hurriedly:

"Pierre would have us hide him in the shed. I know not how that may advantage us; but let me tell you, Saul Ogden, that little Frenchie has got more sound sense in one side of that head of his than you and I in both ours put together. Now do as he has said, and we will listen to him afterwards."

I forced Horry Sims on from behind, still gagging his mouth with my hand, while Pierre, retaining a firm hold on the Tory's coat-collar, dragged him along in the direction I indicated, Saul assisting as well as he could while in such a state of perplexity.

It was little less than a miracle that we could have stood talking there by Master Bemis's shop and then made our way half around it, without coming in contact with some of the red-coats. Even at this day, as I sit here in safety writing down that which we did in the town of York, it seems to me more than marvelous that we were not taken into custody before little Frenchie had time to give words to his suddenly conceived plan.

I set it down to the fact that all those soldiers of the king were busily engaged throwing up entrenchments, for it was known that not many miles away lay General Lafayette with his army, and my Lord Cornwallis must have said to himself that General Washington, finding he had so many of his majesty's troops in much the same as a trap, would push down from the North all the men he could spare. Therefore it came about that every officer was urging the men under his command to the greatest activity, and, fortunately, this shop of Master Bemis's was at a considerable distance from any part of the British works, which explains, at least to myself, why we were not lodged as prisoners in the British garrison.

I believe that from the first moment Pierre began to speak in a tone of command, Horry Sims understood he was in danger, not of a mere flogging, but of something he could not explain to himself, therefore was his fright all the greater.

When little Frenchie, while we were circling around the building, threatened vengeance even to the shedding of blood if he made any outcry, the lad was so terrified that even though he had had fair opportunity I question whether he could have raised his voice sufficiently loud to have been heard a dozen paces away.

He was as limp as any rag in my grasp as we forced him along, and for an instant I feared the cowardly cur would fall helpless from sheer terror of that which he knew not the nature.

Within the time it would take a tongue-tied man to count ten, we had hustled Horry Sims from the southerly corner of Master Bemis's shop around to the rear, where was the shed of which I had told little Frenchie, and again did fortune favor us, for no horses were stabled there, and the rude structure was so nearly filled with rubbish of all kinds that it would have been impossible to have sheltered even a mule beneath the crazy roof.

We entered with our prisoner, Pierre leading the way grasping Horry by the coat-collar, while I brought up the rear with my arm around the Tory's neck so that I might keep a hand clapped over his mouth.

"Shut the door, and, if it be possible, bar it so that no one may come without giving due warning," little Frenchie said to Saul, and my cousin obeyed as meekly as a well whipped cur obeys his master.

There was a crazy affair made of puncheon planks which had served as door, but it hung loosely on its hinges, and I question whether it had been used for many a year; but Saul was by this time so intent on doing whatsoever he might to repair the mischief wrought while his temper had the best of him, that it was as if he had the strength of two men.

While Pierre was looking about him trying to plan something in his mind, my cousin had the barrier closed and fastened with four or five short lengths of logs. It was not done so securely but that one from the outside might force an entrance, yet it would require a minute or two to effect such purpose, and this was what I fancy little Frenchie counted on when he gave the command.

"Over yonder," he said, pointing toward the end of the shed where were several casks and some old boxes, "is the place to which we must take him."

"How long do you count on keeping him there?" I could not refrain from asking, and Pierre replied promptly, thus showing that he had a plan thoroughly mapped out in his mind:

"Only until night, when we must get him to old Mary's cabin where he can be held prisoner."

I was astounded, to use a mild term, by the idea that we were to hold this Tory a prisoner for any length of time. Here we were, shut up within the British lines, in danger at any moment of being haled before some high mightiness of an officer to answer to the charge of being rebels, or of being in the town with evil intent, and we took it upon ourselves to capture a lad who stood to a certain degree in the favor of our enemies!

It was to my mind at that instant, and is even now, as reckless a bit of business as can well be conceived. Why we did not take to our heels at the first moment when Saul gave way to his anger, leaving Uncle 'Rasmus to his fate, and shake the dust of the town of York from our feet, I cannot understand. Yet I am wrong in saying this last, for it was Pierre Laurens who held us where we belonged, and who proved that if there were Minute Boys in York Town, he stood above them head and shoulders as their commander.

But for Pierre's quick wit and decision we had at that moment been racing through the village intent only on passing the British lines. Yet I said then, while we pulled Horry Sims across the rubbish, that perhaps it would have been greatly to our advantage if we had fled the town even though the hue and cry was raised on the instant, rather than remain where it might be impossible for us to go out again save in the custody of a squad of red-coated soldiers.

By the time Saul barricaded the door Horry Sims had been taken to the rear of the building, and there little Frenchie turned two huge casks down on their side, with the mouths facing each other, leaving sufficient space between them for a lad to crawl in, saying to the prisoner when this work was done:

"Creep in there, lad, and hold your peace! If you raise your voice above a whisper, I swear that it shall be the last moment of your life! You can well fancy we would not flinch at killing such as you when it might be to save ourselves. To hold you secretly, and yet securely, is our hope, therefore bear well in mind to what lengths we are bound to go rather than allow you to give us the slip!"

The Tory crawled head foremost into one of the casks, which was so large that he could readily turn around in it, and in the gloom of the shed I could see that his face was as white as my mother's table linen. He shook like one in an ague fit, as well he might, for the threats Pierre made carried with them such a ring of truth that he would have been dull indeed had he failed to understand how far we would go in order to save our own skins.

Pierre followed him into this snug hiding place, and I stood helplessly by, awaiting some word from little Frenchie, ready to obey whatever commands he might give, while Saul, shamefaced because of his indiscretion, came up to my side.

"It is like this," Pierre said as if he had asked a question. "So long as we can hold this Tory sneak secretly, so long are we at liberty to remain in York Town to compass the business which brought us here; but on the instant he gives us the slip, we may count on coming before a military court charged with being rebels, if not with being spies."

"How long do you think he can remain in this shed without being discovered?" Saul asked stupidly, and then it was that Pierre explained his plan, so far as he had formed it.

"One of us, and you should be that one inasmuch as it was through you that all this trouble came about," he said, looking at Saul, "must remain here until midnight, or thereabouts, on the alert all the while lest he give an alarm, while Fitz and I move about the village as we were intending when we left old Mary's cabin. When night has come, and if we find it possible, this Tory must be carried across the town and stowed safely in that loft above the room in which Uncle 'Rasmus is living. There, one or the other of us must act as jailor all the while, until--I cannot guess when our duties may be ended. If, perchance, the American forces give Lord Cornwallis battle, and are victorious, then may we come out of the snarl with whole skins; but if so be the British are the conquerors, we can look to have the tables turned on us, when Horry Sims will get all the revenge he may desire."

A pretty pickle we were in because of what Saul had done! The most we could hope for would be to hold Horry day after day in that loft of old Mary's cabin, with but one show of getting out of the box, which would be such a victory by the Americans that they might take possession of the town of York.

It was a slim chance, though I doubted not that General Lafayette's army, if reinforced as it should be, would whip the Britishers; but again and again the so-called rebels had been worsted by the king's soldiers, and why might they not get a drubbing here? It was well within the range of possibilities that the British army would be reinforced by vessels sent down from New York, in which case we stood to suffer.

Even though the Britishers allowed us to go here or there at will, we were held as close prisoners, because of having Horry Sims in custody, as though they put us under a strong guard. If at that moment when we stood by the casks in the shed speculating upon the situation, I had known that the town of York was to be besieged and shelled by our people, I would not have reckoned that my life was worth the turn of a hand.

Fortunate indeed was it for us that we could not look into the future. Fortunate we had no inkling of all that was to take place between the rivers of York and James within the next few days, else had our courage failed us entirely. As it was, however, I had great faith Pierre would pull through his scheme successfully, and trusted that the future would show us some way out of this snarl into which we had been so suddenly plunged.

"Come in here, and stretch yourself out beside this lad, with your hand closing on his throat so that at the lightest sign of his counting on giving an alarm you can choke him to death," Pierre said to Saul, who was crouching that he might look into the cask, and my cousin did meekly as he was bidden, for by this time he had come fully to understand that he alone was responsible for all this trouble which had come upon us.

Not until Saul was within the cask, and had taken position close by the side of the prisoner, did little Frenchie venture to come out. Then, halting and leaning over so his voice would carry to the prisoner and his jailor without being heard by any who might be in the vicinity of the shed, he said, still speaking in a tone of command which, had I been less excited and anxious, would have sounded comical from one so small:

"Remember, Saul, that your life, mayhap, and ours, depends upon your holding that Tory scoundrel safe. Fitz and I will

learn what we may toward aiding us in getting him to the cabin."

"How long am I to stay here?" Saul asked, and I fancied that he was growing sulky again, whereupon I said soothingly, laying my hand on his leg in friendly fashion:

"Do not let your temper get the best of you again, Saul, else are we all undone past mending. We have fallen into a hobble, and each must do his best to come out alive."

"I am ready to do what I may, and understand, without its being roughed into me, that I am the one who is responsible for it all; but yet I ask how long am I to stay here?"

"Until we come again," little Frenchie said decidedly. "There is no probability we shall dare risk a visit here 'twixt now and the time when we have made ready to carry him to old Mary's cabin, therefore you can count that your duties as jailor will hold you inside that cask until midnight."

I would have added somewhat to that which Pierre had said, counting thereby to soothe my cousin; but little Frenchie dragged me back, motioning with his finger on his lips that I hold my peace. I understood that again was the lad right, for if we did what we might toward coaxing Saul into a better humor, we were possibly giving him an opportunity to fly off in a rage again, and that would have been fatal to all the faint hopes in which we then indulged.

Pierre clambered softly down across the rubbish, motioning for me to follow his example, and then set about pulling away from the ramshackle door the short lengths of logs which barred it; but he was careful to remove only sufficient of the barrier for us to creep out.

When we were in the open air, with the shed so nearly closed that no one, unless having special business there, would be likely to enter, he said to me in a whisper as he led the way up into the village once more:

"Now we will set about our work, and before Saul sees us again he will have had plenty of time in which to repent having given way to his temper."

"Our work?" I repeated dully. "Isn't it enough that we must hold Horry Sims prisoner, without thinking of aught else?"

"We came here to find Saul's mare and your Silver Heels, and, even though it be necessary to stand guard over the Tory, I am counting that we shall continue the work even as was at first proposed."

"It is to my mind that we have enough on our hands, without taking more," I said, and mayhap there was in my voice that same sulky tone which I had heard in Saul's a few seconds before.

"Surely one of us is enough to hold that Tory quiet, unless the Britishers get an inkling that we have him in our hands, and, besides, Uncle 'Rasmus should be able to help us in no small degree. Do you remember that we counted to call ourselves Minute Boys, and to do the work of Minute Boys?"

"Ay, that is what we reckoned on when we were foot-free--when we had not fettered ourselves with a Tory prisoner; but now it is all impossible."

"Why impossible?" and for the first time since we had come upon Horry Sims did Pierre indulge in that indescribable shrug and wave of the hands which was peculiar to him. "It would seem to me that now is the time, if ever, when we can do somewhat for the Cause--when we can prove that although our company of Minute Boys numbers but three, we are of importance, and may make our names known to those who are staking their lives for the liberty of this country."

I looked at the little lad in amazement. The idea that we three boys, who were in as bad a hobble as lads ever could be--we three who stood, one might almost say, face to face with death, should think of aught else, was to me most astonishing, and yet this small fellow from New Orleans was all afire with great plans.

Surely if our company of Minute Boys ever did anything in behalf of the Cause, it would be wholly due to him, for I had come to consider, half an hour since, that his was the only brain among us.

"My countryman, with an army of Americans, is near at hand, holding this English lord here as if he was in a prison, and do you not believe that it may be possible for us to carry to General Lafayette such information concerning what is being done here in this town of York as would be of importance?" Pierre asked, his eyes flashing and his cheeks flushing.

"Ay, if so be we were free to act we might, one or another of us, creep out through the lines and get speech with our people; but hampered as we are, how will it be possible? We are prisoners here, ourselves holding a prisoner."

"Look upon it in that way if you please," and again Pierre shrugged his shoulders. "I count on having one try for the

horses, and, failing that, of having speech with General Lafayette himself after we have been through this town of York and set down in our minds all the work on which the Britishers are now engaged."

"I hope most sincerely you may succeed, lad; but yet I doubt it sorely. In the meanwhile, what about Uncle 'Rasmus?"

"We will go to his cabin now, explain what has happened, and then lounge around the stable quarters of the Rangers, where you shall have a glimpse of your beloved Silver Heels."

I believe the lad reminded me of the horse I loved so well, with the purpose of holding my courage straight, and he could have used no other bait that would have lured me so quickly from out the Slough of Despond into which I had fallen.

There was no hope in my heart, however sanguine he appeared, that I could regain possession of my horse. The most I dared look forward to was that events might so shape themselves as to make it possible for us to escape from this town into which we had voluntarily come, and yet I was such a simple that I failed of understanding it was Pierre Laurens who would get us out of the hobble, if indeed we ever did get out; but I followed him meekly as he led the way toward the Pigeon Quarter.

Uncle 'Rasmus was seated by the window; we could see his wrinkled black face through the dirty glass, and surely he had every appearance of being near to death as he sat there huddled up in a little ball, so to speak, wrapped in his blanket although the day was unusually warm.

"Are you really sick, Uncle?" I asked, hurrying into the hovel with the fear that I should find there additional trouble.

"I'se mighty bad, honey, mighty bad," the old man replied with an odd twinkle in his eyes. "I 'spects I'se 'bleeged ter stay right here, wid neber a chance ob gettin' back to de ole plantation, kase I'se got de misery in my back, my head, an' my legs till I'se des de same as a wuffless ole cripple."

"That's right, Uncle 'Rasmus," Pierre said cheerily. "You are a promising looking old invalid, and I guarantee that if any of these red-coated gentry have a suspicion you may be playing a part, one glimpse of that face of yours will convince them you are nigh to death."

"I'se bin reckonin' on des dat same ting, an' while de ole nigger am so po'ly dese yere gen'men who's in de army carn' grudge my seein' you chillun now an' den."

"You are likely to see a good deal of us, Uncle 'Rasmus," I said grimly, now understanding that the old negro was simply playing his part as had been agreed upon. "We had the ill luck to come across Horry Sims; Saul lost his temper, and let the fellow know we were acquainted with what he had been about."

"Lan' ob massy, chillun, lan' ob massy! Hab you bin rubbin' up agin dat Tory sneak?"

"It's worse than that, Uncle 'Rasmus," Pierre said with a smile. "In order to save our own skins we have been forced to make him a prisoner, and can stay in York Town only so long as it is possible to keep him out of sight. We count on bringing him here, if there's a living show for it, 'twixt now and midnight."

"Chilluns, chilluns, I 'low to goodness you'se done gone crazy! Whar's Saul? Wha's become ob de chile?"

I explained to Uncle 'Rasmus where my cousin was, and what he was doing, after which Pierre gave him a brief outline of his plans, and when both of us had come to an end of our speech, there was no need for the old man to exert himself very strenuously in order to play the part of invalid.

His wrinkled face went ashy pale as the facts of the situation were borne in upon him, and he sank back in the chair with both hands uplifted as if in supplication.

"You chilluns hab done gone crazy! Gone crazy!" he repeated again and again, and I stood helplessly by not knowing what to do; but little Frenchie set about soothing the old man's fears by explaining how it might be possible for us to do this, or do that, and declaring we could keep Horry a prisoner in the loft so long as one of us stood close by to insure his silence, until Uncle 'Rasmus recovered a goodly measure of his former serenity.

"I 'clar for it, chillun, it beats de snakes how much trubble you'se got us all into; but I reckon we'se boun' to hol' our backs stiff agin it, else dese yere Britishers am gwine ter make mighty short work ob us."

"That's just it, Uncle 'Rasmus, that's just it," Pierre cried cheerily. "We've got into the muss, and it stands us in hand to hold our own so long as we can. We're no worse off if Horry Sims gives us the slip after we've brought him here, than we would have been had we allowed him to go free after Saul was so foolish as to let the fellow understand we knew of all his knavery. Now it's a case of keeping our backs stiff, trying to get possession of the horses, and doing all we can

toward carrying to the Americans news of what's being done in this town."

"Sure, honey, you ain' countin' on doin' nuffin 'cept holdin' Horry Sims quiet?" and again Uncle 'Rasmus showed signs of terror.

"Now look here, Uncle," and Pierre knelt by his side, looking up into the wrinkled black face with a cheery smile as if there was nothing in all this wide world to trouble him. "We are not going to waste our time on one Tory--that is to say, all of us are not, for one must remain on guard. After what has happened Saul should do more than his fair share of playing the jailor. Now you wouldn't have Fitz and me loafing around this town doing nothing, would you?"

"Sure enuf, honey, sure enuf."

"You believe if we could carry any word of importance to the Americans we should do it, don't you, Uncle?"

"Sure enuf, honey, sure enuf."

"And if matters should turn, such as we can't really hope for, that there was a possibility of getting hold of the horses, would you have us do it?"

"Sure enuf, honey, sure enuf."

In such manner did this little French lad talk with the old negro until he revived all his courage, and before having come to an end Uncle 'Rasmus was as eager as Pierre to be up and doing, meanwhile as seemingly careless of what the future might bring us as was that little lad on whom all my hopes for the future, so far as the Britishers were concerned, depended.

Having thus restored Uncle 'Rasmus to hopefulness and courage, Pierre announced, as if there could be no question of any protest from me, that we would make our way to where the Rangers were quartered, and I obeyed him, much as a child might have done, mentally clinging to the lad as if he had been my elder.

We two walked around the village as if having no other purpose than to view a military encampment. We gaped here, or stood there in open-mouthed astonishment, as if mightily impressed with everything we saw, and while doing so Pierre would whisper now and then as we passed this redoubt or that battery:

"Have you got everything well in mind now, lad? Seven redoubts and six batteries on the land side; a line of batteries on the river bank; the grand battery near the church; three redoubts just at the ravine, one near the road to Hampton, and two by the river."

Thus it was he called my attention to each point where the Britishers were working, although in some cases it would have been impossible for me to have said whether they were building redoubts, throwing up earthworks for a battery, or simply digging a canal. It appeared that little Frenchie understood all their purpose, and I said to myself that if so be he could make his way from out this town of York into the American lines, of a verity he would be able to give General Lafayette such information as would be of exceeding value.

We saw Silver Heels. She was made fast to the stable line with a lot of other horses, and, so far as I could see, was receiving even more attention than if she had been at home on the plantation, for there were a dozen men or more working all the time currying this horse, rubbing that one down, bandaging a leg that showed signs of swelling, and in many ways taking as good care of the steeds as the best jockeys in Virginia could have done.

"You see she hasn't fallen into such bad hands," Pierre said as we passed for the third time where I could have a good view of my pet, and I replied sorrowfully:

"It isn't that she won't be taken care of, Pierre, for he into whose hands she might fall would indeed be a fool if he neglected so valuable a bit of horse-flesh; but it is the thought that she will be taken into battle, wounded, and left on the field to die, that breaks my heart."

"And yet many a poor fellow will be wounded on the field of battle, and left there to die. Mayhap it will be the fate of you or of me, and since Silver Heels has been reared by a rebel, she must take the same chances that all us rebels in this country are forced to take if the yoke of the king's oppression is to be removed from our necks."

Little Frenchie spoke like a preacher, and I dimly wondered whether his courage might not be failing him, now that we were fully committed to as desperate a venture as ever lads embarked on; but I need have had no forebodings, for after remaining silent a dozen seconds or more he seemingly shook off somber thoughts, and said cheerily:

"The less you and I think of the future, and the closer we keep to the present, the better. Now let us make our way along the outer works in order to decide where we may have the best show of getting through the lines, if so be we

decide to play the part of spies."

"What about making ready to bring Horry Sims into the cabin?"

"There's plenty of time for that 'twixt now and sunset," Pierre said carelessly. "We need spend little time in forming plans, because it must all be done by accident, or, what is the same thing, through chance and the negligence of the enemy. We'll get a good idea of the general situation, and then go back to Uncle 'Rasmus for something to eat."

As Pierre had said so we did. Twice we traversed the entire length of the outer works, meaning the entrenchments facing the north; noted where each sentinel was posted, and otherwise gained all the information possible that might be of advantage to one who was trying to escape from the British.

Then we went back to old Mary's cabin where Uncle 'Rasmus, despite his seeming feebleness, had made ready for us a most appetizing meal, by warming the corn-bread and toasting some of the boiled ham in a frying-pan.

Although the outlook was most dismal to me, it did not affect my appetite on this day, and I ate as heartily, and with as great satisfaction, as I ever ate a meal at the Hamilton plantation.

CHAPTER VI

A DISAGREEABLE SURPRISE

While we ate with so much of pleasure I could not but let my thoughts go out to Saul, who was doubtless as hungry as we had been, and gave words to my regret that we had not first carried the lad some of the food which we had in such generous abundance; but to my repinings of this kind little Frenchie put a stop by saying:

"I have no desire that your cousin shall be in distress because of hunger, and yet it is in my mind that he should have somewhat more of punishment because of having given way to ill temper and put us in such a plight, than simply standing guard over Horry Sims. He will be the more careful in the future, if he suffers considerably because of what has been done."

I was far from desiring that Saul should be punished. The mischief had been wrought, and however bitterly he repented it would not right matters. I believed for the time that Pierre was overly harsh, and would have insisted on going straight to the lad with food, but that I realized how dangerous it might be if we visited the shed in the rear of Master Bemis's shop more often than was absolutely necessary.

Again I consoled myself with the belief that most like Saul had partaken of a hearty breakfast that morning before leaving the plantation, whereas we lads had satisfied our hunger with cold food, and thus arguing with myself desiring to be convinced, I came to the conclusion that since it was not possible to mend matters save at the expense of much risk, it was well I should get such enjoyment as was possible out of the present moment.

Not until we had finished the meal did Uncle 'Rasmus have anything of importance to say, and then he surprised me beyond the power of expression, by proving that he was not counting on being a mere figure-head in this wild plan to regain possession of Saul's mare and Silver Heels.

"I'se done bin tol', chillun, dat dere's six or seben big French ships layin' in Lynn Haven bay, whar dey've come to stop de Britishers from runnin' away 'fore Gin'ral Washington gets a chance to trounce 'em right smart."

"You've been told that, Uncle 'Rasmus?" I cried in amazement. "Have you been toddling around this town after pretending that you were so crippled with aches and pains that you couldn't move out of your chair?"

"Sure I hasn', honey, sure I hasn'. Yer Uncle 'Rasmus ain' no sich fool as dat; but de still trout wha' lays under de shadder ob de rock catches a good many more flies what drif down de stream, dan does de fish what am leapin' an' plungin' to beat de band. Say, wha' you tink when I done tole you Gin'ral Lafayette wid all his army is layin' at Williamsburg des waitin' fo' a chance to jump down on de back ob Gin'ral Cornwallis?"

Pierre and I looked at each other questioningly, as if asking whether the old negro had suddenly taken leave of his senses, for it seemed impossible he could have gathered information which was of the greatest importance to us, while we who had been moving around through the encampment had failed to hear anything of the kind.

"Have you been dreaming, Uncle 'Rasmus?" little Frenchie asked with a smile. "Surely you couldn't have picked up all that news while being denned in here."

"I did fo' a fac', honey, an' s'posen yer Uncle 'Rasmus kin tell you dat Gin'ral Washington is a hustlin' fo' to get all his sogers down dis yere way so's to make de Britishers don' gib him de slip? I'se 'lowin', chillun, dat now's de time when de king's men hab done got dereselves in a mighty small box."

"If you didn't dream it, how did you come to learn all these things?" I asked impatiently, and the old negro replied as he pattered to and fro in front of the fire, adding to the already plentiful supply of provisions before us:

"Don' you 'member Marse Peyton's ole Joe, honey? Course you do, kase you've seen him on de plantation more times dan I'se got hairs on dis yere gray head. Well, ole Joe is right in dis yere town, waddlin' back an' forth, makin' out as ef he was waitin' on some ob de British ossifers. Marse Peyton done sent him down here so's he could keep his ears open, an' he's come dis berry day from Williamsburg, where he sneaked off so's to tell Gin'ral Lafayette wha' he done foun' out."

Again Pierre and I looked at each other in amazement, and I must also add with no little of disappointment. We had been flattering ourselves that it might be possible for us to play the spy upon the Britishers, and thereby earn much of credit for our small company of Minute Boys, never for the moment dreaming that there might be others in the village who were playing the same part; but surely not allowing that an old negro, a slave, might be employed in the same work.

"It begins to look as if we were not needed very much in this town of York," Pierre said after a brief time of silence, and I could well understand by the tone of his voice how disappointed he was because thus suddenly had we been shown that the American army could well dispense with our services, since others were engaged in the work we would have taken up.

"I'm not so certain, Pierre, but that your skill at reading the meaning of military moments will yet prove of great value," I exclaimed as a happy thought came into my mind. "It isn't possible old Joe would be able to tell what the British are doing here, with so much exactness as you who seem to be familiar with such work. There's no good reason why we shouldn't continue to pick up all the information possible, and if we find that we have gained more than has Colonel Peyton's negro, then one of us shall make his way to Williamsburg, after we have Horry Sims stowed snugly away in the loft."

It appeared, as we understood from Uncle 'Rasmus's story, when he told it later, that old Joe had by accident seen him sitting at the cabin window, and, quite naturally, come in, when explanations followed.

As both Pierre and I came to realize, instead of grieving over the fact that this slave of Colonel Peyton's was playing the spy in the town of York, we should have rejoiced, for here was at least one person who might be able to aid us in a time of extremity.

Surely, situated as we lads then were, with a prisoner on our hands, even the assistance of an old slave who was free to move about within the encampment as he pleased, might be of great value.

After we had turned the matter over and over in our minds, discussing what seemed much like a new phase of the situation, Uncle 'Rasmus advised that we did not venture out again until the time had come when we could relieve Saul from his duties as jailor by bringing Horry Sims to the cabin.

The old negro argued, and with much of wisdom it seemed to me, that having been through the encampment more than once, seemingly bent on curiosity, there was no good reason why we should do so again. He contended that it would not be wise to show ourselves too often during one day, and urged that we remain concealed until the time arrived when we were to perform our task of the night.

Following his advice we went into the loft, and, spreading down a blanket on the puncheon floor, stretched ourselves out on the hard bed with the hope of gaining sleep. We could have disposed ourselves more comfortably below; but there was a possibility that some of the soldiers, curious to know who was dwelling in this ramshackle of a building, might enter to gratify their curiosity, and it would not be well if they saw us living there with the old negro; at least, there was a chance harm might come of it, and we were not inclined to take any such risk simply in order to enjoy a trifle more of comfort.

Hard though our bed was, both us lads fell asleep shortly after we were in a position to invite slumber, and, without heed to the many dangers which surrounded us, slept soundly and peacefully until being awakened by Uncle 'Rasmus who, unable to ascend by the rude ladder, was calling us by name softly from below.

It was dark when I opened my eyes, aroused by the old negro's voice, so dark that I could not even distinguish the outlines of my comrade, and I understood that now was come the time for the venture of bringing Horry Sims to the cabin.

Pierre was already making his way toward the scuttle when I had come to a full realization of the situation, and I followed him as nearly in silence as was possible, until we had descended to where Uncle 'Rasmus stood awaiting us at the foot of the rude ladder.

"It's pas' midnight, chillun, an' I'se 'lowin' dat de time hab come for you to snake dat young Tory up here."

"Is everything quiet, Uncle 'Rasmus?" Pierre asked, and the old negro replied:

"I ain' heard a soun' dis las' hour, 'cept when dem sogers what am on guard raise up dere hootin' to let folks know dey're awake. It's dark as de lan' ob Egypt eber was, an' I'se kind'er reckonin' you kin go down to Marse Bemis's shop widout makin' trubble for yoursefs. 'Member, chillun, ef dese yere red-coats do sneak up on yer, an' fin' out what you'se erbout, take to your laigs. Don' stop to fight, kase it won't be any use. Des say to yoursefs dat de Hamilton plantation am a heap better place dan dis yere town ob York, an' you get dere, honey, you get dere!"

"What about yourself, Uncle 'Rasmus?" I asked with deep concern. "Suppose the Britishers learn of our doings and we run away, you would be in danger, for surely Horry Sims never'd let the chance slip him to mix you up in the row."

"Don' you gib any heed to your Uncle 'Rasmus, honey. Ef trubble comes you des look arter yoursefs, an' leabe de ole nigger to crawl out ob de hole de bes' way he kin. Don' stop to talk nor to fight, ef de Britishers pounce on yer; but get

back to de plantation. Git dere, honey, git dere!"

Uncle 'Rasmus's advice, instead of strengthening my courage, was weakening it. In the darkness, and now when we were about to make this venture which I knew to be in the highest degree dangerous, I was growing weak-kneed. The attempt to bring Horry Sims across the entire length of the village, where were Britishers on every hand, seemed an entirely different matter from what it had been when the sun was shining, and, fearing lest I might show the white feather if we stood there many moments, I went out hurriedly into the night, giving little heed as to whether Pierre followed until I felt the soft pressure of his hand upon my arm.

"There is no need of great haste, Fitz," he whispered, and I replied in a tremulous voice:

"Indeed there is, Pierre, else am I like to grow so cowardly as to turn tail and make for the Hamilton plantation, regardless of anything save my own feelings."

"You will never do anything of the kind, Fitzroy Hamilton, and that you know as well as I," the little lad whispered with emphasis. "I am not afraid you will turn coward, for it is not cowardly to be afraid when one makes such a venture as this, providing he keeps his face resolutely toward the goal."

I might fill up an hundred pages with an account of my fears and forebodings as Pierre and I went cautiously through the darkness from old Mary's cabin, to Bemis's shop, and yet not have told anything which would interest a stranger, therefore it is that I shall content myself by simply saying that we crossed the village without having been molested, almost without having heard a sound from the enemy.

As a matter of course it was necessary we pass at this point or that near by where soldiers were in camp, or on duty; but the darkness was so intense that by making a slight detour we could avoid being seen, and, judging from what few noises we heard, the encampment was in a state of almost complete repose.

Arriving at the shed door we stood motionless and silent while one might have counted twenty, our ears pricked up to catch the lightest sound which would tell of the approach of an enemy, after which, hearing nothing, we set about making our way into the rude building and thence across the rubbish to where were the two casks which formed Horry Sims's prison.

This last was anything rather than a simple matter, if we would move noiselessly, for in the darkness it was impossible to make out what obstruction lay in our way, and we were forced to pass our hands over every inch of the rubbish before daring to advance a single pace.

Not until we were come to the opening between the casks was a word spoken, and then came an exclamation from Saul:

"Thank God you are come! I was beginning to believe you had been made prisoners, and I would be left to get out of here unaided, which meant beyond a peradventure that I would speedily find myself in the clutches of the Britishers."

"Has Horry attempted to raise any row?" I whispered.

"Beyond speaking now and then to make threats as to what will surely come to us in the future, he has behaved himself," and Saul stood erect, stretching his limbs to throw off the cramp which had come upon him. "I have given him to understand thoroughly well how necessary it is we hold him prisoner, and to what lengths we are ready to go, therefore I believe he realizes that it would be taking his life in his hands if he made any attempt at giving us the slip."

Then Saul would have asked concerning what we had been doing during the day, and how we counted on making our way to the cabin, but I silenced him, promising that he should hear of all our movements when it should be possible for us to hold converse without danger of betraying ourselves.

Once more little Frenchie took upon himself the command of the party by literally dragging Horry out from the casks, and saying to me when the lad was on his feet beside us:

"Help me thrust this in his mouth, for it is not safe to take him through the streets without being gagged."

To my surprise I found that this little French lad had, without acquainting me with his purpose, made ready for the venture, thus again proving his right to act as our captain.

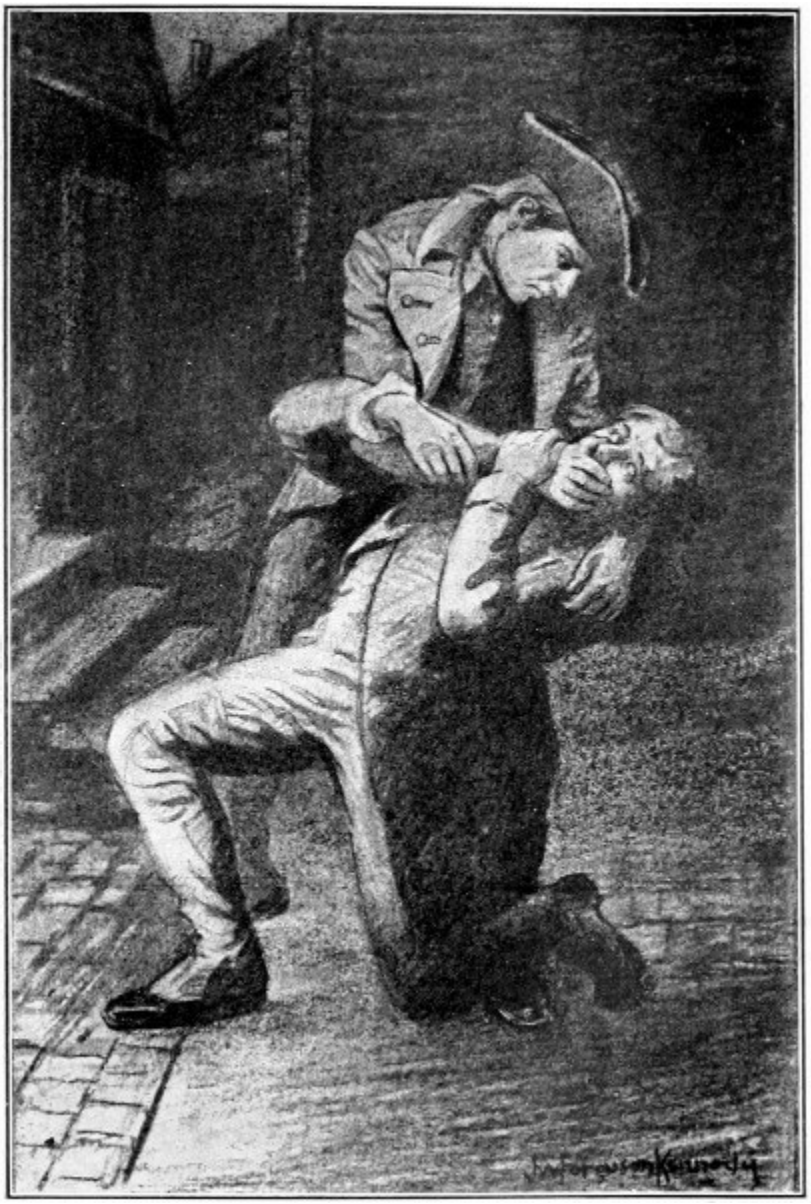
He had at some time while in old Mary's cabin made ready a gag of wood covered with strips torn from a blanket, and this, much against Horry Sims's will, we thrust into the fellow's mouth, tying it securely; but promising that if he followed at his best pace and without making an attempt to get away, he should soon be relieved from what must have been in the highest degree painful.

Then we began again to make our way over the rubbish, this time with greater noise than when Pierre and I had

entered, because we could not direct the young Tory's footsteps as cautiously as our own, and more than once before we had come to the door did we dislodge a bit of timber or a fragment of wood, causing such a disturbance as must have been heard by any who might have been within an hundred paces of the shed.

At each time such a thing occurred we halted, silent and motionless, striving to learn whether any of the enemy had been aroused by the noise, and, hearing nothing that betokened danger, kept on until another mis-step forced us to a halt once more. Thus we continued, traversing a distance of no more than fifteen or eighteen feet, but which seemed to me a full mile, until we were come to the door and had crept out into the darkness, when I breathed a fervent prayer of thanksgiving, for surely it seemed as if we had already overcome the greater portion of the difficulties that lay in our way.

Saul and Pierre were leading the Tory cur, one on either side of him, and I set off in advance as if believing I was the only lad of the three who could pilot us in safety.



"WITHOUT THE SLIGHTEST WARNING I FOUND MYSELF IN THE CLUTCHES OF A MAN."

Because we had succeeded in getting out of the shed without making sufficient of noise to bring the guard down upon us, did I fancy we were much the same as free to do as we pleased, and set off at a reasonably rapid pace around the corner of the shop, when suddenly and without the slightest warning I found myself in the clutches of a man, my throat held so tightly in his grasp that I could not give the faintest alarm to my comrades.

That a British sentinel who had dogged our footsteps held me prisoner, I had no doubt, and my heart sank like lead in

my breast, for to my mind now was come the end of all things for me in this world. Because of having been taken while prowling around the village in the night, there could be no question but that I would be considered and punished as a spy.

I strove in vain to give some warning to my comrades so they might make their escape even though I was doomed; but he who held me seemingly understood that which was in my mind, for he forced me onward lest Pierre and Saul should over-run us, and thus for mayhap a distance of an hundred yards we advanced, I, a prisoner, forced to lead my comrades into what I felt certain was a shameful death.

Because the night was so black they could not see that there were two persons in advance of them instead of one, therefore did they follow blindly, and all unconscious of the sickly, deathly terror in my heart, until we were come to the rise of the land on our way toward the Pigeon Quarter, where the outlines of him who held me, and my own body, were marked against the lighter sky.

Then I heard a muffled exclamation from Pierre, whereupon my captor suddenly wheeled me about until we were facing the two lads and their prisoner, when he whispered softly, yet sharply:

"Continue on as you were going, and as you value your lives make no outcry or delay!"

Having thus spoken, one can well fancy that I was nigh to being paralyzed with mingled astonishment and bewilderment, because the tone was friendly and the words indicated that he would aid us. He released his grasp on my throat, and involuntarily I stretched out my hands, when they came in contact with my captor, and by the sense of touch I understood that he wore a uniform.

"You are a British soldier!" I stammered, terror once more taking firm hold upon me.

"Ay, that I am for the time being; but now move on if you would continue that which you have begun, else are you like to fall into the hands of other soldiers in this encampment who will have less care for your safety."

I wish it might be possible for me to set down in words, so that he who reads could understand, the frame of mind into which I was plunged by this remark. When he first seized me I had no doubt but that I had begun my journey on the road which leads to the gallows, and on learning that he was a British soldier my fears were not lessened, yet was his behavior and his words so unaccountable, taking into consideration who he appeared to be, that I became numbed, like one who has received a blow which deprives him of a portion of his senses.

How my comrades were affected I had no means of knowing; but understood that they were obeying the commands of this man who had captured us, because they continued on close at my heels, and from the stranger's movements now and then I knew he was making certain they did not attempt to deviate from the straight course which led to old Mary's cabin.

Never did a journey seem so long, or a way so strange, as that over which I walked like one in a dream in the darkness, surrounded on every hand by the enemy, and knowing as I did that the king's officers set little value on the life of those whom they call rebels.

As we advanced the situation became yet more strange and terrifying, if indeed that could be possible, for suddenly I came to understand that this stranger who had taken us in custody seemed familiar with the course we should pursue, for instead of lagging ever so slightly to learn in which direction we would go, he led us straight as an arrow might be driven, toward our destination, and, having come to the cabin door, pushed it open and himself entered, leaving us to follow or to flee as might be our inclination.

