

THE RIDER OF  
THE  
BLACK HORSE



BY EVERETT T. TOMLINSON





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To Paul,  
From Grandma.

1904.

Q.3.









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THE RIDER OF THE BLACK HORSE









HE FIRED DIRECTLY AT THE MEN

# THE RIDER OF THE BLACK HORSE

A Story of the American Revolution

BY

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON

*Author of "The Boys of Old Mounmouth," "In the Hands of the  
Red Coats," "Under Colonial Colors," "Camping  
on the St. Lawrence," "Ward Hill  
at Weston," etc., etc.*



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## PREFACE

THE incidents incorporated in this story are true. Some of them have been taken out of their exact setting; but as they serve to show forth the experiences of the people in the trying days of the Revolution, the writer has taken the liberty to make use of them in this tale.

The peril of the couriers as they rode between the armies, and the part they played in the struggle, has never been fully recognized; and the writer trusts that the adventures of Robert Dorlon may serve in a degree to interest his young readers in some of the ignored or forgotten elements that aided in winning the independence of the United States.

“The Public Papers of George Clinton, First Governor of New York,” has been of great service in the preparation of this book, and the various local and early histories of the counties and towns wherein the events

that have been described were related, have been freely used. Certain local historians have also freely given their assistance, and to all such the writer gives his thanks and freely acknowledges his indebtedness.

EVERETT T. TOMLINSON.

ELIZABETH, NEW JERSEY.

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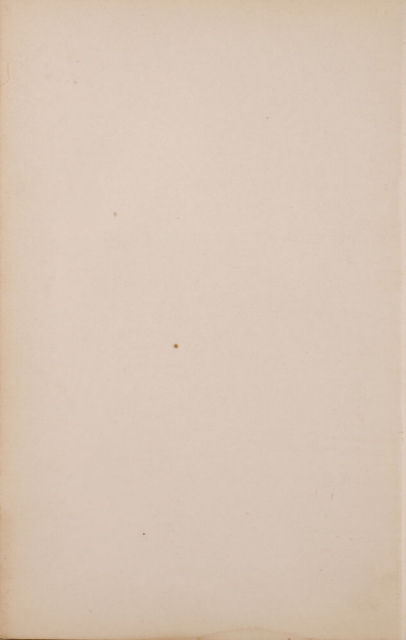


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THE RIDER OF THE BLACK HORSE



# THE RIDER OF THE BLACK HORSE

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## CHAPTER I

### ON THE SHORE OF THE HUDSON

THE June day was near its close, and already the shadows of the great hills were lengthening as they were reflected in the waters of the lordly Hudson. Almost like glass the river itself extended, so quiet was the air and so still were the wooded shores. The heat of midday was no longer felt, but the oncoming night promised only a measure of relief, for the air was still sultry and the few thunderheads that had been banked low in the western sky had been scattered, and the heavens were now apparently cloudless.

Not far back from the western bank of the Hudson, a young man, apparently about nineteen years of age, on horseback, was following the rough roadway or path that led to the shore. Both his own appearance and that of the horse which he was riding indicated a weariness that the stalwart and muscular frame

of the rider could not entirely conceal. It was evident that he had been in the saddle for a long time, and his dust-discolored face, streaked as it was where streams of perspiration had rolled down his cheeks, almost concealed the dark eyes and darker hair that under other circumstances would have been the most noticeable of his features.

"Never mind now, Nero! We're almost at the place where we'll get fodder and a chance to sleep, old fellow!"

Almost as if he understood the words and the gentle patting on the neck which his rider bestowed upon him, the little black horse raised and dropped his head as if he were nodding approval, and once more broke into a run.

"No, no, not that," said his rider soothingly. "You've covered more than a hundred miles since yesterday morning, and you're entitled to a rest. Besides, old fellow, we're not done yet. I wish we were at our journey's end and well back on our way, don't you?"

Again the horse threw his head up into the air as he came to a walk, and nervously lifted his feet as he picked his way over the stony road.

"If we get back into Jersey all right, Nero," resumed the young rider, "maybe that Gen-

eral Washington will pat you on the shoulder and say, 'My trusty fellow,' just as he did to me. It's worth it all, Nero, if we can only help him a bit, now is n't it?"

Despite his weariness it was a relief to young Robert Dorlon to speak aloud, although his faithful little steed could not make any response. For two days now he had been on his way from the hills of Jersey, where he had left Washington and his army facing the forces which Howe had sent in the early summer of 1777 to try to draw "the rebel" from his stronghold down into the plains, and give the redcoats battle. Of the issue of such a contest Howe and Cornwallis had never a question, and it is a natural inference that their wily foe had none either, for he steadily refused the challenge. Into the hills the redcoats had no mind to go, for the memory of Bunker Hill was still keen among them. However much they were inclined to belittle the courage and skill of the untrained farmers and farmers' boys in the ranks of the defenders of the colonies when they met them, as they did in the battle of Long Island in the preceding summer, it was an altogether different affair when they tried, even with bayonets, to drive them from some stronghold.

Eager as the redcoats were to catch the illusive forces of "the fox," as the British somewhat suggestively had named Washington, the American commander was equally eager to hold them where they were, or in the vicinity of New York. For the campaign, as it had been planned this year by the British, was one that aroused the keenest anxiety among the American leaders. John Burgoyne, with his great army of redcoats, militia, and Indians, was striving to force his way from Montreal, up Lake Champlain and Lake George, and then on to Albany. At the same time Colonel Barry St. Leger was marching with another army of redcoats and redmen from Oswego, in the hope of sweeping away every vestige of opposition as he proceeded on his way through the Mohawk Valley toward Albany, where he fondly hoped that his forces would join the victorious troops of John Burgoyne.

At the same time, up the Hudson from New York it was believed that Howe or Clinton would come with adequate forces to drive away all opposition, and when the three armies had united at Albany, then the American colonies would be effectively cut asunder, and all that the victorious British would have to



do, would be to conquer either part at their leisure.

The plan certainly was one that promised well, and Washington's energies were at once directed toward an effort to hold the redcoats in or near New York and prevent them from going up the Hudson to the aid of their northern army, while Howe, Clinton, and Cornwallis were equally busy in striving to accomplish a similar result among their enemies. The early summer of 1777 accordingly became a time when the men of either side were tested as they seldom were throughout the eight weary years of the struggle for American independence.

It became, therefore, of the utmost importance to Washington to know how it fared in the north, and "expresses" were provided, — men who rode swiftly from one American post to the one that was nearest it, and there delivered their missive or message to their waiting successors, who in turn rode swiftly to the next point in the line, while the others retraversed their way with a word from the opposite direction.

In addition to these "expresses," however, Washington was accustomed to make use of certain trusty men who were to go directly from the army in Jersey to the forts on the

Hudson, or to the army in the north, with the letter that was to be placed directly in the hands of the northern commander, and likewise to receive from him the word which in turn he was to bear back to the anxious leader in the Jersey hills.

Among the men assigned to the latter task was young Robert Dorlon, who already had twice made the journey and now was well advanced on his third. The need of haste on his part had been most impressively emphasized by the commander when he had set forth, and the recollection of his kindly words and confidence was even now, despite his weariness, strong in the thoughts of the young rider. It was General Maxwell who had selected him for the task and had commended him to Washington, confident alike in his strength, his discretion, and his energy. And a chance observer would speedily have declared that all these qualities were marked in the young man's bearing. His physical strength was apparent in every movement he made, his face at once begat confidence, and his manner was dignified despite the twinkle and the mischief that lurked only partly concealed in the dark eyes of young Robert. A frolic or a "rough and tumble" was his delight, and

as a wrestler his fame had gone throughout the little army stationed in New Jersey. A contest between himself as a representative of a Jersey regiment and a young soldier from Pennsylvania had been arranged for the very day when he had been compelled to leave camp with his message for the army in the north, but his own necessary departure had prevented the meeting, for which he was almost as eager as his friendly and enthusiastic messmates had been for him.

And now as the June day drew to a close, Robert Dorlon found himself near the place where he was no longer to follow the shores of the Hudson, but was to obtain rest for the night at the humble abode of Dirck Rykman. In his former journey Robert had crossed to Peekskill and left a message for sturdy Israel Putnam, who was in command at the time of the patriot forces there, but the recent activities of the redcoats in that vicinity had caused Washington to direct his young "express" this time to proceed farther up the river before he even halted, for all chances were now to be avoided. The rumors and reports from the northern army had been of a character to render the leaders most anxious, and it was deemed wise to insist upon all haste

in the journey which Robert Dorlon was making. The young man had clearly understood the demands upon him and was keenly alive to the part which he was to take.

The sun had just sunk below the western horizon, leaving behind it a brilliant sky, whose lurid colors Robert clearly perceived portended a morrow that would be even warmer than the present day had been. It was then with a sigh of relief that he perceived the little log house before him, where the young Dutchman with his wife and two little children dwelt. Only once had Robert seen him before, having stopped at his home over night on his most recent return from the north. Of Dirck's devotion to the cause of the colonies General George Clinton himself had been the voucher, and in many ways it was whispered that the young man had already been of aid to the patriots stationed in the highlands.

"Good-day to you, Dirck Rykman," called Robert, as he guided his horse into the pathway that led to the house, which was partly concealed from the sight of a passer-by by the bushes and trees that were in front of it.

Dirck himself he had seen standing in front of his home, leaning upon the handle of his hoe and apparently lost in meditation.

The young Dutchman hastily changed his position and glanced up at the unexpected hail. In a moment he perceived who his visitor was; but though he advanced to meet him, he was still visibly abstracted or troubled as he grasped the outstretched hand.

"How are the vrouw and the babies?" continued Robert, who, in the thought of the rest from his long ride, was once more in high spirits. "Got room and a bed for me to-night?" he added, as he flung himself from the saddle to the ground, and stood holding his horse by the bridle.

"There is room and a welcome," replied the Dutchman slowly, "but" —

"Take me across the river if it is n't all right," interrupted Robert quickly. "I can find a place on the other side" —

"No. Nein. There is room and a welcome. It is not that." Dirck spoke in low tones and almost unconsciously glanced toward the house as he spoke.

"What is it then?"

"There is somebody here."

"Who?" demanded Robert hastily, though he too dropped his voice.

"I do not know. You shall help me say when you see him."

“How many?”

“One.”

“Where is he now?”

“In the house.”

For a moment Robert was silent, minded to ask more questions; but Dirck's suggestion that he could help decide when he himself had seen the man, and the fear that his conversation with the Dutchman might be overheard, caused him to hesitate. As he glanced again toward the house, he was positive that he could see the form of a man even then behind the vine that had been trained upon the lattice-work in front of a part of the house.

“Shall I take my horse back into the woods?” inquired Robert, referring to the concealment of his faithful animal which had been deemed wise on the occasion of his recent visit.

“Nein. No. I will put the horse in my barn. It was already too late to hide him. We shall see later.”

“That's good of you, Dirck. You take him and give him a good rubbing down and I'll run down to the shore for a swim. I'll not be gone long, and I'll see to feeding Nero myself when I come back. That's something

I would n't let my own mother do for you, would I, Nero?" he added, softly rubbing the nose of his horse as he spoke.

Flinging the rein to the Dutchman, Robert ran swiftly down the bank until he arrived at a secluded spot on the shore, and quickly removing his clothing, plunged into the river. For a time he was almost unmindful of his weariness and previous discomfort, as he swam about in the water; but the oncoming night and his uneasiness concerning Dirck's visitor soon caused him to return to the shore, where he hastily donned his clothing and prepared to return to the house. Before he had climbed the bank, however, he perceived Dirck approaching, and instantly he halted, waiting for his friend to come near.

"How's Nero? Have you rubbed him down?" demanded Robert.

"Yaas. I had some help."

"Who helped you?"

"The man."

"Your visitor?" inquired Robert hastily.

Dirck nodded his head in reply, but did not speak.

"How long has he been here?"

"About an hour."

"What does he have to say for himself?"

"He wants me to keep him over night and ferry him across the river in the morning."

"Does he say where he's going?"

"He says he was doing somedings for General Clinton."

"He does? Does he say what?"

"No. Nein," replied Dirck, shaking his head.

"Naturally he would n't do that. Did he know who you were, Dirck, or did he just chance to stop at your house?"

"I cannot tell. He" —

Dirck stopped abruptly as the sound of a footfall was heard near them, and as both men glanced up they beheld a man approaching. To the unspoken question in Robert's eyes, Dirck quickly nodded, and the young "express" knew that the visitor whose arrival had perplexed and troubled Dirck was before him. He was glad that he had an opportunity to see the man before he spoke, but his hasty glance was interrupted by the stranger himself.



## CHAPTER II

### A PUZZLING INTERVIEW

STANDING in the pathway before him, Robert saw a young man a few years older than himself, dressed in the ordinary garb of the country people. The light was too dim to enable him to see the face and its expression clearly, but there was something in the bearing of the man that at once impressed him strongly. That the stranger possessed great physical strength was evident, and as soon as he spoke Robert Dorlon shared in Dirck's suspicions, although he would have found it difficult to explain even to himself why it was that he distrusted him.

"Why did n't you let me know what you were doing?" said the stranger lightly. "I'd have been only too glad to join you."

"It is n't too late now. The water is all here," replied Robert.

"Too late. It's always my luck — just too late for everything."

"Not too late for supper it was," said Dirck soberly.

"The good wife may think it is," laughed Robert. "Does she know she has two more to feed to-night, Dirck?"

Acting at once upon Robert's suggestion, the three men immediately turned back toward the house, Robert himself hastening in advance of them to the barn, where he fed his black horse, — a task which on his journeys he never intrusted to another. When he, too, approached the house he perceived Dirck Rykman's little girl Mina standing in the doorway, and at once lifting her to his shoulder he entered the room with the child holding fast to his hair while he danced about in pretended pain.

"Oh, Mina," he cried, "you're worse than a Tory! Let me go, and I'll see if I can't find something in my pocket. Don't you remember that I promised to bring you something when I came again?" In spite of his apparent carelessness, Robert had glanced keenly at the visitor when he had spoken of the "Tory," but the man apparently was unmoved by the reference and was laughing as heartily as the others when Mina was swung to the floor.

It was some time before Robert discovered the little packages in his pocket and with a

bow handed one to the little Mina and the other to her mother, whom he had already greeted.

"I don't know very much about the taste of the ladies, but they seem to be somewhat alike," he added laughingly, as with eager hands his gifts were opened and brightly colored ribbons were disclosed in each.

At Dirck's suggestion, however, the little party was speedily seated at the rude table upon which Mistress Rykman had already placed the smoking supper. A lighted candle added its pleasing effect to the plain but tempting fare, and the men were all speedily doing ample justice to the culinary skill of their hostess.

"You're a stranger in these parts, I see."

Robert looked up quickly as the other visitor spoke, and in the light he could see that the man was keenly regarding him.

"What makes you say that?"

The stranger laughed as he replied, "Your question would be answer enough of itself, if there was n't any other reason for thinking so. The people on the shores of the Hudson don't answer one question by asking another."

"By the same token one would know that you did not belong here, either."

"Oh, I don't belong here, that's true enough," said the other lightly.

Now that he was enabled to perceive plainly the face of the man, Robert became more strongly convinced that the visitor was one who was abundantly able to protect himself. His face was strong, the glance of his eye was keen, and there was an indefinable something that pervaded him that spoke of a larger experience in life than belonged to most of the dwellers in the colonies.

"Where might your home be?" inquired Robert bluntly.

"It 'might be' in any one of a dozen places, but as a matter of fact it is n't in any one of them."

The laugh of the man was somehow irritating to Robert, but he was not to be turned from his purpose now, and boldly continued his questioning.

"Every one is supposed to be able to give an account of himself in these days," he said soberly.

"A most excellent plan. I was about to inquire who you were and where you came from."

Robert's face flushed slightly as he realized that his own question had been turned back

upon himself, but he answered quickly, "Oh, I'm not afraid nor ashamed to tell who I am. My name is Robert Dorton, and I'm the sixth in direct descent to bear the name, too."

"A good name. I once met a man of that name in London. Perhaps he was a relative of yours," he added quizzically.

"It may be. We came from England, or at least my grandfather did."

"But you are Americans now?"

"Every inch of us!" said Robert stoutly, though he perceived even while he was speaking that the man was drawing him on without declaring anything about himself. "Now that I have told you who I am, it is your turn to favor us with a similar word about yourself," he said quietly.

"Oh, I am English born too," said the stranger lightly, "but I don't know that I can say much more. I'm a wayfaring man, and sometimes I almost suspect that I am a fool, too. But whatever else I am, I can assure you that I am a good friend of General Clinton."

"So is every one here," said Robert quickly.

"I suspected as much, and that was one reason why I stopped at the home of Dirck Rykman for the night, and have engaged him

to ferry me across the Hudson to-morrow morning early. Doubtless you, too, have a similar plan in your mind."

"Are you going to Fort Montgomery?" inquired Robert quickly. "That is where General Clinton is now."

