Altsheler Joseph Alexander

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Содержание

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Chapter One – *In Hostile Red*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then he drew me aside again.

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

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

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

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

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

He rose and bowed low.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What is that?" I asked.

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

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

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

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

We bowed our heads and wept.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"But there is no time to explain," he replied. "If we were to check our speed we would be overtaken by bullets before we could make explanation. Our uniforms, though very fine and

becoming, are much against us, and even if we should escape without wounds we would be taken back as prisoners to the American army."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Are you hurt?" asked Marcel, apprehensively.

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

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

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

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

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

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

We twisted about in our saddles and discharged our weapons as Marcel had suggested. But, unfortunately for us, our countrymen were brave and not at all afraid of our pistols. They came on as fast as ever, while our movement had checked our flight somewhat and caused us to lose ground perceptibly. We began to grow discouraged.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Two – *Feeling the Way*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then Marcel with an air of great modesty told a most remarkable story of our encounter, how we had driven the rebels back once, and had knocked two of them off their horses, but at last under stress of numbers were compelled to retreat. I took careful note of everything he said, because if the

time came for me to tell the tale alone, as most like it would, mine must not vary from Marcel's in any particular. Sir William seemed to be much pleased with the story.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Perhaps, if the discourteous rebels had known that I was one of the gentlemen whom they were pursuing," I said, "it might have saved my friend Captain Montague much exasperation of spirit and the loss of a most elegant military cloak that he brought from England with him. I assure you, gentlemen, that when we were compelled to take to flight the captain's beautiful cloak trailed out behind him like a streamer, and finally, a puff of wind catching it, left his shoulders entirely. I doubt not that some ragged rebel is now wearing it as a trophy. Ah, captain, it was a most beautiful cloak to lose, was it not?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, one of the Tories."

"They are the worst of all."

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

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

"Nor upon mine," I said.

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

Which we did.

Chapter Three – *Sir William's Revel*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Miss Desmond," he said with easy grace, "permit me to introduce to you the valiant Lieutenant Melville, who is one of the heroes of yesterday's encounter with the rebel band, of which you perhaps

have heard. – Lieutenant Melville, make obeisance to Miss Desmond, our fairest and most faithful ally."

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

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

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

Her words increased my anger.

"Miss Desmond," I said, "I am a soldier of his Majesty King George, and hope to serve him well, but I can condemn the rebels as rebels only and not as men also. I hear that Mr. Washington and many of his officers are, aside from their lack of loyalty, most worthy persons."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I inwardly rejoiced at the bold and blunt reply, but Sir William only smiled. In truth I soon saw that he and some of the high officers around him had set out to badger the old Philadelphian, which I deemed to be a most ungallant thing, as he was wholly in their power.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Did you find him?" I asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Why?" I asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I doubt it not," he replied.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Four — *On a New Service*

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

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

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

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

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

That was a very reasonable and consoling way of putting the matter, and I mounted my horse with a feeling of relief at the prospect of being out in the country again. At least the hangman's noose was not drawn so tightly around our necks there. We attracted attention from the populace as we rode through the city, and in truth a fine body of men were we, well mounted, well clothed, and well armed. Some of the people cheered us, but I could see other faces glowering, and I liked them the better. Though this Philadelphia, our finest city, lay under the heel of the enemy, I knew it yet contained many faithful friends of the good cause.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I had been examining the men with great attention. The one who was nearest to us was large, dark, and apparently very powerful. His figure did not appear altogether strange to me. I was vexing

my brain in an endeavor to account for the recollection, when Marcel leaned over and whispered to me, —

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The whole troop turned to meet the charge, but they were ill fitted to endure it, for their flanks were still quivering beneath the fire from beyond the gully. The two bodies of horsemen met with a crash, and the British line staggered back. The next moment Wildfoot and his men were among us.

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

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

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

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

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

The Americans, much to the surprise of the British, did not pursue, but drew off towards cover. Blake lay between the two detachments, his face almost concealed in the grass. I could not leave him there while life might still be in his body, to be trampled to pieces in the next charge of the horsemen, and driven by a sudden impulse, I sprang from my saddle, ran forward, and seized him by the shoulders, just as the great ranger whirled his horse and galloped by me. He had his sabre in his hand again, and I thought he was going to cut me down, as he might easily have done, but, to my

unutterable surprise and relief, he made no motion to strike. Instead he said to me, as he galloped by, —

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

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

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

Chapter Five — *The Work of Wildfoot*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What is this?" he exclaimed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"The question is unfair," I answered hastily.

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

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

knowledge that the incident formed a coat of armor against any suspicions that Belfort might have formed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Six — *A Cousin from England*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'The lovely Thais sits beside thee.

Take the goods the Gods provide thee!'"

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

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

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

Marcel looked grave for a moment.

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

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

Catron and Vivian came in, a half-hour later, and urged us to spend the evening at the former's quarters, where we would meet all the men whom we knew, for a good time. They would accept no excuse. Marcel's spontaneous wit and gayety made him a favorite wherever he went, and I was a temporary hero through that happy chance of the Blake affair, and so we were in demand. Secretly I was not unwilling, and Marcel certainly was not. This lively, luxurious, and careless life, this companionship of young men who knew all the ways and gossip and pleasant manners of the great

world, took instant hold of me, and I felt its charm powerfully. Having gone so far, it seemed to me the best thing we could now do was to do as those around us did, until our own opportunity came.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.