I am free to confess that when he thus left me at liberty there was but one thought in my mind, and that to seek my own safety in flight, regardless of my comrades, or of the old negro whose life might be in danger if I thus deserted him. I was cowardly enough for an instant to think only of myself, to look forward only to the possibility of saving my own skin; but, fortunately, even before I could have turned to flee like a poltroon, I realized that it was my duty as a lad of Virginia, even though I had seemingly thrown aside the name of Minute Boy, to remain with my comrades whom I had thus counselled into peril.

Even at that supreme moment, when as I believed death stood facing me, there came into my heart a feeling of shame that I should have even thought of doing such a dastardly thing as to seek my own safety by deserting my comrades, and I went into the cabin, following the footsteps of our captor, hoping that no one, not even that red-coated soldier, might suspect what had been in my mind a few seconds before.

Pierre and Saul must have understood that they could do no less than enter this place of shelter, for it was the only one open to them in the town of York, even though we were led by an enemy, and so thrust Horry Sims forward on my heels

until Uncle 'Rasmus closed the door behind us.

I stood there enveloped in a darkness so dense that one might, as is said, almost feel it, wondering what strange turn of affairs had come, and why it was that this British soldier should be so harmless--why he should have allowed us to come into the cabin when most like he counted on taking us to the nearest guard-house.

We remained there in silence, and, so far as I was concerned, in most abject terror, while one might have counted ten, and then the stranger, throwing himself down on the floor at one side of the fireplace in which a few half-dead coals yet glimmered faintly, as if he was a welcome visitor, said in a low whisper, yet in a tone which carried distinctly through the room:

"You lads are from the Hamilton plantation?"

No one made reply. I was yet too much confused to have answered such a simple question, and, as Pierre afterward told me, he refrained from speaking because of not understanding whether it would be safe to admit the truth.

"You need have no fear in speaking plainly before me," the man continued. "I am wearing a British uniform, and mayhap am putting my life in jeopardy and doing a grievous injury to the Cause by interfering in this matter while you have a prisoner who may be able later to carry to headquarters information of what you have done this night. I beg you to trust me for the time being, and tell me who is this lad that you have brought from yonder hiding place gagged lest he make an outcry?"

I was yet too thoroughly bewildered to make an intelligent reply; but fortunately little Frenchie had begun to get his wits together, and most like to suspect at least a portion of the truth, for he answered promptly, not only giving the young Tory's name, but explaining why we thus held him.

To my alarm he went so far as to tell the whole story, even though more than once I clutched him by the arm to prevent his laying bare all our secrets; but he threw me off with friendly violence, and continued until the red-coated man who lay by the fireplace had full knowledge, not only of what we had done, but of what we would do.

Then Pierre was come to an end of his story, and so seemingly eager was he to give all the details to this stranger, who by his costume was an enemy and by the tones of his voice a friend, that he spent no little time in the telling of it, while I was nearly beside myself with grief and rage because we had thus put ourselves wholly within the man's power.

It would have been better, so I said to myself with bitterness, if we held our peace. In case he charged us with being spies, as I counted he intended to do, let him prove what we were, rather than that we should give him all the evidence, making his way plain if he would hang us, and I cried out to Pierre, my voice trembling with anger:

"Now that you have doomed us, lad, tell me in what better position you stand than if we had held our peace? Of what advantage can it be to us to proclaim ourselves spies in intent if not in deed, to this soldier of the king?"

Before I could say more, and the hot words of anger were slipping from my mouth so rapidly that I might have continued casting reproaches upon little Frenchie until many moments had passed, the stranger interrupted me by asking calmly:

"Now that you have brought your prisoner here to this cabin, what are you counting on doing with him?"

Again Pierre unbosomed his very heart, and explained that we would carry Horry Sims into the loft, one of us standing guard over him all the time, while the others went about the work which they had set themselves.

"It may be well to continue as if nothing had occurred," the man said thoughtfully. "I have no doubt but that you are burning to know why I have done this thing to-night, and yet explanations may not be made while that Tory lad can overhear, although it is true I have already said and done far too much in his presence. Let him understand that if an hour ago you counted on holding him close prisoner, now are you doubly intent on doing so, for he has at least a portion of my secret, and there are others in this town of York besides myself who would compass his death, rather than that he should whisper the lightest word of what he has heard or seen."

Now it was I began to get a glimmer of light through my head; my tired limbs ceased to tremble, and my heart beat less furiously as I set about aiding Pierre force Horry Sims up the rude ladder.

The Tory must have been quite as terrified as I had been a few seconds before, for he obeyed all our whispered commands, striving to find here and there a foothold on the shaky cross-pieces, and otherwise making every effort to ascend rapidly.

When we were in the loft and had led our prisoner to where the blanket was spread over the puncheon planks, little

Frenchie took the gag from his mouth, saying as he did so:

"Even though you would have spied upon us, Horry Sims, I am sorry we were forced to give you the pain of wearing this ornament; but our own lives are of more concern than your suffering, therefore was it a necessity. Now if so be you are minded to give up all hope of making your escape, and do what you may toward remaining hidden from your red-coated friends who would lend assistance if they knew of your plight, we promise to treat you fairly, and with more of tenderness than you deserve."

"Are you counting on leaving him to guard himself?" I asked in surprise, believing from Pierre's words that such was his intention, and the little lad replied promptly:

"I cannot say that it will be possible for him to do very much guarding of himself. Certain I am that there is only one way of escape from this loft, since the holes which serve as windows are too small to admit of his crawling through, for I myself tried that experiment this afternoon. If he leaves here it can only be through the scuttle, and with all of us on the floor below, I question whether he would make much headway."

"But he can raise his voice to give an alarm," I answered, and Pierre replied softly, turning toward the young Tory so that there might be no question of his hearing the words:

"If he should dare to speak above a whisper, then I promise you, Fitz Hamilton, that this gag goes into his mouth not to be removed until the hour comes when we no longer fear his tongue."

It seemed to me reckless to leave the Tory sneak alone in the loft, even though we would be on the floor below; but there had been so many happenings within the past four and twenty hours which had aroused in me needless fear, that I was ashamed to give words to what was in my mind, lest Pierre begin to believe I was grown cowardly, and when the little lad moved toward the scuttle, I caught him by the arm as I whispered in his ear:

"What would you do? You have told the man below all you can, and now are we to follow him meekly, in case it is his intent to drag us off to the guard-house as spies?"

"I believe, if he gives us the name of spies, it will be a case of the pot calling the kettle black," Pierre said cheerily. "Are you so thick-headed, Fitz Hamilton, that you cannot understand somewhat of this stranger's purpose? Surely if he was what his uniform gives token, we would not have been treated so gently when he first came upon us; but, instead, the alarm must have been given, and a squad of Britishers summoned to take us away. From the instant he failed to call the guard I began to suspect what he might be, therefore followed willingly his directions."

"And I followed in fear and trembling," I replied shamefacedly, "for I had no doubt but that he was leading me to the gallows."

"Then have you suffered needlessly, as do all who fail of taking heed to everything which goes on around them, judging one incident from its connection with another," little Frenchie said with a low, soft laugh, and then, taking my hand in his as if he was the father and I a baby, he led me to the scuttle, going down the ladder in advance cautiously, much as though believing it would be necessary to aid my faltering steps.

CHAPTER VII

MORGAN, THE SPY

When Pierre and I were come to the lower floor I noted that some one had thrown a bit of wood on the embers, and it was blazing up sufficiently to cast faint rays of light whereby we could see Uncle 'Rasmus standing midway between the outer door and the chimney, looking down upon the red-coated man who lay near the fireplace, as if questioning what his intentions might be.

Saul stood opposite the stranger gazing at him in mingled wonderment and alarm, while the man himself appeared to be wholly unconcerned and entirely at his ease, as if he was among friends in the one place of all others he most desired to be.

It was a strange scene that thus presented itself to me, and rendered so by this seeming Britisher among us who claimed the proud title of rebels, apparently friendly after having learned what should have brought us to a speedy military trial, the conclusion of which must have been conviction and the halter.

It was the soldier who broke the silence, as he said with a faint smile wherein was more of sadness than of mirth:

"By this time you lads must have come to understand that I am a friend instead of an enemy, and yet I am enlisted in the king's service, wearing this uniform in token of being willing to serve him."

"You are a spy?" Pierre said thoughtfully, whereupon the stranger nodded, and, motioning to the loft above, replied in a tone so low that we were forced to gather close around him in order to hear the words:

"Although the lad up yonder has seen enough to convict us all, if he had an opportunity to give information, there is no reason why he should be let into all the secrets, and necessity demands that I confide in you. Had it not been that I suspected--in fact, had fairly good proof of very much regarding the situation, I would be this night considered a deserter, and no longer able to serve the colonies in their righteous war."

"Meaning what, sir?" Pierre interrupted.

"Meaning that in order to carry information to General Lafayette which it is important he should know, I would have left the lines this night, thus betraying my mission here."

"Who are you, sir, if you please?" Pierre asked, for neither Saul nor I had gathered our wits sufficiently to be able to question this friendly red-coat.

"My name is Morgan; I am better known in the American army as Morgan the Jerseyman. It was by special request of the Marquis, General Lafayette, that I enlisted, and were we at this moment at my home in New Jersey, I could show you such writing from the commander-in-chief, General Washington, as would convince you that while my coat is red my heart is true blue."

"How long have you been in the British army?" little Frenchie asked.

"Since my Lord Cornwallis was in James Town. There it was I enlisted, representing myself as a Tory at heart who had been forced to take up arms in the American army, and thus far, as it seems to me, I have conducted myself in such manner as not to raise any suspicion regarding my purpose, else had I long since been dancing with nothing beneath my feet."

"And you say you knew during this last day what was our purpose in coming here?" Pierre continued.

"I suspected it, lad, because of seeing this old negro stealing into the cabin yesterday morning just before daylight, and, wondering what his purpose might be in coming here, I kept close watch over the building until I saw you lads enter it and afterward wander around the encampment. You did not cloak your designs so closely but that a watchful Britisher might have had an inkling, for I noted more than once that you were taking careful heed to all the fortifications, although why you lingered so long near the quarters of Simcoe's Rangers I failed to understand."

Then little Frenchie told him what our original purpose was in coming to the town of York; explained that we would have been Minute Boys until the time when we were forced to take Horry Sims a prisoner, and otherwise gave all the details which he had passed over when he first gave up his heart to the man who had seemingly made us captives.

"Now if you please, sir, will you tell us why you would have been counted a deserter from the British army if you had not had your suspicions aroused regarding us?" Pierre asked in conclusion, and Morgan replied promptly:

"It is absolutely necessary General Lafayette have early information of the work which is being done here in York, and in order that there may be no uncertainty as to getting word with him, some one must set off without delay, for, unless I mistake, the American forces will besiege Cornwallis as he lays here in much the same as a trap, after which to go back and forth between this place and Williamsburg will be exceeding difficult. If I myself go then I must be absent such a length of time that I shall be set down as a deserter, and could not return save at cost of my life, whereas one of you lads could repeat my words to the marquis as well as I."

"Why not more than one?" I asked in my folly, thinking that two might make the journey with greater safety, and Morgan replied with a smile as he motioned toward the loft above:

"What about the lad whom you must guard as you would your own lives, for verily his escape would mean your death? Since only one is really needed to carry my message, at least two should remain behind to play the part of jailors."

"I will set off at once," Pierre said without hesitation, and I knew the dear little lad was burning to do something of moment; but there came into my mind like a flash of light, that he was the only one of us who called ourselves Minute Boys, who had sufficient wit and cool judgment to keep our secret in case any suspiciously inclined red-coats should venture into the cabin. Therefore it was I cried quickly and decidedly:

"No, no, Pierre; not you! If Horry Sims is to be held prisoner, you are the only one among us fitted to take charge of the scoundrel. But for you he would long since have told the Britishers of our coming into this town of York, and, having proven yourself capable of conducting such a game as we are playing, it is your duty to remain here in charge."

"Then who will go?" and Pierre looked from Saul to me, and back again to Saul.

I waited while one might have counted five to learn if my cousin was eager for this mission which promised somewhat of danger--very much of peril if he who left the village was seen going in the direction of the American lines, and since Saul remained silent, I said with so much of cheerfulness as I could command:

"I am the one to go. I know well the road from here to Williamsburg, and it may be that my father is among the troops there, in which case I shall have no trouble in getting speech with the French general."

It was quite plain to me that Pierre would have insisted on his right to play the part of messenger between spy and general; but I was not minded to be left in such a delicate position as must be that lad who remained to guard our secret, and without giving him a chance to make protest I continued hurriedly, as if he was indeed my superior and I forced to obey him:

"Let me go, Pierre dear; I am too thick-headed to be left in charge should more dangers arise than already surround us. You have already shown your adroitness in crawling out of narrow quarters, and therefore must remain here."

Up to this time Uncle 'Rasmus had not spoken. It was as if he failed, even after all that had been said, of understanding the true situation; but now it appeared much as if the truth had burst in upon him, for I saw what was like unto a sudden flash of light come over his black, wrinkled face, as he stepped forward to lay his hand on Frenchie's shoulder while he said gravely, and with more of dignity in his manner than I had ever fancied the old negro could assume:

"Your place is des' here, honey, here wid Uncle 'Rasmus, an' Marse Fitz is de one to go kase dere's a chance he'll meet wid his father. I'se 'lowin' it would do Missey's heart good ef she could get word from Marse straightway frou de chile's lips. Stay whar you is, honey, kase I'se gwine to be needin' you mighty bad."

Why Uncle 'Rasmus was so eager for me to act the part of messenger rather than Pierre, I failed to understand; but it gave me wondrous relief of mind that he did interfere, and the little French lad immediately stepped back a pace or two from the fireplace, as if to say he would make no protest.

Then I, to clench the matter, fearing lest Pierre might reconsider his apparent determination to remain, asked the red-coated spy what message he would have carried to General Lafayette, and when it was his desire the messenger should set out, whereupon he replied by demanding:

"Tell me what you lads saw to-day while taking note of the fortifications?"

I repeated that which Pierre had impressed upon my mind, and in order that little Frenchie should have due credit for the military intelligence displayed, I explained that he it was who had given me my lesson as we walked, and he it was who had surmised that a battery was to be placed here or a redoubt there, whereupon Master Morgan said in a tone of approbation:

"You may set it down that your friend is a keen lad; one who keeps his eyes wide open and understands whereof he

speaks. There are many men who could have walked through the town of York this day and not seen one-half, nay, not one-quarter, for you have placed a redoubt here on the right and there on the left, which is as yet hardly begun. How know you, lad, that such works are to be put there?" and the spy turned toward Pierre as he spoke.

"I knew that if my Lord Cornwallis was fortifying this town against a siege he would need redoubts to the right and left of the village near the river, and, indeed, the ground has already been broken for such works."

"You must have seen somewhat of military movements in this short life of yours?"

"My father was a soldier," Pierre said proudly. "I have heard him and his friends discussing their campaigns and sieges until it seems to me I should be able to say with somewhat of reason how a town like this could be fortified."

"I give you credit for stationing the grand battery near the church. To my mind, Cornwallis counted on putting it farther to the westward, but now I can see that you are right." Then, turning to me again, the spy continued, "You will say to the marquis when you have speech with him, that I sent you, not being able to leave the village, as he can readily understand, and, after giving a description of the fortifications, say that much of the information has come through your friend, a little French boy, who seems to have a better idea of military works than a Jerseyman like myself. Let him know that one of his countrymen has been thus keen in finding out the plan."

"When am I to go?" I inquired, and Morgan said quickly:

"As soon as may be now that you have the message. There is no reason why you should linger, and if you go at once I can point out the safest place to make your way through the lines. An hour later I must be in quarters lest suspicions be aroused."

I confess to a weakness of heart on learning that I was to set off on a mission without delay. When I had proposed to act the part of messenger the work was seemingly in the future, and I did not give much heed to the possibility of danger until he set the time for departure so close at hand. Now I could see before me all the perils which might be encountered, and imagined many that might never come my way; but I strove to the utmost to prevent the others from reading by my face that which was in my heart, putting on a bold front as I buckled my belt a bit the tighter, and turned toward the door as if to take my departure.

Morgan rose to his feet, and Uncle 'Rasmus seized both my hands in his as he whispered softly:

"Take care ob yoursef, honey, take care ob yoursef. Make a straight getaway for Williamsburg, an' don' go gallivantin' 'roun', kase dere's danger from de time you leabe here till you get inside de rebel lines."

I had had a certain affection for the old negro before this moment, but now something akin to love came into my heart because of the anxiety he displayed concerning my welfare, and I returned his handclasp heartily, saying in what I strove should be a cheery tone:

"Don't let your heart be troubled about me, Uncle 'Rasmus. I'll pull through without difficulty, for the road is short, and I have had so much of rest this day that I am fitted for travel."

Little Frenchie patted me on the shoulder; but remained silent. Saul stood shifting uneasily from one foot to the other, not attempting to bid me good-bye, nor even to meet my gaze, and I understood that he was saying to himself with shame that he ought at least have striven to act the part of messenger, rather than held his peace, which was much the same as showing that he did not dare make the venture.

I had no time to give further heed to the surroundings. The red-coated spy had taken me by the arm and was hurrying me out of the house, doubtless fearing lest I grow timorous because of parting words, and he prevented the others from following by closing the door quickly behind him.

Moving cautiously and not venturing to speak, he led me a certain portion of the way across the village toward the west, as if I was counting on going to my own home, and when we were come to where a line of entrenchments was but just begun, he whispered softly in my ear:

"There are but three sentinels on this end the line, and you should be able to make your way past them. Go straight ahead until coming to the road which leads to your home, and then strike off to the right for the Williamsburg highway, after which the way is clear unless British scouting parties are abroad. Move cautiously; take plenty of time until you are outside the lines; then see to it that you waste not a single moment, but push forward at your best speed, for the new day is near at hand."

Having said this, and once more pointing out the direction in which I should go to best avoid the sentinels, Morgan turned abruptly, leaving me to my own devices, and during the half-minute I stood there irresolute I felt more desolate

and with a greater sense of abandonment than ever before or since, however desperate the situation.

Now was I indeed embarked in the business of spy; now had I set my face on that road which led to a shameful death in case I was taken prisoner, and while I would not have exchanged places with the lad, I regretted that Pierre, not I, had set out to do this work, for I doubted my own ability. In event of being overhauled by the enemy and questioned, I was not so quick of wit and ready of speech as the little lad from New Orleans, and would fall in many a trap of words where he could pass safely by and with seeming honor.

Fortunate indeed was it, so far as my own good name was concerned, that I did not stand there many seconds in the darkness reflecting upon what might be before me, else had I become so timorous that I believe of a verity I would have gone back to old Mary's cabin, admitting to my comrades that I dare not go further on the venture.

Luckily, however, a sense of shame at my own cowardice urged me forward, and when I heard the footsteps of the sentinel giving token that he had gone toward the other end of his beat, I crept softly along in a crouching posture, even though I might not have been seen in that dense darkness had I walked erect, and, having covered a distance of fifty yards or more, I was come to the road which led toward the Hamilton plantation.

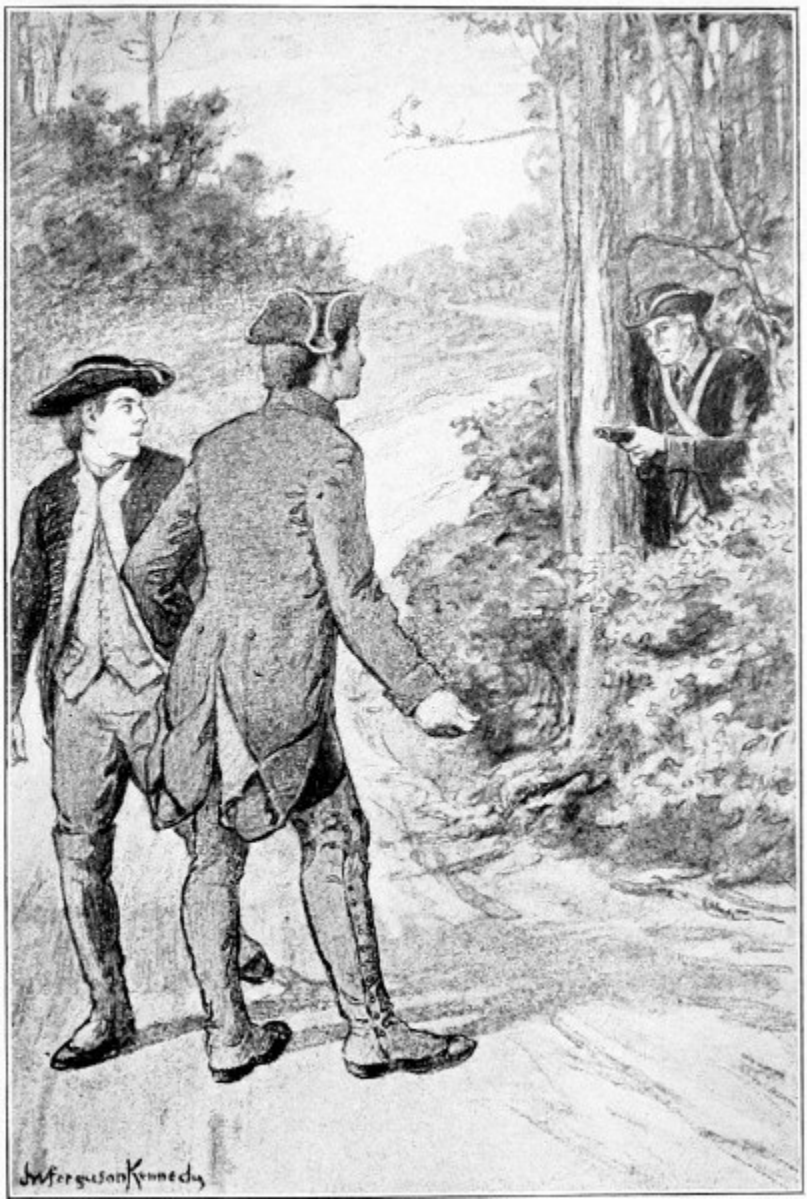
In front of me was the way which, if pursued, would have brought me to those I loved, and to safety for the time being, instead of which I must turn my back upon it, and go on the road where I might reasonably expect to meet with the enemy, for it was not likely my Lord Cornwallis would remain quietly in York Town without striving to learn what his adversaries were doing, even as General Lafayette had striven to ascertain when he sent Morgan to enlist as a British soldier.

It pleases me to be able to say now, that when the moment came to set my face away from home and toward danger, I did not hesitate. Believing I was so far from the enemy's lines that I could safely advance at a rapid pace, I set off at a lope which I knew from past experience I could hold until having traversed the distance from York Town to Williamsburg and back again.

The old adage that he who crosses a bridge before he comes to it is a fool, was proven in my case. From the moment of insisting that I should be the one to act as messenger, there had been before my mind all kinds of dangers to be encountered, and I had vexed myself with the belief that there was hardly more than one chance out of twenty that I could go through in safety, and yet I did, never seeing friend or foe until I was come, as nearly as I could judge, to within a mile of where Morgan had said the Americans were encamped.

Then suddenly, while I was half-running half-walking along the highway, dreaming no evil, came a voice from the thicket on my right, shouting:

"Halt, or I'll fire! Halt, I say!"



"HALT, OR I'LL FIRE!"

On the instant I obeyed the command, my heart standing still as it were with terror, for I made certain I had blundered upon a British scouting party, and one can well fancy the relief of mind which was mine when there came out from amid the foliage a man in the uniform of our own Virginia riflemen, who was followed by two others, and I knew I had been stopped by a friend to the Cause.

By this time, it is needless for me to say, the new day had come, and they could see me as clearly as I could them, therefore I counted on being given a friendly welcome, instead of which he who acted as commander of the squad, and I counted he was a corporal at the very least, asked as if in anger:

"Where are you from in such haste, and where going?"

"From York Town, and with a message to General Lafayette."

"You from York Town?" he cried with a coarse laugh. "You from York Town wanting to see the marquis?"

"Ay, that I am," was my angry reply. "Why should I not come from York, and why should a boy of Virginia not carry a message to a general who is serving in the American army?"

"There is no reason why he should not, providing it was being done honestly; but there are Virginians who would go from Cornwallis to Lafayette on anything rather than honest business. If you are acting as messenger, who in the town of York would send you?"

For an instant the name of Morgan trembled on my lips, and then I realized in what danger I might put the spy by thus proclaiming that he had enlisted in the British army, while the man, seeing me hesitate, laid his hand heavily upon my shoulder, as he said in what sounded very like a tone of triumph:

"If you were bent on honest business there is no reason why you should delay in saying who sent you. It looks to me much more as though you were one of the Tory spawn that infest Virginia, and were counting on learning what you might concerning our people."

Now indeed was my anger aroused, and I ministered to the suspicions of this zealous patriot by giving way to it. Instead of speaking him fairly, as Pierre Laurens would have done had he been in my place, I must needs fly into a temper, asking if he saw on my face anything betokening a Tory leaning; if he could not recognize an honest lad when he saw him, and all that sort of foolish talk which only made the matter worse, whereas if I had explained on the instant who I was, then would he have had no doubt.

The result of my folly was that not only the man who acted as spokesman, but both his companions, were straightway convinced I was playing the part of a British spy--that I was one of those vile things known as a Tory, who was willing to work whatsoever of harm he might to his own country.

At once I found myself a close prisoner, being seized by both arms and marched in triumph up the road by these men who I must confess were doing no more than their duty, and being given no further opportunity to make explanation.

During two or three minutes I held my peace, the anger in my heart being so great that I could not think clearly, and then, realizing that the truth must be shortly known when I was brought before the marquis, General Lafayette, as in my folly I believed I would be, I set about telling that which had best been told before I gave way to anger.

"My name is Fitzroy Hamilton," I said, striving to speak in a friendly tone. "Surely you know the Hamilton plantation, and that my father is in the American army?"

"Who in the town of York sent you with a message to the American lines?" the man demanded.

"That I cannot tell you; but General Lafayette will know, for it is from one whom he sent into the village."

"That won't do. If you had come from a friend to the Cause, there would have been no reason why you refused to give his name instead of flying into a passion."

I realized only too well that there was much of truth in what the man said; but did not give over striving to convince him of my honesty and loyalty to the Cause, until he angrily bade me hold my peace, saying I should straightway stand before those who would know how to get the truth out of me.

Then it was I begged him to carry me before Virginia soldiers, if indeed there were any under General Lafayette, claiming that they would know who I was, and most like have come in touch with my father, whereupon he said with a sneer, as if my prayers had only strengthened his suspicions:

"If indeed you were a loyal Virginian, you would know from the uniform I wear that we are riflemen, and you are in the presence of three of those same Virginian troops you claim to be so eager to meet."

This last was enough to silence me finally. I had made another mistake where Pierre Laurens would have come out triumphantly, for I did recognize the man's uniform, I did know he was a rifleman, and had simply meant to ask that he carry me to some other Virginian who might be willing to listen more patiently, whereas, instead of conveying such idea, I gave him to believe I was wholly ignorant of how our people who were fighting for the Cause should be dressed.

It is not to be supposed that I was thoroughly cast down by thus being made prisoner, for I knew before many hours had passed I should find some one who would believe my story, at least, so far as to give me an interview with the marquis, and once I had repeated what Morgan told me, there could be no question but that my honesty would be established.

Therefore it was I walked on with my captors almost cheerfully, and they who at first had watched me as a cat watches a mouse, expecting I might make some attempt at escape, began to treat me in a more decent fashion, thereby causing me to believe they were beginning to suspect I had told somewhat of the truth.

There is little need why I should go into detail concerning this part of my poor attempt at playing the spy, for it had no other result than my own discomfort for the time being, and served to show me, if indeed I needed to be shown after all Saul had done in the town of York, that the lad who gives way to his temper, whatever the situation, acts foolishly and to his own harm.

As I had guessed, we were less than a mile from the American line when I was made prisoner, and within a very short time my captors were halted by the outposts.

He who acted as the leader of the party gave the countersign, and straightway I was conducted into the village of canvas tents and shelters of brush-wood until we were come to a marquee, in front of which the American flag was floating and two soldiers stood on guard.

Here I was left seated on the ground under the care of one of the men who had captured me, until a full hour passed, and then to my great relief of mind and wondrous joy, none other than my father came up, welcoming me with all the love which I knew full well he had in his heart.

It needed but few words to explain why I was come to Williamsburg, and then my business was speedily transacted.

If it had not been my own father who conducted me, I would have said I was being played upon for a simple when I stood before him whom they called the Marquis, General Lafayette, for he appeared to me no more than a boy, hardly older than Pierre Laurens, and because of not having yet breakfasted he was in partial undress, therefore wore no insignia of rank.

It was necessary my father prompt me before I found my tongue to repeat the message, and I fancied the marquis himself must have understood somewhat of that which was in my mind, for he took me by the hand kindly, asking what it was I would say to him, and but for the difference in the faces I might have said it was little Frenchie with whom I was speaking.

I contrived to gather my wits, however, in time to prevent myself from acting like a veritable simple, and on the instant I announced that I had come from a Jerseyman by the name of Morgan, who could not get out of the town of York without deserting from the British lines, not only General Lafayette himself, but all others in the tent were eager to hear what I had to say.

Then it was, and feeling by this time much more at ease, I repeated all that lesson I had learned from Pierre, until having described the fortifications as they then existed, and told of those which were evidently intended to be thrown up.

I would I might say that the young French general praised me for my bravery in bringing the information; that I was complimented by all the officers for having shown so much of courage as to walk that short distance from the town of York to Williamsburg, and that my father clasped me in his arms calling me a hero; but I cannot tell such a story because nothing of the kind happened.

It was as if all those men who were serving the colonies looked upon that which I had done as a simple and a natural act; as if it required no more courage to set out from York than if I was to have gone from one end of the plantation to another.

True it is the General thanked me for that which I told him; but straightway the words were out of his mouth he turned to the officers nearabout and began discussing the news while one of them sat down at a table and attempted to draw the fortifications as I had told him they existed, or were about to be built, and no one gave any heed to me whatsoever save my father.

And I must also confess that even he whom I loved so dearly did not spend overly much time in caressing me, nor did he utter one word of praise. It was to him that I had simply done what any lad of Virginia should have done, and he was satisfied, rather than proud, that I had acted the part.

"It is well you should return at once, my lad, and since I see no good reason why you should not do so, I advise that you make your way around by our home, so you may tell your mother what you have seen. I sent a messenger to her yesterday; but she will be pleased to get later information from the mouth of her own child. If you are an hungered we can give you food."

I was hungry; but after having failed of receiving the reception accorded a hero, and being treated as if I had done nothing of moment, my folly got the best of me once more, and instead of saying that it would refresh me to have food, I declared there was nothing to prevent my setting out on the return journey at once.

If I had counted that this might remind my father of his neglect to bestow praise, then did I make a grievous mistake, for he took me at my word without parley, saying:

"Very well, my son, perhaps it is as well that you should not linger here, lest there be spies in camp who would recognize you when you re-enter the town of York. I will go with you as far as the outposts so you may have no difficulty in leaving the lines. It needs not that I should remind you of your duty to Virginia, and urge that you continue as you have begun. It would have pleased me far better were you in the ranks, even though you served as a private,

rather than playing the part of spy; but since it has been brought upon you by the force of circumstances, we must accept the situation as it is, and pray to the good God that you come to no harm."

This last served better than any other words could have done, to show me how foolish I had been to give way to irritation and disappointment because I had not been received as a hero, when I had done nothing as yet to win a hero's crown, and, thoroughly ashamed of myself, I clasped my father around the neck, kissing him again and again, mentally asking his pardon for having been such a simple, yet not daring to put the prayer into words lest he should come to learn that his son was so great a fool.

The good man talked with me as he led the way toward the outposts which I must pass, telling me of the great hopes in the breasts of the Americans that Cornwallis would speedily be overcome, and otherwise discussing the affairs of the colonies, rather than private matters.

I now believe he did so because of not daring to give words to his affection for me, lest he weaken my heart when he would have it stout. At the time, however, it surprised me, because he had ever been a most loving father, who took pleasure in showing his love; but I laid it all to the door of a soldier's anxiety at this time when there was so much of vital importance to the colonies at stake.

Within an hour from the time I first had speech with General Lafayette I was alone on the road, not that which led to the town of York; but rather across the peninsula to the Hamilton plantation, and the dangerous journey which was to win me so many laurels was finished with no more peril, nor more of adventure, save when I had been accosted by the American scouts, than if I had walked into my mother's drawing room at night-fall.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF SAUL

I had no difficulty in going from the American lines to the Hamilton plantation. I suppose that my Lord Cornwallis's desire to speedily fortify York Town so he might the better be able to prevent the "rebels" from doing him harm, was the reason why no scouting parties were met with, and even though I had come upon a dozen red-coats, there was little possibility harm would be done me, unless peradventure they had been sent out with special orders to make me prisoner because of my having entered the town of York under false pretences.

However, I did not look forward to anything of that kind, nor was there reason so to do. It did not seem probable any of the king's officers were aware of what we lads and Uncle 'Rasmus were striving to do, else had they made a descent upon us before I acted as messenger for the Jerseyman.

Because of having had no sleep the night previous, and being somewhat wearied with the tramp from the town of York, my eyes were heavy when I set out for my home; but the thought of seeing my mother once more, of being able to explain to her exactly what we counted on doing, together with the beauty of the morning, when everything around me spoke of peace, content and happiness, rather than of war, served to revive my spirits and my body until it was as though I had enjoyed a long period of repose.

But for that which hung about my neck like a millstone, meaning our having been forced to make a prisoner of Horry Sims, I would have been radiantly happy on this morning. As it was, however, I no sooner began to anticipate the pleasure of meeting my mother, or attempted to enjoy the beauties of nature, than I thought of that cowardly Tory cur lying in the loft of old Mary's cabin, where one or another of us must keep watch over him every hour of the day and night, and if so be he should succeed in giving us the slip despite all our vigilance then would we become fugitives, with all hope of regaining possession of Silver Heels dashed, and considerably more than an even chance we might find lodgement in the British guard-house.

Thus it was I journeyed on, one moment buoyant with hope, and the next cast down by fear of what the future might have in store for us who called ourselves Minute Boys, hoping the day might come when we would be able to give good proof that we had a right to such a title.

The journey came to an end finally, as must all journeys in this world whether they bring us to a haven of rest or a sink of iniquity, and then did I forget all things in the outside world that might give me pain or trouble, in the pleasure I had with my dear mother, telling what I had seen in the American camp, repeating the words father had said to me, or striving to make her believe it would be possible for Saul and me to accomplish that which we had set before us. At the same time I tried to keep in the background the dangers which must necessarily be encountered, unless peradventure the Americans made an immediate advance and were overwhelmingly successful.

I might have saved my breath so far as striving to hide from the good woman who loved me so dearly, the possible dangers in the path we had chosen. She had pictured them all in her mind, and I am bound to give her credit for not having magnified them in the lightest degree. She viewed the situation as you might expect a soldier's wife would, carefully weighing this possibility and that, until she had come to have even a better knowledge of all which threatened than had we ourselves.

It was, however, when I told her we had been forced to make a prisoner of Horry Sims that she grew white lipped, pressing me suddenly to her arms as if imminent danger threatened, and from that moment it was necessary I bring to bear upon her every argument at my command, else would she have set her foot down flatly that I should not return to the town of York.

I believe of a verity all my attempts at making her more friendly with our scheme which had been marred by the capture of the Tory cur, had been in vain but for the fact that I could plead the shame which would come upon me if I should abandon Pierre, Saul, or even Uncle 'Rasmus, after having done my share toward luring them into a position of peril.

She realized even better than I that it was my duty, having set out upon the road with these companions and accompanied them thus far, to bear my full share of all that might result. As a consequence, instead of demanding that I remain with her on the plantation, she held me pressed closely to her bosom while the tears ran down her cheeks unrestrained, until I was grown so faint-hearted and so grieved because of having involuntarily caused her suffering, that a feeling of timorousness began to creep over me.

Fortunately, however, I succeeded in calling back some portion of the courage which had fled before my mother's tears, and realized that if I would do my full duty, as a boy of Virginia should toward the comrades with whom he had bound

himself, it was necessary I leave home without delay, for verily I believe had I remained there until the next morning I could not have summoned up spirit enough to venture into that town of York where the king's soldiers, like a pack of ravening wolves, were denned up after having committed upon a defenceless people all the injury within their power.

Of the parting with my mother that noon I cannot speak, even at this late day, so painful was it. I can see now her pale face as she stood on the veranda watching me walk away, doing my best not to look back upon that mournful picture, and yet turning my head again and again despite all efforts to the contrary.

Unkind though it may sound for me to say so, I must confess to a feeling of actual relief when a turn of the road shut out from my view the house and the dear, mournful figure on the threshold.

Once that had been blotted from my vision by distance I quickened my pace, and with every yard traversed on the road to York did my courage revive, until when I had arrived where it was necessary to put on an appearance of idle curiosity and total disregard as to the wasting of time, I felt almost as if I could work out alone and unaided this plan which we had formed to outwit the officer who represented the king.

It must seem strange to have one claim that at such a time, when my Lord Cornwallis's army was penned up so thoroughly by the French fleet to the seaward and Lafayette's forces to the landward, that a lad like me could wander at will inside the encampment.

Soldiers not familiar with what was done in Virginia at that day, might say it would be an absolute impossibility for even a lad like myself to pass through the lines unchallenged, because Lord Cornwallis knew well that a great number of us in Virginia were those whom he called rebels, and I was of sufficient age and intelligence to carry information to the Americans.

Yet it is true that on this day I saw idlers from plantations on both the York and the James rivers lounging around the British outer works, or passing the sentinels here and there along the line of entrenchments facing landward, without being challenged, or without hindrance in any form, and I, as a matter of course, followed these curious ones who would with their own eyes measure the strength of the king as it was displayed in Virginia.

Like them I entered the village with no one to say me nay. Because it did not seem prudent to go directly to old Mary's cabin, I wandered around through the village, gaping at this or that, and once feasting my eyes with a view of Silver Heels as she stood at the stable line knee-deep in sweet straw, munching her hay as contentedly as if she had been in her own box on the Hamilton plantation.

Then I went my way to old Mary's cabin, seeing the black, wrinkled face of Uncle 'Rasmus at the window while I was yet some distance away.

Hearing my footsteps he looked up with a smile of pleasure and of welcome, and I understood there was naught to hinder my entering, therefore flung the door boldly open and walked in to find myself in the embrace of the old man, who petted and fondled me as if I had been down into the very jaws of death, and was come back only through my own brave exertions.

It had ever been Uncle 'Rasmus's way to treat me as if I was a child, and heretofore it had given me great annoyance that he should stroke my cheeks lovingly, and croon about his "bressed baby," or "brabe little man"; but now that I was in the enemy's country where I might come to grief at any moment, these evidences of affection were welcome, nay, I craved them so ardently as to remain really nestling in his arms until the old man tired of treating as a baby the lad who counted to call himself a Minute Boy of York Town.

Then it was I asked concerning my comrades, and Uncle 'Rasmus replied that Pierre was in the loft above, doing his share of guard duty, and Saul had gone away shortly after breakfast, bent on seeking out his mare that he might feast his eyes upon her even as I had upon my own Silver Heels.