"I'm a wayfaring man, as I told you," said the stranger, the corners of his mouth trembling slightly as he spoke, "and Fort Montgomery may be as good a place for me as any other. You know the way there?"

"Every bit of it. We can go on together. You have no horse, though," Robert added hastily.

"No, I have no horse at present," admitted the stranger quietly.

"Your name, it was what?" inquired Dirck, who up to this time had not taken any part in the conversation.

"My name? Some people might call it 'Legion' — but Russell is the one by which I am ordinarily known. Ever heard the name before?"

"The name, it was known," said Dirck slowly.

"There! I told you it was legion. Everywhere you find it, and every one appears to know it. You don't happen to know of the

name belonging to any one in this part of the world, do you?" The man was speaking quietly, but as he turned toward Direk as he spoke, Robert, who was watching him, was impressed that the man's interest in the Dutchman's reply was much keener than it appeared to be.

"I know *of* one Russell," said Direk slowly. "I do not know him."

"And perhaps all the better for you," laughed the man. "Where does this particular Russell happen to live?"

"He was not at home."

"So? Gone to join Clinton's men perhaps?"

"There was two Clintons. One was in New York and one was not."

For a moment the expression of the man's face changed slightly, or at least Robert fancied that it did, and then he said with a laugh, "I did not think there was but one up here on the Hudson. Sir Henry is so far away I did not think he would count. The only one I thought was of any importance hereabouts is George Clinton the — the commander at Fort Montgomery."

"General George Clinton is there."

"But you can't tell me where my namesake Russell is?"

"He was a wayfaring man and one fool."

The expression on Direk's face was bland and innocent, but the stranger glanced keenly at him before he spoke.

"Oh, you think he is one of the 'Legion,' too, do you? Well, I want to run across him some day. I should like to see how one of the family looked after living in this co — region for a while. Just now I think I'll let him rest, and I'll take mine too, if you are willing. I am tired, and must be stirring early to-morrow morning. What time shall we start?" he added, turning to Robert.

"Before sunrise," said Robert.

"That will suit me. I have no horse and we may not journey far together, but I hope to have one soon, and it may be that we shall have other meetings also. I bid you all good-night," he added, as he took the candle which Direk had lighted and followed his host to the loft.

Robert still was seated at the table when Direk returned to the room, and his thoughts were far from pleasing. He blamed himself for having so quickly revealed his name and the journey he was making. He had too quickly assumed that the General Clinton to whom Russell declared he was going was the same general who naturally was uppermost in his own mind. Besides, he was now suspicious



of the man, whose confidence in himself and his easy manners proclaimed an ability to care for himself and an apparent absence of fear that somehow were not reassuring to the young soldier.

His thoughts were interrupted by the return of Dirck, who placed his candle on the table, and taking a seat close to Robert's, said, as he shook his head, "I likes it not, Robert. He was too much talk. Which General Clinton is he going to see?"

"If it was Sir Henry he would not be here. He 'd be nearer New York," suggested Robert, in reality striving to reassure himself.

"But he comes from up the river."

"He did?"

"We must talk low," admonished Dirck, whose voice was not much above a whisper.

"And he was a Russell, too."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Perhaps sometimes you will read one letter," replied Dirck, as he drew from his pocket a discolored piece of paper and handed it to his friend. Robert eagerly grasped the epistle, and spreading it out before him, with difficulty made out the following letter:<sup>1</sup> —

<sup>1</sup> This letter is an exact reproduction of one which was sent General George Clinton. Even the unique spelling has been retained.

June 14th, 1777.

HONORAD SIR: — a Cordoing to your orders I went with a part of the Light hors in Sarch of Russell; when I come within a Mile and a half of his hous I aplied to Mr. Conklon; ho was acquented with him and sent 2 of the Light hors with him in disgis afoot; as the went thru the woods ner Russells hous the met a man in the woods and the seemed to be Surprised; he told them not to frited; asked them from whence the Come; the Replyd from New York; he told them the need not be afred; the was all good frends about there and asked what news from New York and wither general How was Coming up the River or not; with that there was a woman apered; he told them to Clap down and hid, when the woman Come near he sed the need not be afred for that was one Russells wife and that hir Husbandant was gon off Las night to New York, and if he had been at hom wald been very glad to have seen them; he had been at hom for sum time but had not been in his hous but three nights; this man Inyited them hom with him, but the Sead that the darst not; the must go the Mountains; he sed that he had Last winter Carred provisions for 10 or 12 in the Mount's and in the spring

the set of for New York. Mr. Conklin went privately Inquiring for Creaters he had Lost ; and from all he Cold Larn he thinks he has gon off ; I believe ther is no sesposhin that we wer after him, as for Wood I did not Know wither to go in Sarch of him or no for fear of discovering the mater ; I shall weight the generals advise about Wood, wither it is best to go and sarch for the money or not. I am your Honors most obedant ombel Servant,

SAM'L LOGAN.

TO GENERAL GEORGE CLINTON.

“Where and how did you get this?” inquired Robert in a whisper, after he had deciphered the discolored epistle with great difficulty.

“To-day. I knew you were coming and so I waited, for you can take it to the general to-morrow.”

“And this man Russell who is here” —

“I do not know.”

“Do you think he is the Tory?”

“He may be, or he may be one sent out to meet him.”

“Have you ever seen this man before?”

“No. Nein.”

“Or the Russell who lives near here?”

“Nein. No.”

“I know what I ’ll do, I ’ll” —

Robert stopped abruptly, as a sound outside the house was heard which caused both men to rise hastily and move swiftly and yet cautiously to the door in the rear of the room.

## CHAPTER III

### AN ADVENTURE WITH THE COWBOYS

A SOUND, faint and yet distinct, had been heard by both men coming from the road, and when they heard it repeated they rushed from the house, a great fear having suddenly seized upon Robert. Neither spoke for a moment as they discerned the outlines of a horse led by a man, who was holding the animal by the bridle, disappearing around the bend of the road.

"You don't suppose it's my horse, do you?" inquired Robert in a whisper.

Dirck made no response as he darted back into the house and hastily mounted the ladder that led to the room above. Robert followed his friend into the house, but waited with such calmness as he could assume for the report to be made.

"Come, Robert, come up here," called Dirck from the loft.

With feverish haste Robert clambered up the ladder, and as he stepped out upon the floor he required no further explanation, for

the man was gone. A low open window was in one end of the room, and running to it Robert peered out at the ground below him. It was not more than eight or nine feet from the window to the ground, and the stranger might easily have departed from the house by dropping from the opening.

Convinced that Russell had disappeared in this manner, Robert instantly followed his example; and as soon as he felt the grass beneath his feet he ran swiftly to the little barn, and, flinging open the door, peered eagerly within. His worst fears were confirmed, for his horse was no longer there. For a moment he stood stupidly staring at the stall where a few moments before he had left Nero to enjoy his well-earned rest; but he was roused from his lethargy by the approach of the young Dutchman.

"He's stolen my horse, Dirck! The rascal has got away with Nero!"

"Yes, it was so," replied Dirck, gazing quietly into the empty stall.

"The villain! I wish I had him here. I'd break the Tory's neck!" exclaimed Robert, now almost beside himself with anger.

"But here he was not."

"I can get him! I must get him! I know

in which direction he went! Have n't you a horse anywhere about the place?"

"No. Nein."

"I must go without one, then!" exclaimed Robert. "I must get Nero again! I can't go on without him! I'll be back — sometime," he called; and almost before the startled Dirck was aware of what was occurring, Robert had turned and fled from the barn and was running swiftly along the road in the direction in which the faint outlines of the man and beast had disappeared a few moments before.

There were no plans in the mind of the furious young soldier, only a wild impulse to follow until he had overtaken the thief and secured his stolen horse. In his belt was the pistol he had carried with him, but both belt and pistol were in Dirck's house, where he had left them when he had seated himself at the supper-table. He was consequently unarmed, but he had no thought of weapons or what might befall if he was so fortunate as to overtake the man who had made off with his horse. For the moment his wild rage seemed to provide all the weapons he required, and he ran on and on until at last he was compelled to stop and regain his breath.

Not a trace of man or horse had he secured.

The moon had risen by this time, and above the border of the tall trees that grew close to the roadside was casting its beams over the land until it was almost as light as day about him. For the first time the thought of the folly of an attempt to pursue a man who was mounted on the back of such a horse as Nero swept over him. It was useless, but Robert Dorlon did not feel that he could as yet abandon the attempt, and as soon as he had in a measure recovered from the violence of his exertions he resumed the pursuit, although now he was not running so swiftly as when he had first started. Occasional glimpses of the river were had in the moonlight, and at several places he halted to peer keenly down the banks, hoping and yet not expecting to discover the man in hiding somewhere near. It was not likely, he assured himself, that the man would stop soon, unless he should perceive how nearly winded his horse was; but the brief rest had doubtless prepared Nero for a swift pace, at least for a time.

The first feelings of anger were gone now, and Robert, as he still kept on his way, was striving to think out the plan which Russell would be most likely to adopt. Doubtless he would endeavor to place a good distance be-



tween himself and Dirck's house first of all, and then, secure in the belief that he could not be successfully followed by men who were not mounted, he would strive to cross the river and go on to New York on the opposite side.

But to cross the Hudson he must have aid, and Robert strove to think of the most probable places where he could secure some one to ferry him and his stolen horse to the eastern shore. Four or five miles down the river there was just such a ferry; and if he could only gain it before Russell should succeed in arranging for the crossing, there might be still some hope. The man would have to rouse the ferryman; there was a bare possibility that the latter might not be at home; there were other delays that might occur, and in the thought Robert once more increased the speed at which he was moving. He had entered a darker part of the rough roadway, where the tall trees shut out the moonlight on either side, but a hundred feet in advance of him he could see that the road led one into a broader place where the light was clearer and the dark trees were not so close to the border. For the first time Robert thought of his own safety and became aware of his defenseless condition. Hardly conscious of

what he was doing, he stooped and picked up a stout club and proceeded with increased caution on his way. He glanced keenly about him as he entered the narrower roadway, and the sudden movement of a rabbit in the brush almost caused him to cry aloud, so startling was the sound in the midst of the tense silence. He began again to run, but quickly checked his speed, and could see that he was now within a few yards of the more open place. His alarm was groundless, he assured himself, and with a sigh of relief he was about to step forth into the light when directly across his pathway appeared four men.

So startled was Robert Dorlon by the unexpected appearance that at first he was tempted to believe they were shadows and not living men; but the hail of one of them instantly drove all such suspicions from his mind.

"You travel late, young man," said one of them gruffly.

"Or early," responded Robert quickly, laughing nervously as he spoke.

Who were these men? Was it possible they were friends? Rumors of the activities of both the cowboys and the skimmers<sup>1</sup> had

<sup>1</sup> In the time of the Revolution bands of lawless men who preyed upon the defenseless people and professed alle-

been current of late, and if the men who had halted him belonged to the latter band there was a dim possibility that he might secure their aid. If, however, they should prove to be cowboys, then he knew what his fate was likely to be. In the dim light he could perceive that not one of the men was dressed in the uniform of either army, and the only way in which he would be able to determine their sympathies was to be cautious in his replies to their questions and strive to learn from their own words whether they were friends or foes.

"Where are you going?" demanded the man who had before spoken.

"Back here in the country," responded Robert quietly.

"That won't do," said the man sternly.

"What do you want me to say?"

"Who you are and where you are going."

"I told you."

"Tell us once more, then."

"I'm going back into the country."

giance to neither side. Those who were supposed to be more favorable to the British were called "cowboys," and those who were more friendly to the Americans were known as "skimmers." But plunder was the foremost motive of both, and seldom did sentiment prevent either from carrying out their plans of evil.

"And I told you that would n't do. You have a strange way of going 'back' in the country when you are headed *down* the river."

"Still that may lead 'back' into the country," said Robert quietly. He had been keenly watching the men, and several plans of action had already presented themselves to his active mind, but he would reserve them to the last, he assured himself, as he eagerly waited for the man to speak again.

"Is it to New York, or Morristown?"

"To neither."

"Where, then?"

"I told you."

"Who are you?"

"Robert Dorlon."

A brief whispered consultation followed between the men, but Robert was unable to overhear what was said. He had slight fear that his name would be known, and it would serve as well as any other in reply to the question which no longer could he evade.

"In which army are you?" demanded the man again.

"Can't you see? I'm in neither," replied Robert, striving to speak lightly, although his fears were now increasing.

"Do you belong to either army?"

"I'm a friend of Clinton."

"That settles it. If you belonged to the regulars you would say 'Sir Henry.' You must come with us."

The question in Robert's mind was answered now, and the men before him, he was convinced, were cowboys, Tories, or, it might be, redcoats in disguise. Instantly he turned about and began to run swiftly back over the rough roadway. The men might fire upon him, and doubtless would, but there was a slight hope in the mind of the young soldier that in the darkness their aim might fail them, and he might be able to escape. He crouched low and ran at his utmost speed. He could hear the men coming swiftly in pursuit, but for some reason, which to him appeared to be unexplainable, they did not fire. It certainly was strange, he thought, but he gave it slight heed as he exerted himself to the utmost of his powers. There had been one loud, sharp call from his pursuers when he had so suddenly darted away, but he thought nothing of it save that it was a call for him to stop. When he drew near the entrance to the narrow place, however, he understood it all, for directly before him and swiftly approaching were four other men,

who without doubt had been summoned by the call of their comrades.

In an instant Robert perceived what it all meant. He had entered into a trap and was caught between the two divisions of the band. He glanced at both sides of the road, but the bushes were thick, and there was little prospect of escape on either side. Suddenly he wheeled about, and lifting the club which he had retained in his flight, he brought it down upon the head of the pursuer directly behind him.

He was dimly aware that the man dropped to the ground, and instantly Robert leaped over his prostrate form, and began to run swiftly back in the opposite direction. Every moment he expected to hear the sound of a shot, but still not a pistol was discharged. It certainly was strange; but thankful that it was as it was, he exerted himself as he felt positive he never had done before in all the years of his life. It was a race for liberty, if not for life itself, and everything depended upon the speed he could make now, he assured himself.

The same sharp, loud call had been made when he turned that he had heard before, but he was not troubled now, for he was confident that his would-be captors were all

behind him. He discovered his mistake, however, when, as he drew near once more to the end of the narrow pass, he suddenly perceived two men approaching swiftly from that direction. He saw that he was caught now, and that there was no escape. The trap had been carefully made and he was taken within the lines.

Instantly the two men threw themselves upon him, and he was hurled to the ground, and held tightly in their grasp. He struggled desperately, but he soon was powerless, for the men all gathered about him, and his hands were securely held.

"We know where you are going *now*," said the man who had spoken to him before, and who evidently was the leader.

"That's right, Tom," laughed one of his comrades. "But don't you think it would be better to hit him in the head, and let him go?"

"Not yet," responded the leader. Then, turning to Robert, he said, "Come on!"

There was nothing to be done but to obey, and the prisoner followed obediently until the band came out into the open light.

"Search him," said the leader quietly.

Powerless to resist, Robert saw his hat re-

moved and cut into threads. Next his coat was taken from him, and with knives cut into strips.

“Here we have it!” said one of the men exultantly, as he took from within the lining the letter which Robert had received from the American commander, and had sewed in his coat for safe-keeping. Tears of anger and mortification were in his eyes as he beheld the man who had discovered the letter hand it to the leader, about whom most of the band quickly gathered.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE THIRTEEN

A BRIEF, low conversation among the men followed the discovery of the letter, but Robert was unable to hear any of the words that were spoken. It was not difficult for him, however, to understand what the subject was, and with a feeling of helpless rage he watched them as they conversed. Near him were the sheltering woods, but the few yards that intervened were as impassable as if they had been miles. Even the air of apparent indifference of the two men who were standing guard by his side was maddening, for it only served to emphasize his own hopelessness. His plight was made worse in his own eyes because of the loss of his horse, as well as of the letter that had been intrusted to him, and for the time the young soldier was almost in despair. Visions of what might be done with him were flitting through his mind, and the tales that were current of the hardships of the Americans who were prisoners in New York were recalled with startling distinctness.

Suddenly the men who had been earnestly talking together parted, and three of them approached the place where he was standing. A strap which one of them carried was brought forward and the prisoner's hands were at once securely bound behind his back.

When this had been accomplished, one of them turned to Robert and said quietly, "Come with me."

It was useless to resist, and Robert obediently followed the man as he led the way back over the road that extended through the dark and narrow passage; but when they had gone about half the distance his captor suddenly turned and started directly into the woods. At first Robert hesitated to follow, but a low word recalled him to the necessity of obeying, and he was soon close behind the man, who seemed to be at no loss in picking his way. Indeed, Robert soon perceived that they were following a path, which, though it was not well marked, was nevertheless somewhat plain, and without a word being spoken the two men proceeded on their way.

The ground was rising now, and ere long Robert was aware that they were climbing a low hillside. In spite of the dimness of the light he was endeavoring to note the way in

which they were going, and though there was no likelihood of his retracing it soon, still he was striving to mark certain places so that he would not be lost if fortune by any turn of her wheel should chance to favor him.