Just for an instant there came into my mind the fear that my cousin was forgetting himself by leaving little Frenchie so long on duty; but it was only a passing thought, and I gave no further heed to his absence as I went up the ladder into the bare room festooned with cobwebs and lighted by a single square aperture at either end, through which the breeze came without check.

Horry Sims, miserable Tory that he was, appeared to be having much the best of this imprisonment. Knowing that he could not escape save by making his way down through the scuttle, and desiring to spare him all the pain that might be prudent, our lads had left him unfettered and ungagged.

He was sitting on the blanket which he had rolled up to form a cushion, with his back against the side of the house near the chimney, and appeared to be taking solid comfort, although one might see by the expression on his face that the

close confinement and the fear as to what might finally happen, was telling upon him.

On the contrary, Pierre was the one of that couple who appeared to be getting the worst of the business. He was sitting on the bare puncheons near by the scuttle, with his knees in his arms, looking as weary as a lad well could look, and I pitied the little fellow, remembering what delights had been mine during what had been much the same as a vacation, when I journeyed to the American lines and from there to the plantation.

"Finding it hard work, are you?" I asked, crouching on the floor beside him, and the dear little fellow, with that bright smile of his, shrugging his shoulders as if it was a matter of indifference, said cheerily:

"It is not as lively here as I have known it in New Orleans, and there is but little with which to occupy one's attention; but when Saul has come back I count on going down to the river bank and having a swim, if so be his majesty's red-coated servants do not forbid such sport."

"There is no reason why you should not go now, lad. Surely I can well afford to take your place after having wandered around the country to my heart's content."

"It is not fair that you should do guard duty after having just returned from a long tramp," he replied with a bright, winning smile. "How many hours did you sleep last night?"

I confess I had not realized that I might stand in need of slumber, and would have put the lad off with an evasive reply; but he persisted with his question until I was forced to admit that since leaving the town of York to carry the Jerseyman's message, I had not closed my eyes in rest, whereupon he insisted I go to the floor below, and seek the repose which he claimed I so sorely needed.

"Saul is certain to come back within a short time," he said, "and then it will be for him to take my place here. You are to sleep now, to the end that if work of any kind be demanded of us this night, you will be in condition to perform your share of it."

There was no gainsaying a lad like Pierre Laurens; it would have been much like resisting the entreaties of a girl friend, to set one's face against that which he desired, and I meekly obeyed him, leaving in the loft the prisoner who looked fairly well contented with the situation, and the jailor who appeared to be suffering from confinement.

On the floor below Uncle 'Rasmus had already made up such a bed of blankets as was possible, he having heard the conversation in the loft. Straightway I had stretched myself out on that poor apology for a couch, my eyes were closed in slumber, and I remained hour after hour in blissful unconsciousness of the world of war and of hate around me, until I was brought back to this earth and all the disagreeable realities by the pressure of Uncle 'Rasmus's hand upon my cheek.

"What is it? What's wanted?" I cried, springing up and striving to brush the slumber from my eyes, the cobwebs of sleep being so thick in my brain that for the instant I did not realize where I was.

Then I noted with no little of apprehension that the night had come. Already was the room so dark that save for the flickering of a few pine knots in the fireplace, one could not distinguish surrounding objects, and on fully recovering my senses I asked:

"Did Pierre Laurens go out for a swim as he counted on doing?"

"De po' little French boy am held right here, honey, kase he couldn't leabe dat scoundrel ob a Tory."

"But where's Saul?" I cried. "Hasn't Saul come in since he left this morning?"

"It's des dat what's aworryin' ob me, honey chile. Saul Ogden done lef here arter we got trou breakfas', an' 'lowed he'd loaf 'roun' de town a couple ob hours. I done heard him tell de little French boy dat he's gwine fo' to be back here arter he'd seen his mare, an' yet he ain' shown up sence. I tell you what it is, honey, I'se gettin' pow'ful skeered 'bout dat cousin ob yourn. It can't be he'd stay all dis yere time, knowin' he was boun' to habe an eye out on dat Tory cur, so's Pierre could get a sniff ob fresh air."

For an instant I stood irresolute, looking about me as I tried to guess what could have prevented Saul from keeping his word. During those few seconds it did not come into my mind that aught of evil might have happened; I only questioned what friend he could have met who thus delayed him, or what pleasure he found which would keep him away.

Then like a flash of light came the thought that neither friend nor pleasure could have prevented Saul from returning to his duty, and I understood that one of two things must have happened: He had either been arrested on some charge or

another by the red-coated soldiers, or had through his ill temper got into a brawl, when he had been so grievously wounded that it was impossible for him to come back unaided.

I wheeled about suddenly, like one bereft of his senses, and clambered up the shaky ladder as if my very life depended on my gaining the loft within the shortest possible space of time. There, where by reaching out his hand he could touch that Tory sneak whom I longed to crush beneath my heel because he was causing us so much trouble, having the same as thrust himself into our keeping as a prisoner, sat little Frenchie, patient but nervous, as I could guess by his movements.

"Where is Saul?" I demanded fiercely, as if through some carelessness or inadvertence of Pierre my cousin had come to grief, and the little lad replied mournfully, having lost so much of his spirit during the weary time of waiting that he could seemingly neither shrug his shoulders nor wave his hands:

"I wish I knew, Fitz; but certain it is something serious must have happened to the boy, else he would have been back, as he agreed upon, within two hours from the time of leaving."

"Why did you not waken me that I might go out in search?" I demanded angrily, as if still believing he was at fault.

"It seemed to me necessary you should regain all your strength, that you might be able to meet the disaster which I feel is near upon us. There have been times when I was tempted to call for Uncle 'Rasmus, insisting he send you out at once; but I was checked by the thought that you had already endured much of labor and should be allowed the slumber which was needed."

"Nothing could be necessary at such a time as this, save that I went out in search of my cousin!" I cried, almost beside myself with grief and apprehension, for there was no longer any doubt in my mind but that Saul was either a prisoner in the hands of the red-coated soldiers, or else lay somewhere in the village wounded grievously, perhaps unto death.

"Now that you have come I will search throughout this entire town," and Pierre sprang to his feet as if to descend the ladder, whereupon I caught him frantically by the coat, for at that instant a horrible dread seized upon me, lest I be left alone with that Tory villain and have so much of temptation that it would be impossible to keep my hands from him.

"Why should we not both go?" I cried. "Why is it necessary one stay here when Uncle 'Rasmus may stand guard at the foot of the ladder?"

"Now you are talking wildly. Suppose we both went out, and Horry Sims, hearing footsteps, should go to one of the windows and cry for help? How would it be possible for Uncle 'Rasmus, old and crippled as he is, to prevent the mischief?"

"Then we will gag the Tory scoundrel and truss him up so he can neither move hand nor foot!" I cried. "Is he to stand in the way of our searching for Saul? Is he, after having done us whatsoever mischief lay in his power, to hold us back when perhaps the dear lad is needing us so sorely?"

"Don't gag me! Don't gag me!" Horry cried frantically. "I promise to make no sound, nor so much as lift a finger, if you will leave me free; but to have that gag in my mouth all night, would be murder."

"And so it would," Pierre added emphatically. "I believe both of us ought to go in search of Saul; but this fellow, Tory though he be, should not be forced to endure so much of suffering as would be his if you left him gagged and bound."

"What then will you do with him?" I asked, speaking more like a mad man than a lad who counted it would be possible for him to prove that he might be of service to the Cause through playing the part of Minute Boy. "Surely we can't hoist Uncle 'Rasmus up here into the loft."

"No; but we can take Horry Sims downstairs," Pierre replied quietly, and I cried in alarm:

"Take him to the lower floor where any one who passes may see him?"

"There is no need to leave him in public view," Pierre replied. "We can bind him securely in one corner of the room at Uncle 'Rasmus's feet, where the old negro can readily prevent him from making any outcry."

"But suppose one of the soldiers takes it into his head to enter?"

"That has not happened thus far, and we must take the chances that none will be so curious. Better that than put this fellow to torture."

Just then I believe of a verity it would have gladdened my heart to have seen Horry Sims suffering all the torments a human being can suffer; but fortunately, the little French lad had more good sense in his tiny body than had I in my

lank carcass even though I towered head and shoulders above him, and he literally forced me to fall into his way of thinking, by bluntly declaring that he would not step outside the cabin door unless I displayed more of humanity.

I would almost sooner agree to set the young Tory free, than venture out in a blind search for Saul without having this little French comrade with me, and therefore it was I bore my part in disposing of the prisoner as Pierre had suggested.

We bundled him down through the scuttle as if he had been a bale of merchandise rather than flesh and blood, and then I warrant you but little time was spent in binding his hands and feet so securely that, unaided, he could not get free.

How Uncle 'Rasmus may have viewed being left in the cabin to act the double part of jailor and helpless invalid, I know not. He had heard, as a matter of course, all our conversation in the loft above, and when we came down with Horry Sims and began to tie his feet, the old negro shoved his chair into one corner, saying as he did so that we should put the fellow where he could have him under his hand. Then, seating himself, with a blanket over his knee which might also serve to cover Horry in case visitors entered, he was ready to do his share of the work.

I was not satisfied to leave the two alone, unless Uncle 'Rasmus was armed, and would have set out in search of some weapon, although I knew not where to procure one, but that Pierre said with something almost approaching impatience in his tone:

"Are you so blind, Fitz Hamilton, that you can't see whether Uncle 'Rasmus is armed or not? With that cane of his I dare venture to say he could strike a man dead with one blow; while that is in his hand and Horry lying at his feet, the Tory is completely at the old man's mercy."

All this was true, as I should have seen before Pierre spoke, and when we had the miserable cur of a prisoner disposed of in a corner of the room where the old negro could, if need arose, cover him with the blanket which was supposed to be needed by himself as an invalid, it appeared to me we need not fear going about in the village while the cabin was unguarded save by Uncle 'Rasmus.

It would not have been like the little French lad to linger many seconds after our preparation had been completed, and immediately he satisfied himself that matters had been arranged to the best of our ability, he opened the door, going out into the night as he motioned for me to follow.

It must have been that news had come into the town of York during the afternoon concerning a threatened advance of the Americans, for even though it was night the Britishers were working at their fortifications, having torches of pine knots stuck up here and there, and it seemed as if every man of that army of seven thousand was using either the pick or the shovel, or directing the movements of those who worked with their hands.

"Can it be that our French general is advancing?" Pierre whispered gleefully to me, and because I wished it might be so, it was in my mind almost a certainty that the Americans were closing in on this town of York, with the intent of giving battle to our enemies.

We at once turned our steps toward the quarters of the Rangers, for there was good reason to believe that Saul, on leaving the cabin in the morning, would have gone there first in the hope of getting a glimpse of his mare, and as we came upon a group of soldiers who were at work upon one of the redoubts I barely smothered an exclamation of delight, for there I saw Morgan, the Jerseyman, his coat off, shoveling dirt as if his one desire on earth was to prevent the Americans from entering York.

So thick is my head that I would have gone directly toward him, thinking only to tell of Saul's disappearance and ask his advice concerning what we had best do; but as I stepped forward Pierre clutched me firmly by the arm, and at the same instant I saw a warning look in Morgan's eyes as he recognized us.

Fortunate it was that I had sense enough to obey instantly both the look and the grasp on my arm, otherwise had I betrayed him to his death, and us lads to a prison.

I was faint with the sickness of fear on realizing what might have been brought about by my stupidity; but Pierre led me straightaway in the direction we had been pursuing, and before the dear lad could speak I said, noting that we were beyond ear-shot of any of the king's soldiers:

"Forgive me, lad, forgive me! I came near to doing that which could never have been undone, and remembering the terrible danger I was like to have placed you and Morgan in, it maybe that in the future I shall walk and act more as a thinking boy should."

"No harm has been done, Fitz," and little Frenchie caressed my coat sleeve as if it was he instead of me who had so nearly wrecked three lives. "So long as you didn't speak to Morgan, and no one could have noticed that you

recognized him, it is as if we hadn't seen the man."

It was ever little Frenchie's way to do what he might to soothe the feelings of one who had gone wrong, and flinging my arm above his neck regardless of whosoever might see, I hugged him to my side as if he had been a sister.

Owing to the unusual activity all around us we were able to go at will throughout the village, seemingly arousing no suspicions, for hardly a man noticed us, and we searched every foot of the encampment save, as a matter of course, the guard-houses or the buildings occupied by Britishers, until having satisfied ourselves that Saul was not lying in some out-of-the-way place unable to move because of wounds.

"It must be that the Britishers have made him a prisoner," Pierre said thoughtfully as we wandered down to the river bank where we could converse without fear of being overheard. "If he had provoked a quarrel with any of the soldiers, or the lads who came from the plantations, we should have found him ere this. We may set it down as a fact that he is held in one of the guard-houses."

"Then what is to be done?" I cried impatiently, and to my surprise Pierre replied calmly:

"Nothing; at least, nothing now. Of ourselves we cannot hope to find him; but must wait until we have speech with Morgan. He is the one of all others in this town of York who can help us."

"And we are shut out from him by the fear that we may betray an acquaintance," I said bitterly, whereupon Pierre added, speaking in a soothing tone:

"It is only for a few hours, lad. There is no question but that he will seek us out when the opportunity comes, to learn if you succeeded in your mission, or if any word was sent to him, and we must wait."

"But in the meanwhile Saul is lying in one of these wretched places a prisoner, even as is Horry Sims in old Mary's cabin," I cried bitterly.

"True, Fitz, and we will hope that it is the worst which has befallen him; but how are matters to be mended by us who are much the same as prisoners ourselves? To go about making inquiries of any we chance to meet, would be the same as begging that we be arrested on whatsoever charge he lies under. It is what may be called the fortune of war, and you, and Saul, and I must show ourselves as Minute Boys should, by accepting whatever comes with the knowledge that we are aiding the Cause."

"Valuable aid we have given the Cause by coming into this town and looking at two horses which were stolen!" I cried savagely, and Pierre added, again caressing my arm:

"Don't forget that you succeeded in carrying a message which Morgan could not have delivered save at the cost of destroying his usefulness as a spy."

"And yet that had nothing to do with Saul's arrest, if so be he is a prisoner."

"Now you are unreasonable. Let us go back to the cabin and there wait until the Jerseyman comes. Whether the time be long or short, we by fretting and fuming cannot cut off a single minute. If remaining idle seems hard, remember, Fitz Hamilton, that by going ahead blindly we may make matters worse than they are now."

Of course I realized that all Pierre had said was true. No fellow could listen to the little lad when he was talking so earnestly and imploringly, without understanding how much of sound sense was in that tiny body of his, and for at least the tenth time since we set out from the Hamilton plantation counting to call ourselves Minute Boys, did I resolve that in the future I would never make protest at any command he might give, but would fall in readily and cheerfully with every suggestion of his.

He led me back to old Mary's cabin much as a nurse leads a petulant child, and when we neared the door I was like to have forgotten Saul's possible plight as the fear came over me that here might we have met with fresh disaster.

It was a wondrous relief to enter the rude cabin and find Uncle 'Rasmus still seated in his invalid's chair, with Horry Sims lying at his feet, and in my joy and relief I clasped both the old negro's wrinkled hands so tightly that he cried out with pain.

There was little need he should ask whether we had been successful in our search, because we had returned as we departed; but I could not refrain from acquainting him with our ill fortune by saying in a sorrowful tone:

"We have neither heard nor seen anything of the dear lad, and it must be that the Britishers are holding him prisoner."

"De Lawd's will be done, honey! De Lawd's will be done! Ef dat po' chile Saul hab fell inter de han's ob de Britishers,

we'se boun' to set here sorrowin' widout liftin' a han' to help him."

"Uncle 'Rasmus is saying much the same as I did, Fitz dear," Pierre interrupted. "It is the fortune of war, and whatsoever comes to us while we are striving to play our part, must be borne. There is no reason why we should not hope for the best, at least until the Jerseyman comes, as I feel positive he will at the first opportunity."

CHAPTER IX

SUSPENSE

Pierre and I flung ourselves down at Uncle 'Rasmus's feet as if by such close companionship we could the better dull that deadly pain in our hearts, or lessen the horrible suspense which was about us like a dark, threatening cloud.

We had no inclination for conversation, because if we gave words to the fearful thoughts in our minds it was as if we were making of the possibility a reality. Therefore we lay on the puncheon planks alternating between faint hope and blackest despair, feeling that there was one chance in mayhap a thousand that something had occurred to call the lad out of the village, yet at the same time knowing that he must be in the hands of the enemy, otherwise would we have received some token from him by this time.

I said to myself again and again that if the red-coated gentry held him in their power a prisoner, he would be treated with some fair consideration, for these soldiers of the king were not red Indians, and would not proceed to extremities at least until after the semblance of a military trial.

I could account for the dear lad's absence only that by giving way to his ill temper he had unwittingly revealed the reason for being in the town of York, and had been arrested as a spy. That seemed the worst of the possibilities, for surely if such was the case they could prove him guilty, and I knew only too well the fate which would be his.

On looking at the matter more hopefully, I prayed that he might have gotten into a brawl with some of the soldiers, and been carried to the guard-house simply as a disturber of the peace, in which case nothing more serious than his own distress of mind and discomfort of body would occur.

It was Horry Sims who broke the long silence, and on hearing the voice of that Tory cur it was with difficulty I could prevent myself from leaping upon him, choking from his worthless carcass the last breath of life, because he was responsible for all our suffering at that moment.

"It seems to me that now is the time when you can afford to make with me some kind of a trade," the young villain said, struggling to rise to a sitting posture, and before I could utter the words of wrath that arose within me, Pierre asked with that soft, mild voice of his, as if the idea of trading with the Tory was agreeable:

"In what way would you have us bargain, Horry Sims? What have you to offer?"

"You must be willing to admit that at some time in the future it will be necessary to set me free," he began, paving the way for that proposition which was coming, and little Frenchie said in a friendly tone:

"Yes, that is true, unless before such time comes you make it necessary for us to take your life in order to protect ourselves."

"Surely you would not kill me in cold blood when I stand ready to obey whatsoever command you may give?"

"In that case we should hesitate before taking even such a worthless life as yours," Pierre replied, and one might have thought from the tone of his voice that he was saying something which would be pleasing to the listener.

"Then if it be true, as you admit, that the time must come when I am allowed to go free, it seems to me you had better make a bargain now, rather than be forced to let me go later and bear all the consequences of this high-handed proceeding of yours. Surely you must understand that my friends, and my father has many nearabout the towns of James and York, will take revenge because of what you have done to me. Suppose I agree to hold my peace forever regarding what you have done, and, in addition, promise to go out and seek diligently for Saul? I can go where you dare not; I can receive replies to my questions when those whom you approached would be dumb, and may promise almost with certainty that before daylight Saul Ogden will be with you, for if the Britishers are holding him my people have influence enough with Lord Cornwallis to effect his release."

"You are forgetting, Horry Sims, that we have been forced to allow you to share too many secrets of ours," Pierre said mildly, and the Tory cur added eagerly:

"You have my word of honor that I will not so much as think of them after leaving this hovel. Whatsoever I may have heard or seen here is locked in my breast forever, if so be you are minded to treat with me."

"Such a proposition as you make might be heeded if he who suggested it was one who had any honor on which we could rely," Pierre said, still speaking in a mild tone. "We know as well as you, that instantly you were allowed to go free your feet would carry you to Lord Cornwallis's headquarters, and there, regardless of your so-called word of honor,

you would repeat everything you have heard--most likely very much you have imagined. I am not willing to have dealings of any kind with a Tory; but it may be that Fitz Hamilton is more foolish, and if he chooses to accept your bargain I shall hold my peace."

I did not give the young Tory time to ask my opinion. While he and Pierre had been talking the anger in my heart was nigh to stifling me, for I feared that little Frenchie might be inclined to put faith in the fellow's word, and on the instant I cried in a rage:

"Trust you, Horry Sims? Not for a single second after you were free to move about or to speak! There is no oath which you Tories could take that would bind you as against those who are risking their lives to free the colonies. I would sooner throttle you this minute, than trust one of the fair words you might speak!"

It must be that Horry Sims had fully believed the time was come when he could bargain with us to his own advantage, for straightway I ceased speaking he flew into a rage, the first real signs of anger he had shown since we made him prisoner, and began to threaten as to what his people would do with us when my Lord Cornwallis had driven back the forces under General Lafayette.

He continued in this strain mayhap while one could have counted twenty, and then Pierre, quietly laying his hand across the creature's mouth, said with a laugh:

"You are putting too much dependence upon the future, Master Sims, when you reckon time by a victory to be gained by the Britishers. This particular portion of the King's army is in a small hole, from which there can be no escape, and within very many days you and your Tory friends will be striving to curry favor with those whom you now call rebels."

Horry Sims could make no reply to this remark, for the very good reason that Pierre held him dumb, and again we fell into painful silence, picturing in our minds the possible fate of Saul, until little Frenchie said in a tone of hopefulness:

"Why may we not rid ourselves of this fellow entirely? While we hold him he is a menace, and but for the necessity of keeping watch over the cur we would be at liberty to move around at will."

"But how *can* we rid ourselves of him?" I asked impatiently, forgetting for the instant that this little lad from New Orleans, so gentle and so girlish in his ways, was full of resources at such a time.

"It should not be difficult to smuggle him through the lines during the night, and by carrying the fellow to General Lafayette's army I have no doubt the officers would hold him fast for us, because of understanding what might be the Jerseyman's fate if he was allowed to go free. You would only be forced to tell your father the story, Fitz, in order for him to guard the scoundrel as he would guard something very precious."

On the instant my heart leaped with joy, for verily did this plan seem to promise both success and relief, and without looking ahead to the possibilities I said promptly, as if it were in our power to do whatsoever we pleased:

"He shall be carried to Williamsburg! Once there I'll answer for it he has no chance to join his friends who claim to love the king so dearly."

Then Pierre and I set about discussing the best course to pursue while leaving the town of York, as if we would set off that very night, when Uncle 'Rasmus put an end to the hoping and planning, at least so far as the present was concerned, by saying dreamily:

"I'se 'lowin', chillun, dat you won' fin' it so ter'ble easy to get out ob de lines dis yere night. Dere's sumfin in de air dat's trubblin' Marse Cornwallis, an' you can be mighty sure dese yere sogers am keepin' dere eyes wide open."

Surprised at thus learning that the old negro knew so much of what was going on outside, I asked irritably why he had formed such an opinion.

"Didn' you tell me yoursef, honey? I ain' 'lowin' dat dese yere sogers would be shovelin' dirt in de night 'less sumfin had come up sudden like. Des look out ob dis yere winder, an' see de torches all 'roun' us. How you 'low you'se gwine to sneak out ob dis yere cabin wid de young Tory 'tween you, an' get away widout anybody's askin' questions?"

There was no need for me to do as Uncle 'Rasmus suggested. While Pierre and I had been searching for Saul we had seen signs, as I have already set down, of unusual activity in every direction, and I realized that we could not hope to make our way through the lines unnoticed while, as it seemed to me, every member of Cornwallis's army was astir.

"Uncle 'Rasmus is right," Pierre said mournfully, "and I was a fool not to have remembered what we have just seen. There is no sense in our talking of leaving town, at least until the Britishers have quieted down. We must carry the Tory into the loft again, and say to ourselves that we are held prisoners in the village of York even as he is in this cabin."

"Why take the trouble to carry him into the loft?" I asked fretfully, angry because it had been shown me beyond a shadow of doubt that the plan I leaped at so eagerly was an impossibility.

"Because when morning comes no one may say how many red-coated soldiers will be here hunting for us. If Saul has been arrested, then are we under suspicion."

"And if they come to search for us, there is no more assurance of our remaining hidden with this Tory in the loft, than if he remained here in the room."

"We will take him there nevertheless," Pierre said in a tone so decided that I could not have contradicted him even though I had made ready a good argument for so doing, and without delay the little lad from New Orleans set about acting on his own suggestion.

It was not a simple task which we had before us, for Horry Sims, bound hand and foot, was as unwieldy as a bundle of merchandise, and, in addition, he fought as well as he might to prevent us from forcing him up the shaky ladder.

Not until I had cuffed him soundly, promising a more severe punishment in case he continued to resist, did the lad give over the useless struggle, and after considerable labor Pierre and I contrived to hoist him to the loft above.

It was when we had finally succeeded, and were seated on the puncheon planks near the scuttle resting from our exertions, that Uncle 'Rasmus said, speaking sufficiently loud for us to hear him while he yet remained in his chair near the window:

"I'se 'lowin', chillun, dat you bes' stay right whar you are, an' de ole man will keep an eye out here, so's dere won't any ob dese yere Britishers sneak in widout our knowin' it. If de man from Jersey comes erlong, I'se boun' to gib you notice, so try to get your forty winks ob sleep while dere's a chance."

It seemed to me like veriest folly to talk of sleeping while our hearts were so heavy with grief, and danger seemingly closing in around us, yet when Pierre acted on Uncle 'Rasmus's advice by throwing himself down on the puncheon planks by the side of Horry Sims, where he could have due warning if that young scoundrel attempted any mischief, I followed his example. With the Tory between us we two lads lay there on the hard bed, both, I doubt not, thinking with tears in our hearts of Saul's possible fate, and both within a short time journeying over into Dreamland despite all there was in the situation to prop our eyes wide open.

When next I became conscious of my surroundings it was possible to see the faint grey light of coming dawn through the narrow apertures which served as windows, and I sprang to my feet quickly, almost frightened because I had given myself up to slumber for so long a time.

Scrambling down the shaky ladder as if time was most precious, I made my way to the room below, where I found Uncle 'Rasmus sitting as when I had last seen him, with a blanket drawn over his knees and his eyes fastened upon the moving figures of the soldiers outside.

"Why did you let us sleep, Uncle 'Rasmus?" I demanded. "We should have remained awake so that you might have an opportunity to rest."

"Ole bones don' need so much ob de bed as young ones does, honey, an' I'se no good 'cept to set right here an' watch. Don' you fret 'bout your Uncle 'Rasmus, kase he'll look out for hissef all right."

"But it seems selfish for us to have slept while you remained awake."

"Now you'se frettin' 'bout nuffin, chile, when dere's plenty ob real trubble to take up your min'."

"What has happened?" I asked anxiously, thinking for the instant that the old negro had seen tokens of impending danger.

"Dere's sumfin goin' on in dis yere town, honey, as is pas' my understandin'. Dese yere sogers has been workin' all night, an' dey're still at it, as ef de ole man from down below was arter 'em."

"I don't see that we need fret very much if the Britishers have grown frightened," I said with a laugh, and Uncle 'Rasmus replied:

"It looks to me, honey, as if dey counted dere was gwine to be a battle 'roun' here mighty soon, an' ef anyting ob dat kine does happen, I'se askin' mysef how we'se comin' out ob it. We'se a good deal like Brer Rabbit, when de fox an' de wil' cat was fightin' to see which one would hab him for breakfas'. Whicheber way it turned he was boun' to be eat up, an' it kind'er looks to me as ef we'd be in de same fix ef our folks an' de Britishers got to shootin' off dere guns while we was in dis yere cabin."

I stood silent and motionless gazing at the old man with my mouth wide open like a simple, as this possibility of a new danger came upon me. As a matter of course I had believed there would be a battle between the two armies; but that we might be held in the cabin exposed to shot and bombs from both friend and foe, was something to cause the blood to run cold in one's veins.

It was well for me that just at the instant came a change in the situation, else might I have given proof of the timorousness which was in my heart. I was yet looking stupidly at Uncle 'Rasmus when the door suddenly opened. As I turned to see who was the intruder an exclamation of joy and relief burst from my lips, for it was none other than Morgan, and I made sure that now was come the moment when we would have some information concerning Saul.

"Yes, I have been working all night in the trenches as if my greatest desire in life was to hold the Americans in check," he said as he sank down on the floor like one on the verge of exhaustion, when he saw that I was taking note of the stains of toil upon him.

"What about Saul?" I cried, forgetting that we had had no opportunity of warning this friendly spy that our comrade had disappeared.

"Saul? Is he not with you?"

"He went out from this house yesterday morning, and has not returned. Pierre and I were searching for him when we came across you. I then might have made trouble for all of us, but for little Frenchie, who was quick-witted enough to see that you feared lest we might speak to you."

"Your comrade has disappeared?" Morgan said musingly, and seemingly forgetting his weariness of body he rose to his feet like one who suddenly remembers that the time for action has come.

"We thought you might know somewhat concerning him," I added stupidly, for by the surprise, and even the fear, exhibited by this man I might have known beyond a peradventure that he was all ignorant of what had occurred.

"Is there a possibility he might have gone home simply to please himself?" Morgan asked after a brief pause, and I replied emphatically, knowing full well that whatever might be the faults of my cousin, he would not leave us in ignorance concerning his whereabouts if he had set off solely for pleasure:

"It is positive he would not have gone away of his own accord without having told us."

"Then it stands me in hand to find out what has become of the lad. If by chance he has been taken under suspicion of being a spy, then is my shrift like to be short, for within the past twelve hours it has become well nigh impossible for any one to make his way through the lines."

"What has caused such sudden caution?" Pierre asked as he descended the ladder, having been awakened most like by the sound of our voices.

"Word has been brought in that Lafayette's army is being reinforced by men from the North. It was said last night that another fleet has appeared off the Capes; that there is like to be fighting both on the sea and on the land, and General Cornwallis has come to understand better than ever before the necessity of keeping his situation a secret. In other words he has locked the stable door after the horse has been stolen, for there is nothing new we could carry to our people even though it were possible for us to go and come at will."

"Do you think a battle may be near at hand?" I asked, and Morgan replied confidently:

"I am not well skilled in war; but would be dumb indeed if I did not understand that before a battle between the two armies can take place, this village will be besieged. Cornwallis is preparing for such possibility, else why is he fortifying this unimportant point so carefully. It cannot be carried by direct assault, therefore are we like to be shut up in here until the Britishers are starved into subjection, unless, perchance, the fleet which has just come off the Capes proves to be English, and succeeds in driving the French away."

"Is there any reason why Fitz and I should not show ourselves around the village this morning?" Pierre asked suddenly, as if some new thought had come into his mind, and Morgan replied:

"You may do as you will, lad, so that you are careful not to arouse suspicion, and above all, give no heed to me if we come within sight of each other. If it should be that Saul has been taken as a spy, I am thinking you lads will speedily find your way into the guard-house, and it matters not whether you are taken while on the outside, or here in the cabin."

Then Master Morgan opened the door as if to go out, and I would have detained him by clutching nervously at his

arm, but he shook me off as he said:

"I must strive to learn somewhat of the situation, because just now a grain, or two more of knowledge may save our lives. To-night, if not before, and in case the three of us are allowed to remain at liberty, I will try to have speech with you again."

He was gone before I could make further protest, and after closing the door I turned to face Pierre and Uncle 'Rasmus.

"Our company of Minute Boys seems to be of great assistance to the Cause," I said bitterly, for with Morgan's words there had come into my heart the certainty that death stood very near. "Instead of showing that we could play the part of men, we have simply come into this town of York and put a halter around the neck of that honest man from Jersey, for had we remained at home without dreaming of accomplishing the impossible in the way of winning glory, he would have deserted from the British army in order to carry the information to General Lafayette, and thus be out of danger."

"One would suppose to hear you talk, Fitz Hamilton, that the end had come--that we were doomed beyond possibility of escape."

"And how else can you picture it?" I asked angrily. "With Saul arrested as a spy we are certain of sharing the same fate; even though you may account for his absence in some other way, it seems positive we are to be shut up here with the enemy while our friends are striving to kill all within the entrenchments. If that does not warrant my belief that we are standing very close to death, I would like to know how much more proof may be needed."

"We are yet alive," Pierre said softly and with a shrug of the shoulders, "and as yet at liberty so far as this cabin is concerned. I fail to understand why we may not yet prove ourselves worthy of being called Minute Boys, and succeed in doing something which shall win for us credit, if not honor, from those who are struggling against the king."

It angered me that that little French lad should be hopeful at a time when clouds of danger pressed so thickly and so closely about us, and I turned away from him impatiently, looking out of the window where could be seen the laborers in the trenches, squads of men marching here and there, and officers visiting this scene of activity and that; but all working with one common aim, which was the oppression of our people.

Whether Pierre was as unconcerned as he would have it appear, I cannot say; but if he had put on a mask then was he playing his part well, for he went here and there with a smiling face as he made ready our small store of food for the morning meal, and actually spoke in a cheery tone when he announced that our provisions were well nigh exhausted.

"I allow that we can satisfy our hunger this noon, if indeed we have any desire to eat at that time; but we will go supperless to bed, unless some means for provisioning the cabin can be devised."

I could not believe we had eaten all that store of provisions which we brought from the Hamilton plantation until I went to the cupboard and there saw that Pierre had spoken truly, even within bounds, for if we ate our fill on this morning the noonday meal would be slight indeed.

When I turned from this dismal inspection Pierre was carrying up the ladder to the loft a plentiful supply of cold boiled ham and fried hominy, seemingly a larger portion than he had set aside for our own breakfast, and I asked angrily if he counted on giving that Tory sneak more than we ourselves could indulge in, whereupon he said gravely:

"If any go hungry it must not be the prisoner. We are holding him here, and it is for our honor that he be not allowed to suffer."

"It is for our own safety that he be kept on short allowance," I cried. "How do you allow we can add to our store now that it is no longer possible, according to Morgan's story, for us to make our way through the lines?"

"It makes no difference how we can add to the store, or whether we spend this day without breaking our fast, the Tory prisoner is to be fed, and I shall see to it that so long as we have a morsel in the cupboard so long shall the greater portion of it be his."

I had never heard Pierre Laurens speak so decidedly, and with such an assumption of authority, as at this time, and surprise silenced me that the little lad should have taken it upon himself to say this thing, should, or that thing should not be, when, without having actually done so in words, I claimed to be the leader of the company.

Pierre took care to feed Horry Sims before he served out any food for Uncle 'Rasmus and me, and when we sat on the floor near the window breaking our fast, my heart smote me as I took note that he had given both to the old negro and me a portion twice as large as that which he reserved for himself.

The lad was ready to sacrifice his own need to our pleasure, and I would have forced upon him some portion of the

provisions which he had given me, but that he resolutely refused to take it, saying he was not hungry; that the news brought by Morgan had driven all thoughts of food from his mind, and such other excuses which I knew had been invented simply to force me to take more than my share.

Fortunately for my peace of mind even at this late day, I refused to eat more than did he, and the keenness of my anger was not yet dulled when I carried the remainder of the portion allotted me to the cupboard, saying in what I intended should be a jovial tone:

"The knowledge that your stomach is set against food has weakened my appetite, and perhaps it will be as well, for we have the more when the time comes for serving dinner."

The old negro insisted that both Pierre and I should go through the town to put ourselves in the way of learning whether any further information had come in from the outside, and declaring that he would take care of Horry Sims providing we brought him down on the floor once more.

I would have refused to act upon this suggestion; but it seemed to please Pierre, and he at once set about getting the Tory cur where Uncle 'Rasmus could overlook him, therefore was I forced to lend a hand.

"Am I to be left here trussed up like a chicken ready for the roasting?" Horry Sims asked angrily when we had put him once more in the corner of the room without taking undue care as to the handling.

"Your stomach is full; except for your liberty are you better off than either Pierre or I, and you may lie there thanking your stars that matters are no worse for you," I cried, whereupon little Frenchie, as if fearing I might abuse the prisoner of which he was so careful, opened the door and literally thrust me out.

When we were come near to my Lord Cornwallis's headquarters, I noted with surprise that a goodly number of the soldiers, together with a large sprinkling of officers, were pressing on toward the water's edge, and it was no more than natural Pierre and I should follow the throng, excited as we were by seeing the privates throw down shovel or pick without permission, to chase at the heels of their superiors.

Before we were come to the dock it was possible to hear from the distance a dull boom, as if many miles away a heavy cannon had been discharged, and then there came another and another, and I heard those red-coated men nearest me say gleefully:

"Admiral Graves is stirring up the frog-eaters! We may count it as certain that these two rivers will no longer be blockaded by Frenchmen."

Then I remembered what Morgan had said, and understood that the fighting for the possession of this town of York had already begun on the sea; that the British fleet had come down to drive away the vessels under command of Count De Grasse. Once more I grew timorous with understanding that if the Englishmen should be victorious in this naval battle which I doubted not was close at hand, then would it be possible for them to land troops on the river of York or of James at their pleasure, until our forces at Williamsburg were outnumbered ten or twenty to one.

The same thought was evidently in Pierre's mind, and he also must have been fearing that the English sailors might prove superior to the French seamen, for he said in a whisper, drawing me closely to him by clutching tightly at my arm:

"My Lord Cornwallis must be mighty uneasy just about this time, for unless the British fleet can drive away the French vessels, then is he left to the mercy of our people who are coming down from the North to join General Lafayette."

"Ay; but if so be the English succeed, then is General Lafayette's force at their mercy."

"Ay, lad, and it may be a toss-up. At all events, I have it in mind that whatsoever is going on at sea just now decides the fate of this portion of the king's troops. Even though the Frenchmen do no more than hold their own, and prevent the Britishers from driving them out of Chesapeake Bay, then must the day speedily come when my Lord Cornwallis will be crying for quarter."

"With all the fortifications that have been thrown up around this town of York, it strikes me he may hold out many a long hour before being forced to show the white flag," I said bitterly, and the little French lad added cheerily:

"You forget that your people, under the command of my countryman, can work as well if not better with pick and shovel, than have those red-coated servants of the king, and I make no doubt but that there will be as strong lines of entrenchments opposing my Lord Cornwallis, as he has thrown up for his protection."

"And in the meantime we shall be between the two, or what is the same thing, exposed to the fire of our own people, and taking our chances of a stray ball from the redoubt here near the point," I said as my heart shriveled once more

under the influence of fear.

CHAPTER X

NEWS OF SAUL

Pierre Laurens and I might have stood on the river bank and argued as to the future until the crack of doom without its affecting matters in any way, or without our being the wiser, save that we watched what was happening around us, for, luckily, no person may look into the future.

We were so excited by the distant sounds of the battle which was raging between our friends in the French fleet and those whom his majesty had sent to whip us into submission, that for the time being all thoughts of Saul had completely gone out of my mind. It was as if the lad did not exist, until mayhap two hours had passed, when Pierre bethought himself that it was our duty to go back to old Mary's cabin in order to acquaint Uncle 'Rasmus with what was going on, and then I spoke my cousin's name, reproaching myself because I had thus seemingly neglected him.

"You need not be so bitter against yourself, Fitz Hamilton," little Frenchie said with a shrug of the shoulders. "It seems certain that we of ourselves can gain no information whatsoever concerning Saul Ogden, else would we have come upon him ere this. We must content ourselves in patience so far as may be, believing that the Jerseyman will sooner or later come upon the truth."

"And what then?" I interrupted fiercely.

"Then we shall do all within our power to aid the lad, if he be alive, and keep ever in mind, in case he has gone into the other world, that he went because of striving to do whatsoever he might for the Cause."

I believe we could have walked through the village of York again and again talking loudly on the most disloyal topics, and yet no one would have given heed to us, so intent were all upon that distant booming which told of a struggle that must decide the fate of those who held the town of York while they themselves were much the same as prisoners.