After a walk of eight minutes, though Robert was hardly aware of the time that had elapsed, they halted before a rude structure, built of rough boards and logs, and covering a space of about fifteen feet square. A low call from the man brought from within the hut another man, and as Robert gazed at him in surprise the prisoner fancied that never before had he looked upon so huge a being. The man must have been at least six feet and six inches in height, and his enormous frame seemed to the startled prisoner to be even more immense than it really was.

It became speedily evident that the two men were well known to each other, for Robert's captor said, "I've a fellow here for you to look after, Josh, and you must not let him slip through your fingers either. He's slippery and he's valuable, too."

When Josh replied it was in a voice that was deeper than Robert thought he ever had heard, but it was not unmusical, and under

other circumstances might even have been attractive.

"He won't get away," he said. "Who is he?"

"An express from Washington."

"Anything on him?"

"Not much now," replied the captor, with a laugh. "We've looked well to that."

"What's to be done with him?"

"Nothing to-night. In a day or two we'll know more. He's to be left here with you till we come for him."

"How'll I know when to let him go?"

"You're not to let him go at all. Some one of us will come and get him. And if you don't want every bone in your body broken, you'll see to it that he does n't give you the slip."

The giant laughed in a manner that reminded Robert of the rumbling of distant thunder. "Shall I tie his feet?" he inquired.

"If you want to. His hands are tied now."

"Bring him in. I'll 'tend to him."

"In you go! In with you!" said the captor to Robert, and at once he entered the hut.

Neither of the men followed him, and he glanced eagerly about. There was but one

window or opening in the room besides the door, and at first Robert was unable to make out what the room contained. In a brief time, however, his eyes became somewhat accustomed to the dim light, and he could see that there was a table, a few rude chairs or stools, and in one corner a heap of some kind, he could not determine what. It was evident that he had been brought to the hiding-place of some one of the numerous bands of outlaws or cowboys that infested the region, and with whose deeds he was already familiar. It certainly was humiliating to the feelings of the young soldier to be made a prisoner by such men. If he had been taken and his precious letter had been seized by those who were enrolled in the army of King George it would not have been quite so humiliating, he thought; but to be seized by the cowboys and held as a prisoner by them until they should be well paid for delivering him into the hands of his enemies was to make a bad matter even worse. And that such was to be his fate Robert Dorton had not a doubt.

In a brief time the huge Josh returned, but he was alone, and Robert concluded that the man who had led him to the place had gone back to rejoin his fellows, leaving him alone

with the giant. Doubtless he was as well assured of the safety of the prisoner as if a guard of a half dozen had been placed over him, for a contest with his keeper could have but one issue.

"Hungry?" demanded Josh when he entered the hut.

"No."

"Tired?"

"Yes, dead tired," responded Robert heartily.

"I knew it. Everybody that comes here has th' same feelin'," said Josh, with a laugh that again recalled the rumbling of thunder. "It sort o' seems to affect people that way when 'the Thirteen' get hold o' 'em."

"'The Thirteen'?" inquired Robert.

"Yes. Have n't ye ever heard o' that band?"

"Yes, I've heard of it," responded Robert quickly; for the report of the deeds of a band of cowboys with that unique name had been current for some time. Among the hills and passes in Jersey and in the region back of the Hudson they had been busied for more than a year, and their leader, Claudius Brown, was a man whom all the patriots feared. Resolute, without fear, merciless and bold, already the

scattered country people had come to tremble at the mention of his name. Nor was he the only one who had taken advantage of the troublous times to carry out his own bold projects; and though at first he had declared that he asked no favors of either side in the struggle and would give none, of late it had been currently reported that he had been siding with the forces of King George; though whether this was done because of surer gains and larger rewards, or because his own mind led him so to choose, no one knew.

Robert Dorlon shrugged his shoulders in the darkness and softly whistled as he heard that he was a prisoner of the well-known band.

"I thought so," laughed Josh. "'Most everybody has."

"Why do you call yourselves the Thirteen?"

"Because that's what we are, or rather it's what we started with. Some have been shot, and some have left, but we've had more come, so I guess we're about the same's when we started. There's another reason why we call ourselves that, though."

"What is it?"

"Well, it seems to be a sort o' a magical number 'mong the rebels, an' if it is, there's

no good reason why we should n't have it, too."

"I don't see" — began Robert.

"Hold on a bit an' I'll show ye. How many colonies are there?"

"Thirteen."

"Exac'ly. Now, how many hairs has Phil Schuyler left on th' top o' his head?"

"I have n't any idea."

"Well, it's exac'ly thirteen; an' his wife, Mistress Catherine Schuyler, braids 'em up every night most 'mazin' careful, I'm told, so 't not one o' th' magic number 'll get lost. Then Marthy Washington has a cat with thirteen stripes 'round his tail; she won't have any other kind, I hear. The rebels are just clean daft over the number thirteen; so we thought if there was so much in that number, we'd try it a spell ourselves. An' it seems t' have worked like a charm so far. I think ye said ye was tired," he added abruptly.

"Yes, I am," replied Robert quickly.

"Jest stretch yerself on those blankets in the corner there. I'll keep watch over ye so 't nothin' comes t' harm ye." The giant laughed good-naturedly, and Robert was tempted for the moment to try to induce him to permit him to escape.



“Josh, what do you keep me here for?” he inquired abruptly.

“Orders.”

“Suppose I should escape and should send you five pounds. Would n't that fix it all right?”

“No, sir, 't would n't.”

“I might make it ten.”

“Ye might make it a thousand, but 't would n't do ye a mite o' good.”

“Why not?”

“I'm not that kind, that's all.”

“But your 'Thirteen' is doing that all the time. They have n't any scruples.”

“Ye don't know Claud, that's all. Besides, it would n't make any difference if ye did. I don't care a wisp o' barley straw which side wins, but I stick by my friends every time. Here ye stay till ye're wanted.”

“They might hang me,” suggested Robert.

“Like 'nough. Such things have been done.”

“You would n't do it or want it done either.”

“I don't do it, that's true 'nough; but it's none o' my affairs what others do.”

“Where shall I lie down?”

“There, in that corner,” replied the man,

pointing once more at the robes or blankets that could be dimly seen in the corner of the room. "An' let me tell ye," he added, "not to try any o' yer tricks. I'm on hand all the time right in front o' the door, an' if my gun should happen to go off, it would be most likely right in th' d'rection o' where ye were standin' at the time."

Robert made no response, and at once threw himself upon the improvised bed. In spite of his weariness, the predicament in which he found himself kept him awake for a time. He could see the huge form of Josh seated directly in the doorway with his back against the side, and puffing away at his pipe as if it were the sole occupation of his life. That there would be other things he would certainly do if conditions were to change, Robert felt confident, and to escape, or even to make an attempt to free himself, for the time was not to be thought of. He turned over upon his side and resolutely strove to go to sleep.

Whether he had been sleeping or not he was unable to determine, when he was aroused by the sound of voices and the sight of some one standing in the doorway talking to Josh. The voice of the new-comer sounded strangely familiar, and in a moment Robert was listen-

ing intently, although he did not move from his position.

"I'll leave my horse outside," the man was saying.

"Of course ye will," replied Josh. "I'll keep an eye on him. He won't get away."

"I shan't be here more than two or three hours, but if I can get a little sleep I'll be all the better for it."

"Go right in and lie down. There's only one in there now."

"Some one in there? Who is it?"

"I forget his name. He's asleep. Ye need n't be afraid o' him."

"I'm not afraid, but" — began the man in a lower voice.

"Go on in! I'll let ye know when they come for ye. I can tell Claud in the darkest night that ever was," interrupted Josh.

"He sent me word that I was to meet him here. I don't know how he knew I was coming" —

"Oh, Claud knows all right," laughed Josh. "Nothin' escapes him."

"I should n't have stopped if he had n't sent word that he was to give me something of importance. I want to get back to New York in a hurry. As long as he is n't here

and I'm to wait, I might as well get a little sleep."

The man, whom Robert excitedly had recognized by his voice as Russell, then entered the room, and in a moment dropped upon the blankets within a yard of the place where Robert himself was lying.

## CHAPTER V

### A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

It soon became apparent that no heed was given him by Russell, and Robert Dorlon, relieved of the fear which for the moment had possessed him, quietly rolled a little farther from his sleeping comrade. The deep and regular breathing of Russell became monotonous, and even the form of the huge guard in the doorway seemed to be leaning back against the wall as if he too was so confident of the security of his prisoner that he deemed it safe to indulge in a nap. Outside the hut the low rustling of the leaves of the trees could be heard, and the noisy notes of the crickets became almost unnaturally loud.

For a time Robert lay motionless and still, though his mind was busy as he recalled the exciting events of the night. The unexpected coming of Russell had been more than a diversion, for it had sharply recalled the prospects which Robert himself must face. The Tory had declared that he would remain only two or three hours, and then was to receive

something from some one who was to come to the hut that would compel him to depart at once. He wondered if Nero was near by, and the thought at once aroused the eager young soldier. If only he could gain possession of him he would laugh at all the efforts of the Thirteen to overtake him.

He lifted his head from the blankets and gazed earnestly at Josh. The man was evidently asleep, and his heavy breathing came almost like a response to that of Russell, who was sleeping by his side. If he should rise and dart through the doorway he might be able to gain the shelter of the surrounding forest before the mighty Josh could recover from the surprise. Even the possibility that the guard was not really sleeping, but only resting, was hardly worthy of consideration, Robert thought, in contrast with the prospect of many days in one of the sugar-houses in New York, where already so many of the American soldiers were confined,— the tales of their sufferings and privations being familiar to all the patriots of the region.

But his hands were securely bound behind his back and his arms were numb and stiff. To attempt to escape with such a handicap was scarcely to be thought of, he decided,

for if he should stumble or fall in his flight, he would be almost helpless. His first effort must be to free himself from his bonds.

At once he began to strive to withdraw his hands from the strap that held them. Doing his utmost to be quiet as he toiled at the task, he nevertheless exerted himself again and again as he strove to stretch the bands and to pull out his hands. For a long time he apparently made but slight progress. The straps had been wound several times about his wrists, and then had been drawn tightly into a knot. He twisted and strained and pulled, all the time doing his utmost not to arouse either of the men. His face was wet with perspiration, and the muscles in his arms ached from his exertions. He could feel that the skin was broken, and he was aware what it was that was trickling from his fingers' ends. The pain which he was suffering caused him repeatedly to cease his efforts, but every time he resumed his task with a steadily increasing determination. The sugar-house or freedom, failure or success in obeying the orders of his great commander, were the alternatives in his mind, and every particle of will-power that he possessed was summoned to his aid.

His efforts had drawn the knot more tightly, but he was convinced that the strap itself was giving a little. With renewed hope he increased his exertions, and at last, to his unspeakable delight, he was able to withdraw one hand, though it pained him so intensely that he was fearful it would be useless. In his excitement he sat partly erect as he moved his hands in front of him, and with one hastily tore away the strap that was still wrapped about the other. His occupation was interrupted by a slight sound from the doorway, and glancing up, he beheld the giant standing just outside the hut. He had not then been sleeping, after all, and instantly Robert threw himself back upon the blankets, hardly daring to draw a long breath, so fearful was he that Josh had been quietly watching him in his efforts to free his hands. The giant stepped out into the night for a moment, and could not be seen, but he soon reëntered the hut and approached the place where the two men were lying. Was he about to adjust the strap again? The question caused Robert's heart to beat furiously, and for a moment the suspense was well-nigh unendurable. He tried to breathe regularly and heavily, like one who was sleeping, but his efforts seemed to him



to be a miserable failure. A feeling of intense relief swept over him when, in a brief time, the huge guard, apparently satisfied that all was well within, turned and resumed his place in the doorway.

Convinced that his work had not been discovered, Robert did not move, but keenly watched the guardian of the hut. Apparently he was again sleeping, but his recent movements were too fresh in the prisoner's mind to permit him to trust to appearances, and for a time he strove to think out his own best plan to follow; but not once did he turn away his eyes from the sight before him. The deep and regular breathing of Russell still continued, and Robert was convinced that he had little to fear from him. The supreme test would be found in Josh, the giant guard. If he was really sleeping, to leap past him would be comparatively easy, but if he should be awake Robert well knew what would be likely to occur.

Still the young soldier lay motionless upon his bed. He did not even dare to rub his aching hand for fear the movement might attract the attention of his guard. For a time he thought carefully over the problem as to whether it would be safer for him to

rise and creep stealthily and softly toward the exit, or to make a sudden dash across the ten or twelve feet that intervened and trust to fortune to favor him. The sleeper by his side moved uneasily, changed his position, and rolled a little nearer. Robert waited until the deep breathing once more assured him that his companion was not mindful of anything that was occurring in the room, and then he decided that the attempt must now be made. The hours were passing, and Russell had apparently been confident that some one was soon to come. The time might already be at hand, and Robert Dorlon decided that he could wait no longer. The worst feature of it all was that, even if by his sudden departure he should chance to escape, he still must leave Nero behind him. Even the faithful animal must now be left, he decided; and then resolutely, and with every nerve in his body tense, he began to lift himself from the blankets. Slowly and cautiously he rose to a sitting posture, and then waited to discover if his movements were seen. Apparently he was still safe, for Josh had not moved. He placed one foot on the ground, and, kneeling, braced himself for the quick leap he

must make. Still, for some unaccountable reason, he hesitated. The silence in the room was almost appalling. Even the darkness was rendered more intense by the dim light that came in through the doorway, where the form of the huge guard could be plainly seen, seated as it had been for some time. The time for hesitation had passed, however, and Robert prepared himself for the final effort.

With every muscle rigid and all his reserve strength summoned to his aid, he was on the point of bounding toward the doorway when he was startled by a sound outside the hut. He flung himself back upon the blankets, but his feeling of disappointment was so keen that the tears started from his eyes. He was satisfied that the sound he had heard was made by the man who had come for Russell. Bitterly he blamed himself for his undue caution and delay. To have been so near the attempt and then to fail, even before he had put his fate to the test, was worse than to have failed after he had done his utmost. He could see Josh's great frame as the guard rose and stood in the doorway, and the heavy breathing of Russell by his side was still unbroken. The discovery that he had freed his hands would add to his own miseries, Robert was con-

vinced; but he was powerless now to do anything to aid himself, and almost overcome by despair he lay motionless upon his bed and waited in breathless suspense for his companion to be summoned.

Josh had now stepped outside the hut, and wild thoughts of still attempting to rush through the doorway were in Robert's mind; but the attempt would be foolhardy he was assured, and he resigned himself to his fate with such courage as he could summon. Whatever might happen, he was resolved that his captors should not enjoy the sight of any weakness on his part.

He glanced again at the doorway as some one entered. It was not Josh, he at once perceived; and when the man approached the sleeping-place, Robert rolled over upon his side, keeping his arms behind his back. That the man had come to summon Russell he had no doubt.

Suddenly, and to his intense surprise, the stranger touched him upon the shoulder and whispered "Come."

Almost too dazed to realize what it meant, Robert rose hastily and followed the man as he cautiously withdrew to the doorway. What the summons might mean Robert had not

the slightest conception, but his excitement and interest were too keen to permit him to falter now. Once outside the hut the man stopped, and holding a letter in his hand, said,—

“You ’re to give this to Sir Henry himself. It ’s from General Burgoyne.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Robert, still too dazed to comprehend what it all meant.

“Mind you, you ’re to put it into the hands of Sir Henry himself! No other man on earth is to see it. Can you do it?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Robert, his heart giving a great throb as he realized that the man, whoever he was, had mistaken him for Russell. His own letter had been taken from him, but if he should succeed in bearing the other missive to the leaders of the American army it might in part atone for his failure to deliver the letter which Washington had consigned to his care.

“We ’ve had a great time getting it through,” continued the man, “and if you lose it now you ’ll have Claud Brown right at yer heels, and he ’ll never let up. You hear, don’t ye?”

“I hear,” said Robert quietly.

“Where ’s yer coat, man?”

"I have n't any," stammered Robert. "I don't want any for this work."

"Where 's the letter ye got from Washington's express?" demanded the man.

"It 's safe," replied Robert, his voice trembling slightly as he spoke, in spite of all his efforts to control it.

"Where?"

"I sewed it inside the lining of my — my clothes."

"Well, that 's a good place, if ye 'll only keep it there. The other fellow had it there too, but he did n't keep it."

"Shall I start now?" inquired Robert, glancing nervously at the hut and striving to appear calm.

"Here 's the letter. Ye 'd better take that, I'm thinkin'." He laughed as he held forth the letter, which Robert took and placed inside his shirt.

"I don't know much 'bout ye, Russell," said the man sternly. "But I'm told ye 're all right. If ye hang, we 'll hang together. But Claud Brown is n't quite ready to swing yet. If ye play him false, ye 'd better have ev'ry rebel in the colonies after ye!"

Robert made no response, but his fears were in no wise allayed by the knowledge that he

was dealing with Claudius Brown himself, the well-known leader of the band of cowboys known as "the Thirteen." He was fearful every moment that Russell would approach or Josh come near and reveal the mistake which the man evidently had made. He glanced nervously about him, a movement which Brown noticed, for he laughed lightly as he said, —

"Ye seem t' be in a twitter t' get away. Ye may not find it all so fine as ye 're thinkin', for there's more 'n one man on th' lookout for ye."

"All the more reason why I should get started, then."

"That's right; but ye want th' word, don't ye?"

"Yes," replied Robert simply.

"Well, jest say 'Th' Asia,' when ye're facin' our men, an' it may help ye a bit. Sure ye don't want any coat?"

"No! No!" said Robert hastily. He was eager to be gone, and it was only by a great effort that he controlled his feelings.

The man, however, insisted upon giving him some minute directions as to where he would meet friends, how he was to be carried to the other side of the river, when he was to return, and where he was to meet him again.

"Ye'll have somethin' for me," he said, "when ye come back, an' 't won't be healthy for ye t' lose it or t' let anything happen to it, either! I shall expect ye here inside o' four days. I'll be on hand to meet ye."

"Where's my horse?" Robert ventured to inquire, feeling that boldness might be his safest course.

"Where ye left it."

"I'll start now; that is, if you have n't any other word to give me."

"I've said my say. Here's yer horse. Josh has brought it," he added.

Robert turned and beheld Josh approaching, leading Nero by the bridle. A fresh fear of discovery came upon him, but he quickly took the horse by the bridle and leaped into the saddle.

"Here, ye better lead him till ye come t' the road," suggested Brown.

Robert made no response save to speak low to his horse, and start him into a run, for the dull-witted Josh had perceived who it was that was mounting the steed, and with a roar that could have been heard far away was shouting his discovery.



## CHAPTER VI

### INTO THE NIGHT

THE pathway that led to the road below was not clearly defined in the dim light, and stones and occasional trunks of fallen trees obstructed it somewhat; but in the great fear that now possessed the heart of Robert Dorlon he gave slight heed to any of these things. His confidence in the ability of his horse to pick his way was stronger than in his own, so, although he urged Nero to his best endeavors, he left the bridle loose.

Behind him the roar of Josh and the startled shout of Brown could no longer be heard, but the silence was no evidence of his security. There might be a half dozen shorter ways to the road he was seeking; men might have been stationed as guards at various places along the pathway; the band might still be waiting at the place where the path turned into the roadway. All these and various other suggestions occurred to the mind of the fleeing young soldier, but the one supreme purpose in his thoughts at the time was to escape from

the men he had left behind him at the hut. And Nero was doing his very best to aid him.

Leaping over the obstacles before him, occasionally swerving from the direct course, and yet bounding down the hillside, the sure-footed beast kept on his way. Leaning upon his horse's neck and occasionally glancing behind him to make sure that his enemies were not close in pursuit, Robert drew near to the place where he would turn into the road. Suddenly he heard from the hillside in his rear the sound of two shots fired in rapid succession. He quickly sat erect and peered keenly all about him. It was evident at once that he had not been the target, for the sounds indicated that the pistols had been discharged at a considerable distance from where he then was. There was but one conclusion to be formed, and that was that a signal of some kind had been given, and in that event it was plain to him that men must be in waiting somewhere near. The most natural place would be at the junction of the path and the road, and he instantly checked the speed of his horse while he endeavored to decide what was best for him to do. He did not know whether or not Brown and Russell had horses at their command. Russell had ridden Nero,

and he at least was not likely to have any other, unless by some chance the Thirteen might keep horses for their use near their hiding-place on the hillside. There was no way of discovering this except by waiting, and the excited young soldier had no mind for that.

Leaving Nero in the rear of a huge tree a few yards back from the path, Robert hastily ran a little farther into the woods, striving to discover if it was possible for him to gain the road in that direction and enter it at a point above that where the waiting guard might have been stationed. He soon came to the border of a deep ravine and saw that his progress was checked in that direction. He recalled the fact also that by the side of the road below a broad, swift stream of water was flowing, and he was by no means confident that he could safely cross it. He might be taken while he was striving to cross, and the venture was too perilous to be seriously considered. At the place where the path joined the road the stream had been very narrow, and a man might easily step across. If it were light now and he had time to look about, a way of escape might be discovered; but the need of haste was great, and in his excitement Robert ran swiftly back to the place where he

had left his trusty horse, and taking him by the bridle, began to lead him down the pathway. The road could not be many yards distant, he assured himself, and he would look keenly about him as he advanced cautiously, Nero's footfalls being almost as silent as his own.

He drew back hastily among the trees when he was convinced that he heard the sound of men coming up the pathway before him. Some high bushes were growing close to the path, and taking his stand behind these he waited for the men to come near. He was in an agony of fear that he would be discovered. The slightest sound on the part of Nero would be sufficient to disclose his presence. He gently rubbed the horse's nose, at the same time peering out for the coming of the men. Nor had he long to wait, for in a brief time he perceived three men coming swiftly up the pathway, every one crouching low and holding a gun in his hands.

"I tell you," one of them was saying in a low voice, "we're all wrong. What Claud meant was for us to stay and wait for him to come."

"No such thing," said another. "The signal was for us to stay where we were and be on the lookout."

"He wanted us to come up to the shanty. That's what he wanted," said the third man.

Robert was listening intently, but either nothing more was said, or he was not able to hear it. At all events the men passed on, and then instantly the young soldier, trembling with excitement, led his horse once more out into the path and rapidly proceeded on his way to the road below.

He had not gone far before he perceived the place he was seeking, but his fears redoubled when he spied two armed men standing in the roadway directly in front of the entrance to the path. It was too late to stop, for he was aware that he himself had been seen; and it was impossible to turn back, for more of his enemies were there than were before him. Every avenue of escape seemed to be closed, and in sheer desperation Robert leaped upon the back of his horse and advanced. He could see that the men stepped forward to dispute his coming. It seemed to him almost as if he was clutched already by the throat, so difficult was his breathing.

"What's wrong?" demanded one of the men sharply, as he approached the horse's head.

"Everything is wrong," replied Robert.

“Russell’s letter has been taken, and the man has gone up the road. Let me pass. I can get him yet!”

“Who are you?” demanded the man dubiously.

“Don’t stop me!” demanded Robert in desperation. “Claud will never forgive you! He wants that man, I tell you!”

“How do I know that you are not the man himself?”

There was a momentary hesitation, and Robert was eager to follow up his brief advantage. In a moment the men from the hut might appear and there would be no escape from his predicament.

Bending lower, he whispered in the man’s ear: “It’s all right, I tell you! Don’t keep me a minute. ‘The Asia’ will prove it to you, if you’ll take the trouble to ask.”

The man’s hand dropped from the bridle, and instantly Robert struck his horse and darted away.

“Hold on there!” called the man who had not before spoken. “That’s the fellow we took yesterday. He’s Clinton’s express! Don’t let him get away!”

Robert Dornon waited to hear no more, and was already speeding up the road. His bold-

ness and quick wit had availed for the moment, but he was still in danger. Even then a wild shout arose behind him, and he knew that his escape was known. If the band had horses near, then his chances of final escape were dubious, for Nero's weakness was apparent in every movement the faithful animal was making. The issue was too great, however, for even mercy to be considered now, and Robert urged his horse forward with ever-increasing speed. He could feel the heaving sides beneath him and hear the painful breathing as his horse responded to his appeals.

The one great fear in Robert's heart now was of pursuit by horsemen. If the morning would only come, he might be safe, for he well knew that the Thirteen belonged to the class whose work was done for the most part in the darkness. But the stretch of dull sky was unbroken by any promise of the coming dawn. He must still urge Nero forward, he assured himself, and if the faithful animal gave out, then he must trust to his own efforts on foot.

Ten minutes more had elapsed and still no sound of pursuit had been heard. Either the band had had no horses near, or they had not dared to attempt to follow him. Either solu-

tion appeared to Robert to be unsatisfactory, but he lost no time in deliberation. The cool night air fanned his face, the grim outlines of the great trees loomed up on either side, the sounds of Nero's footfalls became monotonous, and still Robert sped on and on.

Suddenly, directly at his left, he perceived a rude path, or road, that led back apparently among the hills. Acting upon the impulse that seized him, Robert turned into the new way, determined to follow it as being, perhaps, safer than the one over which he was now fleeing. He was tempted to remain in hiding for a time and ascertain if he was being followed; but even that temptation was resisted when he thought of the letter in his possession and the peril from which he had fled, but from which he was by no means assured that he had as yet entirely escaped. He did, however, permit his well-nigh exhausted horse to stop for rest, and when he resumed his flight it was at a much slower pace than he had been following. He could see, also, that this road led around through a winding valley and was apparently frequently used, but he had no conception as to where it led. It was taking him back from the river, and in the sense of increased secur-



ity which the conviction afforded he was for the time well content.

He was passing down a sloping hillside now, and was suddenly startled by the barking of a huge dog that came bounding across a field directly toward him. His horse also was startled, and stumbled and fell, and in a moment Robert saw that he was not able to rise. Whether the faithful animal had broken a bone, or was too exhausted to stand, Robert had no opportunity to ascertain, for with a growl the dog was now coming near. The young soldier looked about for some means of defense, and spied a sledge near him, from which he hastily tore one of the posts. It afforded him an excellent weapon, and lifting it in the air, he started directly toward the approaching dog. With a snarl, the animal turned and fled, and in his anger Robert swiftly followed until he had crossed the lot where the dog had first appeared, and then he abruptly stopped, as he found himself just in front of a low house of logs which had been concealed by the surrounding trees. But his surprise was increased when he perceived that in the open door two women were standing, and that one of them, whom he took to be the younger, was holding a gun in her

hands. It was too dark to enable him to see the face of either, but the presence and attitude were unmistakable.

"Stop right where you are! Who are you, and what do you mean by disturbing us at this time of night?" demanded the younger woman.

"I beg your pardon. I did not see — I did not know there was a house here. This dog came out where my horse fell down, and I drove him off."

"Your horse fell down? Where is it now?"

"Out in the road."

"A likely story! You would n't leave it this way to come here."

"I beg your pardon. I must go back for it," said Robert, hastily turning about as he spoke.

"Not yet!" said the girl sharply. "Are you alone?"

"I am, madam."

"Where are you going?"

"That's a bit uncertain. Just now I'm going back to look after my horse;" and Robert once more turned away.

"Are you coming back here?"

"I do not expect to."

"Is your horse injured?"

"I am afraid he has broken his leg."

"It's a shame how some men ride! They have no more mercy than the Thirteen!" said the young woman, whom Robert now perceived to be a girl no older than himself.

The reference to the Thirteen, however, instantly caused him to stop, and he said sharply: "Do you know the Thirteen?"

"To our sorrow."

"To my sorrow I, too, know them. I have just escaped from their hands."

"Are you a soldier?" said the elder woman in a low voice.

"I am, madam."

"Where do you belong?" demanded the girl sharply.

"Not anywhere hereabouts, nor do I want to stay here. If my horse is not too tired to carry me, I'll be gone soon."

"Did you say your horse had broken his leg?" inquired the girl.

"I said I was afraid he had."

There was a low and hasty conversation between the two women, and then the older one said, "You surely need a lantern. Will you take ours?"

"I thank you, madam."

“ We will go with you ; 't is but a step ; ” and despite Robert's protest, the two women and the dog, the elder woman carrying a lantern in her hands and the younger still holding her gun, at once started with him across the field by which he had approached.

## CHAPTER VII

### A DEFENSELESS HOUSEHOLD

IN silence the little party approached the place in the road where Robert had left his horse. The glimmering light of the lantern was an added source of anxiety to the young soldier, for he was by no means positive that he had not been followed, and that his present predicament was not known to some of the members of the band of which Claudius Brown was the leader. However, the women had been so quick in their decision to accompany him, and their fearlessness was so apparent, that he had not repeated his protest, and in a brief time they arrived at the place they were seeking.

As Robert stepped forth into the road he saw that Nero was still lying where he had left him, and at once taking the prostrate beast by the head, he said soothingly, "Get up, Nero! That's right, old fellow!"

The horse struggled to his feet, and it became at once evident that no bones were broken. With a sigh of relief, Robert turned to his companions and said, —

"He's all right now. I'm grateful to you for your kindness."

"Did you say you were running from the Thirteen?" demanded the younger woman.

"I did."

"Where are they now?"

"I don't know. I trust they are back in the woods where I left them."

"Was Claud Brown there?"

"He was."

"The villain!" exclaimed the young woman warmly. "I hope they'll hang him! They will, too, if they can once get their hands on him."

"Who?"

"The men of the country. He's kept up his wickedness till there's hardly a home in all the valley that he has n't robbed. I can stand a redcoat, but such a scoundrel as he is ought not to be left alive in such times as these!"

"There, Hannah!" said the older woman quietly. "Never mind Claud Brown now."

"Where are you going?" demanded the young woman of Robert.

"There are several places I must go to before I go back."

"Back where?"

"Where I came from," replied Robert, laughing lightly. The assertiveness of his questioner amused him, and yet he was pleased with her friendliness, and her outspoken sympathy for the cause of the colonies found a warm response in his own heart.

"You need n't be so careful," said the girl. "We know which side you are on, and as long as it is our side, too, you need n't be afraid of us."

"How far is it to Fort Montgomery?" inquired Robert.

"It's too long a ride for you to think of taking to-night," said the older woman.

"I must."

"No, you must not. Your horse could never make it. Bring him with you and stay with us to-night. It will be safer for you to go on in the daytime anyway, and you'll do better if your horse is rested."

"But I don't like to trouble you."

"It will be time enough to avoid that when you do trouble us. Come now, and Hannah and I will look after your horse, and you can get some rest yourself. If you've been with the Thirteen, you'll need that as much as your horse does."

For a moment Robert hesitated, and then

decided to accept the offer of hospitality which was so cordially given. It was evident that the women were to be trusted, and his own weariness, as well as the exhaustion of his horse, provided more than an excuse for accepting what had been so warmly offered.

"That's right," said the elder woman heartily, as Robert prepared to follow; and in a brief time all three arrived in front of the little house.

"I'll take care of your horse for you," said the girl quickly, as they halted for a moment.

"Thank you," replied Robert, with a laugh. "I'm not accustomed to such attentions from the ladies. If you will show me where to put him, I'll take him there."

"We'll show you;" and both women led the way toward the little barn which could be seen on the border of the clearing. Robert followed without a word, but as they approached the place he was surprised when he was led directly past the barn into the woods beyond.

"It's safer," explained the girl quietly. "We haven't a horse left on the place—thanks to the Thirteen, or some other equally good men. If we put your horse out in the woods, it may be that he won't be found, if we chance to have any other visitors to-night."



Robert made no protest, for the scheme was a wise one, as he quickly acknowledged; and after a few minutes had elapsed Nero was tied to a sapling and left for the night. The women then returned with Robert to the house and all three at once entered. A candle was burning on the rude table in the kitchen, and in its light Robert glanced keenly at the women. The elder was a woman in middle life, but the younger was only a girl, apparently not so old as he himself was. Her vigorous body and firm step at once revealed both physical and mental strength, and her face, animated and attractive, speedily confirmed Robert's favorable impressions.

"Oh, you need n't be afraid of us," laughed the girl.

"I beg your pardon," stammered Robert. "I was not, that is — I am" —

"Exactly. Your statement is very plain."

"Hannah," said the woman, who, Robert was convinced, must be the girl's mother, "you 'd better get our friend something to eat."

"I would not put you to that trouble," began Robert. "I" —

"Oh, you need not try to be too polite. Mother knows that every man is always

hungry, and the first thing to do is to feed him. And I agree with her, for I have n't lived with four brothers, to say nothing of father, all these years without finding out that she's right," laughed Hannah.

"Yes, I have four sons," said the woman quietly, as if in reply to the unspoken question of Robert. "They went with their father."

"Yes, they're in Fort Montgomery, and very likely you'll see them there; that is, if you are able to get in," said Hannah.

"Did they leave you here alone?" inquired Robert.

"No, they did n't leave me alone," retorted the girl sharply. "I have mother and the dog."

"I should think you would be afraid."

"Of what?"

"Of the Thirteen," replied Robert, recalling the anger with which they had referred to his own recent captors.

"We're not any more afraid without our men than we would be if they were at home," said the woman quietly. "Indeed, I don't know that we are so much, for there's less likelihood of trouble if the boys are not here."

Food had now been placed upon the table,

and in response to the warm invitation which was given him Robert seated himself, and at once began to do ample justice to the viands. He was hungry and the food was tempting.

When he arose the first streaks of the morning light were beginning to appear ; and then, in response to the suggestion of the mother, he made his way up to the loft or upper room in the house, and was soon soundly sleeping.

Three hours had elapsed before he was awake again, and in some confusion he descended to the room below, where he found both women busied in their household tasks. The elder woman greeted him with a smile that warmed his heart ; but Hannah, who, in the light of the morning, he now saw was certainly a most attractive girl, looked at him and laughed.

“ Well, Sir Lazy Bones, I hope you are well this fine day.”