It was some such thought which caused me to say with a smile, and as if there was more of courage in my heart than really existed, that Lord Cornwallis was much like Pierre and me. He had taken this village of ours and set himself down to keep it, after which General Lafayette had come up, closing him in, and holding him fast. We on our side had taken Horry Sims a prisoner, and were striving to hold him, while the king's soldiers were much the same as depriving us of our liberty now that they no longer allowed us to make our way through the lines.

"I'll agree that the two situations are alike up to a certain point," Pierre said grimly; "but the end is to be much different. My Lord Cornwallis will be beaten, while I'm counting that we shall come off victors, through the aid of those who are battling for the Cause, and therefore will we laugh best because we laugh last."

A dearer, truer, more cheery comrade than Pierre Laurens never lived! Surely I had good proof of it that day when he heartened me with his light words and his promises concerning the future until I was almost come to believe we were on the high road to success, even though there remained in the cupboard of old Mary's cabin no more than food enough to serve for another meal, and we were unable to make our way to the Hamilton plantation where we might have revelled in plenty.

When we saw Uncle 'Rasmus once more it was as if we had not stirred hand or foot since we left him as Horry Sims's guardian.

The black, wrinkled face could be seen through the window as we approached, and so far as being able to read an expression of either hope or despair upon his countenance, one might as well have gazed at a graven image.

Pierre lost no time in explaining to Uncle 'Rasmus the moaning of those dull yet heavy reports which could be heard from the distance, and when he was done with the story as we had heard it from the Britishers, the old negro said placidly, as if the matter did not affect him in the slightest:

"I'se 'lowin', chillun, dat dere's boun' to be a heap ob fightin' 'roun' dis yere town 'fore de Britishers get what am comin' to 'em."

"And we are like to have as much in the way of danger as if we were serving in the trenches," I added, curious to learn how the possibility of being under the fire of our friends might affect the old man.

"I'se 'lowin' dat you'se right, honey," was the quiet reply. "Gin'al Washington ain't gwine fo' to set down up Norf while he knows we'se needin' him here, kase he's a gen'man ob Virginia, an' dey allers 'tends to dere duty. Course we'se boun' to stand our end ob it when de shot does begin to fly; but bress you, honey, how many dat you know, an' I know, am

gwine to do de same, an' what's good enuf for dem ain' any worse for us."

Surely with such companions as Pierre and Uncle 'Rasmus a decent fellow could not long indulge in gloomy possibilities of the future, and for at least the twentieth time since we left my home did I resolve that I would strive to imitate them in their calm faith as to what the coming days might bring, and their general disregard to bodily discomfort or injury so that they might be able to do something, however slight, to aid the Cause.

Then, of course, we discussed this possible battle which was going on at sea, speculating as to what the outcome might be if the French beat off the enemy, and also what might occur if the English were victorious, for you must remember that while waiting further news from the Jerseyman we had nothing better with which to occupy our time.

Although we talked long and earnestly, going over all the possibilities, Horry Sims did not venture to raise his voice, and this surprised me somewhat, causing suspicions to arise lest the Tory cur had in mind some plan for escape, or that he knew more than did we, although that seemed impossible, regarding Saul's whereabouts.

On that day, because of lack of provisions, we decided that there was really no need of dinner, and deferred the meal until night, the prisoner, as a matter of course, sharing our fast, although I doubt not that Pierre would have insisted on his feasting while we went hungry had there been more than provisions enough to provide a single fair allowance for the four of us.

It was dull work sitting in old Mary's cabin waiting for the coming of the Jerseyman, although we knew full well that he might not be able to pay us a visit within eight and forty hours; but it was in Pierre's mind that we had best remain there, where he could come upon us at a moment's notice, rather than walk around the village now it seemed certain we could get no information regarding Saul.

I hardly remember how that long day did pass. I know full well, however, that it seemed as if more than a week elapsed between sunrise and sunset. I can even at this moment recall the fierce joy which was mine when, just as the shadows of night were beginning to fall, the door of the cabin was opened softly, and that man whom we had been waiting for so eagerly came in.

I could hardly wait until he had closed the door behind him, before I asked impatiently, with mingled hope and despair in my tones:

"Have you heard aught concerning Saul?"

When the reply came I leaped to my feet excitedly, rushing toward the man as if to clasp him in my arms, for I had not dared to hope he would bring positive news.

"Saul Ogden is confined in that guard-house where, so I am told, the Widow Marshall formerly lived. Do you remember a small, one-storied log building that stands perhaps two hundred paces in the rear of the church?"

"Yes, yes, I know it well," I cried eagerly, although not being really certain as to which of the houses the Widow Marshall had formerly lived in. "What is the charge against him?"

"That I haven't been able to determine; but feel quite positive it is nothing very serious, else would he be under stricter guard. Most like he and some of the Tory villagers got into a brawl--"

"How is he guarded?" Pierre asked, and I understood that even then the dear lad was casting about in his mind for some plan which might promise success in our efforts to release him.

"There is but a single sentinel in front of the building. If Saul was charged with being a spy, he would be confined in the basement of that stone house overlooking the water--I know not who owned it before the British occupation. Spies are more closely guarded, while your cousin shares the quarters of such soldiers as are punished for slight misdemeanors."

"Then it may be possible that we can aid him to escape?" I cried breathlessly, and to my surprise Master Morgan said emphatically:

"It would be unwise to make any move in such a direction lest suspicion be aroused regarding you and me. The lad is in no danger, and I dare venture to say more comfortably situated than are you. Leave him alone; do not even loiter around the building in the hope of getting a glimpse of him, and you may be certain nothing of harm will come through the Britishers just at this time. It is well to let sleeping dogs lie."

I cried out against what thus seemed to be an abandonment of our comrade, and stupidly insisted that it was our duty to do all we could to release him from his prison, regardless of what might come to ourselves, whereupon little Frenchie

reminded me in that silken voice of his, that we had no right, even though the peril was greater, to run the risk of bringing suspicion upon Morgan, whose life would most like pay the penalty if it was known that he had any connection, however slight, with those who favored the Cause.

We argued the matter back and forth half an hour or more, Pierre and Morgan against me, until finally I was brought to a sense of my duty; was made to understand that in this supreme effort of the colonists to throw off the yoke of the king, the liberty or even the life of one or a dozen such lads as us should count as nothing; that if by going down to his death, Saul might avert suspicion from Morgan, thereby leaving him where there was a possibility he could aid the Cause, then should a boy be proud to die.

"Very well, I yield; you have shown me why I should desert my cousin, and I am ready to do it. Now, perhaps you can say how we may replenish our store of provisions, for we are about to eat the last morsel of food."

I was angered because of having been beaten in the argument, and because even Pierre sided against Saul, as it seemed to me, therefore spoke hotly and in what I counted should be a scornful tone; but to my deep surprise Morgan said in a tone of satisfaction:

"Like to be hungry, are you? Well, matters couldn't have turned out better for me. I didn't dare dream you would be driven by necessity to do that which I have in mind?"

"So it seems fortunate to you that we shall not be able to break our fast to-morrow morning?" I cried hotly, and the Jerseyman replied with a laugh:

"Ay, lad, so it does. I am not claiming that it will be impossible for you to do as I desire; but by really being hungry you can the better act that part which I had come up here to persuade you was your duty."

"What is it you would have us do, sir?" Pierre interrupted, as if it irritated him because we spent so many words before coming to the meat of the matter.

"If two boys and an old slave are the same as starving, surely there isn't an officer under Cornwallis who would not grant them permission to go fishing. In two or three hours they might be able to get enough to fill their stomachs many times over. I believe you have only to present yourselves to the officer of the day to-morrow, explaining the situation, and asking permission to go out in a boat."

All these words simply formed a riddle; I did not have the sense to understand just at the time, owing to my impatience, that the Jerseyman had something back of this--that it would serve his purpose for us to be on the river to-morrow morning; but dear little Pierre was not needing many explanations before he could come to the root of the matter, and he asked quietly:

"If it should be that we got permission to go fishing, where think you we could make the biggest catch?"

"Two miles or more below Gloucester Point," Morgan replied.

"Having gone so far as that what would you advise?"

"That you keep reasonably near the shore, and if a man wearing a bit of green in his hat came near to the water's edge, put in where you might have speech with him."

"What speech?"

"Remember, lads, these words: 'Despite all the work Cornwallis is doing in the way of fortifying the town, there are indications that he is preparing to retreat by way of Gloucester if the English fleet fails to bring succor.' Now let me hear you say that twice, for the wording is most important."

Pierre did as he was commanded, never missing a word or tone, and when he had finished to the Jerseyman's satisfaction, I asked how it was known that a man would approach the boat.

"I saw him on the shore this afternoon. His being there is much the same as an intimation that he is waiting for some word. I doubt not that seeing two boys in a boat he will come near the water, to give you an opportunity of proving if you have been sent by me. There is a possibility he may be prevented from coming, or that he will not understand you might be serving me. Of all that we must take our chances, and since you are in such sore need of food, the attempt to deliver my message will cause you little or no additional labor."

"It is not the labor that would stop us," Pierre said hotly. "It is needed only that you point out how we can be of service, and nothing else is of importance."

"I know that, lad, right well do I know it, from what little I have seen of you since we met. Go to the officer of the day early in the morning, or to whomsoever wearing a sword you can come at most handily. Tell the truth so far as may be safe, and humbly beg permission to go fishing. For the time being put from your minds all thoughts of Saul Ogden, difficult though that may be, for I assure you he is in no danger, and enjoying more of comfort than it is possible for you to enjoy here in this cabin while you stand guard over a Tory prisoner."

I would have forced Morgan to explain more regarding this man whom he thought we might possibly meet on the Gloucester shore, for I was eager to understand how the fellow had come there, and what cause he had for believing he might be seen by the Jerseyman; but our visitor cut me short by saying that now his business had been transacted there was no reason why he should remain longer, and great need for him to hasten away.

Immediately we were alone Pierre set out the last of our store of provisions, dividing the food equally between us four, counting the prisoner as a member of the company, and when we had eaten the frugal meal, which was in quantity no more than enough to make plain the fact that we were hungry, little Frenchie led me into the open air, making no explanation to Uncle 'Rasmus regarding his movements.

"Where would you go?" I asked when the door was closed upon us, so that those inside the cabin might not hear what was said, and the dear little French lad whispered in my ear, while caressing the sleeve of my coat:

"I would not have you believe, Fitz Hamilton, that I am so cold blooded as it appeared when I agreed with the Jerseyman that we would make no attempt at getting word to Saul. I am burning to let the lad know we stand ready at the first opportunity to give him aid, and to that end would walk down past the house where we are told he is imprisoned."

"But what about the danger we may be bringing upon Morgan by thus interfering, when he has advised that we remain quietly with Uncle Rasmus?" I cried, and Pierre replied softly:

"Can you not see how lame his argument was that he himself might be drawn into trouble if we were suspected? He has visited us twice in the cabin, and both times secretly; it is to be supposed he took good care no one should see him, therefore how may it be said, if we run our noses into danger, that he has had any part in it?"

"Would you set out with me now to do whatsoever we might toward releasing Saul, for verily, Pierre Laurens, he may be released if simply held prisoner in that house belonging to the Widow Marshall, because it is as crazy a building as the one we have just left."

"I am not saying I would do aught toward releasing him this very night, for that could not be other than dangerous. No matter for what slight misdemeanor he may have been arrested, once he has made his escape the hue-and-cry will be raised. What I have in mind is simply to let the lad know we are watching over him, and stand ready to do all within our power when the proper time comes."

Verily Pierre was wise beyond his years. It had not occurred to me that Morgan had some particular reason for keeping us closely housed; but now it was as if I understood all his purpose. He counted on our being where he could lay his hand on us at any moment when it might be necessary we should act in his behalf, therefore advised that we leave Saul out of the question for the time being.

Pierre had apparently agreed with the Jerseyman, while at the same time it was in his mind to do that which we were setting out to accomplish, and I had no scruples about following him, for ponder over the matter as I might, I failed to see how anything suspicious on our part could bring trouble or danger to the spy, or in any way menace the Cause.

It was more than possible we might run our own noses into danger, and suffer thereby; but we alone would be called on to pay the penalty.

I led the way through the village to the Widow Marshall's, meeting here and there a single soldier, or the red-coated gentry in squads, none of whom gave any particular heed to us, because there were other lads then ourselves in this village of York, whose parents had not seen fit to run away when the Britishers took possession.

As we made a detour around the building I said to Pierre, taking good care not to point lest I attract attention:

"Yonder is the house, where the soldier stands in front of the door. Do you see that the only bars to the windows are puncheon planks? If a lad was so minded, and no one approached the rear of the building during a certain length of time, he could dig his way through that chimney of sticks and mud until he was come into the fireplace."

All this, as a matter of course, Pierre had noticed, and he also must have seen, as did I, that our hope of showing ourselves to Saul had been vain, for, as I have said, the windows were closed with planks. Whosoever was held prisoner inside could not get a glimpse of the outer world; but must remain in darkness all the while.

We walked by this apology for a guard-house slowly, not daring to halt lest some red-coat take heed that we were noting the place more carefully than lads of the village would be likely to do. When we were come nearly to the river front we wheeled about, retracing our steps so far as to be able to pass the building on the other side; but at no point could we see an opportunity for warning my cousin that we were near at hand.

"We might as well have staid inside the cabin," I said in a tone of despondency as we turned our faces toward where we knew Uncle 'Rasmus awaited us. "This is the first time, Pierre, that one of your plans has come to naught, and both you and I should have had wit enough to realize that if the building had been turned into a guard-house, the windows would be barricaded in some way to prevent the escape of prisoners."

"The plan has not come to naught. Before we left the cabin I had no idea where the house was located; but now you have pointed it out I would be able, if the time was ripe and you not with me, to find the place. I am counting--"

Pierre did not finish the sentence, for at that moment we came face to face with Abel Hunt, a dissolute fellow seventeen or eighteen years old, who lived in a mean hovel with his meaner parents near to Horry Sims's home, and one who would follow in the footsteps of Horry Sims's father so far as having a Tory leaning was concerned.

It was so dark that I did not see the fellow until we were close upon him, otherwise would I have made every effort to avoid a meeting, for I had no doubt that he, seeing us in York, would immediately ask himself why we who favored the Cause were there. Then might he straightway set about striving to learn what was our business in the village.

Again, and this came into my mind like a flash of light, he might be there searching for Horry. When the lad failed to return home his parents would, as a matter of course, send here, there and everywhere in search of him, and this fellow Abel Hunt would have been one of the first whom Master Sims would have called on, because, having much the same as supplied the Hunt family with food, he could demand their service whenever they were required.

Looking over what I have here set down, it would seem as if I was making it appear that Pierre and I stood motionless several seconds in front of Abel Hunt, whereas all these thoughts had come into my mind in a twinkling, even as I crowded little Frenchie into the roadway with the faint hope that we might pass Hunt and not be recognized.

In this I was unsuccessful, for even as I would have moved out of his path the fellow seized me by the arm, as if he was my equal, and said with a coarse laugh:

"Well, how comes it that one of the Hamiltons, who claim to be red-hot rebels, is loitering around the British encampment? Have you changed coats lately, Master Fitz?"

"I am wearing the same coat of buff and blue that I stood ready to put on when we heard the news from Boston. I suppose if there be any color to yours, it is red, unless peradventure you could find more money in the pockets of a garment of different hue."

This last I said because it was well known two years before that both Abel and his father were willing to sell their services to Whig or Tory; but could find none foolish enough to buy them, therefore, dependent upon Master Sims as they were for their daily bread, fell into line as lovers of the king.

Hunt gave no heed to me when I thus reminded him that he was willing to sell his opinions; but abruptly demanded why I was in York, and where I counted on going.

It is true that I might have told the fellow it was none of his business, and refused to hold converse with him, as I surely would have done had the danger not been so great. If I passed him with an angry word it was absolutely certain he would follow to learn where I went, and, failing in discovering that, might give information that the son of Captain Hamilton of the American army was loitering around York, whereupon I would find myself in that same guard-house where Saul was confined.

The only course, as it seemed to me, and I was forced to decide on the instant, was to speak to the fellow fairly, and, much though I disliked to do so, strive to throw him off the scent.

Therefore it was I said, forcing myself to speak in a fairly friendly tone:

"Pierre and I came into York yesterday to see the soldiers, for never before have I been in a military encampment. We had no difficulty in entering the lines; but it was quite another matter when we would go out. It seems as if there must have been some sudden change in the situation, that Lord Cornwallis should decide not only to prevent visitors from arriving; but also from departing when they desired to go home."

"And what have you lads been doing since the time when you found it impossible to pass the sentinels?" Abel Hunt asked suspiciously, still holding me by the arm, while the fact that I continued to answer him in a friendly manner must

have been proof that I was afraid of him, and he so understood it, as I fancied from the tone in which he spoke.

Never before had he dared to accost me other than in the most civil manner, with his hat in his hand. Now he demanded an answer as if he was my superior.

"We have done the best we might," Pierre answered, most like fearing I would make an intemperate reply. "It is not easy to find food among strangers, and as for a shelter, we long since gave up all hope of that, therefore are spending the night on our feet, as you see."

"Do you count on walking around till morning?" Hunt demanded.

"What else can we do?" I asked laughingly.

"Have you no friends here in the village?"

"None who can give us shelter," I replied, whereupon the fellow fell silent for an instant, and then suddenly wheeling me about with a force that caused me to wince with pain, asked abruptly:

"When last did you see Horry Sims?"

I know full well that a gentleman should never tell a lie, and have ever contended that under ordinary circumstances it is not only wicked, but vile to do so. In this case, however, I knew it would cost Pierre and me our liberty, perhaps our lives, if we held only to the truth, therefore I replied as if striving to awaken memories:

"I believe it was on the morning the Britishers seized the horses of the Hamilton plantation. I saw him on the road at that time."

"And you can make no guess as to where he may be now?"

"Why should we waste our time making such foolish guesses as that?" Pierre demanded as if suddenly grown angry. "Horry Sims, as you well know, is no friend either to Fitz Hamilton or me, although so far as I am concerned he has no reason to be an enemy; but because he and Fitz are at swords' points over politics, do I believe I should side with him whom I call my friend."

"Meaning that you deny knowing about where Horry may be now?" Abel Hunt cried in a threatening tone, and Pierre, straightening himself up to show that he was not afraid of the bully, replied in that silky tone of his:

"Meaning to say that that is what I would have you understand, Master Abel Hunt."

Surely in making such answer Pierre escaped telling a downright lie, for he spoke only the truth.

Then, striving to show myself somewhat at ease in the company of this fellow with whom I had never previously associated, I asked him in turn what he was doing, and where he counted on spending the night.

He gave no heed to my first question, but replied to the second by saying:

"I allow I'll stay with you lads till sunrise. It's a bit lonesome loafing around here alone, and, like you, I know of no place where I can find a bed. We'll hang together as neighbors should."

"We'll do nothing of the kind, Abel Hunt," I cried hotly. "I claim the right to choose my own friends."

"Oh, you do, eh?" the fellow cried with a coarse laugh. "Well perhaps in this case you haven't got any rights. At least, before allowing it I want to know why you are here, and how you happen to be wandering around the camp of an enemy, for surely you rebels count the king's soldiers as enemies."

I understood on the instant that I had made a mistake in thus speaking angrily; but it was too late to make amends, as I thought, and would have moved on but that Pierre said just as Abel Hunt barred my way by stepping in front of me:

"I see no reason, Fitz, why even though you may not be friendly with this lad, he should not remain with us, at least until morning. I can well fancy that if he, like you and me, has no place in which to lay his head this night, companionship of any kind would be very sweet. At least, I know it is with me, and, with your permission, shall welcome him."

"You will because you don't dare do different," Hunt cried triumphantly, and Pierre said with a note of sharpness in his tones:

"Since that is your belief, Master Hunt, we will prove to you the contrary," and Pierre, ruffling like a pigeon, strode off with a great assumption of dignity, I as a matter of course following.

When we came upon Abel Hunt we were going directly toward old Mary's cabin; but now Pierre turned at the next corner, walking slowly as if simply eager to pass the time, and headed in the direction of the river, while I kept close by his side mentally bewailing the little lad's unlucky desire to learn the location of the guard-house in which Saul was confined.

It was possible to see out of the tail of my eye, even though I had not heard his footsteps, that Abel Hunt was following less than half a dozen paces behind us, and a great fear came into my heart, for now I knew he was convinced we had had some hand in the disappearance of Horry Sims, and would act as our shadow in the hope of coming at the secret of the Tory's whereabouts.

There was little chance he would give us an opportunity of slipping into old Mary's cabin unobserved, and I pictured to myself the alarm and distress of Uncle 'Rasmus as the hours went by and we failed to put in an appearance.

I had come to understand that we must walk the streets of York during all the hours of darkness, and, what was of far more importance, must hold back from performing that task which the Jerseyman had set us.

There was little hope we would be able to set off in a boat alone, and it was quite positive we would not dare do so while Hunt was holding us under his eye, therefore had we missed an opportunity of serving the Cause, as well as paved the way, perhaps, for our own arrest as spies.

I turned the matter over and over in my mind as I walked by Pierre's side in silence, asking myself whether this dissolute fellow could gain speech with any of the king's officers, and as I asked the question I could answer it full well, for he had only to whisper the fact that he could give information as to spies, and even my Lord Cornwallis himself would listen to him.

We had come to grief, as it seemed to me, and what presented itself to my mind as the most painful of all the sorry business, was that we had been brought to such a pass by a worthless, ignorant lout whom I would not have allowed to linger even in the Hamilton stables.

CHAPTER XI

A DESPERATE VENTURE

As Pierre and I walked aimlessly to and fro without other purpose than to convince Abel Hunt we were really without a shelter, and not daring to hold converse one with another lest he should overhear, the bitter thought was in my mind that Uncle 'Rasmus must perforce remain in old Mary's cabin standing guard over the prisoner.

I tried to remember how much water we had left in the cabin, and finally came to the conclusion that there was less than a quart in the bucket when I last quenched my thirst, therefore neither the old negro nor the Tory prisoner would have a bit to eat or a sup to drink until we had succeeded in throwing Abel Hunt off our track.

As a matter of course I understood that Morgan, the Jerseyman, would visit the cabin late in the evening in order to learn whether we had delivered the message with which he had charged us; but although I could find so much of trouble in the future, I failed of guessing that we might be forced to remain away from the cabin a full four and twenty hours.

It seemed to me positive that long before such time had elapsed Abel Hunt would weary of acting as our shadow; but certain it was that until we had tired him out, or something more promising attracted his attention, we must keep our distance from Uncle 'Rasmus and his prisoner.

We had been walking to and fro mayhap ten minutes with the fellow close at our heels, and then, quickening his pace, he came up to my side as he said in a surly tone:

"I do not believe you are in this village without shelter for the night! Unless I mistake not your father owns one or more houses here, and why should you be forced to walk around? It is because you are not willing for me to know where you are stopping, which means that there is some of your rebel mischief afoot causing you to fear I may work you harm."

"It concerns me very little, Abel Hunt, what you believe," I replied sharply, "and as for my intent to work mischief, it is a dream born in your own evil head."

"Why do you not go to one of your father's houses?" he demanded, and I replied, striving to curb my anger which rose hot against the masterful tone he had dared use to me:

"It would seem that you have a better knowledge of my father's property than myself. If indeed he does own any houses in York, then is it most likely they have been taken possession of by the king's soldiers, for my Lord Cornwallis is not so kindly disposed toward us whom he calls rebels, as toward you Tories who claim to love the king, doing so simply because you hope to profit thereby in the way of money or of safety for your worthless necks."

Then I pressed forward more quickly to prevent the fellow from walking so close by my side, and whether it was chance, or because Pierre so directed our steps, I cannot say; the fact is, however, that we were speedily come out on the river front directly opposite Gloucester Point, and here, as if he was leg-weary, little Frenchie threw himself on the ground within twenty paces of the water's edge.

"Are you minded to stop here, lad?" I asked in a low tone, and he replied with what sounded to me much like an odd inflection of the voice:

"I have walked around so long, Fitz, that it seems impossible to take another step. Since we must pass the time in some way 'twixt now and sunrise, why not let it be at this place where we can stretch out at full length, and mayhap sleep."

"Thinking you would tire me out, eh?" Abel Hunt cried, he having as a matter of course been so close to our heels that it was possible for him to hear the lightest word.

"It makes little difference whether we tire you out, or you remain near by, so that you keep at a respectful distance. It is not your following which annoys me; but your striving to hug so closely."

"Perhaps I am not good enough for such as you?" Hunt cried angrily, and now it was that I ceased striving to hold my temper in check, replying in quite as hot a tone as the question had been asked:

"You have hit exactly upon the truth, Abel Hunt, and it is no news to you, for from the time I can remember I have ever striven to give you a wide berth, because of your breeding."

"Before this war is over it may be that you, Fitzroy Hamilton, will regret that you were not bred in different fashion. The

people of Virginia are not all alike, and many will hold accountable those who have brought the war into our borders."

It was useless to bandy words with the fellow, as I understood, even though my anger was so great that it would have soothed me somewhat to give him a plain statement of the position he occupied in Virginia; but I held my peace as I threw myself down by the side of little Frenchie, counting that the lad would chide me for having had speech with Abel Hunt. Instead of so doing he remained silent, his head pillowed on his arm as he looked across the river toward the twinkling lights on Gloucester Point where a portion of Lord Cornwallis's army was encamped, and straightway there came into my mind the thought that the dear lad was striving to cook up some plan which might work to our advantage.

It is true that his last scheme had brought us into sore trouble; but that was no proof he could not in the future, as he had in the past, contrive something to our benefit. I made no attempt to enter into conversation with him; but was content to lie there watching.

Abel Hunt stood shifting uneasily from one foot to the other, half a dozen paces distant, as if deliberating whether he would have further speech with me on the subject of breeding, and I fancied, perhaps because I hoped it might be so, that he was eager to turn his attention to something more diverting than acting as a shadow to Pierre and me.

As the time wore on, however, I began to doubt the correctness of my guess, for Hunt in turn threw himself down on the ground at full length, as if to rest, and was seemingly encamped there for the night.

When I would have whispered to Pierre, counting on asking him if we had not best try to escape from the fellow by the quickness of our heels, the little lad motioned for me to remain quiet, and because of past experience I obeyed him on the instant.

Now and then a soldier bent on some errand, or a sentinel on duty, passed by; but gave no heed. None save Abel Hunt in all that town of York appeared to fancy that it might be worth while to watch us.

Then, after it seemed as if a full night had passed, I heard the sentries call the hour of midnight. We must have been there on the river bank not less than three hours, and now it was, being thus warned of the passage of time, that Abel Hunt began to grow uneasy.

Watching him out of the tail of my eyes as I lay silent and motionless by Pierre's side, I saw the fellow raise himself on his elbow and look steadily at both us lads, as if striving to make out whether we might have fallen asleep, and I began to breathe heavily, as does one who slumbers soundly, whereupon Pierre, who must also have been taking note of Hunt's movements, followed my example.

Then the fellow rose to his feet, came softly beside us and bent over, striving to get a view of our faces even though the night was dark, and all the while we gave him fair token of being wrapped in the unconsciousness of slumber.

He stood over us a full two minutes striving to make out to his entire satisfaction whether we were asleep or awake, and then, evidently having come to the conclusion that we were indeed in Dreamland, he stole softly away.

Raising my head ever so slightly I noted that he took the direction which would lead him near to my Lord Cornwallis's headquarters, and for the first time since we had come upon the knave did I grow really timorous. It needed not any very quick-witted lad to understand what would be the result if even such a dissolute fellow as Abel Hunt should give information that the son of a well-known rebel was loitering around the village after night-fall, claiming to have no place where he could find shelter.

"I believe he is going directly to headquarters to make report concerning us," I whispered in Pierre's ear, taking good care meanwhile not to move my body lest peradventure Hunt might look back and discover that we were not asleep.

"Well, there is nothing we can do to prevent him if he be so disposed," little Frenchie replied indifferently, and I exclaimed in surprise:

"One would suppose that it concerned you very little, whereas I'm not so certain but that the end of it may be a halter for both of us."

"It really does concern me very little," Pierre said decidedly. "I can do nothing to prevent it, and cannot afford to spend my time looking for danger in the future, because we have that task to do which must be performed even though a dozen like Abel Hunt were standing ready to accuse us of being spies."

"What do you mean by that?" I cried. "What business have we on hand so urgent?"

"To carry the message with which the Jerseyman entrusted us."

"But that is impossible now Hunt had found us out."

"Why do you say that? How is it that the meeting with such as Abel Hunt can prevent us from doing the work of Minute Boys when it lays at our hand?"

"But how will you leave this town of York? When we go to ask permission to take a boat for the purpose of fishing, you can depend upon it he will be near at hand, and if he has not already done so, will then reveal all he knows concerning me."

"Suppose we don't give him that opportunity?" Pierre said thoughtfully. "Suppose we neglect to ask permission from any one to go out to get fish enough to prevent ourselves from starving?"

"How then will you go? Surely you are not so venturesome as to take to the water on a course to the right of Gloucester Point, when by so doing we must pass the king's vessels? The *Charon* is anchored directly on the course we would need to pursue in order to carry out the instructions which have been given."

"And she would still be there if we waited until daylight, and then asked permission from some of these swaggering officers of the king who have no love for any one save themselves."

I was mystified by Pierre's words, although surely by this time I should have come to understand that his odd speech betokened the perfecting of a plan, and I remained silent as if believing he would make sport of me, until two or three minutes had elapsed when Abel Hunt could no longer be seen in the gloom.

Then it was that little Frenchie suddenly stood upright, and, pointing to a skiff hauled up on the shore not more than thirty feet from where he lay, asked sharply:

"Have you the courage, Fitz Hamilton, to embark with me in yonder craft, and go down to the Gloucester shore where we may remain hidden amid the foliage until it is sufficiently light for us to make out whether any one comes looking for a messenger from the Jerseyman?"

"Meaning to brave the Britishers?" I cried in something very like alarm.

"Meaning to carry the message which it is necessary should be delivered, and without heed whatsoever to these gentry who wear red coats."

"I have the courage, Pierre," I said, after a time of hesitation; "but have we the right to desert Uncle 'Rasmus while he must for his own sake hold Horry Sims a prisoner, and when he has nothing whatsoever to eat or drink in the cabin? Surely it would be deserting him for us to take boat now and leave the village, if peradventure we can do so, for there are an hundred chances against our being able to return, and only one in our favor. It is the same as abandoning Uncle 'Rasmus."

"And if it were abandoning him, and Saul, and every one whom we know, yet would I say it was our duty to go because the Jerseyman, expecting his message to be delivered, will give no further heed to sending it into the American lines."

Although Pierre's words had fired me, and it was possible at any time for the lad to arouse all my enthusiasm and all my bravery when he spoke as he had a moment previous, I understood that it was a most dangerous venture which he proposed, such as might be tried twenty times over without success.

Mark you, in order to gain the Gloucester shore at the point near where the Jerseyman claimed we would find someone awaiting us, we must sail in our skiff, without a pass from my Lord Cornwallis, within hailing distance of the *Charon*, or of the *Guadaloupe*, both of which vessels lay where their guns could be brought to bear either on York or Gloucester, and it did not seem to me within the range of possibilities that we could pass either craft without being discovered by the sentries who would undoubtedly order us to come alongside.

Even though we were minded to be so reckless as to take the chances of disobeying an order, it could avail us nothing, for pursuit would be given immediately, and how might we hope to escape from a vessel of war's boat, manned most like by a dozen men, we being only two lads not overly well skilled in rowing.

I was turning all this over in my mind, and becoming more and more convinced each instant that it was the wildest scheme Pierre had ever proposed, when he turned upon me sharply and asked with a note of anger in his tone:

"Are you afraid to make the venture?"

"There is no lad, no, nor no man either, who shall say I am afraid to do this or that!" I cried hotly. "I dare do what any other lad may."

"Then come with me, and before daybreak we will be hidden on the Gloucester shore."

"Before the day breaks you will be a prisoner on board either the *Guadaloupe* or the *Charon*, unless one of the smaller vessels chances to make the capture," I said, "and yet, knowing that such must be the case, I am minded to follow, so you may have fair opportunity of proving that this will turn out even more to our disadvantage than did your plan of getting sight of Saul Ogden to hearten him, and, instead, come across Abel Hunt."

"It is not well Fitz, that you should harp upon a single failure," Pierre said softly, and on the instant I regretted having spoken. "There was not in my mind any hope we might be able to aid the lad; but I thought by chance he would see us if we passed his prison, and know we had not forgotten him. If I had asked you to go out for a stroll because I was weary with remaining in the cabin so long, you would have followed quite as readily, and then should we have come upon Abel Hunt even as we did."

"Forgive me, Pierre, forgive me," I cried remorsefully. "Lead the way, and I will go with you readily, even though I claim it is a most desperate venture, but promise faithfully not to throw it in your teeth however sore the failure may be."

The little French lad was not inclined to waste words after I had promised to accompany him; but set off at a rapid pace toward where the skiff was lying, and I followed, having vividly in mind the fact that we were leaving Uncle 'Rasmus to what might be a most cruel fate, at the same time believing we had deserted Saul entirely, for there was not in my mind any hope whatsoever we could succeed in re-entering the town of York now that the Britishers were keeping such sharp watch.

Even though fortune should favor us in the most remarkable degree, we surely would not be tempted to come back to this fortified village during the hours of daylight, therefore were we shutting ourselves out until full four and twenty hours passed, during which time how much of disaster might have come upon those whom we had the same as abandoned?

It was much the same as folly for me to hark back in my mind to all the dangers which might come upon us, for I had agreed to follow the lad wheresoever he might lead, and for me to dwell upon the probable danger could serve no other end than that of making me timorous, therefore it was I strove earnestly to put from my mind everything save the old thought that I would do all within my power to help him carry out his purpose.

The lad had not set out toward the boat until the sentry, who had been pacing to and fro near us, turned to go to the other end of his beat, and when we were come to the craft there were none within sight so far as I could make out.

She was a light skiff, perhaps one of the smallest that could have been found on the shore, and had friends been making arrangements for us to do this very work they could not have laid the tools more conveniently at hand, for there were two pairs of oars in the craft, and it only needed we should shove her ten or twelve paces before she was water borne.

I followed Pierre over the gunwale, kicking at the bank as I did so with sufficient force to send her rocking like an egg-shell out into the current.

The night was not so dark but that we could see the black tracery of the English ships as they lay at anchor guarding both encampments, and unless the sentries on board these vessels of the king were asleep or blind they could not fail of seeing us, however wide a detour we might make.

I fully expected to hear one of the sentinels on the shore ordering us to come back and show a permit for being aboard at such an hour; but no one hailed, and we set the skiff's bow on a direct course to that part of the Gloucester shore which we hoped to gain, giving no heed to his majesty's vessels in the way.

"We cannot hope to pass them without being discovered," I said in a low tone as I settled back at the oars, putting into them every ounce of strength I could summon.

"It may be they will let us go on after we have explained our purpose, or so much of it as we may be pleased to give," Pierre said hopefully; "but even if they turn us back, we shall be no worse off than before, and will have the satisfaction of knowing that we strove to our utmost to do as the Jerseyman desired."

"We shall be no worse off unless we are sent to share Saul's imprisonment in the guard-house."

Then I bent my back yet more vigorously at the oars, if that could be possible, the labor serving in some slight degree to prevent me from dwelling upon the disagreeable possibilities.

Our course brought us within mayhap an hundred yards of the *Charon's* stern, and before we were on a line with her came that hail which I had feared to hear:

"Cease rowing!"

"Do as they bid, Fitz; it is our only hope," Pierre whispered, and I obeyed him.

"Come alongside and show your pass," the voice demanded, and I could hear the foot-falls of the sentry as he came from amidships aft and leaned over the rail that he might see us more clearly.

"We have no pass, sir," Pierre said meekly. "We have been sent over to Gloucester with a message from one officer to another, on what I count may be private business."

"Come alongside and show the message," the same voice demanded.

Then did I believe that little Frenchie was at the end of his rope; but instead of showing any confusion or fear he replied cheerily:

"It is no more than word of mouth that the major of Colonel Tarleton's legion come into York for a supper."

The sentry, or whoever it might be that had hailed us, hung in the wind a moment as if undecided whether to give further orders, and then said grudgingly, not being minded, as I fancied, to disgruntle any officers of my Lord Cornwallis's command:

"Go your way, then; but make certain to come directly back as soon as the message has been delivered."

"You can count on our getting into York again as soon as we may," Pierre replied laughingly, and added by whispering to me, "Now, lad, pull the best you know how, and the danger has passed!"

It was as he said. It could only have been blind luck which stationed a credulous and good-natured sentry of the *Charon* at that particular moment, for nineteen men out of twenty would have done their whole duty, which was to bring us alongside and report the matter to the officer of the deck.

We were not disposed to grumble because the fellow had not done his duty, however, and when we were beyond ear-shot I said warningly to the little French lad:

"You have squeaked out of a mighty small hole, Pierre; but do not let it encourage you overly much, for it is not within the bounds of reason that we can take such chances again and have everything turn favorable for us."

"We won't count on those chances that are in the future, Fitz Hamilton," Pierre replied cheerily; "but will hark back on this one, remembering that we got thus far on our journey, even though we may be turned about within the next five minutes."

There was little likelihood we would find any obstacle in the way from this on, if so be we landed at a respectful distance from the encampment. The vessels in the stream between Gloucester and York were evidently supposed by the commander-in-chief to be sufficient guard for the water-ways, and so far as I had been able to learn, no small boats patrolled the river.

Nor did we meet with any. The way was open before us, and ere yet there were tokens in the eastern sky of the coming of a new day, we had pulled the skiff up amid the bushes more than two miles beyond Gloucester point.

"It begins now to look as though we should succeed in delivering the message which the Jerseyman wanted sent into the American lines, and if that can be done we need concern ourselves no further regarding the outcome, for it matters little what happens to two lads like you and me," Pierre said.

I could agree with the first part of the proposition; but was not sufficiently stout-hearted to say with truth that I was indifferent as to what might befall me, because however great a love I had for the Cause, my affection for Fitzroy Hamilton and his safe being, was much stronger.

Until the sun had risen we remained within the screen of foliage resting from our labor at the oars; but straightway day had fully dawned Pierre laid his plans for coming upon this man whom the Jerseyman believed would be looking for a messenger, by stationing me a quarter of a mile up the bank, while he took post about the same distance below.

"Now it is that we must take some chances," little Frenchie said when we were about to go to our posts of duty. "It may be that the first who appears will be a Tory, and we have no means of determining his politics. If I see a person who appears by his movements to be watching for some one from the York shore, then shall I run the risk of letting him know we are lately come from the village."

I understood he would have me do the same, and walked slowly along the shore keeping within the line of foliage, and thinking meanwhile that as soon as this task had been finished, if indeed it ever was, we might with good cause seek for food from some plantation nearby, for my stomach was crying out loudly that it was time to break fast.

Well, to make what may seem an overly long story as short as possible, I will content myself by saying that we two lads remained sometimes out in full view, and again amid the foliage where we were partially screened, until a good two hours had passed. Then there came into my view a man with a bit of green in his hat, clad somewhat after the fashion of a Virginia planter, who moved cautiously, not seeing me until he was where it would be possible to have a view of York village, when he seated himself upon the ground as if on watch.