“ Hannah ! ” said her mother reprovingly, as she perceived that Robert was confused by the unexpected salutation. “ You must not mind her,” she added. “ She has been spoiled by her father and brothers. She is the only girl in the family.”

“ I think I ’ll go out and see how my horse is,” said Robert.

"I have already fed and watered your horse," said Hannah.

"You have? I did not expect you to do that."

"I could n't bear to see the poor beast wait any longer."

"I am grateful to you for your kindness," said Robert seriously. "Is there not something that I can do to repay it?"

"Yes, sir, there is," responded Hannah promptly.

"Please tell me what it is."

"You are to take this letter and give it to my brother Joseph," and as she spoke she held forth a missive which was directed to Joseph Nott. "I don't suppose there is much good in giving it into your keeping, for probably Claud Brown will get it, and he'll read it himself. Much good may it do him, too, for I've expressed my opinion of him in my epistle in a way that he will understand."

"I'll try and see that Claud Brown does not get it this time, though he did get a letter from me yesterday, and one that I'd give much to get back, too."

Briefly Robert related the story of his encounter with the band, but he made no reference to the letter which Brown had given him

by mistake — the one which at the very moment was concealed in his bosom.

“If you see my father, you may tell him that we are all well,” added Hannah. “You’ll know him when you see him, for he is said to look very much like me. He is a little short man, and the best daddy there is on either side of the Hudson, I don’t care where you go! I’d like to send him something, for he had his tenth birthday not long ago,” she added demurely. “I always like to remember him then.”

“His tenth birthday?” inquired Robert in surprise.

“Yes, that’s what I said,” retorted Hannah sharply.

Robert’s face evidently betrayed the confusion in his mind, for even Mrs. Nott smiled, as she said quickly, “Tell him how it is, child.”

“I have told him,” retorted Hannah. “What more can I do?”

“My husband’s birthday was on the twenty-ninth of last February,” explained Mrs. Nott. “He is forty-four years old, but he has had only ten birthdays, and that is what Hannah means.”

“I see,” laughed Robert. “I thought he must be a young soldier.”

"There are other 'young' soldiers, too," remarked Hannah dryly.

"We'll do our best to get over that."

"You'll need to! Now that you know all about our family, perhaps it will not be out of place to tell us who you are."

"My name is Robert Dorlon; I'd almost forgotten to tell you," said Robert, laughing. "I'm a Jersey man" —

"You're a good ways from home," interrupted Hannah.

"Yes, and if all goes well, I'll be farther still before I go back."

"Have you ever seen General Washington?"

"Oh, yes, a number of times. I've talked with him, too. I've got a" — Robert stopped abruptly, for he had almost told what he knew was for no one but General Clinton himself.

"Did you tell him how to beat the red-coats?" inquired Hannah.

"He did not ask my advice, nor did he need it."

"What is he doing at present?"

"That I cannot say now. But when I last saw him — that was only a few days ago — he was doing his best to keep the regulars where they were, over in Jersey, and he was

succeeding, too. Cornwallis was at Brunswick, and doing all he could to get our men to come down from the hills and fight him. But General Washington was too much of a fox for that. He knew his men were no match for the regulars ; and if he can keep the redcoats where they are, or in New York, they won't be able to come up the river to help Burgoyne."

"Some of them have come," said Hannah.

"They have ? When ? Where ? What did they do ?" demanded Robert quickly.

"Oh, they came up as far as Peekskill and did some damage there."

"Yes, I know all about that, but they went back to New York again. They've been trying in all sorts of ways to fool us. First they pretend they're going to sail up the sound and attack Boston, and then they start across Jersey, or pretend to sail down the coast to Philadelphia. They have tried every way to keep Washington from going up to join the forces of General Philip Schuyler. But he has his eyes open. They have n't fooled him yet."

"I don't think they'd go very far up the Hudson."

"Why not ?"

"Well, there's Fort Putnam and Fort Independence and Fort Constitution and Fort

Clinton and Fort Montgomery, to say nothing about the chains that have been stretched across the river. I rather think the redcoats won't sail past them right away."

"Hannah," said her mother warningly, "you are talking too much."

"I know it. That's what my mother always says to me when I go to see any of the neighbors," she explained to Robert, as Mrs. Nott left the house for a moment. "'Don't tell all you know, Hannah,' is the last word I hear."

"You have n't told me any news. I know already" —

Robert stopped abruptly as Mrs. Nott re-entered the house, her manner at once betraying great excitement.

"What is it, mother?" inquired Hannah hastily.

"There are four men on horseback in the road and they're going to stop here."

"Do you know who they are?"

"I think it's Claud Brown and some of his gang."

For a moment there was consternation depicted on every face, but Hannah was the first to recover, as she hastily bade Robert follow her and at once rushed from the room.



## CHAPTER VIII

### HIDDEN

THE first impulse in the mind of Robert Dorton as he followed Hannah from the house was to run to the place in the woods where his horse had been left, and, leaping upon his back, to flee with all haste from the region. Nero must be somewhat rested now, he thought, and once safely mounted upon him he would have but little to fear from the marauding gang that was approaching.

His purpose was apparent even to Hannah, but as she saw her visitor about to dart around the corner of the house and run toward the woods, she said quickly, "Here! Don't do that."

"I must. They'll get me again!"

"You are going to leave my mother and me to face these men alone?"

Instantly Robert stopped, but as he hastened back to Hannah's side the intrepid girl said, "We shall be all right. You need have no fear for us. It's you they want."

“What shall I do?” demanded Robert.  
“They’ll be here in a minute!”

“Wait! Stay right where you are! Don’t move! I’ll be back in a minute!”

As she spoke Hannah turned and darted into the house, leaving Robert standing alone outside. For a moment he was tempted to run again, and then he decided to follow her. Of his own fate, if he should once more be taken by the men, he had no question, but he was still minded to do all in his power to protect the two women who had befriended him. Before he could act, however, Hannah rushed from the building holding in her hands a huge wing of a goose, which was used by the household to brush away the ashes that accumulated about the fireplace in the room.

Quickly drawing two of the longest feathers from the wing, she cut the ends from both with a knife and blew through each to test its emptiness, and then thrust the end of one into the larger opening of the other and so joined the two parts.

“Put this end in your mouth,” she demanded, holding them forth to Robert; and as soon as he had received them she seized a rude shovel that was leaning against the side of the house and began almost frantically to

dig in the great pile of wood ashes that was standing near.

Still Robert was mystified by the actions of the girl, and said, "What are you doing? I can't stay here like this!"

Apparently disregarding his question, Hannah continued to work desperately until she had made a great opening in the ashes. Then turning to Robert she said sharply, "Now shut your eyes and your mouth! Keep that goose-quill between your teeth and do just what I tell you to do!"

"What's that?"

"Get in there!" she exclaimed. "Do as I tell you! Don't stand there like a hitching-post. Get in! Get in!" she added, her voice almost breaking in her excitement. "I'm going to cover you up, eyes, ears, nose, and everything! Do what I tell you! Did you ever see such a man!" she added angrily, as Robert hesitated for a moment. "Be quick, or I'll drop the shovel and leave you! Claud Brown may not ask you to hide in an ash-heap! He'll put you where you won't need any goose-quills! Are you going to do as I say?"

The excitement of the girl, the near approach of danger, the certainty that he would be taken again, all combined to make Robert

Dorlon aware of his own desperate plight, and instantly he threw himself into the opening in the heap which Hannah had made with her shovel. Well-nigh frantic with fear, the girl quickly began to shovel the ashes back over his prostrate body. At any moment now the men might break into the house, and if she was detected in her present occupation her own peril, as well as that of Robert, would be vastly increased. Still she was sufficiently collected to try to make as slight a cloud as possible as she plied her shovel, and Robert was soon hidden from sight. He had followed her directions implicitly, and tightly closed his eyes and mouth, still retaining the precious goose-quill between his teeth.

At last her task was accomplished, and nothing could be seen of the young soldier or his belongings, save the tip of the goose-quill, which only slightly protruded above the surface. Satisfied that her work was done, Hannah turned back into the house just as Claud Brown and one of his companions entered by the other door. He was known to both women, who looked quietly at him as he entered, though the heart of each was trembling with a fear that was born of experience in dealing with the treacherous cowboy.

“Where’s that young rascal?” demanded Claudius Brown brutally.

“We have n’t any young rascal here,” replied Mrs. Nott tartly.

“You know what I mean.”

Neither woman responded, and after a brief silence Brown laughed brutally as he said, “Oh, we know what we’re talking about. He’s here, and the sooner you give him up the better it will be for all concerned.”

“Do you mean my brother or my father?” said Hannah quietly. “If you do, you know as well as I do where they are. If you will go on to Fort Montgomery, I think you’ll find them, and they’ll be glad to see you, too.”

“Where have you hidden him?”

“Who?”

“That rascally young ‘express.’”

“You’ll have to explain yourself,” said Hannah, her heart bounding as she heard the word “express.” Then her visitor was all that he had claimed to be, and whatever misgivings she might have had in striving to shield a stranger were now satisfied by the demands of Brown. She longed to glance behind her at the ash-heap to make sure that Robert had done nothing to betray his hiding-place, but

she was cautious and did not once turn her eyes away from the brutal man before her.

"Come!" said Brown brusquely. "Are you going to give him up to us?"

"I certainly should not give any one up to you if I had any one here that you wanted," said Mrs. Nott. "You know that without my telling you. I think my husband and boys will be deeply interested in the report which I shall give them of your visit to two defenseless women."

"I know all about your 'defenseless women,'" laughed Brown. "I never come here without seeing you an' the girl standing close to your guns. Not that you can scare us any, but it makes me laugh to hear you talk of being defenseless. I rather guess you can do a little toward takin' care o' yourselves."

"We can try," replied Mrs. Nott quietly. Both she and Hannah were standing near two rifles that were leaning against the walls of the room. And Claudius Brown was aware that he had spoken truly when he had declared that they would attempt, at least, to protect themselves.

"If you think there is some one here, why don't you make a search and satisfy yourself?" suggested Hannah tartly. "If you are not

willing to take our word for it when we tell you there is n't a man in the house, why, you'll have to look for yourselves, that's all." She was thinking of Robert as she spoke, and what he must be undergoing at that time. That the traitors would search the place before they departed she was convinced, and if they began it at once then it would the more quickly be ended.

"You did n't say there was n't any one here. Has any one been here?" he demanded sharply.

"Yes, sir. A young man did come here last night."

"Ah! there did? Yes, yes. What became of him?"

"He went back into the road again." It was the truth, though only a half truth, but Hannah did not feel called upon to explain that Robert had returned to the house after he had gone back to the road to secure his horse.

"What time did he come?"

"I don't know."

"About what time?"

"It was before it was light, was n't it, mother?" said Hannah, turning and speaking to Mrs. Nott.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Nott.

"In which direction did he go?"

"He went across the lot to the road."

"In which direction did he go then?"

"I cannot say."

"You will not say, you mean," said Brown sharply.

Neither woman replied, and Brown retired from the room with his companion. Could it be possible that the men were about to leave? The question was in Hannah's eyes as she glanced at her mother, who shook her head and motioned for her daughter to remain where she then was. Behind her, through the rear door, Hannah could see the heap of ashes, and to all appearances it was as she had left it. She was aware, however, how desperate Robert's plight was, and she was eager to learn the decision of the visitors, but still she remained standing beside her mother, striving to be calm and not to increase the suspicions of her visitors.

In a brief time Brown and all his comrades reëntered the house, and the leader said abruptly, "My men don't believe you. We're going to search the place."

"As you wish," replied Mrs. Nott. "We cannot prevent you, though I assure you we can report you."



“ We ’ll soon have that husband of yours and his boys where all the reportin’ you want to do won’t count for much. Ye might send down now to the sugar-houses in New York an’ ask some o’ your friends to come up and help.”

Without waiting for a reply Brown directed two of his men to go up into the loft and one to go down into the cellar, while he himself at once began to search the rooms on the first floor of the house. Boards were torn up from the floor, closets were opened, barrels broken, and every conceivable hiding-place was inspected, but not a trace of the man for whom they were searching could be found.

“ I hope you are satisfied now,” said Hannah tartly, when the men all assembled in the room where she was standing.

“ Satisfied he ’s not in the house,” replied Brown grimly. “ But, my lady, there ’s other places that need lookin’ into, too. Go down t’ the barn,” he said sharply to two of his men. “ Jim and I ’ll take a look at the chicken-coop and the smoke-house.”

“ Don’t you want me to show you the way ? ” demanded Hannah.

Brown did not reply as he and his men de-

parted from the house to do his bidding. Far more fearful now, Hannah stepped to the door to watch their movements. All four men passed close to the ash-heap, but apparently it did not occur to any of them that such a place might be the very one where the man they were seeking was concealed. Two of them passed on to the barn, while Brown and his man at once began to inspect the places nearer the house. A new fear had seized upon Hannah now, and she was listening to discover if Robert's horse, which had been taken into the woods, would hear the men, and mistaking them for his master, expose his hiding-place by a whinny. In such an event the peril of all would be greatly increased; but in a brief time the men returned from the barn and joined their comrades who were standing near the ash-heap. A conversation, so low that Hannah could not hear what was said, followed, and in an agony of fear she watched every movement, not even glancing at her mother. It seemed to her that the men must suspect something, or they would not remain standing so long near the very place where the peril was greatest.

"Careful, Hannah," whispered her mother, as the girl peered out from the door. "You

will make them suspicious. Better come in and wait patiently."

"I can't wait patiently! Oh! Why don't they come! I— There they come!" she added hastily, as she stepped quickly back into the room.

"We can't find him," said the leader, as he stopped for a moment in front of the kitchen door. "Apparently you told the truth."

"Apparently we did," retorted Hannah, her eyes snapping, as it was evident the search was about to be abandoned.

Brown said no more, but at once turned and with his followers remounted and rode swiftly out to the road, not once glancing back at the house.

"There! Thank goodness! We've seen the last of them!" exclaimed Hannah, as the men disappeared from sight. "Now I'll dig the poor fellow out of his grave."

"Had n't you better wait" — began Mrs. Nott; but evidently Hannah had no thought of waiting longer, for she ran to the ash-heap, and with her hands began to dig away the ashes around the place where the tip of the goose-quill could be seen. In a brief time Robert's face appeared and Hannah said gleefully, —

“Why don't you get up? Do you like your bed so much you think you'll stay there forever? There! Don't you try to open your eyes or your mouth! Are you all right? I wish your mother could see you now. I don't believe even Claud Brown would want you. Just wait here. Don't move. I'll be back in a minute. Stand up! That's right,” she added, as Robert arose. “But don't move. Wait for me.”

Darting into the house, the eager girl soon returned with broom and water, and with many exclamations of her pretended dismay at his appearance she carefully washed his face until he could once more open his eyes, and then began to brush him savagely with the broom, which she dexterously wielded. Even Robert was laughing by this time, but the laughter and the task were both sharply interrupted by the appearance of Mrs. Nott with a word that was as startling as it was unexpected.

## CHAPTER IX

### A RENEWED SEARCH

“THEY'RE coming back! They're right here!” exclaimed Mrs. Nott excitedly.

“Where? Who?” demanded Hannah.

“Claud and his men.”

Robert instantly entered the room and ran to the window, and peering out could see three men who were swiftly approaching. There was no question as to who they were, for Claud Brown himself was in the van, and his actions betrayed the eagerness with which he was leading his followers. Whether or not he himself had been seen and his presence in the house was known Robert could not perceive, but the approach of the cowboys was sufficient of itself to inform him of the fresh peril that now threatened. A glance had been enough to convince him that Mrs. Nott had spoken truly, but as he turned hastily away from the window his consternation was increased when Hannah suddenly exclaimed, —

“There are some coming up on the other side, too.”

Darting to the door in the rear of the house, Robert could see that two men were indeed approaching from the woods on that side, and instantly he understood what it all meant. Not satisfied with the result of their search, and convinced, in spite of their apparent failure, that the man for whom they had been searching was still hidden somewhere about the premises, the cowboys had in reality only pretended to depart from the place. As soon as they had gone sufficiently far to conceal their movements from the sight of the people in the house, they evidently had divided their force into two parties, and by their sudden and unexpected return were hoping to discover their man at a time when, confident in their success, the inmates would be less guarded and consequently would be more easily forced to disclose the hiding-place.

"They'll see me if I go out of the house," exclaimed Robert, aghast at the sight.

"Yes, yes. You can't hide in the ash-heap again," replied Hannah, as excited as he.

"What shall I do? Where shall I go? Give me that gun," demanded Robert, hastening toward one of the rifles which were in the room.

"No, no. Not that!" said Mrs. Nott

hastily. "There would be no use in that now."

"What shall I do, then? I'll not stand here and let them tie me up like a winded sheep." The young man's eyes flashed as he spoke, and yet he knew how utterly useless any attempt to defend himself would be. He glanced again at the approaching men, and could see that they would be in the house in a very brief time.

"You must hide!" exclaimed Mrs. Nott.

"Where? Where? They'll search every cranny in the house, and if I try to go out they'll see me." Robert groaned in his excitement, and the vision of the sugar-house in New York, with all its helpless, suffering inmates, was before him. Again his eyes flashed, and he made as if he would seize the rifle, come what might.

"In the cellar! In the garret! Somewhere! Be quick! Be quick, or it'll be too late!" said Mrs. Nott.

"Here! Come with me!" said Hannah, who had not spoken for a brief time. "Come with me! I'll hide you!"

Instantly Robert followed the intrepid girl as she ran swiftly up the steps of the rude stairway to the room above. There was no

plan in his own mind, only his blind confidence that Hannah, who had succeeded so completely in her former scheme, would now be better able to find a hiding-place for him than he could himself. His plight was desperate, and already he fancied that he could hear the voices of the men in the yard.

Without faltering a moment Hannah ran swiftly to a side of the room, and instantly turning a button, opened a door that seemed to be a part of the wall.

"Here! In here!" she exclaimed in a low voice. As Robert faltered a moment, she said more eagerly, "What *are* you waiting for? Go in! Go in! Get close up to the wall! Pull the clothes over you! Don't you dare to breathe!"

Almost thrusting him in, she placed him in the farther corner of what Robert could see was evidently a clothes-press. On pegs on the wall various garments were hanging, and behind these he took his stand, while Hannah, working in desperate haste, arranged the garments so that they completely concealed his presence. The task had barely been completed when the sound of voices in the room below was heard, and Robert knew that the crisis had come.



Hannah quickly departed from the closet, closed the door and turned the button, and was on the stairway when the voice of Claudius Brown broke in upon the stillness, as the cowboy harshly said, —

“We’ve come back for the rebel. We know he is here, Mistress Nott, and it will be better for every one if you give him up peaceably.”

“You back here?” demanded Hannah boldly, as she stopped for a moment on the stairway. “I thought we were rid of you for good and all.”

“‘A bad penny always returns,’” laughed the leader. “What were you doing upstairs? Have you hidden him again?”

“I thought you found once that he was n’t here,” she replied quietly.

“We’ve come back to try it again.”

“Well, try it, then!” she exclaimed, her eyes flashing as she spoke.

“That’s just what we’re going to do.” Turning quickly, he ordered one man to take a position in the yard in front of the house and another to take a similar position in the rear. As soon as his orders had been obeyed he bade two go down into the cellar. “Stick your knives into everything there,” he said

sharply. "Don't let any place escape you. The rascal is here somewhere, I know he is, and we mustn't let him get away with that let" — Brown stopped abruptly, as his men instantly began to do his bidding.

Not a word was spoken by Hannah or her mother while the search was being made, though the excitement was intense. Hannah's confidence in the success of her present scheme was not so strong as when she had hidden Robert in the ashes, and the confidence and determination of the leader of the cowboys were both more alarming now. She glanced at the brutal face of the man, and her fears for her guest increased. If Robert should be discovered she was fearful of what might befall him, for there was something in the very bearing of the young soldier that convinced her that he could not be taken without a struggle. In such an event there could be but one outcome, and she trembled, even in her excitement, as she pictured to herself what that would be. The anger of Claudius Brown and his comrades already was keen, and if it should be increased by anything which Robert Dorlon was only too likely to do in the event of his discovery, she trembled as she thought of the fate of Washington's

express. Still she was doing her utmost to appear unconcerned, and her scornful smile as she silently watched the man in the room was intended to be doubly irritating.

The leader, however, apparently was giving but slight heed to either of the women, for he was listening intently for some sound to come from the cellar to indicate the discovery which he was so eager to make. Occasionally he stepped to each door and glanced out, to convince himself that his orders were being obeyed by the men whom he had placed on guard there, but every time he returned to his place in the room and stood impatiently waiting for a report from the men who had gone down into the cellar.

At last the heavy tread of the returning men was heard and the leader ran quickly to the cellar-way. "Did you find anything?" he demanded gruffly.

"Not a thing, Claud."

"Stay here, and I'll go down myself," retorted the leader, instantly starting down the stairway. In a brief time he too returned, and though he evidently was satisfied that the man was not concealed in the cellar, his anger was every moment becoming greater.

"Shall we toast the toes of the women?"

he demanded of his men, as he came up into the room. "The rascal is here somewhere, there is n't any question about that, and the women know where he is, too!"

At his words Hannah and her mother quickly seized the guns that were leaning against the wall of the room, and though their faces were deadly pale, there was an expression on each that betrayed a determination that apparently was not without its effect on the visitors.

"Not yet, Claud," said one of the men. "We haven't gone through the house yet. The girl was coming down the stairs when we came in. It may be she has put the young rascal somewhere up there. Let's take a look upstairs before we do anything more."

"All right. You stay here, Jim," replied the leader, "and I'll go up and help a bit there. Come on," he added, turning to the others as he spoke.

The men passed quickly up the stairs and were heard moving about in the room above. With her gun still in her hands, Hannah suddenly darted up the stairway, and standing near the top, watched the men as they proceeded with their search. Chairs were overturned and the few articles in the room were

wantonly smashed as the angry men moved about. The bed was ripped open and the geese feathers sent fluttering about the room. Too fearful to utter the indignant protest that rose to her lips, Hannah watched the wanton destruction in speechless rage. A bright red spot appeared in each of her pale cheeks, and her lips were tightly pressed together, but she had not advanced from her position at the head of the stairway, for she was aware that at any moment it might be necessary for her to turn and flee.

"Hello! Here's the girl watching us," said one of the men, aware for the first time of Hannah's presence. "Come up to show us where he is?" he added with a brutal laugh.

"We're hot on the trail now," said Claudius Brown. "She's getting anxious or she would n't come up to see what we're doing."

Bitterly Hannah regretted that she had given way to the impulse to come up the stairs, but to return now would only confirm the men in their conviction, and besides she was almost fascinated by the fear that possessed her. If Robert should be discovered, she wanted to cry out, to warn him against attempting a resistance worse than useless.

"Here's something worth looking into," exclaimed one of the men.

He had perceived the button on the panel, and at once turned it and opened the door. With a shout his companions turned and joined him, while one of them entered the press.

Hannah's heart was beating furiously, and it required all her strength of will to keep back the tears that threatened to pour from her eyes. Robert was certain to be found now, she was convinced, and all her attempts to hide him had been vain. She watched the men, expecting every moment to hear the shout, or the sound of a struggle that would announce the end of the search. Her mother was speaking in the room below, but her voice sounded faint and far away. The sunbeams that danced in the air where a shaft of light came in through a small hole in the roof almost seemed to be mocking her. As the men stood peering into the closet she was tempted to rush upon them and push them inside and close and button the door upon them, but she was aware how foolish such a move would be and wisely restrained the impulse.

"Here's something for you, Claud," called one of the men, as he tossed out a gown which

was almost the sole piece of finery of which Hannah boasted. The sight was more than she could bear, and instantly rushing upon the men she snatched away the garment, and with flashing eyes faced them and said, —

“ You may search the house all you please for the man you profess to believe is hidden here, but you are to leave my things alone. I don't believe you ever thought there was a man here. You just made that an excuse to come here and steal everything you could lay your hands on ! Go on with your search, but you leave my gown alone ! ”

For a moment the men were so startled by the unexpected outburst that they were speechless, but recovering in a moment, when the angry girl ceased, one of them laughed as he said, “ There, Claud, you've stirred up a hornet's nest. Never try to rob a woman of her finery. She's worse than a bear robbed of her cubs. You don't want the gown anyway, do you ? ”

“ No. I want the man,” he replied.

“ Well, look for your man, then, and much good may it do you,” said Hannah ; “ but don't you touch my gowns.”

“ Hear the vixen ! ” laughed one of the men, as he turned to resume the search. Whether

or not it was the presence of Hannah and her own daring in protecting her precious possessions, or whether it was because of their belief that there was nothing in the closet except a few garments hanging on the walls, that caused the men to make only a hasty and superficial search, she never knew. At all events, they only thrust their hands behind a part of the clothing and then carefully searched the floor for a possible trap door. The trembling young soldier pressed tightly against the wall in the farther corner of the closet, and concealed from sight by the garments behind which he had taken his stand, was not discovered, and when a few minutes had elapsed Claudius Brown called to his followers and returned to the room below. But the expression on his face was by no means reassuring, and the fears in Hannah Nott's heart when she, too, came into the lower room had not departed.



## CHAPTER X

### THE CONTEST

A shrill whistle on the part of Claudius Brown speedily assembled his men about him in the room, and for a moment there was a half-formed determination in Hannah's mind to call to her mother to follow her in a precipitate flight from the house. The faces of the men, their evident anger at their failure to discover the man for whom they had been searching, as well as the reputation for cruelty and brutality which the band had already gained in the region, were all sufficient of themselves to alarm the two women. A second thought, however, quickly convinced the intrepid girl that to flee would reveal their weakness, and they would be no more likely to escape the ruffians than if they should remain in the house. Their very boldness thus far had protected them, and their best plan, she hastily decided, was to continue the effort to appear indifferent to the presence of the marauders, whatever their true feelings might be.

Accordingly, Hannah took her place beside

her mother, who was standing near the two rifles, and quietly watched the men as they assembled about their leader.

"The fellow is here. I know he is," said Claudius Brown savagely.

"Why don't you get him then, Claud?" demanded one of his followers.

"Why don't I? Because I've got a lot of men who can't see a barn door right before their eyes!"

"Just tell us where to look, Claud, and we'll string him up for you before he can get time to wink."

"The women know where he is," said the leader, as he glanced wickedly at Mrs. Nott and Hannah.

"Well, if they know they can be made to tell," replied the man.

"So they can, Jim," said another. "What's the use in wasting our time here when we could make them tell in three minutes?"

The face of Mrs. Nott became deadly pale as she turned for an instant to glance at her daughter, and almost instinctively both moved a little nearer to the guns.

"It won't be the first time, Claud," said the man who had first spoken. For a moment the leader hesitated, while his followers made

as if they would advance and seize the two terrified women.

“Not yet. I’ll tell you why,” replied Claudius Brown after a momentary hesitation. His followers drew closely about him, and a whispered conversation followed which neither Hannah nor her mother was able to hear. The result of the conference became apparent when all the men except the leader at once turned and departed from the house, leaving Claudius Brown behind. What the abrupt departure might mean Hannah could not conjecture, but it soon became evident that the men were gone, for she had stepped to the door and had seen them as they swiftly sped down the road.

Somewhat emboldened by their departure, she turned back into the room, and with her eyes flashing, she said, “Why don’t you go, too, Claudius Brown? Your room was always better than your company.”

“Never you mind, my lady,” retorted the leader. “You’ll know more before you are twenty-four hours older. You may be glad that I’m here.”

“Well, if we’re to have the pleasure of your company, all I can say is that you’ll have to entertain yourself. I’ve got my

morning work to do, and I don't intend to let any cowboy or Tory" —

"Hannah!" interrupted her mother warningly.

"I don't care, mother!" retorted Hannah sharply. "I'll take that rifle with me and go on about my work, and you'd better do the same."

"Not yet, my lady!" laughed Claudius Brown brutally. "I'll have a bit to say about that myself."

"Say it, then!" said Hannah sharply.

"You'll hear it all in good time! Never you fear about that!"

"What is it you want? What are you staying here for?"

"I want that sock."

"What sock?"

"The one you have somewhere hereabouts. If you'll give it up quietly, there won't be any trouble; but if you don't" —

"You'll have to look for it yourself," interrupted Hannah angrily. "You must think we're rich! If there's a sock here filled with money, it must be that the man you've been looking for took it away. I have n't seen any money around here since the redcoats took New York; but if you really think there is

some, I'll help you look for it. I would n't mind finding a little myself."

"That's all very well for talk. The man has got away from us, but the money does n't run. Now, if you'll give up that sock, I'll give you my word of honor" —

"Your word of honor!" exclaimed Hannah scornfully.

"Yes, my word of honor that you won't be troubled any more."

"Oh, we're not troubled. It's a pleasure to have you here. Won't you take a chair, Mr. Brown? My father and the boys may come home any time now, and I know they'll be delighted to find you here."

"I know where your father is, and I know where he will be, too, before he's many days older," said Claudius Brown savagely. He was a man in middle life, with huge shoulders and every evidence of great physical strength, though his form was short and ugly. The scars of smallpox were thick on his coarse features, and as he spoke it seemed to Hannah that she had never before looked upon a man so utterly repulsive as he. The expression of rage on his face was so disgusting and threatening that for a moment she heeded the unspoken appeal of her mother, and resolved

not to rouse the vindictive spirit of the man any further.

"You seem to know all about us," she said more quietly. "If you are sure there is a sock full of gold here, and you know where it is, then there is n't any need of my staying here any longer."

Stepping past the man, she took her gun in her hands and at once went to the kitchen. Outside the kitchen door was a box or kennel in which the huge dog that had greeted Robert the preceding night was confined. The entrance of the kennel had been barred by Hannah early in the morning, for she was fearful of the dog's attentions to Robert, and for the safety of both she had shut the animal within his house. Why it was that he had been silent or not discovered during the visit of the members of the band she could not understand, but it would be safer to release him now, and accordingly she unfastened the strap and, bidding the dog follow her into the kitchen, began to prepare his breakfast.

She was sharply interrupted by the sudden growling of the beast as well as by the sounds that came from the room where she had left her mother. A struggle of some kind was going on there, and instantly seizing her gun

Hannah opened the door and the dog with a fierce growl darted before her. On the floor she saw two men who were engaged in a desperate conflict, and one glance was sufficient to show her that the contestants were Robert and the leader of the Thirteen. Over and over upon the floor they were twisting and turning, but before she could speak the dog flew at them. Growling, snarling, he seized one of the men by the leg, and instantly the man relaxed his hold upon the other and shouted for help.

"Let him get up, Robert," said Hannah quickly. "I've my gun. He can't get away. Stop it, Lion! Get away! Get away!" she added sharply, as she seized the dog and tore him away from his hold. The dog, still growling and with every hair on his back on end, slunk into a corner of the room, where he lay watching the men and evidently eager to spring at them again.

"Let go of him, Robert," she said again.

"Make him stay where he is, then," said Robert breathlessly, glancing up at the girl as he spoke, but making no movement to comply. Claudius Brown was no longer struggling, for the words and actions of Hannah were not to be disregarded.

"He'll stay right where he is, Robert,"

said Hannah. "Do you get up and we'll see what's to be done. What was he doing? How did you happen to be here?"

"He was going to strike your mother," explained Robert, rising as he spoke. "I was listening and watching from the head of the stairs and I thought 't was time for me to take a hand. What shall we do with him?" he added, looking down at the man who was still lying upon the floor.

"Take his pistol away, first of all," suggested Hannah, and Robert stooped and drew the huge pistol which projected above the belt of the prostrate leader.

"Now, Claudius Brown, what were you doing?" she demanded.

The leader glanced malignantly at her, but did not reply.

"You ought to take him with you to Fort Montgomery," said Hannah. "Are you hurt any, mother?" she added quickly, turning to Mrs. Nott as she spoke.

"Not hurt, only frightened, Hannah," said the woman. "He was going to make me tell where the sock was hidden and he tried to get the gun."

"He won't try any more now, anyway. What shall be done with him, Robert?"





"LET HIM GET UP, ROBERT."



The girl was still holding her rifle in her hands, and the man on the floor still made no attempt to rise, evidently having a wholesome fear of what might befall him.

"Let me search him first," said Robert quickly. "I may find my letter."

A thorough search, however, failed to reveal the missing letter which had been taken from Robert in the preceding evening, and a smile of malignity passed over the leader's face when the young express said, "It is n't on him. When do you expect your father, Hannah?"

"Any time."

"Would n't it be a good plan to tie this fellow up somewhere, and let your father deal with him when he comes?"

"No, no," said Mrs. Nott hastily. "We don't want him here. Let him up and let him go."

For a moment Robert hesitated and glanced inquiringly at the girl by his side.

"I think mother is right. Let him go. But if he ever dares to come back here, he'll know what to expect. You must tell my father and the boys all about it, Robert, just as soon as you get into the fort."

"I'll do that," replied Robert quickly.

“Get up, then!” said Hannah to the prostrate man. “Take yourself away and tell your friends that the next time they come here there’ll be some men to give them a welcome.”

Claudius Brown waited for no second invitation. Leaping to his feet he darted through the open door, and began to run toward the road in the direction in which his recent companions had disappeared. He limped somewhat as he ran, and it was evident that the attentions which the dog had bestowed upon him had not been without effect; but the man did not once glance behind him, and soon could no longer be seen.

“Now you take your horse and go, too, Robert!” said Hannah sharply.

“I don’t like to leave you here alone,” began Robert. “I” —

“Never mind what you like or what you don’t like! We’re not alone, and we’re not afraid, either!”

“I know,” began Robert hesitatingly, for his own duty was indeed apparent, but he disliked to leave the women unprotected.

“Did the cowboys come because we were here, or you were here?” demanded Hannah sharply.

"I suppose it was because I was here," admitted Robert.

"Well, then, if you go, there won't be anybody here that will trouble us, will there? Besides, I want you to tell father and the boys that some of them must come home to help us," she added illogically.