I made no delay in going toward him, and fancied he looked more than a little concerned that I should have appeared so suddenly, all of which went to strengthen my belief that this was the man whom we were seeking, therefore without juggling words, I asked him:

"Do you await some messenger from the other shore, sir?"

He looked me over from head to toe before answering, and then replied by asking a question:

"Is there any good reason why it concerns you, young master, if I so wait here?"

"Ay, sir, that it does, since I, with my comrade who is on watch lower down the shore, am come to find some one who awaits a message, or, we may say, who is eager for news."

"Who are you?"

"The son of Alexander Hamilton, whose plantation lies within the bounds of the town of James; but who himself is in the American army."

"Did any one send you here?"

"Yes, we were asked to show ourselves in a boat off the shore; but inasmuch as we were forced to sneak out of York, it did not seem safe we should make overly much of an exhibition of ourselves."

"Who sent you?"

"Tell me first from whom you are expecting a message, and then I will answer the question."

"Do you know aught of a man by the name of Morgan?"

Then it was that without replying I raised my voice, calling Pierre by name, for now was I positive we had hit upon the man whom the spy would have us see, and when little Frenchie had replied, I explained to the stranger that it was my comrade to whom the message had been delivered, and I believed he should have the credit of repeating it. Ten minutes later the man was scurrying across country at his best speed, without having uttered no word of thanks or praise for what we had done. No sooner did Pierre give that message which the Jerseyman had entrusted him with, and declared that we had no other information, than the fellow wheeled quickly about like a fox who has got the scent of dogs, and straightway we were alone, looking blankly into each other's faces, asking mentally whether it might not be possible we had given the Jerseyman's information to another, for it did not seem within the range of possibilities that one of our way of thinking would have received such news and never given sign or word of acknowledgment.

"I fancy he has only in mind to save his own skin, and believes that this shore in the rear of a British encampment is not the safest place in the world for one of his politics," Pierre said musingly after a brief time of silence. "We were not told how this man would prove himself to be the one we were sent in search of, therefore it cannot be set down to our discredit if we have fumbled the job."

"And what now?" I asked moodily, almost persuaded, because of the movements of the stranger, that we had advertised the fact of our serving a spy, and the stranger had gone in search of those who would arrest us.

"We can do no less than stay here until another night has come, and before sunset it should be possible to devise some means of passing the English sentries. Just now, however, I am inclined to believe we would do well to set out in search of something to eat. Do you know any of the planters nearabout?"

"Not within a dozen miles or more. It is quite certain, however, that many of them nearabout Gloucester are Tories, while others would remain neither for king nor for colony; yet I suppose we must take our chances, unless we are willing to make breakfast, dinner and supper of this pure, fresh air."

"We will make our way to the negro quarters on some plantation," Pierre said quickly. "When it comes to trusting a stranger, I can put more faith in a black face than a white one."

Having thus spoken the lad started inland, walking swiftly, and as if he had both course and destination marked out plainly before him.

CHAPTER XII

SAUL'S OPPORTUNITY

It was destined that we should approach neither white man nor negro in quest of food on this day, however severe might be the pangs of hunger, for little Frenchie had hardly more than began a blind tramp across the country, trusting that fortune would bring him to the destination desired, when we were startled, I should say alarmed, by the report of a cannon which rang out startlingly clear on the morning air.

As a matter of course we were brought to a sudden halt; but before either of us could speak, boom, boom, boom came from the direction of York, and with the report of the guns we could see heavy smoke rolling up from the village telling of burned powder.

"What can it mean?" I cried, fancying like a simple for the moment that this cannonading had somewhat to do with us, and Pierre, quick-witted as ever, cried joyously as he turned his face shoreward once more:

"Our people are advancing upon York, and the king's soldiers are warning them to keep back."

He ran at racing speed through the brush, I following as best I might at his heels, and all the while came that dull roar of cannon, intermingled now and then with sharp, crackling noises, which I understood to be the rattle of musketry.

Before we had gained the river bank it was positive our forces had come within touch of the enemy, and I who, as has already been seen, was wholly ignorant of military matters, believed the Americans were forcing the Britishers to a battle.

No sooner had we arrived where an uninterrupted view of the river could be had, than we saw half a dozen vessels with as many barges coming down the stream as if from the direction of Williamsburg, and, favored by the wind, were shaping their course directly toward the Gloucester shore on that side the point opposite where we were.

Then it was that the guns of Gloucester joined with those of York, and as these heavy pieces were discharged it seemed to me that the very ground trembled, while over all hung smoke from the burning powder until it was as if a heavy cloud had suddenly gathered, shutting out the light of the sun.

This fleet which was coming down the river apparently giving no heed to the king's ships that lay in the stream, was hardly more than two miles away, and as we lads gazed at the vessels breathlessly, trembling with excitement, I fancied I could see the uniform of our Virginia militia. Then my heart sank within me, for both the *Guadaloupe* and the *Charon* were slipping their cables that they might swing around in such position as to deliver broadsides upon those who were advancing so boldly.

There is no good reason why I should not set down now the facts instead of waiting until we came to learn of them later.

This fleet which was coming down the York river was manned by a French Legion, by French marines, and by a brigade of Virginia militia under General Weeden, the whole under command of a French officer. They had been sent to lay siege to the British encampment at Gloucester, for our General Washington was not minded any of the soldiers under command of Lord Cornwallis should make their escape, now that he held them as one might say in the hollow of his hand.

Although we could not see anything in the rear of York village, we knew full well, because of the incessant cannonading, that our people must be advancing by land as well as by water, and the one question in our minds was whether a battle might be fought that very day, for then, as can readily be understood, we had no idea that a regular siege was to be begun before York.

It was when the British vessels slipped their moorings to pour a broadside into the little fleet of Americans that Pierre Laurens saw clear before him the plan which we should follow, and running with all speed toward where the skiff had been hidden in the foliage, he shouted to me:

"Make haste, Fitz, make haste! Now is the time when we can gain the village with but little danger of attracting unpleasant notice, for while the Britishers have their hands full with trying to hold our people back, two lads like us may slip in without heed from friend or foe."

"But why shall we strive to enter York?" I cried, growing timorous once more. "If there is to be a battle it were safer we stayed here, rather than took our chances of being killed by cannon ball or musket-shot from our own people."

"It is not allowed that we shall stay here, Fitz Hamilton!" Pierre cried almost angrily. "Do you forget that Uncle 'Rasmus, with that Tory prisoner of his, yet remains in York awaiting our coming and needing us most sorely? Even though it were certain we would be shot immediately after gaining old Mary's cabin, then are we bound to keep on. Are we to stay here simply to insure our own safety, when Saul is in the Britishers' guard-house exposed to even as much danger as we would be with Uncle 'Rasmus?"

It was not needed the lad should say more in order to recall me to a sense of duty. A red flush of shame came over my face as I realized that I would have played the part of a coward, forgetting that there were in York those who needed me, and from that instant Pierre had no reason to complain because I moved too slowly or failed to display an equal amount of enthusiasm with him.

Immediately the skiff was water borne we lost no time in setting off on what might prove to be a perilous passage, and yet there was none of danger whatsoever in it as we soon came to know.

The men on the British ships had sufficient to occupy their attention without giving heed to two lads who pulled against the current, making a detour of a mile or more, for they were serving their guns with all diligence, hoping to check the advance of those rebels who so lacked in reverence to the king and his commands that they made their appearance in warlike array without first having asked permission.

The roar of the cannon both from the ships and from my Lord Cornwallis's encampment was almost deafening, and as we tugged at the oars, straining every muscle in order to take advantage of each moment of time, it seemed to me as if the waters of the river were dashed here and there into waves by the concussions.

Without losing stroke or ceasing to exert ourselves to the utmost, we kept our eyes fixed upon the scene before us, and again and again, without being aware that I had uttered a cry, I shouted aloud in joy and in pride at seeing that little fleet of small craft moving steadily on toward its destination regardless of the heavy shot which were being poured in upon them.

So far as we could make out, not a British ball hit the mark. It is very likely some of the missiles found their way among our people; but no severe damage was done else we should have observed it; the fleet would have been thrown into confusion had one of the craft been seriously disabled, or turned back if they suffered too heavily. Instead of which, however, they continued on as I have said, seemingly indifferent to the efforts of the enemy.

It was a sight well calculated to stir the blood of a boy from Virginia, and my excitement, my admiration for the coolness of our people, and the determination shown where the Britishers were doing their best to work destruction, fired my heart until it was with difficulty I could continue my share of the work at pulling the skiff.

"Unless you can look at what is going on around you and row at the best of your strength at the same time, then it is better you close your eyes," Pierre said sharply when I missed a stroke and thereby nearly threw him from the thwart.

I could not have taken my eyes from that which thrilled every nerve in my body; but true it is I did succeed in holding to my work, at least to such extent that Pierre no longer found cause for fault with me, and by the time we had reached the bank of the river, almost at the same point from which we had embarked the night before, the fleet had so far closed in with the land that the king's men did not dare fire upon it from the ships lest they do more damage to their own people on Gloucester Point then to impudent rebels, who had the effrontery to disturb the servants of his majesty.

The cannonading from the town still continued, now dying away to a single shot every moment or two, and again roaring in thunderous notes as battery after battery discharged all its cannon.

These people were not firing upon the vessels near by Gloucester; but straightway up the river, and therefore it was we knew our people were coming over the land in considerable force, giving no more token of an inclination to halt because of this summons by heavy missiles, than had those who manned the fleet.

The water front of the village was much the same as deserted when the bow of our skiff grounded on the shore. I was too deeply excited to give particular heed to everything within my range of vision; but it was to me as if no man stood near at hand to observe our landing, and on comparing notes with Pierre afterward I learned that he was of the belief that we had come ashore into this encampment of seven thousand soldiers without having been observed.

As we made our way up into the village we found that all the troops were in front of us, having manned the outermost entrenchments. We passed my Lord Cornwallis's headquarters to find it apparently deserted. At the stable lines of the Rangers not a single horse stood, and my heart went heavy as lead for I realized that poor little Silver-Heels, with a red-faced, red-coated Britisher upon her back, was most likely well toward the front where she stood a good chance of being disabled if not killed, for by this time Pierre and I understood, because of the roar of guns in the distance, that our people were not remaining silent under this iron hail which the enemy were sending among them.

"If they keep this up ten minutes longer we shall have no trouble whatsoever in making our way to old Mary's cabin," I cried almost gleefully, forgetting in this my moment of triumph, when I was pluming myself with having accomplished something heroic, although I had simply taken advantage of an opportunity, that men a short distance away were lying mangled and in the agonies of death.

"We can do better than that, lad," Pierre cried, catching me by the shoulder as if a sudden thought had just come into his mind. "Look about you as we run, and if so be your eyes light upon a pick or an axe, seize upon it."

"To what end?" I asked, panting because of the swift pace which my comrade had kept. "Are you counting on taking part in the battle?" for then it was I had no doubt but that our people had set about measuring strength with my Lord Cornwallis's army.

"Yes, we'll fight a battle on our own account, and the result shall be the release of Saul from the guard-house. I'm allowing that the sentries are not giving any great attention to prisoners just at this moment, and if those who should be outside the prison have pressed toward the front to see what may be going on, our chance has come."

It did not need that the dear lad should go into the details of what he would do. I realized on the instant that even though we were within the enemy's encampment, there was a possibility we might work our will, and no time was wasted.

It was reasonable to suppose that the sentries here, there and everywhere throughout the village would be pressing toward the front from motives of curiosity, if nothing else, feeling thoroughly well convinced that no harm could come upon them from the rear.

Fortune so far favored me as we run that I was speedily armed with an axe which had been left near by a pile of fuel, and before we had traveled twenty yards further Pierre came upon a pick. Therefore it was we had all the weapons we needed for an attack upon the guard-house, if so be little Frenchie had the same aim in mind which had come to me, that is to say, to force an entrance through the chimney into the fireplace.

Then we were come to that house in which the Jerseyman had told me our comrade was confined, and I, thick-headed as usual, would have begun an attack upon the chimney without delay, for we had approached the building from the rear; but before I could strike the first blow little Frenchie grasped me by the arm, as he whispered warningly:

"Would you take the risk of spoiling everything by going to work blindly? We must first learn if there be sentries on the other side."

Then, leaving me standing motionless and silent, covered with confusion because of having shown myself such a simple, he went cautiously around the house, moving with as much care and deliberation as if having full knowledge that a squad or more of red-coats were on guard, and I awaited his return, my heart thumping so violently that it was as if the pulsations vied in volume of sound with the reports of the cannon.

When next I saw Pierre he approached from the opposite side of the house, thus showing that he had made a complete circuit of the place, and the expression on his face told as clearly as words could have done that we might set about our task without delay, for there were none near at hand to stay us.

Without waiting for him to speak I struck my axe into the structure of sticks and clay with such force that it was buried to the head, and I could not release the tool until little Frenchie had aided by tearing away some of the fabric with his pick.

"Haste is like to make waste," Pierre reminded me in a half whisper. "Unless we get about this work with somewhat of system we shall make but little headway, and no one can say how soon the sentries may remember that it is their duty to stay here on guard instead of watching the advance of the rebels."

I would have been a dull lad indeed had I not come by this time to understand that it was Pierre Laurens who should take the lead when he and I were working together, therefore I stood back, leaving him to begin the task, and striking with my axe when he directed me so to do.

Before we had succeeded in cutting a hole as large as a man's hand, I heard a voice from the inside which I believed to be Saul's crying excitedly:

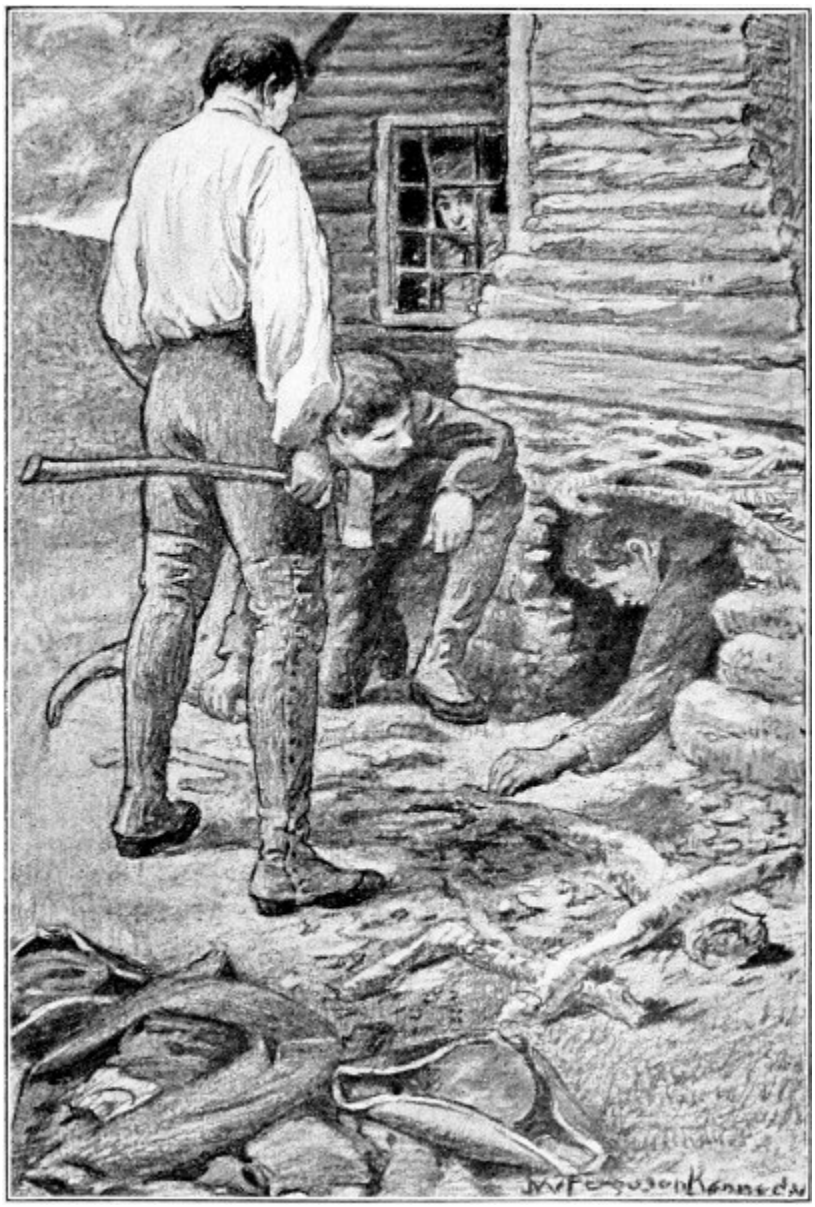
"Who are you that are striving to enter? There should be a sentinel just outside the door, and unless you take due care he will give an alarm."

"Saul! Saul! It's Pierre and Fitz!" I cried, no longer able to restrain myself, and little Frenchie clapped his hand over my mouth on the instant, saying angrily:

"Is it not enough that you have opportunity to work your will even here in the midst of the enemy's encampment, but that you must raise your voice to give notice of what you would do? It matters little whether Saul knows it is us who are here, or that he waits until we have effected an entrance."

While he spoke Pierre was working industriously, having taken his hand from my mouth after leaving it there sufficiently long to give token that he intended it for a reproof, and from that moment until sounds from the inside told that whoever was held prisoner had been on his part aiding in the work, I held my peace, watching little Frenchie's every movement, determining never again until we were out of this village, would I raise my voice until he had given permission.

Whether we worked there at tearing a hole through the chimney five minutes, or thirty, I have no idea. Around us yet roared the cannon, telling that the American forces were still advancing, and the Britishers striving to hold them back. Ever present in my mind was the knowledge that at any moment the guard might come up and take us into custody.



THE RELEASE OF SAUL OGDEN.

One can well understand in what a tumult was my brain, and how like a flood in spring-time the blood leaped through my veins. I was like as one held in the grip of a raging fever, until from out that aperture which we had made in the flimsy chimney I saw Saul Ogden, looking considerably the worse for his short imprisonment, come crawling until it was possible for me to clasp him in my arms, where for an instant I held him fast, tears of gratitude rolling down my cheeks because of having been permitted thus to have taken some little part in the dear lad's release.

There were other prisoners than Saul in the guard-house, and, as can be supposed, they were not backward in taking

advantage of the opportunity to make their escape from imprisonment even though they were red-coats; but as the first soldier came on the heels of Saul, Pierre, raising his pick threateningly, ordered the man to stop.

"Remain where you are, or your death will pay the penalty," he cried, and there was that in his tones which told it would not be safe to disobey him.

"If you are willing to let one out, why not another?" the Britisher asked, an expression of perplexity coming over his bloated red face, which gave token that he had been brought into the guard-house through drunkenness.

"Because I don't intend it shall be within your power to work us harm."

"Why should I work you harm?" the half-drunken soldier asked as he lay on his belly in the aperture looking up at the small lad.

"You are a British soldier who has come here to work the king's will on us of Virginia, and we are minded to make our escape before you can atone for your misdeeds by making us prisoners," Pierre cried hotly.

"I have no mind to take anybody prisoner, be he rebel or whatsoe'er you will, for now the fight is going on, and by joining my troop this little slip of mine which landed me in the guard-house is like to be forgiven if not forgotten."

"Stay where you are until we get well away, for we have been taught not to put overly much faith in what you men who wear red coats may say," Pierre cried, and at the same time he motioned for Saul and me to go our way, which we did without delay, knowing the lad would follow close at our heels.

Saul had kept a tight grip on my hand from the moment he came into the open air, and we two ran side by side, thus yoked together by token of friendship, on the alert for the first show of a red coat in our path.

It seemed to me that we might have raced around and around that village until we were spent with the exertion, and never have come upon one of the king's men, for they rushed into the outer works at the first alarm, officers, soldiers, camp-followers, and even the sentries, all of them most like believing it would only be necessary for them to give token of being ready for battle in order to make the Americans turn tail in terror.

Surely this time they were making a grievous mistake, for the fire from the front was continued with vigor as I understood full well before we were a dozen yards from the guard-house, for then a cannon ball came so near to me that I could feel the wind of it, and I started back in surprise as if having supposed that our people had been firing blank cartridges.

Saul laughed at my show of fear, and asked as though he found something comical in the situation:

"Did you think that amid all this noise there were no shots flying?"

"To tell the truth, Saul Ogden, I haven't had time to think since the cannonading began. Then Pierre and I were on the Gloucester shore, having made up our minds it would be useless to try to get into York before another night had come. When we found it might be possible, as has been proven, such a fever of excitement seized upon me that I have had no clear knowledge of what has been going on."

"It seems that you knew sufficient to understand the moment had come when you might set me free," the lad said in a tone of exultation, and I, determined that the credit should go where it belonged, replied promptly:

"It was not me, Saul Ogden, who was quick-witted enough to think that we might find the guard-house without sentries around it. Pierre Laurens is the one to whom your release is due, and save for him I dare venture to say at this moment I would be with you inside the Widow Marshall's house with red-coated sentinels standing guard over me."

"Why? How? What has happened since I have been shut up yonder?"

It was no time for story telling just then, as Saul must have understood, for the first cannon ball which had reminded me that there was danger in the air and that danger coming from the ranks of our own army, was followed by another and another, until while we ran it seemed as if we were actually being pursued by these missiles--as if there was a force in the air to guide them out of a direct course to where they might work destruction.

By this time Pierre had overtaken us, for the lad could ever run more swiftly than either Saul or I, and seizing me by the arm as if I was a child who needed guidance, shouted in a tone of triumph even amid all that peril:

"If any one had told us when Abel Hunt was following so close at our heels, that we might have worked this trick, it would have seemed like a fairy tale, and yet we have come through thus far in safety, with every chance of gaining old Mary's cabin unmolested."

"If so be we get in the path of one of these messengers," I said, motioning toward a cannon ball which was ploughing up the earth not twenty yards away, "then shall we find that we have been molested for all time."

"If we have worked our will in this encampment of my Lord Cornwallis's, we two lads alone, then I predict that we shall come through in safety, at least so far as this work is concerned. What may happen before the battle is ended I care not, so that we have kept faith with those who waited for us."

It can thus be seen that Pierre, quick-witted and versed in military matters though he was, believed as did I, that this cannonading betokened a regular battle, whereas, as we afterward came to know, it was simply the investment of York, the beginning of a regular siege.

There is no good reason why I should use many words in telling of that flight across the village, although again and again were we in danger of death from the missiles sent by the Americans, even though I might make an interesting story of that which we saw and feared; but it is enough that we were finally arrived at our destination.

I, who at the end of the race was leading the way, dashed into the cabin without realizing the alarm that I might thus cause Uncle 'Rasmus; but I understood instantly I was inside, that it would have been better had I entered in a more seemly fashion, for the old negro leaped to his feet, his black face grey with the pallor of fear, believing from my sudden, noisy entering that the enemy had come to work him harm.

Because of the dim light in the cabin it was a dozen seconds before he could distinguish our faces, and then while we three stood in front of him he sank back in the chair where he had so long played the part of invalid, trembling in every limb as he said in a quavering voice:

"Bress de Lawd! Bress de Lawd for all his mercies! Here am de chillun come back when I neber expected to see dere faces agin!"

Saul in his delight clasped the old man around the neck, hugging him as affectionately as though he had been of the same color and of the same blood; but Pierre, cautious and thoughtful as ever, instead of spending his time calming Uncle 'Rasmus when there was no real need of doing so, began looking around to find Horry Sims.

Even though a battle might be raging on the outside, it was yet of vital importance to us that the Tory be held prisoner, because his escape might mean our death, if so be the fortunes of war allowed the Britishers a breathing spell.

Pierre ran hurriedly to the corner of the room where we had last seen the Tory cur lying, and an exclamation of dismay burst from his lips, for the lad was not there. Hearing the cry I ran toward him, whereupon he turned to Uncle 'Rasmus asking sharply:

"Where is he? Has he given us the slip? Who has been here since we went away?"

"De Sims boy am safe, honey," Uncle 'Rasmus replied as Saul released his hold on the old man's neck. "I 'clare for it I done got scared kase you didn' come back, an' 'lowed it wouldn't do no ways to keep dat young snake whar he could kick up a row ef any ob de king's sogers come in, so I done put him away, honey, I done put him away."

"Put him away, Uncle 'Rasmus?" I cried in alarm. "Do you mean to say that you killed Horry Sims?"

"Kill him, chile? Sure not. What for I kill him?"

"But where is he?" Pierre demanded, and I understood from the quick, nervous tones that he had been equally alarmed with me by the old man's words.

For reply Uncle 'Rasmus went to that end of the room near the fireplace where he raised a short length of the flooring, and there we who gathered around in breathless anxiety, saw Horry Sims lying upon the earth, bound as we had left him, in a narrow space between the puncheons which had evidently at some time been hollowed out as an apology for a store-room.

"How did you get him down there, Uncle 'Rasmus?" I cried, for I had not believed the old man sufficiently strong to perform such a task.

"I done roll him ober, chile, I done roll him ober. Don you see, honey, I didn' dare keep him whar de sogers might see him, so I'se boun' to get him out ob sight. I'd seen dat yere hole befo', an' sence de shootin' begun I 'low he was mighty glad to be under cover."

"Can't you take me out of here?" Horry asked imploringly. "I've been tied up so long that my legs and arms are numb and aching. I promise not to open my mouth and to do whatsoever you say, if these ropes can be taken off for ever so short a time."

"That's what they shall be," Pierre said quickly. "We have no desire to cause you suffering, Horry Sims, and never counted on being forced to remain away so long; but matters couldn't have been changed, for of course we must think of our own safety before consulting your comfort. Now, however, you will have a chance to move around."

As he spoke so Pierre did, and when I would have argued with him that it was unsafe to let the Tory lad have the freedom of the cabin even while all of us were there to guard him, he shut me up in short order by declaring that unless we were disposed to give the prisoner something like fair treatment, he would insist on setting him free altogether.

"And when Abel Hunt has found us out, as I believe of a verity he will, then Horry is on exhibition where that meddlesome fellow may see him," I cried hotly, but Pierre, giving no heed to my words, released the Tory from his bonds.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SIEGE

For some moments after Pierre released Horry Sims from the bonds which had held him so securely, the Tory was literally unable to move hand or foot, thus giving good proof of the suffering which must have been his while he lay beneath the puncheon planks of the floor, powerless to command his body save in the way of breathing.

After having chafed his limbs until the circulation of blood was partially restored, the prisoner limped over into the corner where Pierre and I had left him when we set out upon that stroll which resulted so differently from our expectations, and there he crouched upon the floor as if intent on showing us that he would remain a willing captive. As a matter of fact, I believe the lad was more terrified by the cannonading which yet continued and seemingly shook the very ground beneath our feet, than he was by the knowledge that we held him in our power.

And it was terrifying, whether for Tory or Whig, far more so than if we had been in the open where it might be possible to see all that was going on, or if we were taking part with the troops; but to remain shut up in the cabin, not knowing how near death might be to us, and fearing each instant lest our frail shelter should be torn to splinters by a cannon ball, was something that got on one's nerves more, I dare venture to say, than any other danger.

During the first two or three minutes after the excitement of meeting with Uncle 'Rasmus had died away, there were times when it seemed well nigh impossible for me to so far control myself as to remain in-doors; it was as if I must go out; as if I must face that danger which seemed so imminent; as if I could not meet death while being all ignorant of how it might come to me.

It was well, perhaps, that Pierre started a conversation by asking Uncle 'Rasmus how he had passed the hours of our absence, and I believe little Frenchie did this rather in order to take our minds from what was going on around us, than because he really desired information.

The old negro told us in his peculiar way, of awaiting our coming with whatsoever of patience he could summon, believing each instant we would enter, and then as the hours wore on fear, as was quite natural, took possession of him. He could not imagine any combination of circumstances which would keep us abroad so long, save we had fallen into the hands of the enemy, most like arrested as spies. Before morning came he was convinced that such must have been the case, and the only hope he had of learning what had befallen us was in the coming of Morgan; but there was a fear that he might have been taken in our company, and would therefore share our fate.

"I done got terribly flustered up, chillun, an' dats a fac', kase I counted I wasn' eber gwine to see youse any mo'. Dere was one spell jes' 'fore daybreak when I got it inter my min' dat dere was nuffin lef' fo' de ole nigger to do but skitter out ob dis yere village, an' it was mighty uncertain whether he could get out ob it or not."

"In that case what did you count on doing with Horry Sims?" Pierre asked.

"I done made up my min' to leabe him sittin' up in de chair by de winder, kase I couldn' take him wid me, an' it wouldn't hab done no how to let him go gallivantin' 'roun' from one ob dese yere ossifers to de odder tellin' 'em what had happened to him."

Then the old man painted with painful vividness the hunger and thirst which had come upon him with the morning, after he had decided it would be impossible for him to make his way through the lines. He repeated what Horry Sims had said while begging for food or for water, and added with an odd grimace:

"I 'clare for it, chillun, I got right mixey wid Horry, eben ef he is a Tory, kase de lad was sumfin to talk wid, an' I was carried away wid fear till it seemed as ef I was boun' to keep my tongue runnin', else I'd gone crazy."

"You didn't get so mixey with him, Uncle 'Rasmus, but that you finally dumped him under the floor," Pierre added with a laugh, and the old man chuckled as he replied:

"I done tell you how dat was, honey. De mixier I got wid him de more afraid I growed 'bout his gibin' me de slip, or in case any ob de king's sogers come in an' was curious to know what I had covered up wid de blanket. It seemed like I couldn' bear de sight ob de boy, an' yet I wanted to keep talkin' wid him all de time. I done splained dat dere wasn' anyting to eat or drink in de house, an' dat we'd hab to go hungry an' thirsty till de gen'man from Jersey come to look arter us. Den dere come inter my min' dat yere hole in de floor, what ole Mary dug so's to keep de milk an' de butter fresh, an' how your Uncle 'Rasmus did toddle 'roun', gettin' de chile inter it! I ain' half so shaky as I'se been tryin' to make out since we come here to York; but it seemed like my back-bone wasn' stiff enuf for de job I'd tackled when I got

hol' ob Horry Sims an' he tried to hang back. Howsomeever he got in dar, an' I covered de plank ober, an' den I went back to de winder, an' I mourned, an' I mourned, an' I mourned for my chillun what I 'lowed was in de han's ob de Britishers."

Then the old man, as if overcome by the remembrance of his suffering, gave way to tearless grief, when he trembled like one in an ague fit, covering his face with his wrinkled hands, and rocking his body to and fro until I perforce knelt by the chair to soothe him.

Again did little Frenchie come to the relief of us all by changing the subject of the conversation once more, and this time he called upon Saul to explain how it was he had been taken prisoner and confined in the guard-house.

Strange though it may seem, I had had no curiosity concerning this matter from the time we set him free, perhaps because there was so much of excitement and confusion everywhere around, but now I turned from Uncle 'Rasmus to gaze at my cousin eagerly, so impatient to hear his story that I could hardly control myself until he was ready to begin.

"Of course I knew you would insist on being told of all that happened," he said gravely, hesitating now and then in his speech, "and the thought that I must confess my folly caused me greater pain, I believe, than did the knowledge of being held prisoner in that guard-house with half a dozen half-drunken soldiers as companions. It was a case of giving way to my temper, and the sooner I admit the fact the better, perhaps, I shall feel."

"With whom did you quarrel?" I asked curiously, surprised by the possibility that any British soldier should have condescended to squabble with a country lad.

"With Abel Hunt," Saul replied, and Pierre and I leaped to our feet as if moved by a powerful spring.

Abel Hunt! And that scoundrel had followed us, knowing what he did about Saul, without saying anything whatsoever concerning the lad; but striving to find where we were lodged so he might work yet further mischief!

As this came into my mind I realized that the danger which menaced us was greater than I feared, for Abel Hunt, having met Saul and compassed his imprisonment, knew also that we were in the village. It was not within the bounds of probability that he could even guess of our visit to the Gloucester shore; but he would spare no labor to lay us by the heels as spies. He had shown himself deep, that villain Hunt, deeper than I ever believed was possible, for until this instant I had set him down as one almost lacking in mental ability.

"Tell us how the quarrel came about?" Pierre said quickly. "We also have seen somewhat of this Abel Hunt, and it may be we need to know more about him without loss of time in order to protect ourselves, if indeed there be any protection for us in this British camp."

"*You* have had to do with Abel Hunt?" Saul cried in astonishment. "Does he know that you two lads are here?"

"That he does," I replied. "He followed us until midnight, after we told him we had no shelter and were forced to sleep out of doors if we slept at all."

"Did he tell you of meeting me?"

"Never a word, and it is that very thing which troubles me," Pierre cried, more excited than I had ever yet seen him. "He knew that if he said aught against you or confessed to having had a hand in making you a prisoner, there would be no possible chance of our confiding in him, or be frightened into telling that which he sought to learn. Now go on with the story, lad, and quick!"

"There is not much more to tell, when I say that I met with Abel Hunt. We came together nearabout the quarters of the Rangers, where I stood hoping to get a glimpse of the mare, and, daring to take me by the arm as if he were my equal, he demanded to know what I did there in the British camp. Then it was I forgot myself, allowing my temper to get the best of me, and instead of speaking him fairly because of the circumstances, I threatened he should be flogged by one of my uncle's negroes in the slave quarters, for daring to thus accost me. It stands to reason that I realize now how foolish was this course, for I might have put him off, or answered his question after my own fashion, and later, when there were not so many king's lovers around, I could have had him punished. But, instead, I lost control of myself, as I have said, and I believe my actions pleased the scoundrel. He taunted me with being a rebel, and otherwise strove to set yet further flame to my anger, until forgetting all else, having lost to mind the danger in which you lads would be placed, I struck at the fellow, knocking him down, much to my satisfaction.

"In a twinkling he had me by the legs while yet lying upon the ground and cried out for the guard, declaring he was being murdered, and otherwise making as much disturbance as half a dozen could have made if they were being whipped to death. Then, as a matter of course, the guard came up. Abel Hunt, who seemed to be on a friendly footing with some of the red-coats, explained that I, a rebel, had attempted to win him over to the side of the Whigs, and,

failing, had set upon him with intent to kill.

"There was little need for him to have made so many charges against me. The fact that I had been so bold as to make a disturbance nearabout the quarters of the high and mighty officers of my Lord Cornwallis, was in itself enough to warrant me lodgings in the guard-house, and before many seconds had passed I was thrust into that filthy place, where I was fed on bread with now and then a slice of bacon, and no more than half enough of the river water to quench my thirst.

"I knew full well that you lads would leave no stone unturned until you had learned of my whereabouts, and I was also well convinced you could do nothing whatsoever to aid me. Therefore it was I strove to remain in that horrible place content, and succeeded in a measure until the cannon began to roar, when I cried aloud with joy, for I believed our people were giving battle to Cornwallis's army, although how that might advantage me, unless they gained such a victory as to take all the red-coats prisoners, I could not have said.

"When you struck the first blow against the chimney of the house, I knew as well as if I had seen your dear faces, that you, Fitz, and you, Pierre, were there, taking advantage of the cannonading to rescue me. But even as I rejoiced I mourned because of believing you would speedily be made prisoners like myself. It never came into my mind that the red-coats would leave even the prisons without a guard in order to man the entrenchments. There is no more to be said, for you know the rest, and now I am asking what about Abel Hunt?"

The question which Saul asked was in Pierre's mind as well as mine, for now did it seem as if our end was near at hand. There was no probability he could effect anything now while the Britishers were striving to beat back our people; but as soon as the firing ceased, and by this time we had come to understand that it was not a battle which was being fought, but an attempt on the part of the Britishers to prevent our forces from gaining a foothold near the town--I say, when the firing ceased, and the officers were at liberty to take heed to their own affairs in the encampment, what might it not be possible for Abel Hunt to accomplish?

He knew that Saul was here; that he was my cousin, and most like that the horses on the Hamilton plantation had been seized, therefore would have been even more dull than I fancied, if he failed to put together the story in such a manner as to convince himself that both Pierre and I were in York for some purpose other than that of curiosity.

In fact, if he should tell no more than he already knew, without attempting to add to the story in any way, that officer who listened to him could, and with good reason, have set it down as a fact that we had remained in the village to act the part of spies, after which straightway every building in the village would be searched.

"All of us, even if we take Horry Sims, might make our escape by the river while the cannonading continues," I cried eagerly, having but the one idea of making our escape without loss of time. "We had no difficulty either in coming here or tearing away the chimney of the guard-house, therefore does it stand to reason we can get to the river bank without being seen. The skiff still remains where we left her, I have no doubt, and by moving quickly we may be out of this trap and at our home in James Town within two hours."

"Why are you so eager to leave York?" Pierre asked in a peculiar tone, and I, failing wholly to understand what the little French lad was driving at, replied promptly:

"Because of the danger we incur by remaining here."

"And was it not you, Fitz Hamilton, who counted that we should call ourselves Minute Boys with the idea that at some time, perhaps, we could enlist more in our ranks until we had formed a company?"

"Well, and what if I did propose such a foolish thing?"

"You have allowed it to be understood among us that you considered yourself bound to perform the part of a Minute Boy?"

"And what then?" I cried angrily.

"Why, then, at some time in the future it might be said that you lads from Virginia made bold talk as to what you would do as Minute Boys, and began the work; but when danger menaced you turned tail to take refuge under your mother's apron. How would such a story as that match with what is already well known the lads of New York, of Boston, and of other places have done for the Cause? Had they banded themselves together as you and Saul and I agreed to do, and then shown the white feather, it would have been known throughout all the thirteen colonies by this time. And yet we of Virginia must be the first to act the cowardly part!"

If Pierre had taken a horsewhip to me he could not have cut the flesh more deeply than he cut my heart by these words. When I proposed to make our way out of York, going to my own home, there was no thought in my mind that the act

could in any way have the appearance of cowardice. It was simply before me that with Abel Hunt ready to give information, and we shut up where a search of half an hour must surely reveal our whereabouts, it was simply our duty to go away if so be that were possible.

Now, however, after the little French lad had spoken, I would have stood in that village baring my breast to all those lovers of the king, allowing them to do whatsoever they might with my body, rather than take the first step toward escaping, and Pierre must have seen by the expression on my face somewhat of that which was in my heart, for, coming up to me closely and caressing my arm in that old familiar manner, he said soothingly:

"I did not count to give you pain, Fitz Hamilton; but only said that which was in my mind, with the idea of preventing you from carrying out any plan that might cause you deepest pain in the future. Far be it from me to accuse you of being cowardly, for I have seen you advance when you were afraid to do so, and he who can control himself under such circumstances may be counted a brave lad."

While we had been talking the cannonading ceased gradually, until by the time Pierre was done with his efforts to soothe me, comparative silence prevailed. Straightway we lads forgot all else in the desire to know what had been done; whether our people had retreated, or if the Britishers had fallen back, and I was on the point of proposing that I go out to get an idea of the situation when the door suddenly opened, and to our great surprise and delight the Jerseyman flung himself headlong into the room, as if he had run until so exhausted that he could no longer remain on his feet.

We closed the door behind him speedily, as you can well imagine, and then barricaded it to the best of our ability, after which we darkened the windows with blankets lest some curiously inclined soldier might pass that way and see who was our visitor.