"If it was n't for this letter" —

"You've got the letter, and General Clinton will need it, too."

"Yes, that's so."

"The sooner you get it to him the sooner he'll know, and the sooner my father and the boys will know about us, too. I'll get you something to eat," she added quickly, "but you must n't stay to eat it here. Eat it on your way. Come, and I'll go with you to look for your horse."

Robert turned for a moment to thank Mrs. Nott for what had been done for him and to express the hope, which was not strong in his own heart, that the home would not be molested again, and then quickly followed Hannah as she led the way to the place where his horse had been concealed. The huge dog was growling and plainly objecting to his presence, but a word from Hannah quieted the savage brute which was left to

guard her mother, and then the two young people hastened into the woods.

In a brief time they arrived at the place where Nero had been left, and Robert quickly perceived that his faithful horse was rested and apparently ready for the hard ride that awaited him. At once he was made ready for the departure, and as Robert leaped upon his back he turned to Hannah and said, —

“I’ll be back soon. Then I’ll thank you for what you’ve done for me.”

“You look like a heap of ashes,” laughed Hannah, apparently ignoring his words.

“It was pretty nearly dust to dust and ashes to ashes, was n’t it?”

“Good-by,” said Hannah abruptly.

“Good-by,” responded Robert; and then, speaking low to his horse, he began to ride swiftly across the lots toward the lower road.

## CHAPTER XI

### FORT MONTGOMERY

WHEN Robert Dorlon found himself in the lower road and with his face turned toward the north, he became exceedingly watchful, for the persistence of the band which had followed him to the house of Hannah Nott had convinced him that the men were determined to take him if such a thing was possible. The letter, which he still had in his possession, must be of great value he was convinced, and that fact also served to increase the caution with which he advanced.

Not a man could be seen, however; and, eager to place the letter in the hands of General Clinton, as well as to secure his own safety, he rode rapidly, for Nero now was apparently rested and as ready for the swift flight as was his young rider. The day was warm, and the sun, already past the meridian, was not hidden by any clouds. Occasionally the road came out into open places, and then again led through the depths of the sombre woods, where the songs of the birds and the

sight of the chattering squirrels afforded some variety in the monotony of the swift and steady ride which Robert was taking.

As soon as he had proceeded a few miles beyond the region where he believed his greatest peril was to be met, he regained a measure of composure and his thoughts reverted to the stirring experiences through which he had passed that morning. He had not succeeded in entirely freeing his garments from the ashes in which he had been concealed, but the fact of his escape was so much more important than the discomfort, that he felt like shouting and singing in his enthusiasm. He laughed as he recalled the lowering countenance of Claudius Brown when the cowboy had fled from the house, but a silence followed when he thought of the peril of the two women who had been left in the lonely farmhouse. It was wrong, he said decidedly to himself, that they should be thus left unprotected. The sturdy boldness of Hannah and the more quiet strength of her mother were not unlike that which was displayed by many of the patriotic women of the period who had urged their husbands and brothers to go into the struggle for the freedom of the colonies, but none the less it was more than ought to



be demanded, that they should be left with no one to protect them from the marauding bands of Tories or cowboys. Already the deeds of these outlaws were becoming so frequent that some concerted action was necessary against them, but the greater peril which now threatened the struggling colonies from the advance of John Burgoyne and the possible and expected movements of the redcoats up the lordly Hudson to join their comrades from the north, was of a nature to demand all the attention and energies of the little army of the patriots.

Robert was familiar with the action of the Congress early in the war, when it had been decided to fortify some of the places in the highlands and narrows of the Hudson, and was aware of the part which General Washington had taken in the oversight of the task. He himself had been within most of these little forts, and well knew the direction which he must follow in order to gain an entrance into Fort Montgomery, where he was hoping to find General George Clinton. The fort itself stood on a sharp precipice about a hundred feet above the waters of the river, and to the young soldier, on the occasion of his first visit, it had seemed to be

too strong ever to be taken. His confidence, however, had been somewhat lessened by his increased experience, and now he was also well aware of the fears of the leaders that the militia with which the little forts in the region were manned might not be able to offer a very sturdy or prolonged resistance to a determined onslaught by the redcoats. He knew also of the current belief that, after the experience of the British at Bunker Hill, they would not attempt, even by the bayonet, as they had done there, to dislodge the Americans if they were intrenched in the heights above them; but the reverses of the preceding year, when the farmers and farmers' boys had fled from before the well-disciplined redcoats in the fight on Long Island, in New York, in Harlem, the bloody defeat at Fort Washington and the wild flight from Fort Lee, had not been forgotten. It was true that the skill and energy of Washington had turned apparent defeat into victory at Trenton and Princeton; but even the enthusiasm aroused by these events had in a measure been forgotten in the face of the perils that were threatening in the summer of 1777.

Across the Hudson, in its narrow channels near the fort he was seeking, he was aware that

heavy chains and cables had been stretched, in the hope that a possible advance of the British fleet might be checked by them; but Robert also knew that the same measures had been employed before nearer New York, and that the British had really paid no more attention to them than if they had been made of paper. As a check to their progress, they had been complete failures.

It was currently reported that the real hope in Washington's mind of being able to prevent the British from going up the Hudson and joining the forces of Burgoyne lay mostly in his attempt to make the redcoats believe that he would fall upon New York if they should withdraw their soldiers. But the British generals were expecting large reinforcements to arrive soon, and in that event they would have a sufficient force under them to leave a part to guard the city and still have a large army to go up the Hudson to Albany or beyond. The need of quick action on the part of the troubled Americans was therefore imperative, and under the influence of the thought Robert Dorlon almost unconsciously increased the speed of the horse he was riding.

And yet in the midst of the anxiety of the young express there came again and again the

thought of the young girl and her mother whom he had so recently left in their lonely farmhouse. The courage of the girl, her gray eyes that at times seemed almost to snap fire, her intrepid and apparently fearless manner, and at the same time her gentleness and the tenderness with which she had cared for him, were uppermost in his mind. It was strange, he reflected, that he should be thinking so much more of what Hannah had done than of the part her mother had taken. Both were in peril, and as soon as he had delivered his letter into the hands of General Clinton and received his instructions from him, he would at once seek out Mr. Nott and his sons and inform them of the danger that threatened their home. If it should be impossible for the men to return, then at least they could make arrangements for the removal of the two women to some place where they would be safe from harm.

His meditations were interrupted as he glanced up and recognized that he was once more near Dirck's home. His first inclination was to stop and see the man, and perhaps follow out his original purpose of being ferried across the river, then proceed on that side until he should have gained a place opposite

Fort Montgomery, and then be once more brought over the river. This plan had repeatedly been followed because of its supposed greater safety, for the prowling bands of red-coats and cowboys were more plentiful in the region between the forts and the city. A brief reflection, however, caused Robert to decide to abandon that project and to keep on in the way he was then going, not even stopping to see Dirck. On his return a brief stop might be made, and then he could both report his own success and learn from Dirck how it had fared with him.

Accordingly Robert kept steadily on his way, though he glanced keenly about him as he passed Dirck's humble home; but he was not able to discover any one about the place. As he proceeded, his fears of interception became less, for the prowling bands of cowboys or straggling outposts of the Tories or red-coats were not to be found so near the forts of the Americans.

It was near nightfall when at last Robert arrived at the place where he was to leave his horse and proceed on foot. He then hastily followed the path that led up to Fort Montgomery, and as soon as he had been admitted, sought out the quarters of General Clinton.

To his delight he found that the general was within and alone, and in response to the word which he gave the guard he was speedily admitted, and at once made known his errand.

General Clinton listened quietly to his story of his seizure and the loss of the letter which had been intrusted to him, but the scowl which rested upon his face quickly departed when Robert held forth the letter which he himself had secured, and he said as he eagerly took it: "There will be nothing for you to do to-night. Report to me early in the morning, and doubtless then I shall be able to give you instructions as to what you are next to do."

Robert bowed and retired, relieved that his failure to bring the letter of the commander had been received with such apparent unconcern, though he was well assured that the substitute letter had been no slight aid to him; and then he decided at once to seek out Mr. Nott or his sons and repeat to them what had recently occurred at their home.

Near him he perceived a young soldier, apparently about his own age, and advancing toward him Robert said eagerly, "Can you tell me where I can find Mr. Nott?"

"Which Mr. Nott?" replied the young man sharply. "There are several here."

"I don't know which one, but he is the father of Hannah Nott."

"What do you know about Hannah?" demanded the man tartly.

As Robert gazed at him he could see that his face appeared to be strangely familiar. He must have seen or met him somewhere, he was convinced; but though he endeavored to recall some former meeting, he was unable to decide when or where it had occurred. He was somewhat chagrined, too, that he had mentioned Hannah's name, but it had escaped his lips almost before he was aware of it, in his eagerness to describe the man for whom he was searching. "I don't know that I am called upon to explain that," he replied, somewhat warmly. "And if you can direct me to this Mr. Nott I shall be under obligations to you."

"Who are you?"

"I'm not called upon to explain that either. I want to find Mr. Nott, but if you don't want to tell me I can find some one who will."

"My name is Nott," said the young soldier.

"It is? Are you one of his boys?"

"You are a brilliant man," laughed the other. "If my name is Nott, what did you suppose my father's name would be?"

His good humor was contagious, and Robert also laughed as he said, "I did n't know whether or not you were the son of the Mr. Nott I want to find."

"If I'm not the Nott you want, then you'll not want this Nott. But if I am the Nott you want, then you'll not have to look for any other Nott, at least not right away. Is not that so?"

"I think it is," replied Robert. "But how do I know you're the right Nott? You may not be the Nott after all, and then I'll wish I'd not spoken to this Nott."

"I'm Hannah Nott's twin brother anyway. My name's Joseph Nott."

"You are!" exclaimed Robert. Yes, he could understand it now, and his resemblance to his sister was certainly striking. Doubtless it was this very fact that had led him to believe that he must have seen the young man somewhere when he had first met him. "Then I'll tell you what I have to say," he hastily added; and he related the story of the visit of Claudius Brown and his gang, and what occurred in the home where Hannah and her mother had been left.

Joseph Nott listened attentively, and as soon as Robert's story had been told he said,



“ You stay here. I ’ll go and tell my father. I ’ll be back in a few minutes.”

The young man darted away, leaving Robert where he then was, and quickly disappeared from sight. Left to himself, Robert began to look about him at the men and the defenses of the little fort. The men he could see for the most part were evidently farmers and farmers’ boys, members doubtless of the militia from which the defenders of the forts on the Hudson had been drawn by the order of Congress. They were a sturdy lot, but how much they would be able to do if they should be attacked by a force of the redcoats he was unable to decide. Of experience they had had but little, and it was already apparent that the discipline in the army of King George was an element of no small consequence in the struggle that was then going on. The defenses of the fort, too, were not impressive, and Robert’s fears were not allayed by what he saw when he thought of the probable advance of the British army under Howe or Clinton.

The dusk was deepening now and he began to realize that he was exceedingly weary. The long ride had been supplemented by such adventures as never before he had met with, and

now that he found himself in a place of comparative security, and a part of his journey accomplished, the natural reaction had come. There were misgivings in his mind, too, as he thought of his ride on the morrow, for he understood that he was to go on as far as Albany at least; but there still was one source of consolation, in that no perils were likely to be faced between Fort Montgomery and the town for which he was bound. Almost all the danger was in the region below the forts undoubtedly, and it would be some time, he assured himself, before he would return. Meanwhile he must not meet trouble more than half way, and he resolutely strove to banish from his mind the fears that beset him, due doubtless in large measure to his own weariness. A good rest would restore his hopefulness and courage, he tried to assure himself; but his meditations were interrupted by the approach of Joseph Nott, whom at first he had failed to recognize in the dim light. The bearing of the young soldier had entirely changed, and Robert at once became deeply interested in the report of his interview with his father.

## CHAPTER XII

### A NEW MESSAGE

“My father has gone to see General Clinton,” said young Nott. “I told him we never should have left mother and Hannah there alone, but he said ‘he guessed they could take care of themselves. He was n’t afraid for them.’”

“But he is now?”

“Afraid? Why, man, he trembled like a leaf when I told him your story. He acts like a crazy man. I’m afraid the general’ll think he ought to shut him up in the guard-house. Something will be done now, though. I don’t mind telling you that it was mighty good of you to bring us this word.”

“Hannah did more for me than that,” replied Robert quickly. “I have n’t got the taste of those ashes out of my mouth yet.”

“They taste better than Claud Brown’s bullets or his hemp,” laughed Joseph.

“That they do.”

“I may see you before you leave the fort, or if I don’t this time I will some other,” said Joseph. “But now I must say good-by and go

back to wait for my father and to get the boys together." He extended his hand as he spoke and then turned quickly away.

There was nothing more for Robert to do until morning, when General Clinton had assured him that he would receive instructions concerning his further duties; and the young soldier, completely wearied by his recent experiences, was glad to seek out his quarters and retire for the night.

On the morning following, as soon as he had eaten his breakfast, he at once sought out the general's quarters, though on his way he glanced eagerly about him hoping somewhere to perceive Joseph Nott and learn from him what decision had been made concerning the protection of Hannah and her mother; but the young man was nowhere to be seen, and Robert was received by the general with the question still unanswered. He was obliged to wait for a brief time before the commander could receive him, and as soon as he was admitted he was compelled to relate once more the story of his adventures on the preceding day. The general was a stern man, and yet when his face was lighted up by a smile, as it frequently was, the expression was most winning. Stories of the leader's popularity, which

were current, and the frequently expressed determination on the part of many to select him for the governor of the new "state," were easily explained, Robert thought, as he stood looking into the face of George Clinton and listening to his words.

"The letter you brought me, young man," said the general kindly, "more than makes up for the loss of the other. I do not fancy that the redcoats will obtain much information from the one they took from you, but the one you had is very valuable, very valuable indeed. Have you any knowledge of its contents?"

"No, sir."

"It matters little. It will be put to a good use. Now tell me all you know of affairs in New Jersey."

Thus bidden, Robert once more respectfully related the tale he had already told of the advance into the state of the detachments from New York, of their landing at Amboy and holding of Brunswick, and how they had again and again failed in their attempts to draw Washington, who had followed the British and yet kept within the security of the hills, into an engagement.

General Clinton smiled and his face beamed

with satisfaction as he listened, and then said, "I shall tell you a few facts which you may be able to give the general, even if your letter should be lost on your way down as it was on your way up the river. We have comparatively quick knowledge of Burgoyne's movements, and he is now advancing."

Robert looked up eagerly as he heard the statement, but he did not speak, and the general continued: "Yes, we know that Burgoyne arrived at Quebec on the sixth of May, and on the tenth of the same month received the command of the army from General Carleton. On May twelfth he had advanced to Montreal. Then from the fifteenth of May till the seventh of June he was at Three Rivers, and doubtless by this time has pushed on to Fort Chambly, and it may be that he is even as far as Isle aux Noix or Cumberland Head. We shall surely know within a day or two, for his movements are watched and quickly reported."

"And will General Schuyler be able to stop him?" inquired Robert eagerly.

"That remains to be seen," replied the general, a momentary frown appearing on his face. "Naturally we hope so, we expect it," he added more cheerfully, "but the task is not

one for boys. It is a difficult and trying one, but Philip Schuyler, though he is my chief rival for the governorship of this state, I can say is one of our best men. If the New England people would only support him as they ought, I think there would be no question as to the outcome."

"Are they not supporting him?"

"Not as they ought to."

"Why not?"

"Jealousies, petty and local for the most part. The fools don't seem to realize that it is a time for every one to forget himself and for us all to pull together. However, General Washington is aware of all this, and I do not need to explain it to you more fully. We have found out how many there are in the command of General Burgoyne," he added quietly.

"How many?"

"There are three brigades, with General Phillips, General Fraser, and General Hamilton in command. The Hessians have been distributed among these three brigades, with one corps of reserve, and Riedesel, Kingston, and Money in command of the Dutchmen."

"The Dutch butchers!" exclaimed Robert angrily.

"Yes, I know," replied General Clinton quietly. "I know how you feel, and how most of the people feel, but I don't quite share in the feeling myself."

"You don't? I don't see how you can help it!"

"You must not forget that the German soldiers are not here because they want to be. They belong, body and soul one might almost say, to the man or prince to whom they have sold themselves. And this time the gambling debts of a petty prince must be paid. Besides, King George and Lord North have found it extremely difficult to get the Englishmen to come over here to fight us. Many of them believe we are right, and they are almost willing to fight for the very same things in the old country for which we are fighting in the new."

"But the Hessians are paid for coming," protested Robert warmly, to whom any apology for the presence of the "Dutch butchers" in America was not likely to appeal.

"And are not our own men, you yourself, for example, paid for what you do?"

"That's different," replied Robert, somewhat abashed.

"Yes, it is different, I admit that. We



must fight these Dutch butchers along with the redcoats, but I don't blame them for being here nearly as much as I do the men in power who sent them. But you can remember that John Burgoyne has more than three thousand of them in his army."