We had no water with which to refresh him, therefore it was we could only wait until he was in a measure revived, for strong though the man had appeared to be, now was he apparently on the verge of exhaustion. His face was powder-stained, as if he had been doing full share in holding back our people, and his clothing torn and rent, showing token of some desperate struggle.

Not until four or five minutes had elapsed, during which we knelt by the side of the man unable to give him any aid, did he recover some portion of his strength, and then he said, speaking indistinctly because of his heavy breathing:

"There is nothing to cause alarm. The enemy have not discovered who I am; but yet would I hide myself here with the hope of being able to make my way through the lines this night."

"But with whom have you been fighting?" I cried, pointing to his trousers which literally hung in rags.

"That was done in the trenches when seeing, as I believed, an opportunity to get into our lines, and having as companion only a wounded Britisher, I strove to make my escape; but he, suspecting what I would do, grappled with me. The fellow had more strength than I gave him credit for, because he held me in good play, and before I succeeded in overcoming him there were so many red-coats around that I dare not make the attempt."

"Then he knows that you are a spy, and will give information to Cornwallis!" I exclaimed, my voice trembling with excitement, and the Jerseyman replied gravely:

"He may have suspected, and probably did; but never can he carry information to any officer."

Then it was I understood the man was dead; but whether killed by the Jerseyman, or by his wounds, I knew not, nor did I dare make inquiries.

"Why did you come in such hot haste?" Pierre asked anxiously. "You must have run at full speed from the farthermost outworks."

"So I did, lad; two of us were sent to headquarters to bring up some horses, and I, outstripping the fellow who went with me, decided on making my way here, believing now the village is so closely besieged that I would not have another opportunity of getting through the lines."

"But what about the morrow, after you are missed, or to-night when you fail to answer to the roll call?"

"They may say of me what they please, so that I remain here hidden until midnight, when I shall take my life in my hands, counting not the cost of the venture if I may finish the work in this town of York which I began so long ago."

I could not then understand why it was Morgan spoke as if this might be his last opportunity to desert from the British lines; but all of us soon came to have a very good idea as to the reason, when he explained what had happened.

And now instead of endeavoring to set down the matter in his words, and lest I should make a mistake in repeating them, let me write here that which I read in plain print some time after the colonies had won their freedom from the king. It was written by one who strove to tell all that had happened, without taking either the Whig or Tory side, and, so far as I have been able to learn, is true concerning what took place in that village of York up to the close of this day of which I am writing.

"Cornwallis, with the main division of his army, occupied York Town. The main body of his troops were encamped on the open ground in the rear of the town. Lieutenant-Colonel Dundas, who did good service at James Town, occupied Gloucester with about seven hundred men, and was joined by Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton and his men shortly before the siege began.

"The combined armies of the Americans, about twelve thousand strong, left Williamsburg by different roads and marched toward York Town. The French Legion, a squadron of French marines, and a brigade of Virginia militiamen, were sent to invest Gloucester, while the remainder of the forces kept on toward the British encampment. On their approach the British left their field-works and withdrew to those near the town. The American light infantry and a considerable body of French troops were ordered to take possession of these abandoned works, and serve as a covering party for the troops while digging trenches and casting up breastworks. Cannonading of the town and one or two sorties occurred during the day.

"Colonel Alexander Scammel, officer of the day, while reconnoitering near the Fusileer's redoubt, situated on the river bank at the mouth of a stream on the extreme left, was surprised by two or three Hessian horsemen. He surrendered; but they shot him and left him for dead.

"When the place was completely invested by the allied armies, their lines extended in a semi-circle at a distance of nearly two miles from the British works, each wing resting on the York river. The French troops occupied the left, the Americans the right, while Count de Grasse with his fleet remained in Lynn Haven bay to beat off any naval force which might come to the aid of Cornwallis.

"On the extreme left of the besieging army were the West India regiments under St. Simon. Next to them were the French light infantry regiments; the French artillery and the quarters of the two chiefs occupied the center. On the right, across a marsh, were the American artillery, under General Knox; the Virginian, Maryland and Pennsylvania troops under General Steuben; the New York, Rhode Island and New Jersey troops, with sappers and miners, under General James Clinton; the light infantry under Lafayette, and the Virginia militia under Governor Nelson. The quarters of General Lincoln were on the banks of Wormeley's Creek on the extreme right."

All this, as I have said, was told us by Morgan while he lay on the floor of old Mary's cabin; but I dared not trust my memory to make an attempt at repeating his words, therefore it is I have copied it from the printed account, although by so doing have seemed to advance the time by giving the position of the besieging army, for they did not occupy the quarters as here set down until the following day.

Now we understood, else had we been thick-headed indeed, that York was to be besieged to the end that none of my Lord Cornwallis's force might escape, and how many days must pass before the proud Britisher would be willing to surrender, no man could say.

These facts caused me no little anxiety of mind, and I saw plainly by the expression on Pierre's face that he was deeply disturbed, as indeed he had good reason to be. All us lads, even though we were not experienced in warfare, knew that during the time of siege it would be next to impossible for any person to make his way into the American camp from the village, because the outer works would be heavily manned night and day, and every red-coated soldier be on the alert to prevent information being carried to the so-called rebels.

In the meantime we must hide in the besieged town, holding our prisoner with us; but now that the British army was drawn more closely together, and we as a matter of course more nearly surrounded by the soldiers, did it seem a matter of impossibility we could remain undiscovered any very great length of time.

In addition to this danger, which it seemed to me was so great as to overshadow all else, was the fact that while we were in hiding we must contrive in some way to supply ourselves with food, and how might that be done save at the expense of revealing the fact that old Mary's cabin had other occupants than the decrepit negro and a lad who had come to care for him?

Before the siege was begun it needed but little proof to convince the king's officers that whosoever was charged with being a spy was guilty; and now that the village was invested, with the Americans pressing hotly for every advantage, the lightest whisper would be sufficient to bring one who had spoken or moved indiscreetly, to the gallows.

As I brooded over these things it seemed to me as if we were already within the shadow of the valley of death, with no way of escape save over the dark river into the Beyond.

Certain it is that even Morgan shared in the forebodings which I have here set down, otherwise he would not have taken the chances of remaining hidden in the cabin until midnight and propose then to venture his life as the price of being discovered while striving to creep through the lines.

He himself had said that this was the last opportunity, poor though it might prove, to get word to our people, and he must also have realized all the dangers that would menace us when another day was come and the king's soldiers settled themselves down to the task of holding their enemy in check.

That which made the situation seem to me more painful, more intolerable, was the fact that there was no longer any possibility we could be of service to the Cause by thus remaining in York; yet we were bound to stay for the very good reason that there was no hope of getting away.

I could not bring myself to believe we had accomplished aught of good by coming into this village of York. It seemed to me matters would have been better for all concerned had we remained on the Hamilton plantation, and yet Master Morgan was so kind as to say before that day had come to a close, that when he had speech with any of our generals he should take good care to give us due praise for what we had done.

"Even though it had been nothing more than carrying the message to Williamsburg and repeating my words to the man on the Gloucester shore, then would you lads have good reason to be proud," the Jerseyman said when I asked petulantly what we who called ourselves Minute Boys had done deserving of praise. "Without you I should have been forced to leave the lines some time ago, and thanks to your being here, it is now possible for me to give accurate information as to all the defenses."

"That is, providing you get through the lines alive," Saul said grimly, and the Jerseyman added:

"I count on getting through with sufficient of life remaining to be able to tell my story; but if peradventure I am shot this side the entrenchments, then I conjure you lads as you love your country, to risk everything you hold most dear in the effort to communicate with our people. Value your lives as nothing; the greatest suffering you can endure as a pleasure, so that you may be able before another day has come to a close to describe in detail that which you have seen."

CHAPTER XIV

AN UGLY SITUATION

After Morgan had finished telling us what would be our duty in case he gave up his life while trying to get through the lines, then came a discussion as to how it would be possible for us to procure food.

With Abel Hunt at liberty, roaming around the village seeking us out and most like counting to denounce us as rebels, it was in the highest degree dangerous for any member of our company to venture forth from the cabin lest we come upon that fellow whom I doubted not was bent solely on doing us a harm.

Why he should have turned his attention to such end I cannot well say, save it might be that he fancied it was the best way to curry favor with the British officers. Neither Saul nor I had done anything to make of the fellow an enemy. It is true we did not associate with him, and I question whether that could have rankled in his breast, because he knew full well that lads of our standing would not stoop to such a thing.

However it might be, certain it was, as I set it down in my own mind, that after we had met him the night before he would leave no stone unturned to bring us into trouble, and it would not be a difficult matter for him to learn from some of the Tory citizens of York who yet remained in the village, which of the buildings were owned by my father.

Having come to know that this cabin belonged to the Hamilton plantation, there was every reason to believe Hunt would watch it closely, therefore for any one of us three lads to venture out even though we might be starving, would be much the same as advertising him of our whereabouts.

Certain it was that the Jerseyman could not aid us in this extremity, for he must remain even more closely hidden than we, lest he be prevented from making the desperate attempt he counted on as soon as night had come.

"I see no other course than for Pierre Laurens to set his wits at work striving to find some way out of this trouble," I said after we had talked together, as you might say at random, without having arrived at any definite conclusion. "Since we came into this village of York Pierre has shown himself ready of thought and has pulled us out of more than one hole. If he cannot devise some means to procure food save at the expense of bringing Abel Hunt down upon us, then will I say it is useless to attempt it; but that we must either starve, or take the poor chances of trying to follow Master Morgan through the lines, which would be much the same as death."

"But why should we be so certain this cabin is likely to be watched?" Saul asked in a tone of irritation. "Why may we not say to ourselves in good truth, that after you and Pierre met Abel Hunt--"

"Who is it calls on Abel Hunt?" a familiar voice from the outside cried, causing the blood to run chill in my veins, and almost at the same instant the door was burst open, the flimsy barriers we had set against it being of no avail as opposed to the strength of him who threw all his strength upon it.

We sat there like statues, and I dare say fear was written on every face, even on that of the Jerseyman's, when Abel Hunt in his bullying way strode into the center of the room and stood there gazing around at us as if to say we were at his mercy, and would obey his lightest word because we dared not do otherwise.

As for myself, I was literally paralyzed with fear. That man who could do us more mischief in this town of York than any other, had found out our hiding place, and what was even worse, had seen in our midst, as if taking council with us, a British soldier, for Master Morgan still retained so much of his uniform that it might be readily distinguishable.

My limbs trembled as if I was suffering from an attack of the palsy, and in my great terror I saw no way to counteract this last stroke of misfortune. I could bring to mind no act of ours which would tend to relieve us from the danger that menaced, and I might almost fancy that at his heels he had brought a squad of red-coated soldiers to carry us off to prison, from which we would emerge only to stand under the gallows.

Involuntarily I glanced toward Pierre, for the little French lad had ever shown himself of such ready wit that in time of great danger all my hopes were centered in him, and again did I have cause for fear. The lad, keeping his eyes fixed upon Abel Hunt that he might watch his every movement as a cat watches the movements of a mouse with which she is playing, was slowly yet surely moving around the room toward the door, and in my folly I said to myself that we were in such desperate straits that Pierre Laurens was not only willing, but striving, to give us the slip.

Although knowing him so well, I imagined that he, like me, was well nigh overcome with terror, and intent only on saving his own skin without giving heed to whatsoever might come upon his companions.

During a single instant my eyes fell upon the Jerseyman, and I saw what I fancied was already pictured plainly on my own face, until he, like me, had a glimpse of Pierre. Then it was as if a wave of satisfaction and approbation passed over his features, whereupon he turned to Abel Hunt, who still stood in the center of the room grinning in triumph at each of us in turn, and began to engage him in conversation.

It seemed to me that the Jerseyman uttered the words of a foolish person, when he said to the grinning fellow who was burning to humiliate and bring us to our death:

"There is no good reason, Hunt, for such I gather to be your name, why you should not sit down. Let us discuss the situation. I admit that you have caught us foul; but there is no need to hasten affairs, and we may as well speak of the matter among ourselves while there is yet time, for I am of the belief that it may be mended."

"You'll mend nothing with me, you renegade Britisher!" Abel Hunt snarled. "I looked to find a nest of rebels here; but didn't count they would be harboring a traitor such as you give token of being."

"Why should you call me a traitor?" the Jerseyman asked calmly and much to my astonishment, yet even at that moment when I was both terrified and perplexed I noted that he gave more heed to Pierre Laurens, than to the man with whom he was talking.

"Why should I not give you the name of traitor?" Abel growled. "You still wear part of the king's uniform, and it must be you have turned against him, else why do I find you consorting with rebels?"

"It may be I am striving to lead them from the error of their ways," Master Morgan said with a smile, and then it was I saw Uncle 'Rasmus pulling his chair forward, at the same time shaking his fist at Horry Sims in token that he should remain in the corner.

"Don't think to blind my eyes!" Hunt screamed. "Don't fancy that soft words will butter any parsnips with me! I've got you all under my thumb now, and count on keeping you there!"

"All of which you know to be a lie," the Jerseyman said, still speaking quietly but fixing the fellow with his eye as if to hold closely his attention.

As a matter of course these words were amply sufficient to arouse Hunt to the highest pitch of anger, and on the instant he seemed to give no heed to any save the one who had insulted him.

"You shall live to repent those words, and die regretting them," he snarled.

"Why don't you cause me now, single-handed, to regret them?" Morgan asked threateningly, rising to his feet as he spoke as if expecting an attack, and Abel Hunt literally shrieked in his anger:

"Because there is no need why I should spend my strength on one who lays so near the gallows as do you. I count on turning you over to those officers of the king who will deal out such justice as you have earned, instead of spending my time flogging a traitor who deserves more the halter."

Now it was, when it seemed to me as if Master Morgan was trying to provoke a rough-and-tumble fight, that I began, thick-head though I was, to have an inkling that some plan, which had been concerted without the aid of words, was on foot, for as soon as Abel gave way to anger old 'Rasmus moved his chair yet further forward until it stood as a barricade in front of the door, while Pierre held in his hands by one leg a stool, handling it as if it were a weapon.

"If you have aught against me, and are not a coward, you will try it out now and here, instead of hiding yourself behind the skirts of the king's soldiers!" the Jerseyman cried as if he no longer held control over his temper, and at the same time he advanced a step toward Hunt as if to grapple with him.

The cowardly fellow fell back before Morgan; but dared not take his eyes from the Jerseyman because of fearing that a blow might be delivered. Back, back, slowly, pace by pace he retreated, Morgan advancing with clenched fist, and then against Uncle 'Rasmus's chair the fellow came at full force, half toppling over.

Then it was that I understood all the scheme; understood why Uncle 'Rasmus had moved where he did, and why the Jerseyman strove to provoke Hunt to anger, for Pierre raised the stool which he had been swinging to and fro in his hands, and brought it down upon the scoundrel's head with such force that he was nigh knocked to the floor.

If little Frenchie had been able to get in a direct blow, I have no doubt it would have settled matters on the instant, for I could see even in the gloom that the lad was putting all his strength to the effort, and counted on taking human life if by so doing he could the better relieve us from the difficulty into which we had fallen.

As it was, unfortunately, Pierre's arm glanced across the back of Uncle 'Rasmus's chair, and the blow was robbed of half

its force. It was sufficient, however, to partially daze Abel Hunt, and before he could recover either his senses or his footing Morgan was upon him like a wild-cat, clutching both hands around the fellow's throat to prevent any outcry, while the two came down upon the puncheon planks with a thud that shook the building.

On the instant, and without giving any heed to the struggling men, Uncle 'Rasmus sprang with the agility of a boy to the corner where Horry Sims stood as if ready to leap forward to Abel Hunt's aid, and there the old negro, with his cane upraised, held the Tory lad where he neither dared lift a hand or open his mouth.

At the same instant little Frenchie sprang toward the door, replacing and mending so far as possible the barriers which had been torn away, and otherwise doing what he might to put it in such shape that it would resist, at least for a short time, the efforts of any who might try to enter.

Meanwhile Saul and I stood as if dazed, looking down upon the floor where Master Morgan and Abel Hunt were struggling most desperately, rolling here and there with such swiftness of movement that had we been armed with the best of weapons it would have been impossible for us to have struck a blow in defence of the Jerseyman, save at great risk of hitting him instead of our enemy.

I did succeed, after mayhap a full minute had passed, in gathering my wits sufficiently to seize upon a stick of firewood which was lying at one side of the fireplace, and then I went toward the combatants, watching the opportunity to strike a blow in Master Morgan's defence. So great was the rage within my heart, that I sincerely hoped I might bring the oaken stick down upon Abel Hunt's head with such force as to kill him on the instant.

At almost the precise moment when the Jerseyman leaped upon Abel Hunt, the British cannon were discharged, and from then on until long after the struggle had come to an end, was the firing kept up on both sides with such violence and volume of sound that however much of a disturbance we might have made in the cabin, or however near the Britishers had approached to the building, no token of our movements could have been heard. Otherwise certain it is to me that we would have brought the enemy down upon us, for the tumult inside old Mary's cabin was indeed great.

How long the struggle between the two men continued I had no means of knowing. My blood was, as one would say, so boiling in my veins that I saw nothing but red before me, and was conscious of but the one desire to kill the scoundrel who without reason had sought to hunt us down.

Therefore it was I could not have told whether I sprang here and there in the effort to strike a deadly blow, five minutes or half an hour, and something very like disappointment came over me when Master Morgan concluded the fight without aid from any of us.

His grip upon Abel Hunt's throat was so firm that the fellow's eyes were literally starting from their sockets when he had been choked into insensibility, and his tongue hung out of his mouth seemingly a finger's length.

The Jerseyman although victor, had not come out of the fight unharmed. He was bleeding from a cut on the face. His shirt had been torn from his body until he was near naked, and so severe had been his exertions that when Hunt finally sank back upon the puncheons like one dead Master Morgan could only with difficulty move to his knees, panting, and with the perspiration running down his face in tiny streams.

How long Saul and I stood gaping open-mouthed at the apparently dead man and nearly exhausted spy I dare not venture to say. Neither of us thought we had any part to play now that the battle was at an end; but not so with Pierre Laurens. He, dear lad, ever on watch and ever ready to take advantage of the first opportunity, understood that Abel Hunt had only been choked into unconsciousness, and that it was necessary we set about so fettering him that the battle could not be continued when his senses returned.

Pierre seized upon the blanket which had fallen from Uncle 'Rasmus's knees when he set about making his way toward the door to offer his body as a living barricade, and tore it into strips until he had an apology for a rope sufficient to have tied two men, and began dextrously binding Hunt's feet and arms.

His action caused me to bestir myself, and I began to fashion a gag for the fellow's mouth, knowing full well that we could not frighten him into silence as we had frightened Horry Sims.

The Jerseyman recovered from his exertions before little Frenchie and I had finished our task, and then he took from my hand the stout billet of wood which I was wrapping with strips torn from the blanket, as he said:

"I am not minded to have the blood of this fellow on my head, yet perhaps it would be better for all concerned if we shut off his wind for so long a time that it could never be recovered again, for he is like to be a millstone around your neck, lad, and may yet succeed in working his purpose. Killing one in cold blood, even though it be for the Cause, is more than I am willing to undertake."

"But he must be gagged," I cried, thinking that Master Morgan was growing soft-hearted and might waste too much time in mourning over his victim.

"Let not your heart be troubled as to that, lad," the Jerseyman said grimly. "To thrust this gag into the fellow's mouth just now would be indeed the same as cutting his throat. We must wait until he is well nigh conscious of his surroundings, and then bind it in place so securely that he cannot work loose from it."

Then it was, while Morgan knelt by Abel Hunt's side awaiting the proper moment to deprive him of all power of speech, that I realized what we had done. I speedily understood that this victory of ours was the same as a disaster, for how could we, unable to procure food or water save at great risk, care for two prisoners, and at the same time the thought came into my mind like a red light of warning, that the companionship of Abel Hunt would embolden Horry Sims, and mayhap make of him something more than the coward he had thus far shown himself.

Even though we should be able to feed these prisoners, yet must we hold them here in the midst of the British camp where the least accident would bring the soldiers in upon us, and it did not at that moment seem to me possible we could keep the two fellows in the loft any length of time without in some way betraying the secret.

"What about the Tory lad?" Master Morgan asked while he yet awaited the proper time for thrusting the gag into Hunt's mouth.

"We are forced to hold him, as a matter of course. The question in my mind as you spoke was how we might care for two prisoners, while we ourselves are in much the same situation, save than we are at liberty to move about inside this cabin?"

"There are many things, lad, which seem impossible while they are yet in the future; but when the moment for action comes the way is made plain, and we succeed where failure appeared certain."

Not understanding fully the meaning of what the Jerseyman said, I did not extract much of comfort from his words; but stood looking down upon Abel Hunt who was now beginning to breathe heavily like one who snores in his sleep, until Pierre aroused me by saying:

"We shall be forced to put both prisoners into the loft, as a matter of course, and may as well get Horry Sims there now, for stowing Abel Hunt away will be considerable of a task."

Despite the roar of great guns from the outside the Tory lad heard what little Frenchie said, and straightway set about begging us not to put a gag in his mouth, vowing by this and by that which he held most sacred, that he would make no outcry.

At first it seemed to me absolutely necessary for our own safety that we deprive him of the power to raise an alarm; but Pierre, who had already thought over all the possibilities of the situation, said:

"We will put Abel Hunt one side of the scuttle, and Horry Sims the other. Whoever is on guard must sit by the side of the Tory lad, and if so be he gives any token of crying out, then shall the gag go in and remain there."

"Do you count on making the same bargain with Abel Hunt?" I asked scornfully, for my blood was yet so heated that I could have no feeling of tenderness or of mercy toward those two who had forced us to encounter such peril.

"He must take his dose," little Frenchie said from between his clenched teeth, and I was really pleased, even while standing there facing death, to see that the French lad's anger could be aroused.

Without loss of time we drove Horry Sims up the ladder, and when he was in the loft Pierre and I fettered him securely with strips of blanket, threatening him with the gag if he moved a hand's breadth in either direction.

Then we went to the floor below, ready to do our share in hoisting into his attic-prison the scoundrel who would have denounced us as spies.

The Jerseyman had already put the gag in Hunt's mouth, and when we came down he was telling the fellow what he might expect if any resistance was offered.

"Here is a pistol with mayhap a dozen charges of powder and ball," Master Morgan said as he drew from his ragged trousers a weapon and a small package which I knew contained ammunition. "Whichever of you lads stands guard over the prisoner, and close watch must be kept night and day if you would preserve your lives, will have by him every moment this pistol ready loaded and primed. At the first sign of an attempt to escape, or to give an alarm, which you see Abel Hunt display, put the weapon to his head and blow his brains out regardless of everything, even though there might be a squad of soldiers standing beneath the scuttle, for his life must be as of no value if you would hope to come

out from this British nest with whole skins."

Then looking at Hunt, who perforce lay there motionless and silent, the Jerseyman repeated to him very much the same as he had said to us, assuring the fellow over and over again that if the Britishers should come to his aid, or if it was discovered either through his exertions or by accident that he lay there a prisoner, we lads were bound to kill him because of what he could tell to our disadvantage.

I have seen a wild-cat held helpless in a trap, and there was much of his look about Abel Hunt's face as he glared at Pierre and me, unable to stir even a finger, while Master Morgan was threatening.

It seemed as though the fellow must have realized that we would have no compunction about taking his life in cold blood if so be he stood between us and liberty, yet was he like the wild-cat, ready and willing to struggle to the very last even though the odds were so heavy against him, and when we strove to carry him into the loft he did his best to prevent it, although both hands and feet were bound securely.

It was not until we had made a rope of the second blanket, thus depriving ourselves of even the apology for a bed, and tied it around his body, hoisting him as we would a bale of cotton, that it was possible to get the fellow through the scuttle.

With two of us pulling from above and the others shoving him up from below, we finally succeeded in landing him on the puncheon planks, rolling the fellow over until he was at such a distance from the opening in the floor that he could not well spy upon those who were below.

All the while, fortunately for us, the cannonading continued, therefore we were at liberty to work as we would regardless of making a noise, and well it was, for had we stood in danger from eavesdroppers, then must all of us have been in the guard-house within five minutes after the fight between Master Morgan and Abel Hunt began.

It was with a sense of greatest relief that I stood near the edge of the scuttle wiping the perspiration from my face when finally we had got the scoundrelly cur where we wanted him, and then the satisfaction which should have been mine because of having thus far succeeded in holding our own, was entirely wiped out by thoughts of the future. Strive as I might, I could not prevent my mind from going ahead of time and picturing what must finally be our fate.

That we could hold these two Tories securely for a day, mayhap eight and forty hours, I had little doubt; but it was the same as a proven fact in my mind that within a short time must the Britishers learn all the secret, and lay us under the most terrible of all military charges.

It was as if Master Morgan understood that if we were given much time for thought there was fear of our growing timorous, for no sooner had we disposed of Abel Hunt than he called for all to come to the floor below where he could have speech with us, saying at the same time that the prisoners could effect nothing toward their release, even though it were possible for them to cry out, because while the cannon were roaring and one could hear the crackle of musketry from seemingly every point, the strongest lunged man who ever lived could not have made his voice heard an hundred paces away.

"It has come time for me to take leave of you, lads," the Jerseyman said much to my surprise, and I interrupted him by crying out, for it was to my mind as if the moment he departed we were standing in even more imminent danger of death than we did at that instant.

"I thought you were not counting to make the venture until midnight," I cried.

"That was in my mind, lad, when matters were quiet here within the entrenchments; but from the sounds of conflict it would seem as if the Britishers had all they could attend to without looking after a man here or there. I count on making my way very near the outer works, where I shall await an opportunity of slipping through the lines."

"Think you it will be possible to do so?" Pierre asked thoughtfully, and the Jerseyman replied without a tremor in his voice:

"I am of the mind, lad, that the odds are strongly against it, and yet must the venture be made. I have the hope that if death comes to me you may have knowledge regarding it, so that that which I have failed in may be carried on by one of you. It is not a time to think of taking precautions to save our own lives; but rather to try how we may so sacrifice them that by our dying we shall have benefitted the Cause."

Even while he was speaking in such a strain as to bring tears to the eyes of us all, little Frenchie, ever realizing what should be done, was unbarring the door, and when he had finished the task the Jerseyman went out without so much as turning to look at us. Never a word did he speak, but went quickly into the open air as if eager to rid himself of our company.

Only those who have been in a like situation can understand our feelings at this moment when we were left alone, and knew that the man who stood our friend, had gone most like to his death.

We remained silent and motionless, not daring to gaze at each other, much like a band of mourners who have gathered around the lifeless body of a dear friend, and so we would have stood there until all the courage oozed out from our hearts, had it not been for dear little Frenchie, himself quite as brave a man and as good a patriot as the one who had just left us.

Regardless of the sorrow in his own heart, and of the forebodings which I knew must be his, he put on a cheerful face, saying as he righted Uncle 'Rasmus's chair which had been overturned during the struggle:

"There is no good reason why we should stand around here like a company of sore-heads, for there is work in abundance to be done. We must have food, and now would seem to be the time to procure it, when the Britishers have all on their hands to which they can attend."

"For my part I have no desire for food," I cried, almost irritated because he had brought up the matter at such a time, when it was as if we had taken leave of an old friend. "It seems to me as if I should never be hungry again."

"But yet you will be, Fitz Hamilton, and that before this night-fall. Even though we were inclined to starve ourselves, thinking it might benefit the Cause, we have two prisoners to look after, and now that we have no longer reason to fear a meeting with Abel Hunt, what prevents us from going through the encampment?"

"It seems to me that at such a time the Britishers would be over-cautious, and insist on knowing why we lads roamed around instead of offering our services to those in the entrenchments," Saul said gloomily, and I was much of his mind; but when little Frenchie has once set out on a road it is most difficult to turn him back, and now in answer to our suggestions, he insisted that we must make an effort to procure provisions whatever short of actual death might stand in the way.

I am willing now, as I was then, to confess freely that I was afraid to step outside old Mary's cabin for any purpose whatsoever. The struggle with Abel Hunt, and the departure of the Jerseyman when it seemed certain he had gone out only to be killed, had brought to the surface all my cowardice; but when I said as much in plain words, little Frenchie laughed me to scorn, declaring he knew me better than I knew myself, and that it needed only for me to stand face to face with imminent danger in order to give token of bravery.

"Then surely now should be the time when I showed myself a hero," I replied with a laugh that had in it little of mirth, "for verily are we face to face with as many dangers as the most gluttonous swash-buckler could desire."

"Come with me and we will find more," Pierre said with a laugh as he opened the door, and for the life of me I could not have refused to follow the lad, even my knees bent beneath me as I crossed the threshold.

CHAPTER XV

FORAGING

Sorely afraid though I was to go out of the cabin lest I find myself a prisoner on the charge of being a spy, no danger however great could have prevented me from following little Frenchie when he thus led the way.

I was so timorous at that moment as to be irritated, and it would have done me a world of good could I have taken the little lad by the shoulders and shaken him severely, because of thus venturing forth when he might have remained in hiding a few hours longer without suffering overly much from lack of food.

Once in the open air, however, I the same as forgot that I was faint-hearted, because of the scene which was presented. Looking northward we could see closely surrounding us, hardly more than a cannon-shot away, our people who had come to capture Cornwallis and his men, and in so doing were preparing a way for our escape, if so be we lived long enough to take advantage of the opportunity which they were counting on offering.

It was a sight well calculated to warm even the most timorous heart, that vast army pressing forward as if certain of victory, and holding the enemy on this peninsula from whence he could not escape even by water, for at Lynn Haven bay lay the French ships ready to intercept any flight.

We of Virginia had remained so long under the heel of the invader, with only now and then a glimpse of small detachments of our soldiers, that it seemed for the moment almost incredible that there could be so many men ready to sacrifice their lives in the effort to free the colonies from the yoke of oppression which bore so heavily upon them.

Looking Gloucester way, by which I mean gazing across the encampment of those who held our village of York in a wavering grasp, we could see that the red-coats had not only withdrawn from the outermost works; but appeared to be massed together close within the limits of the village as if for mutual protection, and little Pierre, ever quick to see, and keen to understand what he saw, said to me in a tone of triumph as he laid his hand on my shoulder:

"Look yonder; see the red-coats huddling together like a lot of rats in a trap, and verily they are trapped now, for so long as the French vessels remain inside the Capes, so long are they shut in here at the mercy of those brave fellows who have drawn the net around them!"

Then it was that I began to question if Cornwallis was indeed in such close quarters? In the river lay, as I have already said, the *Guadaloupe* and the *Charon*, and in addition were a number of other large vessels, the names of which I do not remember.

I asked myself whether, by making a brave attempt, they might not force their way past the French fleet, and thus escape by the sea?

"There is no chance they will try anything of the kind," Pierre said when I suggested that mayhap our people did not hold the British in such a firm grasp. "Look more closely at the ships, and you will see that but two of them are armed for war, the others being only transports. What chance would all of them have against a single frigate? No, no, Fitz Hamilton, Cornwallis knows only too well that he is in a tight place; but he is not such a fool as to make so desperate a venture. Here he has taken his stand, and here he must remain until having beaten off our people, or made up his mind to surrender."

I wish it might be possible for me to paint a picture of the British encampment surrounded by our brave Americans, as Pierre Laurens and I saw it that afternoon when the shades of night were gathering. Points of lights, betokening camp-fires, or torches set up in the entrenchments that the troops might be able to strengthen their defences, twinkled in every direction. Then was a zone of darkness lying between the enemy's works and our forces, after which came again a circle of twinkling lights that seemed to shine out in a most friendly fashion, as if telling us lads to be of good cheer for kindly aid was nigh at hand.

Now and then would come a great flash of fire, followed by a heavy booming noise, as one army or the other sent a shot across the lines to show that all were on the alert, and again we could hear in this direction or that, the sharp crackle of musketry which caused us to start forward toward the sound believing a battle had begun. During all the time we were besieged in the village of York did it appear to me certain the two armies would come together immediately in a hand-to-hand grapple, and many times did I believe the end was nigh at hand, although never were both forces in their entirety engaged in conflict.

Not until night had fully come did Pierre and I cease to gaze around us, at the same time exulting and despairing,

allowing our eyes to rest longest on the encampment of our friends, and then it was that the little French lad brought me to a realization of the task before us, by saying laughingly:

"We ventured out to forage, not to watch the two armies, and I am of the opinion that we had best get about our work, else will Saul and Uncle 'Rasmus believe we have been taken prisoners. That cousin of yours is none too patient under the best of circumstances, and I can fancy how he is raving at this moment because of being forced to stay in the loft guarding the prisoners, while the old negro remains at the window watching for our return."

It was one thing to say we would forage, and quite another to do it. There were provisions in abundance in the British camp; but no possibility that we lads could come upon them, either by begging or by stealing, while our only chance lay in finding some of the villagers who were able and willing to minister to hungry boys without questioning whether they were for the king or the colonies.

Left to my own devices, I should have returned to old Mary's cabin, declaring it was impossible to get that which we needed; but Pierre was not minded to confess himself beaten, and proposed that we present ourselves boldly at a dwelling mayhap an hundred yards away, which we knew was yet occupied by its owners.

I tried to dissuade him from such a course, insisting that most like the people were Tories, else they would not have remained to be shut up in this beleaguered village; but he only shrugged his shoulders and waved his hands in that peculiar fashion of his, as he said in what he counted should be a careless tone:

"It is better, Fitz Hamilton, that we are held in the guard-house even under the charge of being spies, than that we starve to death, as you must admit there is danger unless we speedily find provisions. Let the people in yonder dwelling be Tories or Whigs, I question whether they could get the ear of any British officer within a very short time, and if we find that they are inclined to do us harm, it is only a case of taking to our heels. Besides, I am of the mind that those who were rank Tories yesterday, are standing undecided to-day until they shall see which side wins the victory that they may put on the proper coat."

Then, without waiting to learn whether I agreed with him, the lad led me forward by the arm with such a tight grip that I could not escape him save by a downright struggle, and knocked boldly at the door of the dwelling.

It was opened by an old man, whom I believed I had seen more than once since we had come to this village of York in converse with some of the red-coated officers, and even then I strove to pull Pierre back that we might make our escape in the darkness.

With a strength such as I had not believed was his, he held me by his side as he said to this man who might prove to be our bitterest foe:

"We are lads who came down from the Hamilton plantation to look after an old negro who was too feeble to leave his quarters here, and now are we shut in with nothing to eat and no way of getting provisions save by begging. We ate our last morsel of food yesterday, and have come here believing you would give from your store rather than sit down at table knowing there were those near you dying from starvation."

"You don't appear to be very near death just now," the man said gruffly, as he came nearer to peer into our faces. "So you belong on the Hamilton plantation, do you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And when Captain Hamilton went North to join the rebel forces he left an old negro in this village, did he?"

"It is not to my mind certain that Uncle 'Rasmus was here when Captain Hamilton went away; but I know only too well he is now in this village, and in need of food."

"I don't claim to know very much of military movements," the man said grimly, having satisfied his curiosity regarding our personal appearance; "but it seems to me you might have waited a little with the belief that the rebels are bound to make their way inside those lines whatever my Lord Cornwallis may do in opposition."

"It is painful waiting even for a short time, when one's empty stomach reproaches him," little Frenchie said with a shrug of his shoulders, and the man stood irresolute while I might have counted ten, after which he wheeled about suddenly, and entered the house saying as he did so:

"Wait until I come."

You may be certain we waited, although I had many misgivings as to whether the return would be to our advantage or to our sorrow, for there was a possibility he might hold us until he could send word to some of the Britishers telling

them who we were and much of this fear I whispered in Pierre's ear, whereupon he said cheerily, shrugging his shoulders and waving his hands:

"I cannot believe any in this village would be so unwise, just at this time, as to take advantage of our helplessness, save it might be such cattle as Abel Hunt, for even the dullest must understand that our friends are like to have the upper hands before this affair is finished, and he who sent two lads to their death might himself suffer in like fashion when the Americans held possession of this town of York, as they are certain to do before many days have passed."

Whether the man to whom we had appealed was at heart a friend to the colonies, or if he was prompted as Pierre had suggested, I cannot say; but this much I do know, that he brought us in a bag near to half a bushel of corn meal, and with it a large ham, saying as he laid the provisions on the threshold:

"To these you are welcome, lad, whether you be for the colonies or for the king; but I am asking that you do not come to me again with stories of your hunger, for my larder is not so well filled that I can share it with any outside my own family, lest we ourselves come to want before it is settled as to who shall be master in the village."

Pierre thanked the man in a manner which would have been impossible for me, tongue-tied as I always am at such a time, and then gathering up the bag and the ham hastily we went with all speed toward old Mary's cabin, mentally hugging ourselves because we had succeeded so well when there seemed little possibility aught of good would come from our foraging.

No sooner had we opened the door of the hovel and spoken to Uncle 'Rasmus, when Saul cried impatiently from the scuttle above:

"There is no good reason why you should loiter around the encampment when I alone am left in charge of the prisoners. Could you not understand that I ought to be relieved after so long a watch?"

"We understand nothing save that it was necessary we bring back food," Pierre said laughingly, giving no further heed to Saul's impatience.

The lad would have set about building a fire that we might cook the meat; but Uncle 'Rasmus eagerly prevented him from so doing, declaring that such task belonged to him, and Pierre, with a laugh which had in it much of content, gave way before the old negro and at once took up the bucket, running out of the cabin to get a supply of water.

"Heard you aught of the Jerseyman?" Saul cried from above, and I replied that there was little chance we could have had word concerning him.

If Morgan had been able to slip through the lines, then would there have come to us no token whatsoever, and if peradventure the enemy shot him while he was trying to make his escape, then again must we have remained in ignorance, for at such a time when many thousand men were facing each other, striving their utmost to kill or wound, the life of one, be he soldier or spy, would appear of but little importance.

"I'se boun' to believe, honey, dat he got trou all right," Uncle 'Rasmus said as he busied himself with preparations for the supper which we needed so sorely. "Dat 'ere Jerseyman is mighty spry, I'se tellin' you, an' ef he could hang 'roun' here wid de Britishers, keepin' his eye open ebery time dey jumped, I'se 'lowin' he's gwine to make a small job ob gettin' out ob dis yere place."

"If it's such a simple matter, why don't we try it ourselves?" Saul cried and started with surprise, for that very thought had been in my mind during the last five minutes.

So far as our being able to work benefit to the Cause was concerned, we might as well have been on the Hamilton plantation, and there I most ardently wished we were. It would be impossible, and most like unnecessary, for us to get word of importance to our people, no matter how many risks we ran, and I was of the mind that it was useless to take any chances, for surely the Americans, being so near, could keep themselves well informed of all that went forward in the encampment.

Pierre came back with the water; Uncle 'Rasmus made a pudding of the corn meal, and toasted slices of the ham before the fire. Saul came down from the loft, leaving the prisoners alone when the food was thus prepared, and we three lads and the old negro enjoyed that meal, surrounded though we were by enemies, more keenly than I ever remember of pleasuring myself in a like fashion.

When our own hunger had been appeased we set about feeding the prisoners, and this task in case of Horry Sims was a simple one, for we dared set his hands free that he might wait upon himself; but when it came to Abel Hunt it was a horse of an entirely different color.

We ran no little risk even in removing the gag from his mouth, and I firmly believe but for the fact of Pierre's standing over him with the loaded pistol which the Jerseyman had left for our use, threatening to shoot with intent to kill if he uttered the slightest sound, the fellow would have striven to give an alarm.

It was some minutes before he could work his jaws, so cramped were they from being held fixed in one position since we had made him prisoner, and then instead of eating, although I knew full well he must be hungry, he set about threatening us with what he would do when he was at liberty, striving to impress upon us that we could not hold him in the loft many days without attracting some attention from the Britishers.

"I am well known inside these lines," he snarled, "and had been intrusted with important business, so that if I fail to present myself at headquarters within a reasonable time, search will be made for me. You can guess what must be your plight once a squad of soldiers enters this cabin to set me free."

"I'm thinking, Abel Hunt," Pierre replied softly, "that the Britishers have got as much on their heads as can well be attended to just now, without troubling their minds regarding you. Don't expect a squad of red-coats to come here on your behalf very soon, and, in fact, I would advise you to give over thinking of such a thing, for there is every indication my Lord Cornwallis will be too deeply occupied with the American army to give heed to Tories, however important they may believe their business to be."

Abel continued to threaten, declaring he would send us to the gallows before many days had passed, if we failed to release him, and he went on in such strain until even Pierre lost his temper, and roughly told him that unless he made ready for eating he would get no food until next morning, whereupon the fellow opened his mouth obediently, much like a calf.

Mine was the disagreeable task to feed him, and it may be I thrust the pudding into his mouth with unnecessary force; but certain it is I was in no wise tender with the scoundrel, for I knew to a certainty that if the tables were turned, and we in his power, we might hold ourselves fortunate indeed if we were given the slightest morsel to eat.

That night we lads took turns standing guard in the loft, each remaining on duty two hours, although as Saul said, if we had been willing to cause Horry Sims suffering, all of us might, by gagging him, have taken the rest which we needed. I am not sorry that we failed of following my cousin's suggestion, for since that day I have come to know from painful experience how much suffering may be caused by a gag firmly fixed between one's jaws.

There is no good reason why I should strive to set down all the doings of each day while it seemed to me much as if our people were making slow progress in this work of capturing my Lord Cornwallis.

Having been so successful in our first attempt at foraging, we went almost boldly around the village when our store of provisions ran low, begging at this house or at that without questioning whether the occupants might be for the king or for the colony, receiving sometimes with a generous hand, and then again in niggardly manner, at least enough of food to keep us alive, although I am free to confess that never once from the day the Jerseyman left us until I was home again on the plantation, did I feel as though my stomach was well filled.

Instead of striving to tell what we lads did, which is of little consequence compared with what was going on around us, I had best hold this poor apology for a story to the movements of those brave fellows who had come down from the North to rid our colony of Virginia from red-coated invaders.

During all the while, whether by day or by night, one of us three lads remained in the loft doing guard duty, while the other two, if by any fortunate chance we had a small store of provisions on hand, were at liberty to watch our people. It can well be understood how greedily we gazed out upon that army which we counted friendly, watching for the least change of position, and even questioning with impatience how long it would be before the end came.

It was as if the Britishers gave no heed whatsoever to anything save their own defense, and I question whether we lads might not have boldly presented ourselves to the quartermaster begging for food and receiving it, instead of striving as we did to keep ourselves from their particular notice.

We could see day after day our people bringing up heavy guns, digging ditches which Pierre called parallels, meaning embankments thrown up to protect the advance of a besieging army, and otherwise seemingly making preparations to fall upon the enemy in overwhelming force.

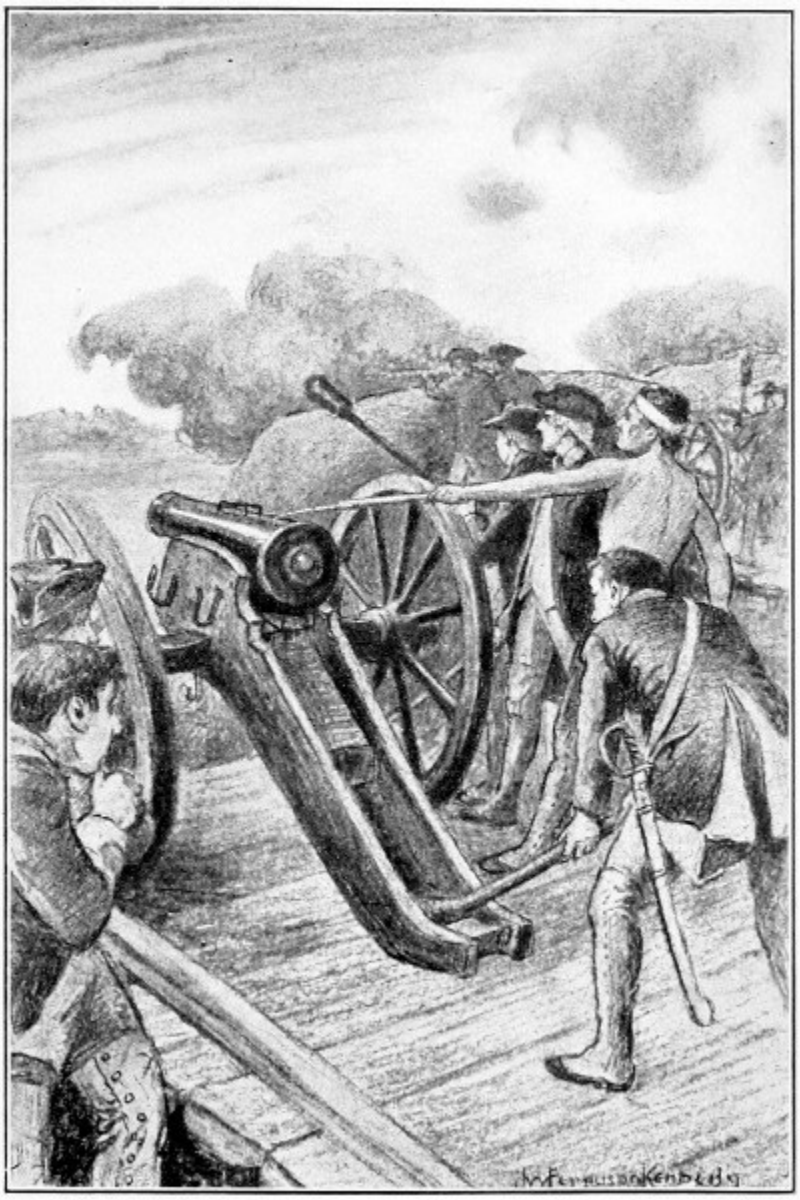
I remember well on going out early one morning, after it seemed to me that we had been shut up in this town of York weeks and weeks instead of only a few days, and seeing much to my surprise a parallel, or embankment, not more than five or six hundred yards from the outermost of the British works, which had been completed during the hours of darkness. With a great joy in my heart I ran into the cabin to make known the welcome news, for surely did it seem as if the American army had taken their first step toward entering the village.

We expected each moment to hear sounds of conflict; those who were not on duty in the loft remained out of doors watching the soldiers in the distance, and greatly disappointed were we when night came and nothing decisive, so far as we could see, had been done.

Next day Pierre pointed out to me as he and I stood overlooking the American lines, that two or three redoubts were being thrown up, and batteries placed in position. Then came that for which we had been hoping and praying--the sounds of conflict.

It was in the afternoon that our people opened fire upon the enemy with great vigor, and until the end came the earth trembled continuously beneath the heavy detonations, while the smoke of the burning powder hung over us until our throats were parched and smarting.

It is impossible for me to set down of my own knowledge all that was done during this seemingly long time by the Britishers, for I saw only a portion of the movements. Often the clouds of smoke prevented me from seeing friend or foe, and again, when came this change of position, or that counter-marching, I failed to understand the meaning, therefore it is that again shall I make my story more plain by setting down the words of another, which I have seen on a printed sheet:



"A GENERAL DISCHARGE ... WAS COMMENCED BY THE AMERICANS."

"The evening of the sixth was very dark and stormy, and under cover of the gloom, the first parallel was commenced within six hundred yards of Cornwallis's works. (Parallel is a technical term applied to trenches and embankments dug

and thrown up as a protection to besiegers against the guns of a fort. In this way the assailants may approach a fortification, and construct batteries within short gun-shot of the works of the beleaguered, and be well protected in their labors.)

"General Lincoln commanded the troops detailed for this service. So silently and so earnestly did they labor that they were not discerned by the British sentinels, and before daylight the trenches were sufficiently complete to shield the laborers from the guns of the enemy. On the afternoon of the ninth several batteries and redoubts were completed, and a general discharge of twenty-four and eighteen-pounders was commenced by the Americans on the right.

"This cannonade was kept up without intermission during the night, and early next morning the French opened their batteries upon the enemy. For nearly eight hours there was an incessant roar of cannon and mortars, and hundreds of bombs and round shot were poured upon the British works. So tremendous was the bombardment that the besieged soon withdrew their cannon from the embrasures, and fired very few shots in return. At evening red-hot cannon balls were hurled from the French battery on the extreme left, at the *Guadaloupe* and *Charon*.

"The *Guadaloupe* was driven from her post, while the *Charon* and three large transports were burned.

"The night was starry and mild, and invited to repose; but the besiegers rested not, and York Town presented a scene of terrible grandeur such as is seldom witnessed by the eye of man.

"From the bank of the river I had a fine view of the splendid conflagration. The ships were enwrapped in a torrent of fire which spread with vivid brightness among the combustible rigging, and ran with amazing rapidity to the tops of the several masts, while all around was thunder and lightning from our numerous cannon and mortars, and in the darkness presented one of the most sublime and magnificent spectacles that can be imagined.

"Some of our shells, over-reaching the town, were seen to fall in the river, and, bursting, threw up a column of water like the spouting of a monster of the deep. All night long the allies kept up a cannonade, and early the next morning another British transport was set in flames by a fiery ball, and consumed.

"During the night of the eleventh the besiegers commenced a second parallel, between two and three hundred yards from the British works. The three succeeding days were devoted to the completion of this line of trenches, during which time the enemy opened new embrasures in positions from which their fire was far more effective than at first.

"Two redoubts on the left of the besieged, and advanced three hundred yards in front of the British works, flanked the second parallel and greatly annoyed the men in the trenches. Preparations were made on the fourteenth to carry them both by storm.

"To excite a spirit of emulation the reduction of one was committed to the American light infantry under Lafayette; the other to a detachment of French grenadiers and chasseurs commanded by the Baron de Viomenil, a brave and experienced officer.

"Toward evening the two detachments marched to the assault. Colonel Alexander Hamilton, who had commanded a battery of light artillery during this campaign, led the advance corps of the Americans, assisted by Colonel Gimat, Lafayette's aide; while Colonel Laurens, with eighty men, turned the redoubt, in order to intercept the retreat of the garrison.

"At a given signal the troops rushed furiously to the charge without firing a gun, the van being led by Captain Aaron Ogden. Over the abattis and palisades they leaped, and with such vehemence and rapidity assaulted and entered the works, that their loss was inconsiderable. One sergeant and eight privates were killed; seven officers and twenty-five non-commissioned officers and privates were wounded. Major Campbell, who commanded the redoubt, and some inferior officers, with seventeen privates, were made prisoners. Eight privates of the garrison were killed in the assault, but not one was injured after the surrender.

"The redoubt stormed by the French was garrisoned by a greater force, and was not so easily overcome. It was defended by a lieutenant-colonel, and one hundred and fifty men. After a combat of nearly half an hour, the redoubt was surrendered. Eighteen of the garrison were killed, and forty-two were made prisoners. The French lost in killed and wounded about one hundred men.

"During the night of the fourteenth these redoubts were included in the second parallel, and by five o'clock the next afternoon some howitzers, which had been placed in them, were opened upon the British works.

"The situation of Cornwallis was now becoming dangerous. Beleaguered on all sides by a superior force, his strongest defenses crumbling or passing into the possession of the besiegers, and no tidings from General Clinton to encourage him, the British commander was filled with the gloomiest apprehensions.

"Knowing that the town would be untenable when the second parallel should be completed, he sent out a detachment under Lieutenant-Colonel Abercrombie, to make a sortie against the two almost completed batteries guarded by French troops. They made a furious assault at about four o'clock in the morning and were successful; but the guards at the trenches soon drove the assailants back, and their enterprise was fruitless of advantage.

"Cornwallis, confident that he could not maintain his position, determined to make a desperate effort at flight. His plan was to leave the sick and his baggage behind; cross over to Gloucester, and, with his detachment there, disperse the French troops; mount his infantry on horses taken from the duke's legion, and others that might be seized in the neighborhood; by rapid marches gain the forks of the Rappahannock and the Potomac, and, forcing his way through Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, form a junction with the army in New York.

"This was a most hazardous undertaking, but his only alternative was flight or capture. Boats were accordingly prepared, and at ten o'clock on the evening of the sixteenth a portion of his troops were conveyed across to Gloucester. So secretly was the whole movement performed that the patriots did not perceive it, and had not a power mightier than man interposed an obstacle, Cornwallis's desperate plan might have been successfully accomplished.

"The first body of troops had scarcely reached Gloucester Point when a storm of wind and rain, almost as sudden and fierce as a summer tornado, made the passage of the river too hazardous to be again attempted. The storm continued with unabated violence until morning, and Cornwallis was obliged to abandon his design. The troops were brought back without much loss, and now the last ray of hope began to fade from the vision of the earl."

CHAPTER XVI

PREPARATIONS FOR FLIGHT

There is little of particular interest that can be told concerning ourselves during that time of happenings which I have just set down in the words of another, when our people were showing themselves such able soldiers.

When the fighting was hottest at least two of us lads were out of doors where we could see what was going on, and regarding not the bullets or cannon balls that came our way, in our eagerness to watch for some advantage which might be gained by the Americans.

It was for us a time of constant anxiety. We had the prisoners to guard, and had we not been forced to take Abel Hunt as we did, then might it have been a simple matter, for we could frighten Horry Sims into submission. But this hulking, dissolute fellow, as ready to fight as he was to eat, regardless of whether he faced friend or foe, was smarting under the sense of being held captive by lads, and we knew only too well that he would struggle to his utmost to set himself free that he might denounce us as spies, which he could well do after knowing what he must have known regarding the Jerseyman.

While I was on duty in the loft I stood at one of the small apertures or the other gazing out, oftentimes hearing the shrieking of a bomb as it came within what seemed to be a very short distance of the building; but ever keeping a watchful eye on Abel Hunt.

At such times as I was off duty and not obliged to go with Pierre foraging, for he was the only one of us three who could successfully conduct such expeditions, I was lounging around the outside of the building, saddened when our people slackened fire, lest they should be wavering in the attempt to overcome Cornwallis, and again exulting when the big guns boomed their notes of defiance until it was as if the very air vibrated with the detonations.

Although we were so fearsome that Hunt might succeed in making his escape, at least four times in every four and twenty hours were we forced in humanity's name to take the gag from his mouth, that he might get relief for his jaws.

The fellow begged again and again that we would relieve him from his bonds so he might walk around, promising to be as obedient to our orders as was Horry Sims; but I knew him too well to put any trust in his words.

Now and then we released his feet, and again gave him free use of one arm at a time; in other words, we did all we might to relieve the pain of his position without running too much risk on our part.

On that day when the French and the American troops attacked the redoubts on either side the village, I thought we had come to our last hour on earth, so thickly did the shots from the American redoubt directly in front of the lines which were sent to cover the assault I have already described, strike roundabout old Mary's cabin. It seemed certain we must be sent into the Beyond by those who would lend us every aid within their power.

It was when a solid shot struck the corner of the cabin near to the ridge-pole, just above where Abel Hunt lay, and plowed its way through the solid logs, tearing them aside as a child might shatter a lot of jackstraws, that I believed we were soon to meet our death. Hunt must have been of the same opinion, for he begged like a cur, when Pierre and I went up shortly afterward, for us to keep the gag from his mouth, declaring that we were striving to compass his death by leaving him in such a place.

But for Pierre Laurens I believe we would have abandoned the prisoners, and, taking Uncle Rasmus with us, fled down to the bank of the river immediately in the rear of the captured redoubt, where several of the villagers were gathered in abject terror, thinking only to shield themselves from the iron hail which came into and across the encampment with the fury of a summer tempest.

It was not possible for us to go an hundred yards in either direction from the cabin without coming upon wounded or dead, and so accustomed did we become within a very short time to such horrible scenes that they ceased to terrify us, save when, as happened more than once, a soldier was shot down within a stone's throw of our hiding place. Even then it was to us nothing so very terrible, save that it served to point out the peril in which we were placed.

We had long since ceased to depend upon the citizens of York for food; but went boldly up to the quartermaster's department when rations were being served, and only once were we turned away empty-handed.

I would not have it understood that during the siege we were living on the fat of the land; we had sufficient with which to partially allay our hunger, and took good care that the prisoners should not suffer from lack of food, even though we ourselves might be forced to fast.

Once during these times of excitement a bomb struck that portion of the cabin which had already been shattered, and on the instant the dry timbers were in a flame. Fortunately, however, we had a full bucket of water in the house, and by aid of this, with what could hurriedly be brought from the well near at hand, we succeeded in extinguishing the fire before it gained headway.

"If that had happened in the night, then had we all been burned to death," Saul said thoughtfully, and Pierre laughed him to scorn as he replied:

"If so be we lads haven't sense enough to go out of doors when the heat inside becomes too great, then of a verity do we deserve to be burnt alive. No danger which may come to us from our people can cause me to grumble, for it is all in the way of teaching the king's soldiers a lesson, and my life counts for nothing."

I believe we had all come to cheapen the value of a human life by this time, having seen so many of the red-coated soldiers shot down. Until we were come to this village of York I had shuddered at the very thought of shedding blood; but now so hardened was I become to such scenes that I gave no heed to those who fell within view of the cabin, nor did I hold my own life as of great importance even to myself.

He who has followed thus far my attempt to tell the story of what certain lads who called themselves Minute Boys of York Town did during this time of the siege, must strive to picture for himself our goings-in and comings-out while we were thus tied to old Mary's cabin. They must see in their minds' eye Pierre and I foraging, or mentally be with us when we divided our scanty store of food, giving to the helpless ones in the loft more than we took ourselves, for I cannot set all this down so that another may see it clearly, without using so many words that the most patient reader would turn aside from the pages wearied.

Therefore it is that I shall come directly to that evening so near the end of the siege when my Lord Cornwallis attempted to turn tail, leaving the sick and wounded behind him as he strove to gain a shelter in New York.

That forenoon Pierre and I had gone to the commissary's quarters when the rations were dealt out, and stood in line to receive our share, for during the past few days there had been no question as to giving us a certain amount of food. We were most likely looked upon as village lads, and by this time my Lord Cornwallis had been forced to feed the citizens of York from the army stores, he having seized from those who had an abundance everything that might serve to satisfy hunger.

Even I, thick-headed and dull of vision as I am, understood on this morning that some change was near at hand. The red-coats were moving here and there hurriedly, like bees whose hive has been disturbed. There was a great gathering of horses nearby the river bank, and among them, to my grief and anxiety, was my own colt Silver Heels; baggage wagons were being drawn down to the shore, and officers rode to and fro in hot haste, seemingly giving little heed as to what might be going on in the fortifications.

Half the buildings in the town had been taken possession of that they might be used as hospitals for the poor wretches who had been wounded, and as we passed them on our way to the commissary's quarters I noted that the surgeons were going from one to another as if having but little time to spend. The British fire had slackened although the Americans continued to pour shot and bombs into the town in a half-hearted way, and one might almost have supposed they were getting short of ammunition.

"Something of importance is going on here," I said decidedly when Pierre and I, having received what was supposed to be our proper amount of rations, had set off as if to return to the cabin. "Do you note that baggage is being carried to the river, and the horses are tethered there? Have you seen how hurriedly the surgeons were moving about, giving but scant heed to those who need their services most?"

"All that I have seen," Pierre replied gravely, "and it would seem to me that the riddle may easily be read, even by you who claim to have no knowledge of military matters."

"What do you mean?" I cried sharply. "What is it you read in this movement, except, perhaps, that Cornwallis is making ready for another sortie?"

"Would he make ready for a sortie by moving his baggage to the river? By gathering the horses there?" Pierre cried, speaking incautiously loud, and then lowering his voice to a whisper as he realized that the words might carry far even despite the roaring of the American guns. "If it was in his mind to strike a blow at our people would he be overhauling his baggage? Would not the horses be taken near to the front where they might be used?"

"What is it you mean?" I cried impatiently, not in the mood to wait until Pierre had gotten ready to repeat after his own fashion that which was in his mind.

"Do you remember that the Jerseyman said my Lord Cornwallis was making ready to run away?"

Like a flash it came upon me. I remembered all that Morgan had said, and as it came to my mind everything unusual around me had its meaning as plain as the sun at noon-time.

At last this general of the king who had boasted that he would come down and drive all the rebels out from Virginia, regardless of what that "French boy, Lafayette, might do," was making ready to run away--to run away from those American soldiers whom the Britishers did not believe could fight, although certain it is they had good proof of it at Bunker Hill in the colony of Massachusetts, and were they not getting more proof now? Was there a red-coat in all our village of York who had not come to realize, and would be willing to admit, that the so-called rebels who fought under every disadvantage and bore patiently every suffering, could stand at their guns as bravely as any who wore his majesty's uniform?

It was a moment when I was more proud than I have ever since been in my life, proud of my people, not of myself, and with the pride came a feeling of sad disappointment because I had not been able to contribute anything to this downfall of the swaggering Britishers. I had hoped we might enroll a full company of Minute Boys who despite their age would earn the right to serve as soldiers, and yet had I accomplished nothing save coming into this village in the vain hope of being able to regain possession of my horse, remaining here almost as much of a prisoner as either Abel Hunt or Horry Sims.

The news was too good to be kept to myself, and regarding not Pierre's movements I ran at full speed back to old Mary's cabin, shouting as I burst through the door:

"The Britishers are getting ready to run away! Cornwallis has grown frightened, and is giving up the fight!"

"How know you that?" Saul cried sharply, seizing me by the shoulder as if forcing me to give proof, and at the same instant I heard the prisoners in the loft stirring as if in fear, while Horry Sims asked, although knowing full well his companion could not answer a question:

"Do you believe it possible my Lord Cornwallis would really run away?"

"He is getting ready to run away!" I shouted triumphantly. "Even now the baggage is being carried to the river bank; all the spare horses are tethered there, and save for the few soldiers who are left in the works, there is no further heed being given to what our people are doing!"

"Bress de Lawd! Bress de Lawd!" Uncle 'Rasmus cried in a fever of ecstasy. "I'se done been certain ole Marse would help dribe de red-coats out ob Virginia; but I neber dreamed dey'd get so scared as to run away. Bress de Lawd! Bress de Lawd!"

When Pierre joined us, and we were given over to joy and triumph there suddenly came into my mind the thought that if my Lord Cornwallis did beat a retreat speedily, and was not overtaken by our people, then was Silver Heels lost to me forever. He could only leave the village of York by crossing over to Gloucester and making hurried marches toward the Potomac River, and under such circumstances I knew that my dear little Silver Heels could not hold out as would the seasoned steeds of the troopers. She would be left by the roadside crippled, mayhap, and linger there until she died.

Dearly though I loved the Cause, or thought I did, I was almost unwilling to pay such a price for victory as that this colt of mine, which had been carefully tended since she left her mother, should be abused as I knew she would be in event of a hurried retreat, and when Pierre asked in surprise what had happened to cast such a veil of gloom over my face, I gave words to the fear in my mind, whereupon he said soothingly, caressing my arm as was his wont, for the dear lad understood how near to my heart was that same little Silver Heels:

"There are others nearabout, Fitz Hamilton, who can also make a hurried march, and who knew the country better than do these under my Lord Cornwallis's command. Do you believe our people will remain idle and let this army, which they have much the same as gotten under their thumbs, slip away?"

"But the Britishers will have the start of them before they know what has been done. Give Cornwallis twelve hours' advantage and traveling light as I doubt not he intends to do, there is every chance he can make good his escape."

"But he will not have twelve hours the start!" Pierre cried sharply. "Do you count that we who call ourselves Minute Boys will linger here one moment after those red-coats have set off for the Gloucester shore? Do you fancy we will have no part to play? The moment the troops have been withdrawn from the fortifications so that a fellow may cross the lines without bringing down a shower of bullets upon him, each of us three will set out at full speed, regardless of the danger, for our own friends may fire upon us ignorant of our intentions. We must get word to the American forces before the last of my Lord Cornwallis's army has passed out of Gloucester."

"But how shall we know when the Britishers have been drawn from the fortifications?"

"By watching them, lad!" Pierre cried eagerly. "By watching them! Do you count that from this moment on we shall do anything save watch them? I would almost be willing to let Abel Hunt go free so we might be unhampered, for while the red-coats are getting ready to retreat they will give little heed to any information such as he can give them. But it may be well to hold him until night-fall, and then the three of us, each going in a different direction, must keep sharp watch over all that is being done, ready to make a break for our lines at the first moment we are certain the enemy has fled."

The lad's tone, equally with his words, was well calculated to stir the blood, and as I saw in the future a possibility that Silver Heels might yet be reclaimed by me, I ceased to mourn her as being lost forever, but gave all my thoughts to the triumph which awaited our people.

We were talking loudly, having ceased to be cautious in speech because the roar of the guns drowned all other sounds, and were giving noisy voice to our joy when Uncle 'Rasmus suddenly cried from his seat at the window, where he had stood watch, so to speak, all the dreary time we had been in the besieged village:

"Hol' on dar, chillun; hol' on dar! Here comes a crowd ob red-coats!"

"Coming for us?" Saul cried nervously, and I am ashamed to say that the suggestion caused my knees to tremble, even though had I stopped to reflect upon the matter I would have understood that at such a time as this, when he was in sore straits, my Lord Cornwallis would not trouble himself about three boys and an old negro who were where they could not do him harm however much they so desired.

As a matter of course we crowded to the window near where Uncle 'Rasmus sat, and there saw a group of nine men, powder-stained and evidently wearied from work in the trenches, halt within less than twenty yards of the cabin door where they threw themselves down upon the ground, evidently for no other purpose than to gain a needed rest.

"It is nothing," Pierre said, again quickly reading the signs. "These men are becoming discouraged, most like having an inkling of what their officers count on doing, and have deliberately come out of the trenches without permission, to take such ease as can be found to-day for a red-coat in the town of York."

We watched the men curiously, and for my part with a certain sense of exultation because I fancied they knew the fate which was in store for them. They were all armed, fully accoutered, and should have been at their posts, as I understood.

After their arrival we talked more guardedly, but not the less triumphantly regarding what we would do, and little Frenchie explained how one of us might cross the lines at this point, the second at another, and the third elsewhere, so there might be no delay in getting news to an officer of our army immediately we were positive Cornwallis had drawn off his forces.

We ceased to pay any particular heed to these idle soldiers who were neglecting their duty, until there came to our ears shrieks of agony like to chill the blood in one's veins, followed by groans and moans from that group of idlers.

We soon came to understand that a shot from the American lines had just missed crashing into old Mary's cabin at the very point where we were gathered, and plowed its way through that little company of men, maiming or killing every one.

It was a gruesome sight, from which I turned with my hands over my ears that I might neither see nor hear, and trembling in every limb with sheer pity though these who had been thus suddenly hurled into eternity would have killed me without wincing.

I had believed I was hardened to scenes of war; familiarity with suffering, with wounds and death such as we had had around us all these days, prevented me from giving away to feelings of pity; but now was I shocked even as if this was the first shedding of human blood I had ever seen.

It was Pierre Laurens who aroused me from the stupor of horror by shaking my arm as he said stoutly:

"Come, lad, with me; we must not miss such an opportunity!"

"Opportunity for what?" I cried, neither turning nor taking my hands from my ears save sufficiently to hear his voice.

"Here is a chance for us to arm ourselves. These soldiers who were killed, and seemingly there are only two alive although they are much the same as dying, were fully accoutered, and we must have so many of their muskets and so much of their ammunition as will serve if it should become necessary to protect ourselves."

"Why have we need to protect ourselves now that the Britishers are turning tail?" I asked in dull surprise, but I took

my hands from my ears and wheeled about, knowing that if little Frenchie commanded me to do this or that I would obey if it lay within my power.

"When the red-coats begin their retreat our time of danger has passed, I believe," the lad said, speaking gravely and clutching me by the arm to insure my close attention. "You can see that these soldiers who have just met their death threw off all restraint; were insubordinate, believing the end near at hand, and if such be the case at this early hour, what may happen when the main body of the troops have embarked for Gloucester Point? We must hold ourselves at liberty to carry the news to our people at the earliest possible moment, and that can best be done by getting in shape to defend ourselves. It is as if heaven itself had sent us these weapons, and we would be little less than idiots if we failed to take advantage of that which has come at such a seasonable time!"

I did not believe Pierre was in the right when he said we might be able to defend ourselves. I had in mind that instantly the retreat was begun all the red-coated men would hasten upon the heels of their comrades lest they be left behind; but fortunately, as I came to understand later, I did not protest against following Pierre out of the cabin, although my stomach revolted when we were come to that scene of slaughter.

By this time only one of the men was yet alive, and he so far gone into the Beyond that it was a question whether he remained conscious of his surroundings.

The squad had thrown their muskets down in a pile near where they were lounging, and I picked up four of the weapons, hurrying back to the cabin with them, hoping that while I was gone Pierre would set about obtaining the ammunition, for my heart grew faint as I thought of meddling with those lifeless bodies for the purpose of taking away that which was upon them.

"Put dem under de floor, honey, whar I stowed Horry Sims," Uncle 'Rasmus said as he raised the puncheon plank.

So stupid was I even then, that I mentally laughed at the idea of taking such precautions when the end had come so near that it was almost as if we were within speaking distance of our friends; but I did as the old negro suggested, and went back for another load, although why it should have been in my mind that we might need more than sufficient to arm ourselves I cannot well explain.

When I returned to that scene of carnage Pierre had already gathered a goodly assortment of accouterments from those men whose bodies had not been mangled, for even he shrank from dyeing his hands with blood.

Well, in short, we gathered all the weapons, ammunition and accouterments that could be come at handily, depositing our burdens beneath the puncheon planks where were the muskets, and when the task was finished I turned upon little Frenchie, feeling almost angry because of having been engaged in such gruesome work, as I said:

"So far as we ourselves are concerned it has been labor lost to bring these things here. If so be I am making my way across the lines to-night to carry the tidings that Cornwallis has fled. I shall travel without encumbrance; even the Jerseyman's pistol will be useless while no enemy remains in the rear."

"All that is very well," little Frenchie said with a shrug of the shoulders; "but before the last of the army has gone muskets may serve us in good stead, and even though the need does not arise, it is better we should be prepared, than taken at a disadvantage which might cost our people dearly."

The sudden taking off of so many men directly before our eyes, and the knowledge that if the cannon ball had inclined ever so slightly toward the east, we, instead of them, would have gone out from this world forever, served not to dampen our joy and triumph, but to cast a veil over it, as you might say, so that we spoke in whispers, and did not indulge in mirth; but carried ourselves much as people do in the presence of the dead.

There was no good reason why all of us lads should linger in the cabin, and every cause for us to go forth to keep an eye over the enemy, therefore when I said that it stood us in hand to know what was going on, even at the expense of losing our breakfast which was not yet cooked, Pierre, seemingly having grown careless, insisted that Saul should come with us.

"While our people are working their guns so lively there is no danger those fellows in the loft can make themselves heard, and even though they did cry for help, I do not believe any of the king's troops would spend time to go to their assistance, therefore we will leave them as they are."

This did not seem to me consistent with little Pierre's caution when he gathered up the muskets, insisting on taking twice as many as we could use; but I held my peace, because, as I have already set down again and again, he had shown himself so much the better lad than I under such circumstances, that it was not for me to say him yea or nay.

CHAPTER XVII

OUR BLUNDER

When we went out of old Mary's cabin, leaving the two prisoners unguarded in the loft, and Uncle 'Rasmus, who could not be depended upon in case either of the fellows should succeed in working himself free, on the floor below, it came into my mind just for an instant that we had no warrant for being so careless. Yet while the booming of the American cannon was roaring in my ears and the Britishers moving to and fro like ants whose nests have been disturbed, giving little or no heed to the defense, then did I comfort myself with the belief that nothing of harm could come to us.

It was in my mind that the hour of our danger had passed, and now it was only a question of a short time before our troubles would be over and we in the midst of our friends.

Then, as we walked slowly and unmolested through the encampment, seeing on every hand signs and tokens of preparations for flight on the part of the enemy, was I yet further convinced that we need not fret ourselves regarding the future save so far as Silver Heels and Saul's mare were concerned. I yet had hope that it might be possible to regain possession of our pets. As a matter of course there was no idea in my mind that we would be able to do it before Cornwallis's army had begun to retreat; but I said again and again to myself that if we lads carried the news of the evacuation speedily to our people, then would they set off in such hot pursuit that there were many chances I might have Silver Heels with me but little the worse for her experience in the British army.

So thoroughly well satisfied was I that this struggle had come to an end, that the Britishers were willing to acknowledge themselves beaten and now were only striving to prevent themselves from being taken prisoners, that I gave little heed to anything save the hope of being able, by the aid of our friends in the American army, to regain possession of the dear little colt. I even put from my mind as if they did not exist those two scoundrels in the loft of old Mary's cabin, saying to myself that they could do us no harm even though they were set at liberty this very moment, because my Lord Cornwallis had on his mind more important matters than the taking into custody of three boys who might be charged with being spies, by a dissolute fellow who could produce no evidence save his own word.

We lads spent the entire day roaming here and there throughout the encampment without hindrance, and I had even grown so bold that I went up to Silver Heels while she was tethered on the bank of the river, caressing her silky nose as she whinnied with delight at being with me once more.

"Keep up your courage, my dear little Silver Heels," I whispered in her ear as if it were possible she could understand me. "You may have a hard time during the next four and twenty hours; but no longer, for then I promise you we two shall be on our way to the plantation. Once there we need have no fear that you will again be disturbed by the red-coats, for our General Washington of Virginia is nigh upon the point of driving the last servant of the king out of this colony."

Never a man interfered while I was caressing Silver Heels; but little Frenchie speedily began to drag me away, whispering sharply in my ears:

"Don't get the idea into your mind, Fitz Hamilton, that all the danger is passed, and strive not to grow reckless in your hour of triumph, for this army will not move until after dark, and 'twixt now and then the red-coated soldiers have it within their power to do you a deal of mischief."

I was near to laughing at these words of caution, thinking how completely the tables were turned between us, when it was him who seemingly had grown timorous, and I showed myself the venturesome one.

Saul apparently gave no heed to over-cautiousness or impudence; but wandered here and there with his hands in his coat-pockets as if he was an honored guest, and I could well fancy that the lad much the same as forgot all the fears which beset him a short time before.

We noted with glee the fact that the Britishers were gathering all the boats that could be come at, and even from Gloucester Point did they send over barges and skiffs until the river front was completely lined with small craft.

The afternoon was not yet more than half spent before baggage wagons were being loaded into the larger boats. I saw more than one officer carrying his belongings down to the river to stow them in this or that craft instead of trusting a soldier to perform the labor, as would have been done had matters not been so pressing, and if each man who wore a red coat was not looking forward with somewhat of fear to the possibility that the retreating army might be choked before it had gotten well on its way toward New York.

As the day drew nearer to a close I became painfully nervous, fearing lest something even at this last hour should prevent my Lord Cornwallis from carrying out his plans, and seeing the expression of trouble on my face, understanding perhaps from that which was in his own mind, little Frenchie whispered to me in a tone of encouragement:

"Don't fret yourself, Fitz Hamilton, fearing lest the red-coats will not carry out the manoeuvre. They only await the coming of night, when it will be possible to steal across the river without being seen by our people, and then you may set it down as a fact that all these valiant soldiers of the king will make every effort to get out of the way of that French boy who, as my Lord Cornwallis has said, is striving to 'play war with a handful of rebels.'"

"Then there is in your mind no question but that the retreat is much the same as begun?" I asked, wanting to hear him confirm that which was in my mind.

"I can see no evidence of their failing to go on as they have begun," the lad replied cheerily, and added as he dropped his voice to a whisper: "The one chance which may work against us is, that my Lord Cornwallis will take some steps to prevent any of the people in the village from carrying word regarding his movements to the Americans, therefore let us get into some place of hiding, where we may watch all that goes on here about the river bank without presenting ourselves to the eyes of the red-coats."

Hardly more than fifty yards from where we were then standing were the ruins of a house which had been literally torn into fragments by shot from the American lines. Under these splintered and partially-burned timbers would it be possible for us to find a fairly good hiding place, unless peradventure strict search might be made, which was not probable because so far as we knew, the red-coats had no reason to suspect us as being other than lads whose parents so loved the king that they had been willing to remain in the village of York even during the siege.

Saul was not at first inclined to go into hiding. When Pierre told him what we would do, he declared that it was putting ourselves to useless trouble, for these gentry who wore red coats no longer had the time nor the inclination to concern themselves about us; but when little Frenchie explained that we might in some way be prevented from carrying early news of the retreat to the American lines, then my cousin followed, unwillingly, mayhap, still he kept at our heels until we had wriggled our way beneath the shattered timbers to where it was possible to have a fairly good view of the river.

It was not until we had snugly stowed ourselves into this place that I began to realize how great was the danger which menaced. Our people had the range so well that the buildings roundabout this place were torn and wrecked, while now and then a shot came unpleasantly near, and I saw two men killed while they were striving to get one of the heavy baggage wagons on board a barge.

Then I realized that it was more than possible we might never come out from beneath these timbers alive because of having been killed by our own friends. The triumph which had been mine was sadly marred by the timorousness which came over me, as I understood that death might be nearer at hand than when we were in old Mary's cabin, with Abel Hunt roaming around the village in search of us.

Not for anything I owned of worldly goods would I have allowed Pierre to know that which was in my mind. I strove manfully to drive out the fear by saying to myself that while we remained in the village of York exposed to the fire of our friends we were as safe in one place as another, and if it was written we should die that day, then did it make little difference what precautions might have been taken.

When the sun had set the activity of the red-coats was redoubled. In the twilight we who were hiding beneath the ruins could see the officers as they went to and fro hurriedly, and hear their sharp words of command or of reproof as they chided this man or that with lingering, or strove to incite a squad into more rapid movement.

Now was my heart beating so loudly and so violently that it was as if even the enemy on the river bank must hear it, for I realized that the supreme moment for us of Virginia had come, and could conjure up nothing which might prevent the Britishers from carrying out their plans.

I ceased to think of Uncle 'Rasmus who had been alone in the cabin all day, and gave no heed whatsoever to those scoundrels in the loft; forgot all else save the fact that the moment was fast approaching when I would be on my way to the American lines with the most welcome news ever carried by a lad of Virginia.

It was not until nigh to ten o'clock, as nearly as I could judge of the flight of time, that we saw the first of the boats loaded with men push off, heading for Gloucester Point.

The retreat had begun! Barge after barge, skiff after skiff, and craft of every kind, all heavily laden with soldiers or with baggage, set off from the shore, while as far back from the river as Governor Nelson's house, where my Lord Cornwallis had his headquarters, the men were massed awaiting their turn.

"Now has come the time, Fitz, when we must make ready for a swift journey," little Frenchie whispered, as if counting it a long distance from old Mary's cabin to the outposts of the American lines, whereas it was within less than half a cannon-shot. "Every minute is precious now, and I am counting that we should be ready to set off on the instant the men have been called in from the outer works."

"What preparations have we to make?" I asked in surprise.

"Have you forgotten Uncle 'Rasmus and the prisoners?"

"I count that they are yet in old Mary's cabin, and there they may remain until our people have entered the village," I replied indifferently.

"But none of them have broken their fast this day, and those fellows in the loft have had nothing whatsoever of drink."

"Well, what then?" I asked irritably. "Neither have we lads had anything to eat, and, save that it is possible for us to drink our fill, I see not that we are any better off than they."

"But we must not have ever on our consciences the knowledge that we doomed two human beings to starvation."

"Surely there is no danger of their dying 'twixt now and to-morrow, and by that time our people will be here."

"As to that you cannot say, Fitz Hamilton. True it is the enemy is retreating; but the night is half spent, and it may be that the last of the troops will not have gone over much before daylight. Then our army is like to set out in pursuit, and I am minded to go with it, whereas matters be arranged properly at the cabin, we are confined here in the village with no opportunity of showing ourselves as Minute Boys among real soldiers."

I had almost forgotten that we decided to call ourselves Minute Boys. There had been so much of pain, fear and hope during the past four and twenty hours that all else had gone from my mind, save the fact that the Britishers were much the same as whipped, and that it might be possible for me to regain possession of Silver Heels.

When, however, Pierre thus reminded me that we might, even at this eleventh hour, do something toward showing ourselves worthy of being called Minute Boys, although we really accomplished nothing more, then was I fired with the same desire that was in his mind.

Although as I have said many times, I had little knowledge of military matters, it appeared to me that as soon as it was learned the red-coats had crossed over to Gloucester our people would, by using the boats and vessels which were lying in the stream 'twixt York and Williamsburg, cross directly over to the other shore without coming down through the village, for thus they might circle around the advance of the retreating foe.

In the meanwhile both encampments would be in the hands of such Tories as had remained throughout the siege, and, most like, a certain number of camp followers would linger behind.

"What can be done with Uncle 'Rasmus?" I asked anxiously, fearing lest it might be necessary we take him with us and thus have a drag on our movements, for the old man could not travel very swiftly; but little Frenchie had the matter already mapped out in his mind as I might have understood, and replied:

"It has been decided that you shall go on a westerly course, while carrying word across the lines, and therefore it is I propose you take Uncle 'Rasmus with you. Once beyond the enemy's works, where there is no danger either Tory or camp follower can molest him, set the old fellow's face toward the Hamilton plantation and let him plod his way on alone, for there is naught of danger on that road."

"But the prisoners?" I asked.

"They must be set free, else will it become our duty to remain here instead of joining in the pursuit."

"When do you count that should be done?" I asked, and much to my surprise little Frenchie replied thoughtfully:

"There is no reason why we should not begin at once, and every inducement for us to have our preparations made for a quick departure from the town. Suppose you go back and attend to it? Within the hour we must be on our way, for when those boatmen who have just put off, come back and take on another cargo, then is the retreat much the same as accomplished, for by that time every soldier from the works roundabout will be called in."

Because of the past, when Pierre had shown himself so quick-witted and having such a good idea of military matters, I made no protest against his proposition; but stood ready to obey implicitly any orders he might give. Therefore I asked how he had it in his mind we should release the prisoners, for I was not burning to go into the loft and set Abel Hunt free, because of knowing that the first of us lads with whom that scoundrel came in contact when he was at liberty to

use his hands, would suffer most severely.

Pierre had it all planned out, and, as I believed, in a most skillful manner. He proposed that after Uncle 'Rasmus had left the building, and had gotten say twenty or thirty yards on his road toward the Hamilton plantation, I should bring Horry Sims down to the lower floor, and there set him free with instructions for him to remain where he was a certain length of time, after which he was to go up and release Abel Hunt.

Before this could be done I ought to be well toward the enemy's outer works, where I was to remain in hiding until all the Britishers had left their posts. This would give me the advantage of starting instantly the works were abandoned, and even before the last of the army had embarked, therefore was it reasonable to suppose I might gain speech with some of the officers of our army while there was yet time to draw the nets around the fleeing red-coats.

"I will go whenever you shall say the word," was my reply after little Frenchie had explained thoroughly the plan. "But what is Saul to do in the meanwhile?"

"I am counting that when you start for old Mary's cabin, he shall set off further to the eastward, where he will remain hidden as I propose you are to do, until the works have been abandoned."

"And you yourself, Pierre?"

"I am counting to wait here only until I see the boatmen return from the Gloucester shore to take on another cargo, and then I shall follow your example, giving no heed, however, to either you or Saul; but bending all my energies toward getting within the lines of our people with as little loss of time as may be."

After this there was nothing for me to say, unless peradventure I had some fault to find with the plan, and I lingered only to press each of my comrades by the hand as I whispered:

"God grant that we Minute Boys of York Town, as from this instant we will call ourselves, may be able to do that thing to-night which will result in the capture of Lord Cornwallis and all his troops!"

Then I crept out from the shattered timbers, not taking overly great care to avoid making a noise for there were none who would pay particular attention to me at that time, and once free of the ruins I walked without undue haste in the direction of old Mary's cabin, knowing that I had ample time to do all which was set me before the way into the American lines would be opened.

When I entered the cabin Uncle 'Rasmus was seated by the window, as he ever had been since we came into this place of refuge, patiently waiting for our coming, and surely the old man's heart must have been tried during that long, long day when we failed to give any token of our whereabouts, for he had good reason to fear, because of our continued absence, that some trouble had overtaken us. Yet there was never a word of repining or reproach upon his lips when I showed myself.

"Bress de Lawd, honey; bress de Lawd dat you'se come back! Whar's de odder chillun?"

I speedily made the old man acquainted with all that was going on; but did not tell him what it was proposed he and I should do, for luckily I realized that Abel Hunt's ears were open, and if I should advertise all our proposed movements there might possibly be a chance of his overtaking us to wreak revenge before our task could be finished.

Therefore it was I told the old man only that the British army was retreating, and made an overly long story because he could not refrain from crying out in his joy now and again, and insisted on hearing all the little details concerning the movements of the soldiers.

But the story was told finally, however, and then I led the old man out of the cabin, he following me obediently, never asking where we were going, and when we had come to a ruined building mayhap fifty yards distant from old Mary's cabin, I halted, explained what we would do, saying that he should stay there while I went back and released the prisoners.

For the first time in my life Uncle 'Rasmus set his face against that which I would do. He declared that Pierre was in the wrong when he would handle the Tories so tenderly; that our first and only thought should be of our own safety, and no heed be given to the sufferings of those who would have sent us to the gallows.

I was not able to argue successfully with the old negro because there was in my mind much the same thought as in his, yet did I know that the fellows must be set free since it was a portion of Pierre's plan. I had promised him it should be done, and if I failed in my part of the work then might all the rest go awry. It was to my mind a question of doing exactly as the little lad had planned, or else let him understand that I was set against a certain portion of it.

All this I said to Uncle 'Rasmus, striving to make him understand clearly why I must go on even though it was against my inclination, and when I was finally come to an end the old man said in a tone of resignation:

"Well, honey, I'se 'lowin' you'se gwine to do jes' as dat yere little French boy says; but I'se tellin' you, chile, dat de only way to treat dese yere Tories is de way you treat a rattlesnake, an' dat is to get 'em on de end ob a split stick an' leabe 'em dere, widout worryin' yo' head ef dey's habin' it comfortable or not."

"I'll go back and do as I've promised, Uncle 'Rasmus. You stay here, and in five minutes I shall return unless something unfortunate happens."

"Keep your eye mighty sharp on dat Abel Hunt, chile. Don' let him get de best ob you no how, kase he's slippery, an' like de rattler, he's gwine to strike when you ain' lookin' for it."

"I'm not counting on having any trouble whatsoever with Abel, Uncle 'Rasmus. Horry Sims is to do that part of it, as I have told you."

Then I went hurriedly away, feeling ill at ease on this errand of mercy because of the old negro's insistence that it was dangerous and bordered on folly to set loose such as Abel Hunt, when we had him trussed up where it was not possible for him to do any mischief.

I hastened back to old Mary's cabin, and, halting not on the floor below, went directly into the loft, where, cutting the bonds that held Horry Sims's feet, I ordered him to follow me down the ladder. At that moment I would, had it not been for Uncle 'Rasmus's warning, have taken the gag from Abel Hunt's mouth that he might be saved just so many more moments of suffering; but having in mind all the old negro had advanced as an argument against showing such mercy, I withheld my hand, and Horry Sims followed me in surprise and bewilderment at this sudden change in affairs, as obediently as a well whipped cur would have done.

It had been Pierre's command that I bring the Tory lad down to the floor below, there set him free, and then make my escape; but, because of the doubts in my heart, I exceeded little Frenchie's instructions by leading him some distance, say an hundred feet, from the cabin before telling him what were my intentions.

"You are to go back now and release Abel Hunt," I said, after having explained to him as much as I thought necessary, although I took care to have the lad understand that his British friends were retreating.

"And after that has been done?" Horry asked as if counting that he must continue to obey me however the circumstances might be changed.

"When you have released Abel you may go whithersoever you please."

"And do you count that the time will never come, Fitzroy Hamilton, when I can repay you, Saul Ogden and that French boy for what you have done?" the young Tory cried as soon as I had removed the bonds from his hands, his courage reviving immediately he was free of limb, and the anger which he had been bottling up while he was helpless, pouring from his mouth in a torrent of words as he threatened this, that and the other, which should come to me and mine.

"I have no care as to what you can do, Horry Sims," I said, holding him by the shoulder so he should not be able to leave until I had given him due warning. "Remember you this, that the next time you come across my path with any intent of evil, or with any token that you would raise your hand against me, from that moment what you have already suffered as a prisoner will be as nothing compared with the punishment we lads will deal out. Now that your friends the Britishers are being driven from the soil of Virginia your fangs are gone. If you have any commonsense in that Tory head of yours you will keep a still tongue, and never raise your hand against any of the people in this colony."

Then I released the cur, and watched for an instant to see that he went straight back toward the cabin, after which I turned about to rejoin Uncle 'Rasmus, and at that instant it was as if all nature had suddenly been convulsed.

Because of my excitement, and owing to the fact that I was so intent upon that which was to be done, I had given no heed to the tokens in the sky, and the clouds may have been gathering half an hour or more without my knowledge. Certain it is, however, that on the instant, and suddenly as the lightning's flash, came the roar of a tempest that shook the half-ruined houses nearabout until the last timbers were overthrown, and I was forced to exert all my strength in order to stand against that furious blast. Then came peal upon peal of thunder, which drowned the roaring of the guns, for our people were yet firing upon the doomed village in order to show the Britishers that they were on the alert.

The vibration of the thunder had hardly died away when the lightning flashed great sheets of flame across the eastern sky, illumining the river whereon boats were plying to and fro, and showing clear as in a mirror the red-coats massed upon the banks awaiting their turn to go across to Gloucester Point.

After that came a downpour of water, when the wind drove the rain-drops in solid sheets, as you might say, which stung one's face like thousands of needles. The roaring of thunder, for after the first outburst of the tempest it seemed to be almost continuous, the blinding flashes of light, together with the deluge of water, all served to confuse one, and I believe I stood there struggling against the elements to hold my footing, a full minute before gathering my wits sufficiently to turn about in order to rejoin Uncle 'Rasmus.

"For de Lawd's sake, honey, am de earth turnin' upside down?" the old man cried when I came to where he stood exposed to all the fury of the tempest, for he dared not remain amid the ruins of the building where great timbers were being flung about by the wind like straws. "What's Gin'ral Cornwallis gone done to bring on dis yere ter'ble racket?"

"I have released the Tories, Uncle 'Rasmus," I shouted, forced to speak close in his ear else he could not have heard me. "Why should we not push on even as Pierre has planned for us to do?"

"Was you gwine to tell our people dat de Britishers were takin' to dere heels for Gloucester Point?" Uncle 'Rasmus asked, as if having forgotten all that I had told him.

"Of course that is the story. Why else should it be necessary for us to make such haste?"

"Den stay whar you are, honey. Dere's gwine to be no retreatin' dis yere night."

"What do you mean?" I asked in bewilderment, almost fancying the old man had taken leave of his senses. "We saw a portion of the army go across."

"I'se 'lowin' all dat, honey; but yer Uncle 'Rasmus am tellin' yer dat dere won't any odder Britishers go ober dis yere night. I'se libed right erlong dis riber all my life, an' I knows dere ain' de bigges' skiff eber was built dat could make a landin' on de Gloucester shore sence dis yere storm got up. Gin'ral Cornwallis am boun' to put an end to dat ere fun ob his kase he can't get across, honey, I'se tellin' yer he can't get across, not till dis yere racket done died away, an' den dere's boun' fo' to be a ragin' torrent."

It was not until several moments had passed that I realized the truth of all Uncle 'Rasmus had said. Then was borne in upon me the memory of what I had seen in ordinary hurricanes, when the river had been lashed into a fury by the wind, and the ablest boatmen along the shore dare not put out, for I venture to say there is no other body of water in this country so quickly changed to a boiling flood, or so dangerous to cross, as that portion of the York river which turns around Gloucester Point.

While I stood there in painful indecision, tears of disappointment rolling down my cheeks because at the very moment our time of triumph was apparently come it was turned aside by the elements themselves, I saw as the electric flashes lighted up the sky even more brilliantly than before, two forms come out of old Mary's cabin and set off in the direction of Governor Nelson's house, where my Lord Cornwallis made his headquarters.

"There go Abel Hunt and Horry Sims!" I cried bitterly. "The tempest is as nothing to them so that they may lodge a charge against us as being spies, to the end that we may come to the gallows here in this village of York."

"Hab dey done gone out ob de cabin, honey?" Uncle 'Rasmus cried, and when I repeated again that which I had seen the old man said as he held my head down to his mouth that no word might be swept aside by the furious blast:

"You'se boun' to go back, honey, boun' to go back inter de house, kase when de mornin' comes you'se gwine to be in a pickle wid Abel Hunt an' Horry Sims gallivantin' 'roun' tryin' to lay you by de heels. Go back in dar 'fore dey comes dis yere way!"

"But why should we go there, Uncle 'Rasmus?" I cried angrily. "Why shut ourselves up in a trap where the Britishers may lay hands on us whenever they may be so disposed?"

"You'se gwine back dar, honey, kase dere ain' any odder place in dis yere village. Dere's no show ob gettin' trou de lines now, chile, an' what you'se needin' is dem yere guns what we done hid under de floor."

"You're crazy, Uncle 'Rasmus! You're crazy to think we three lads may stand up against all these Britishers!" and now indeed did I lose my temper; but Uncle 'Rasmus, still holding my head where he could make certain every word he spoke might be heard by me, said earnestly:

"Tell me whar's you gwine to go, honey, ef you don' hide yoursef in ole Mary's cabin? Does you count on bein' run 'roun' dis yere village when de sun comes up, like a fox wid a houn' at his tail? Ef de Britishers hab begun to get across to Gloucester Point, dere's a chance dey'll keep at it when de riber quiets down, an' all you chillun's needin' to do is keep whar you can hol' your own. Get back inter de cabin, honey!"

Then it was that Uncle 'Rasmus took me by the arm with a strength which I never suspected was in his frail body, and although I struggled not, he literally dragged me through that howling, raging tempest to the hovel which I thought I had left never to return, and we two entered, the water running in streams from our garments as we stood in the middle of the floor silent and motionless, each striving, most like, to decide what should next be done.

CHAPTER XVIII

TRAPPED

Uncle 'Rasmus and I were still standing on the puncheon floor in the darkness of old Mary's cabin when the door was suddenly thrown open, and in came Pierre and Saul, bringing with them such an onrush of water as the rain swept through the opening, that it seemed as if the hovel must soon be flooded.

"Thank heaven you did not start as I counted on!" Pierre cried in a tone of relief as he set about barricading the door to keep out the elements, and I cried bitterly, remembering that if I had heeded Uncle 'Rasmus's advice we would not be in such great peril.

"The storm came in time to prevent us from making an effort to get through the lines; but not sufficiently soon to stop us from setting loose that miserable scoundrel, Abel Hunt, and the sneak Horry Sims."

"What?" Saul cried in a tone of mingled surprise and dismay. "Are they at liberty?"

"Surely they are, for I obeyed Pierre's orders to the letter, despite all Uncle 'Rasmus could say against it. The old man has more sense in his black head than we, for he declared that such scoundrels should be treated like rattlers, and no heed given to their possible sufferings."

"Then are we undone!" Saul cried helplessly. "The retreat has been prevented by this tempest, for no boat can live on the river while the storm rages as it does, and we know without being told that Cornwallis will not attempt to send more troops across, at least until another night has come. In the meanwhile Abel Hunt and Horry Sims will have laid us by the heels, as they have threatened to do! It is only a matter of accusing us of striving to get across the lines to tell our people what has been done, when Lord Cornwallis will make certain we come to a speedy end."

I believe even little Frenchie was daunted for the moment, as he came to realize what our blunder, for it was not less, might mean; but he strove manfully to repress any show of fear as he said in what he counted should be a cheery tone:

"I dare venture to say that neither red-coat nor Tory will go abroad this night while the storm is so furious, therefore we had best make ourselves as comfortable as possible," and he set about kindling a fire, for surely it was needed that we might dry our clothing which had been thoroughly saturated.

"We will take our comfort for the last time," Saul said bitterly, as he threw himself down upon the floor like one from whom all hope has fled, and Uncle 'Rasmus, for the first time since we had left the Hamilton plantation, seeming to count himself as one of us lads, said in a tone of deepest satisfaction:

"Ef it's de las' time, honey, we'll make it mighty oncomfortable for whoever comes to drive us off, kase we'se inside our own fortifications, an' I'se 'lowin' dat ef de Americans keep it up as lively to-morrow as dey did dis yere day, den can we hol' de fort quite a spell afore dey work dere will."

It was this remark which showed Pierre Laurens the single ray of light remaining for us, and, ceasing his task of building the fire, he sprang excitedly to his feet as he cried joyously:

"Uncle 'Rasmus is right! Cornwallis has begun to retreat and sent a portion of his troops to the other shore. Now he's weaker than before, and if we can hold our own in this cabin four and twenty hours, then is there good reason to believe the Americans will have possession of York Town. If we made a blunder in freeing the prisoners, it was not so great as that which my Lord Cornwallis has made because of not first looking at the signs of the weather before he began to move his forces. When day breaks our people must see what has been done, and seeing, will strive to take every advantage. We will hold this fort, and it must be that some power beyond that of earth paved the way for our safety, else had we not been provided with weapons and ammunition. Through the death of the red-coats who were shirking their duty, we may hold quite a force of the enemy for a considerable time."

"How long can you hold your own in this miserable hovel with two of three hundred Britishers surrounding it?" Saul cried, and Pierre added yet more cheerily:

"Do you believe for an instant, Saul Ogden, that while matters are so bad with him, General Cornwallis will call off three or four hundred soldiers to obey the behest of such as Abel Hunt? Even though he may believe all that scoundrel can tell him, he has other fish to fry than that of capturing three boys and a negro. I tell you, lads, we are not beaten yet, for within four and twenty hours there will be a wondrous change come over this village of York, and even though the Britishers may not have been taken, our forces, seeing the advantage that can be gained, will advance their earthworks; when there's a chance we shall be able to get word to them."

This caused me to have what, for the instant, I believed to be a brilliant thought, and straightway I cried out:

"Why is not now the time when we might have speech with our people? While the tempest rages as it does, I dare venture to say it will be possible to cross the British lines--"

"Less possible than if the moon was shining. The red-coats will be in their works and along the intrenchments to screen themselves from the storm, instead of moving around, and therefore you have no chance of making your way across. It would be death to attempt it."

"And it is very near like death to stay here?"

"In this cabin we may die fighting, as Minute Boys should, which to my mind is far better than being killed like rats in a ditch, as would be the fate of him who attempted now to cross the lines. The red-coats in yonder fortifications are not fools. Every man jack of them understands that this attempted retreat is a failure, and must of a necessity be yet more keenly on the alert, therefore I say, you had best have tried to get across the lines this morning, in the light of day, than just now when Cornwallis's troops are smarting under what is very much like signal defeat."

I was silenced if not convinced by what Pierre had said, yet did not resign myself to the inevitable as a lad of Virginia should have done.

Instead of accepting the consequences of our blunder with cheerful face as Pierre and Uncle 'Rasmus were doing, I threw myself down by the side of Saul in sulky humor, never offering to lend a hand toward putting the cabin in a state of defense until the old negro and little Frenchie had worked desperately ten minutes or more, after the fire was kindled, to barricade the door.

Then it was I grew ashamed of myself; realized what a miserable part I was playing, I who had conceived the idea of forming a company of Minute Boys with the thought that I might stand at their head, and, springing up, I joined Pierre and Uncle 'Rasmus until Saul, in turn taking shame, did his part.

First we tore from the floor of the loft the heavy puncheon planks which were laid across the beams but not fastened in place, and with them as props and bars fastened the door that the side of the building itself would yield to pressure from without before would that barrier, strengthened as we had succeeded in strengthening it.

Then we fastened planks across the windows, forced to tie them in place with strips which formed the bonds that held Abel Hunt and Horry Sims helpless, for we had nothing else with which to work, and after all that had been done we made a rude platform just beneath where the roof of the building had been torn away by a cannon ball, so that one of us could stand sentinel watching the approach of the enemy and give due warning of his coming.

This done we took from beneath the floor the muskets, loaded each, and portioned out the cartridges fairly, giving to every one his share, after which, at Pierre's suggestion, we made a hearty meal of the last fragments of food in our possession.

When my stomach was fairly well filled, then did there come back to me that courage under which I should never have lost hope.

There was no token that the storm might be losing its force; in fact it seemed to me as if it increased momentarily, if indeed such could be the case when the wind was raging, the rain falling and the thunder pealing as I had never heard or seen it before.

It was almost as if we were in a ship at sea, so violently did old Mary's cabin rock to and fro under that mighty blast, and there were many times before the coming of morning when I really believed the hovel would be rent asunder by the wind, and we deprived of this seemingly our last opportunity to sell our lives at somewhat of a fair price.

When we had made ready our defense so far as was possible, and had satisfied our hunger, Uncle 'Rasmus would have it that we lads should lie down to sleep, trusting him to stand guard over us; but never one among our company was willing to act upon the suggestion, for what fellow could have slept with the elements raging and roaring without, while he knew full well what must be before him when the sun rose again.

It was not even possible for us to seek repose; but all three paced to and fro from one end of the small room to the other, as if by thus remaining in motion we could the better hold in check our fears and our forebodings.

Before we were aware that the new day was breaking, it was possible to hear dimly as though far away in the distance, the roar of the American cannon, drowned at times by the howling of the hurricane, and Pierre cried as if those detonations were promises of safety for us:

"Could anything be working more to our advantage, lad? It must be that our people understand somewhat of that which was done last night, for they are sending their iron messengers into this village with more of fury and determination than since the siege began."

I failed to understand how it could advantage us greatly even though our people made a direct assault, as I said to Pierre; but the lad could not well answer me, and I understood when he held his peace that he had simply cried out in the hope of heartening us.

Then I listened intently for noises from the outside, and, unable to distinguish between the roar of the cannon and the pealing of the thunder, proposed that I be the first to go on watch in the loft above, for I was burning to be able to see something other than the four walls of that miserable hovel.

No one said me nay, and with two of the loaded muskets so that I might be able to shoot twice in rapid succession if need arose, I clambered up the ladder into the attic where Abel Hunt and Horry Sims had spent so many, and such painful hours.

It was not yet sunrise, but the light of the coming day was sufficient to enable me to see surrounding objects, and yet I could perceive no change in the disposition of the British troops.

Overhead the clouds were rolling swiftly in token that the terrific tempest had well-nigh spent its force, and I said to myself that when the rain ceased to fall in such torrents, then would Abel Hunt and Horry Sims present themselves, knowing full well where we would take refuge in event of having failed to make our way outside the lines.

The hurricane ceased almost as quickly as it had begun. It was as if the rising sun stilled the wind and caused the rain to cease, for within half an hour, as I now remember, all nature was at peace; but man was yet struggling and with desperation to kill his brother.

Never had the guns within our lines been served so rapidly; never was cannonading continued so long, nor had such great destruction followed as a result.

While yet I stood looking out I had a view of our Governor Nelson's mansion which Cornwallis had taken possession of, and speedily saw that the Americans must be using it as a target, for in as many seconds a dozen balls struck the building, or passed close to it, and I could well fancy that Governor Nelson himself must be directing or agreeing to the destruction of his own beautiful home, for I had learned during my visit to Williamsburg when I went out to aid the Jerseyman, that the governor himself was leading the Virginia militia.

When the first ball struck that stone mansion tearing away the walls until two of the upper windows were made into one, I saw the red-coated officers pour out like wasps from their nests, and scatter in every direction, at which sight I laughed aloud in my glee, rejoicing that the enemy were finding themselves in quite as disagreeable a situation as we lads who were waiting with as much of courage as we could command for the coming of those soldiers who would drag us off to the gallows, most like without even the formality of a trial because affairs had come to such a dangerous pitch with my Lord Cornwallis.

I believe the day was no more than an hour old, and the fire from the American guns had not slackened, but continued to do quite as much execution as when I first took my post, that I saw in the distance coming toward us, but unattended, those two scoundrels who were bent upon our destruction.

Leaning over so that my voice might carry the better to the floor below, I cried:

"Here come Abel Hunt and Horry Sims!"

"How many red-coats have they with them?" Saul asked.

"They are alone; but carry muskets."

Then it was Pierre shouted triumphantly:

"It is as I told you! My Lord Cornwallis has other fish to fry than the taking into custody of three boys who may or may not be spies, but who can do him no harm at this late day. Those scoundrels may tell their story wheresoever they please in this village of York; but no one will give heed to them while our people are making matters so hot."

I could not quite agree with little Frenchie in this, because of believing that the curs might find here and there among the privates one who would like nothing better in the way of pleasure than the smoking out of a rebel, and I strained my eyes in every direction that I might have ample warning of the approach of the soldiers. Yet none appeared.

Those who were in the fortifications had quite as much on their hands as could be attended to just then, if they would

preserve their lives, while those off duty were by no means inclined to come within the line of fire. I also understood that there must be considerable of confusion arising from the fact that a portion of the army and a goodly part of the baggage was already on the Gloucester side.

While believing that an attack would not be made upon us by considerable numbers, I grew brave at seeing only Hunt and Horry coming toward the cabin, and hailed them by shouting:

"I am giving fair warning that if either of you come a dozen paces nearer, we shall fire!"

The two halted, and Abel Hunt cried derisively, pointing out to Horry Sims my head which appeared above the splintered timbers of the roof:

"There is one of the rebels who has come to the end of his rope, and before this day closes we will see him dancing on nothing."

To this I made no reply, and before the scoundrel had ceased speaking Pierre Laurens was at my side, resting his musket upon one of the logs in order the better to take aim.

"Are you going to shoot them down without warning?" I cried in what was very like alarm, and he replied in a matter-of-fact tone:

"You have already given sufficient warning, and if I can drop either of them now, we shall have one the less to fight."

He discharged his musket as he ceased speaking, and the ball, missing the target, passed so close to Abel Hunt's head that the fellow leaped back at least six paces, and then wheeling about, ran like a frightened rabbit, followed by Horry, until the two were beyond musket-shot, when they halted as if to take counsel.

After mayhap a full minute they went away in the direction of the westerly redoubt, and we stood there speculating as to what might be their purpose in thus seemingly abandoning the attack before it was really made, when they reappeared, leading five soldiers, and then did I understand that that which I feared had come to pass. Most like by representing to these red-coats that a bit of sport could be had by smoking out four rebels, they succeeded in persuading some of the more dissolute ones to join them, and now was our moment of trial come.

"Now we shall have a taste of their metal, and they shall know what we can do," Pierre said grimly, his lips tightly shut and an expression on his face such as I have never seen him wear. "The time has come, Fitz, for you and me to go to the floor below."

"Why should not one of us stay here to keep watch?" I asked, impatient in my nervous fear.

"Because he who stands in this place offers too fair a target for yonder rebel hunters, and I am not counting they shall draw Virginia blood until we have left our mark upon some of their scurvy bodies."

I was not pleased at the idea of stationing all our force at one point, for surely it seemed necessary those who were defending the cabin should know what was going on outside; but Pierre was so insistent, and so commanding in his tone, that even though it was his blunder which had thus trapped us, I could not disobey.

There were loop-holes in plenty for us four, and we counted Uncle 'Rasmus among our number. Between the puncheon planks which had been tied at the windows, and even 'twixt the logs of the building itself, we could thrust the muzzles of our muskets, and when Pierre, who took command of the company without question, had stationed us to his satisfaction, he said as he walked once around the room like a general surveying his troops:

"Do not fire until the enemy are so near that you can make certain of hitting the target, and then shoot to do harm. We are trapped here, and will pay the forfeit if we fall into the hands of yonder men and lads, for there will be no question of military trial, or even of reporting our capture to Lord Cornwallis. Remember that our lives depend upon your aim."

It so chanced that Pierre himself was the first to open the battle, if such it could be called. Abel Hunt walked side by side with the soldiers as they advanced at easy pace; but I noted that Horry Sims hung back as if he had no stomach for such work as was evidently before him, and when the company were come within mayhap fifty paces Pierre shouted shrilly:

"Halt where you are, or we shall fire, and there is little chance of a bullet's going amiss at such close range."

Just for an instant I fancied the red-coats wavered, and certain it is Abel Hunt nimbly sprang back behind the man at whose side he had been walking; but the soldiers themselves kept on, and before I could have counted five little Frenchie fired.

One of the Britishers plunged forward and then sprawled out on the ground, looking there like a clot of blood because of the color of his uniform. The other four continued at a steady pace when I fired, wounding one of them in the leg so sorely that he was fain to turn tail and beat a retreat for the redoubt.

This last shot brought all the would-be rebel hunters to a halt, and I had taken up my second musket, counting to send another ball among them, when they wheeled suddenly about, while Pierre, clutching me by the shoulder, said hurriedly:

"Do not shoot a man in the back! Thus far we have but defended ourselves, and will not shed blood needlessly. It may be they have got a full dose, and we are done with them for the time being.

"Don' let dat idee run away wid you, chile," Uncle 'Rasmus cried in quavering tones. "Once a Britisher hab done trapped sich as we, he's boun' to keep up de sport."

I myself believed Uncle 'Rasmus spoke the truth, for it did not seem possible these soldiers of the king would allow themselves to be beaten off so suddenly, more particularly since one of their number lay at full length on the ground in front of us apparently unable to move.

Pierre and I reloaded the muskets which had been discharged, and then during ten minutes or more we stood with our eyes glued to the crevices between the puncheon planks, watching for the next token of danger, while all around the cannon of the Americans roared and thundered, sending across the village balls and flaming bombs until it was as if we had above our heads a veritable roof of flying, deadly missiles.

When mayhap ten minutes had passed we received good proof that Uncle 'Rasmus was in the right, for then from out the redoubt came a squad of red-coats, no less than twenty I should say, and tailing on behind them, seemingly not eager to occupy any post of danger, were Abel Hunt and Horry Sims.

"It looks to me as if our race was well-nigh run," Saul said grimly, and even in that time of deadly peril did my heart go out in rejoicing toward the lad whose courage revived at seemingly the very moment when his doom was sealed.

This last force of the enemy was not disposed to venture as carelessly as had the first, for while they were yet a musket-shot distant they separated into three squads, two of which made a wide detour around both ends of the cabin, taking good care meanwhile to keep out of range, and the third halted in their tracks, evidently waiting until their comrades had taken up such positions as had previously been decided upon.

"They are going around to the back of the cabin, and most like count on attacking us through the roof, for it must be plain to them, even at such a distance, that the hovel has been shattered by cannon balls," Pierre said, and I leaped toward the ladder, whereupon he sprang after me, counting on pulling me back as he said almost angrily:

"That is my place, Fitz Hamilton! It was I who caused us to be trapped, by advising that the prisoners be set free at such an early hour, and I am the one who shall go into the loft!"

"Because it is a place of greater danger!" I cried, still swarming up the shaky bars of wood which were nailed across the side of the building, and when I was come to what was left of the floor above, I threatened to throw Pierre down if he attempted to join me.

"I have shown the white feather more than once since we have been in this town of York, and now am I determined to prove whether I be a coward or no!" I cried shrilly, hardly knowing what I said, for the imminence of the danger had stirred me into a fever, and once more in my life did I see a reddish hue before my eyes, while my one desire was to kill those who counted on speedily overcoming us. "You are needed below, Pierre, where some execution may be done, and I shall take my stand here."

Even while speaking could I hear sounds from the rear of the cabin as if the soldiers were piling up timbers, or something of that sort, to make their way to the roof, and although it was borne in upon me clearly that within a few seconds most like I would be struggling hand to hand with men who had been trained in the art of warfare, yet I set it down as true that never did there come into my heart the slightest idea of wavering or of fear. Yet that may not be put to my credit, for, as I said before, the fever of battle had seized upon me, and I burned to see the first red-coated scoundrel show himself at the aperture in the roof that I might send a bullet into his worthless carcass.

Suddenly, and so far as I could judge, before those in the rear had been able to gain a position on the roof, fire was opened upon us from the front, and on the instant it was returned by our lads with such spirit that at once dense clouds of smoke from burning powder came up through the scuttle, parching my throat, and rendering it difficult for me to keep my eyes free from the blinding tears of irritation which filled them.

I was yet saying to myself that the Britishers had not succeeded in gaining a foothold upon the roof, when suddenly I

saw the muzzle of a musket through the crevices of the logs, where as yet the timbers remained intact, and immediately came the report of a weapon as a bullet whistled past my cheek, cutting the lightest furrow in the skin, and causing the blood to flow as if I had been grievously wounded.

I had yet sufficient of sense remaining to understand that by staying longer in the loft, if they were counting on shooting at me through the crevices of the logs, I would sacrifice my life without being able to make any reprisals, and, stopping only long enough to fire in the direction where I had seen the musket, I dropped to the floor below, explaining hurriedly to Pierre why I had seemingly retreated.

"It is all over with us," the dear lad said, and would have examined the wound on my face. "No less than a dozen more men have come from the redoubt, and we can only sell our lives as dearly as possible."

Then it was the fever of battle so far left me that there was room in my heart for fear, and while taking my stand by the side of the other lads, believing firmly that within the next few minutes I should be dead or wounded unto death, I contrived to hold command over my knees so no one might see I had again grown cowardly.

Then it was, when all of us were, as you might say, resigned to death, that we suddenly heard the parley sounded by drums all along the lines, and straightway those red-coats who were facing us, counting to hound us to death, wheeled about, making for the redoubt, while we stood looking at each other in bewilderment, until Pierre shouted at the full strength of his lungs:

"A parley! A parley! My Lord Cornwallis has sounded the parley, which means that he is ready to surrender! He who came to drive us from off the soil of Virginia is now wanting to make terms with the rebels!"

It was indeed as the lad had said. From the moment the drums were heard all fighting ceased, and where had been such a tumult and a roaring as drowned all other sounds, silence fell.

It was like some work of magic; those who had been thirsting for each other's blood threw down their arms; men no longer shouted in anger; never a weapon was discharged, and in both the armies every one seemingly stood silent and motionless awaiting the result of this flourish of drums.

There is no good reason why I should continue this story of the Minute Boys of York Town, for there can be no doubt but that every one who reads what I have written knows full well all that happened there on the York river from the time parley was sounded until the vast army of red-coats were held prisoners in the hands of the "rebels."

In writing the closing lines let me set down that which happened some time after my Lord Cornwallis surrendered, lest he who has read thus far may think I am taking too much credit to my comrades and myself, by calling ourselves Minute Boys:

No less a soldier than General Lafayette himself told us four, for we insisted on having Uncle 'Rasmus with us when an orderly came to say that the young French general would speak with those who had befriended the Jerseyman--even General Lafayette himself told us that we had done in coming to the town of York that which advantaged the Cause, and asked what should be given us by way of reward.

Then it was that Pierre, speaking to him in his native tongue, told how we lads would have formed a company of Minute Boys but for the fact that we were shut up in the town of York, and asked that we be allowed, despite our age, to enroll ourselves as soldiers under his command.

This prayer he readily granted, claiming that he was pleased to do so, and from then on we served as real soldiers, although as you know full well the war was nigh to being ended.

It was General Lafayette who reclaimed for Saul and me our horses. When, after the surrender, I rode out with my father to see my dear mother, Silver Heels was the beast that carried me, and from that day to this we have never been parted, although she is getting now so far along in years that I fear death may soon step in and do that which the Britishers failed of doing.

It is to be regretted that he who set down the movements of those lads who took upon themselves the name of Minute Boys despite the smallness of their numbers, did not tell what part they played in the surrender of Cornwallis, which must have been a magnificent military spectacle, and because he has brought his story to an end without giving any of the details, it seems well to set down here that which has been written concerning it by the historian Fiske:

"The combination against Cornwallis had been completed, and day by day the lines were drawn more closely about the

doomed army. Yorktown was invested, and on the 6th of October the first parallel was opened by General Lincoln. On the 14th, the second parallel, within three hundred yards of the enemy's works, was opened by Steuben. On the night of the 14th Alexander Hamilton and the Baron de Viomenil carried two of the British redoubts by storm. On the next night the British made a gallant but fruitless sortie. By noon of the 16th their works were fast crumbling to pieces, under the fire of seventy cannon. On the 17th--the fourth anniversary of Burgoyne's surrender--Cornwallis hoisted the white flag.

"The terms of the surrender were like those of Lincoln's at Charleston. The British army became prisoners of war, subject to the ordinary rules of exchange. The only delicate question related to the American loyalists in the army, whom Cornwallis felt it was wrong to leave in the lurch. This point was neatly disposed of by allowing him to send a ship to Sir Henry Clinton with news of the catastrophe, and to embark in it such troops as he might think proper to send to New York, and no questions asked.

"On a little matter of etiquette the Americans were more exacting. The practice of playing the enemy's tunes had always been cherished as an inalienable prerogative of British soldiery; and at the Surrender of Charleston, in token of humiliation, General Lincoln's army had been expressly forbidden to play any but an American tune. Colonel Laurens, who conducted the negotiations, directed that Lord Cornwallis's sword should be received by General Lincoln, and that the army, on marching out to lay down its arms, should play a British or a German air.

"There was no help for it; and on the 19th of October Cornwallis's army, 7,247 in number, with 840 cannon, marched out with colors furled and cased, while the band played a quaint old English melody, of which the significant title was 'The World Turned Upside Down.'

"On the very same day that Cornwallis surrendered, Sir Henry Clinton, having received naval reinforcements, sailed from New York with twenty-five ships-of-the-line and ten frigates, and 7,000 of his best troops. Five days brought him to the mouth of the Chesapeake, where he learned that he was too late, as had been the case four years before, when he tried to relieve Burgoyne. A fortnight earlier, this force could hardly have failed to alter the result, for the fleet was strong enough to dispute with Grasse the control over the coast."

THE END