"How many regulars?"

"Something more than four thousand."

"Seven thousand then, all told."

"Many more than that, many more, for there is the Canadian militia which he expects to join him, to say nothing of all the Indians. Then, too, I know he believes there are hundreds of Tories all about the country who will flock to join his army just as soon as he advances a little farther, or certainly as soon as he wins his first victory."

"Will they do it?" demanded Robert.

"No man knows. It's one of the things for which we must wait before we can really form much of an opinion. Personally, I do not believe there are many Tories around Albany, not nearly so many as the British suppose, and I do not think they will all dare to come out on Burgoyne's side. Certainly not, if we can keep Clinton or Howe from coming up the Hudson and can manage to starve out or hold back, even if we can't head off, Bur-

goyne's army. I think I understand pretty well the sentiment of the people, but one never knows. Sometimes even the very men on whom we believe we can most strongly rely are the ones to disappoint us first. Here 's a letter I received this morning, for example," he added as he held forth a paper to Robert. "I know the young Dutchman referred to, and I would have relied upon him as much as I would upon you, but you see what Captain Underdunck has to say."

Robert took the letter and began to read :<sup>1</sup>

Taken in Tappen Lane between the Hours of Eleven & Twelve O'clock at night Dirck Rykman on Horse Back Heading one David Rake & Peter Lent with a Scouting party from the Enemy ; And it appears by Evidence that said Rykman was Privy to the Scout, for said Rykman was Riding up and Down the Lanes at the Said time of night, untill one of our Centinals challenged & Stopt him, and Orderd him to Return home ; yet he past the Lane which led Home, went on to meet his party, as appears by the Short approach of the

<sup>1</sup> With the exception of the substitution of "Dirck" for "Philip" Rykman, this is an exact reproduction of Captain Underdunck's letter, dated June 25, 1777.

Enemy ; after being Chaleng'd by a Second Centinal he then Dismounted, Securd his Saddle, Left his horse in the Lane And Retird to a house where he was taken ; then a scer-mash Ensued, a Negro was wounded and taken who before his Disease, Confes'd that said Rykman was their Leader.

GARRET UNDERDUNCK, Capt. of the  
Orang County rangers.

“Dirck Rykman !” exclaimed Robert, looking up as he had read the letter. “I know him.”

“What do you know of him ?” inquired the general, gazing keenly at the young soldier before him.

“I know he is a good man. I don't believe it ! I don't believe a word of it ! That Captain Underdunck does n't know what he 's doing. I mean he has made a big mistake,” Robert added hastily and in some confusion.

“He appears to think he knows.”

“But Dirck is one of the best men we have. I've stopped at his house, and I know what I'm talking about.”

“And you never knew of his having any dealings with the Tories or of the Tories being at his house ?”

"No, sir. That is, — I" — Robert stammered and then stopped in increased confusion, for suddenly he recalled the presence of Russell and the flight of the Tory with Nero. Could it be possible that Dirck had betrayed him? Was the visit of Russell pre-arranged, and had he himself fallen a victim to the combined cunning of the two men? The suggestion was startling, and for a moment Robert was almost staggered.

"You see," said the general quietly, "it is n't safe to be too confident of any one in these trying times."

"But General Washington either trusts a man entirely or he does n't trust him at all, or so I have been told."

"That may be. It is safe to leave the general to follow his own conclusions, but is is n't safe for you."

"Did Mr. Nott go back home?" inquired Robert suddenly.

"Yes. He and two of his boys went last night. Do you know them?"

"No, sir. I brought him word last night of what had happened there."

"Then you were the man, were you? Well, Nott is a good man, one of our best; but he ought not to leave his family there. He'll

look after them now and be back in the fort before night. I am hoping you will not have to stop on your way back and be the knightly defender of any unprotected ladies."

Robert's face flushed as he replied, "I did n't stop because I wanted to, General. I don't know how I would ever have got away if it had n't been for Han — for Mrs. Nott and her daughter. Instead of my being the one to defend them, it seems to me they were the ones to help me."

"Doubtless," said General Clinton dryly. "Don't stop there to-day, though, if you can possibly avoid it."

"To-day? I'm not likely to stop there for a good many days yet. It will take me a week to go on and come back again."

"You are not going on. You are to return this morning."

"I am? Why, General Washington told me" —

"Yes, yes. I know. The letter you brought must be taken back to him, and at once. It is more important than you think. I have sent a copy of it on to General Schuyler, and our expresses here can do the work north of us for a time. I have explained many things to you, so that if you lose your letters you

still may be able to make a good report for us. Have you no coat?" he suddenly inquired.

"No, sir. They cut mine when they took my letter."

"Very well. I'll have one for you. Take these letters and conceal them so that not even Claud Brown can find them. By the way, if you will get him for us we will never refer again to the letter which you lost on your way up. Now, young man, be careful and don't stop anywhere for anything unless you are obliged to do so."

Robert Dorlon received the letters, and at once departed from the fort to secure his horse and begin his unexpected return to the army in New Jersey.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ASHES

THE rest which Robert Dorlon had obtained in the preceding night, the fact that he found his horse also apparently ready for the long journey, as well as the knowledge that the men in Fort Montgomery were confident and hopeful, did much to restore the spirits of the young soldier. The early morning air and the very beauty of the scenery through which he was passing also combined to increase his confidence as he rode swiftly forward. There was a haze upon the summits of the purple hills and an air of peacefulness over all the region that in themselves were marvelously comforting, and when Robert had left the fort some miles behind, it almost seemed to him that war was something which had no real existence. Even the winds had died away, and the Hudson itself, as he obtained occasional glimpses of its waters, was as quiet as the peaceful landscape all about him.

When, however, two hours had elapsed and he found himself once more near the abode of

Dirck Rykman, the full sense of his own peril returned once more in full force upon him. It was here that he had first encountered danger on his journey up the shore, and the sharp recollection of what General Clinton had informed him concerning the arrest of the young Dutchman brought back to him forcefully the knowledge that he himself was on dangerous ground, and that, if reports were to be believed, even his trusted friend had proved recreant to the cause of the struggling Americans.

At the thought he checked the speed of his horse and, as he proceeded more slowly, gazed keenly about him. The singing birds, the metallic sounds of crickets, the chattering of squirrels, were all that broke in upon the silence of the summer day. Not a man had been seen since he had departed from the fort, but Robert was aware now that all these things did not protect him from the sudden call, or the sharp report of guns of men who might be concealed somewhere within the silence of the woods through which he was passing. His anxiety increased, and, as he climbed the hill and perceived the humble abode of Dirck Rykman, not many yards in advance of him, he increased his precautions



and looked carefully to the priming of his pistol.

He was aware that haste was required on his part, for the general had explained the importance of the letter which Robert had this time concealed in his shoe; but he was eager to learn if the report concerning Dirck had been correct, and he also comforted himself by the assurance that he would in the end save time by giving his horse an occasional rest. Whatever the motive may have been that at last controlled him, at all events he turned aside from the road and approached the rear of the log house in which Dirck Rykman had dwelt for two years, and where he himself had been received with such cordial and simple hospitality on the occasion of his former visit. He had not perceived any one about the place as he drew near, and the silence but increased his feeling of uneasiness when he halted a few yards from the door.

Still retaining his seat on the back of his horse, and with one hand on the butt of his pistol, he leaned forward and in a low voice cried, "Dirck! Dirck! come out here!"

He waited a brief time but no response was given to his hail, and then he repeated his

summons in a louder tone. "Dirck! Are you in the house? Come out here a minute!"

"What it was you want?"

Robert turned sharply in his seat as the unexpected question came from behind him, and beheld Dirck's wife and little girl approaching from the barn.

"You startled me, Mina!" he said foolishly, thrusting his pistol back into his belt. "And how is the little Mina?" he added lightly, glancing down at the child, and then in response to her pleading bending low and swinging her up on the seat before him on the horse's back.

"She was well, as you see," said the child's mother simply.

"Mina, where is Dirck?" inquired Robert quickly.

"He was not here."

"Where is he?" a fear creeping into Robert's heart, as he spoke, that Captain Underdunk's letter was not based upon an entirely false rumor.

"I do not know. He was not here all night. I was afraid." There were no tears in Mina's eyes, and her voice did not break as she spoke, and yet her anxiety and suffering were so apparent that Robert's own heart in-

stantly responded. Her appearance was not unlike that of some dumb and patient animal under suffering.

“Where did he go, Mina?” he inquired gently.

“He was not here after supper.”

“Did any one come for him?”

“Yaas.”

“Who was it?”

“It was the man what was here before, sometimes. You was here too, may be.”

“Do you mean it was the man who was here night before last, when I was?”

“Yaas. It was the man.”

“It was!” exclaimed Robert. “Are you certain of it, Mina?”

“Yaas,” replied the woman simply.

“Do you know what he said?”

“Nein. They talk some long times in the barn.”

“Did n't he come into the house?”

Mina shook her head, but did not speak.

“What did Direk do, then? Which way did he go? Did they go away together? Did n't he leave any word with you? Did n't he say where he was going?”

Direk's wife stared blankly at Robert as he excitedly asked his questions, but apparently

they were too quickly spoken to permit her to comprehend their meaning.

"Mina," began Robert, perceiving his mistake and endeavoring to speak more clearly and not unduly to alarm the woman, "did n't Direk tell you where he was going?"

"Yaas."

"He did? Where was it?"

"He was going to Esopus."

"With that man?"

"Yaas."

"What was he going for? When did he say he would come back?" Robert's eagerness was returning again, but he repressed himself by an effort, for his hope of receiving a reply to his questions depended much upon himself, as he was aware.

"There was some one sick."

"Did Rus — Did the man tell him that?"

"I do not know. Direk told me."

"Did he go with the man?"

"Yaas."

"And he did not tell you when he expected to come back?"

"Yaas, he told me."

"When was it?"

"Last night. But he don't was come back yet," she added, shaking her head.

“Has any one else been here?”

“Nein. I was all alone with Mina. Dirck don't leave me sometimes before.”

“If Dirck does not come back for a day or two, what will you do, Mina?”

“If Dirck was not come back?” Mina's blue eyes stared at him in a manner that made Robert's heart ache, and yet from the knowledge he had he was convinced that something must be done, for Dirck was not likely to return soon.

“Yes. You know, Mina, that in days like these no man can tell surely just what he will do. I don't believe anything has happened to Dirck, that is, I don't believe he has been harmed,” he added in some confusion, “but one never can tell just how long he'll be gone from home.” He was trying to comfort the woman and at the same time prepare her for what he feared was likely to be a prolonged absence on the part of her husband. A half dozen various explanations for what had occurred had flashed into his mind. Dirck's arrest might have been due to a prearranged plan of Russell or the cowboys. And yet if they had merely wanted to secure him, why had they induced him to depart from his home? It must have been a simple matter to seize him, and as

for caring anything about the sorrow of his wife or the helplessness of his little girl, Robert well knew that they were not accustomed to permit any motives of sentiment to interfere with their plans. But Dirck had been taken by the Orange County militiamen and apparently in the very act of leading the Tories on some expedition, the nature of which Robert could only conjecture. It was almost impossible to conceive of the honest hearted young Dutchman as being false to the colonies; and yet he had been taken after repeated warnings and when he had been followed by the patriot guard. If he only had the time to spare he would look into the matter himself, Robert assured himself, but he must leave that for others to do. Meanwhile what was to become of Mina and her child? One solution that presented itself was to take them with him and leave them at the house of Hannah Nott. There they would be cared for, but it was uncertain what would be done there, and he did not even know whether the family was to remain. Then, too, if Dirck should return to his own home and learn that his wife and child were gone, the confusion would be greatly increased, and instead of aiding he would hinder the safety of all.

“Mina,” he said, after a brief pause, “how far does your mother live from here?”

“Two miles.”

“Then if Dirck does not come back by noon I should take Mina and go there if I were you. Dirck will know where to look for you if he comes back and finds that you are not here.”

“Yaas.”

“You’ll go, will you?” said Robert eagerly.

“Yaas.”

“Don’t wait too long. You know the way through the woods, and you would do better to take that path than to follow the road. I hope everything will come out all right. I must go on now.”

Robert lifted the little Mina gently from her seat on his saddle, dropped her to the ground, and then with a wave of his hand started swiftly down the road. When he glanced behind him he could see that Dirck’s wife and child were still standing where he had left them, and there was a fear in his heart that they would not do as he had bidden them. What they were likely to suffer if they were left alone and unprotected he did not dare to dwell upon. Even Hannah and her mother, bolder spirits far, were not safe, and their natural defenders had hastened to their aid

with the first report of trouble from the cowboy bands.

The thought of Hannah and the possible presence in her home of her father and brothers instantly caused Robert to decide to stop there and inform them of the report of Dirck's arrest and the predicament in which Mina and her little girl had been left. The young express knew that it was not expected of him that he should delay his journey in order to be knight-errant or the defender of the helpless. Speed was one of the foremost demands upon him, and other duties must be left to other men. However, it was not difficult for him to persuade himself that he would lose no time by making a brief stop, and at the same time leave word with Mr. Nott (he was very positive that it was with the father he was to deal) that might be of service to all concerned.

Almost unaware of what he was doing, he quickened the pace of his horse and was soon speeding down the road. Aware of the perils that now might be met, he kept a sharp lookout all about him; but when he arrived at the place where the road branched and he had turned into the one that led past the home of Hannah Nott, still not a man had been seen.

When a half hour had elapsed, so swiftly



had he ridden, he came to the well-remembered spot where he had turned and had made his way across the lots to Hannah's home. The impulse was still strong upon him, and almost instinctively he turned his horse into the field.

In a brief time he came out beyond the sheltering trees, and eagerly gazed in the direction of the house. A cry of dismay escaped his lips as he looked, for the house was gone, and in its place was a mass of discolored timbers and ashes, from which an occasional curl of smoke could still be seen to rise.

"Burned! Burned to the ground!" he exclaimed, as he sharply drew the rein on his horse and gazed in consternation about him.

There could be no question as to the fate of the house, but there was nothing to indicate what had become of the inmates. He glanced keenly about him in all directions, but the silence and loneliness were only too apparent. Nothing was to be seen of the party that had attacked the place, any more than of the people who had lost their home. The smouldering ashes seemed to imply that the fire had been started hours before this time, and doubtless the men who had been guilty had long since fled. Robert had no question that Clau-

dius Brown and his associates had been the guilty ones, and undoubtedly had returned soon after his own departure to engage in their evil deeds. But as Robert slowly advanced, he was in nowise prepared for the sound which suddenly broke in upon the stillness of the summer day.

## CHAPTER XIV

### JACOB GUNNING'S TAVERN

A LOW moan had been heard from the bushes that grew not far from the kitchen door, and the sound had broken in upon the young soldier's thoughts in a manner that had startled him. He glanced hastily about the place, but still no one could be seen. Robert, his heart beating furiously and a sudden fear sweeping over him, leaned forward on his horse's neck and listened intently. For a brief time the oppressive silence was unbroken, and then once more the sound was heard, and there was no mistaking its meaning or the place from which it had come.

Again looking hastily all about him to make certain that he was not seen by watchful eyes and being led into a trap of some kind, Robert leaped from the back of his horse and cautiously approached the bushes from which the startling sound had issued. He held his pistol in his hands and still was peering intently about him as well as before him. The quiet of the summer day was unbroken, and save for

the sight of the ruins of the home and the recollection of the sounds that had startled him there was nothing apparently in all the region to alarm him.

Carefully pushing aside the outer bushes, he was startled to behold the form of a man on the ground before him. The groan he had heard was not a fancy, he assured himself, as he at once kneeled beside the prostrate man and gazed into his face to discover if he was any one whom he had known. One glance satisfied him that the man was a stranger. He was dressed in the ordinary garb of the farmers of the region, but there was a bruise on the side of the head that plainly indicated what had befallen him. But the man was unconscious, and had it not been for the sound that he had heard Robert could have easily believed the man was dead.

A careful examination, however, revealed the fact that the heart was still beating; and, satisfied as to that point, Robert hastily rose and going to the well lowered the sweep and lifting the bucket from its place hastened with it to the prostrate man, and at once began to bathe the head of the sufferer with the cold water.

For several minutes he continued in his oc-

cupation, but although the man occasionally moaned he still gave no signs of returning consciousness. A whinny of his horse caused Robert to rise hastily and dart out into the open space, but as he was unable to perceive any cause of the horse's uneasiness he soon returned to his place in the bushes.

He was puzzled now to know what to do. The man evidently was a stranger to him, but common humanity demanded that he should not be left in such a plight. Still Robert Dorton recalled the words of General Clinton, that "he was not to be knight-errant," and that the lives of many men as well as the successful execution of the plans of the leaders of the army demanded that he should make all haste on his return to the camp in New Jersey.

Moved by a sudden impulse, Robert began to search the pockets of the man before him, though he had no other purpose in mind than to discover, if possible, who he might be, and if he belonged in the immediate region, to send some one to his aid. Throwing back the coat of the man, he drew from his inside pocket a letter which, feeling at liberty to open, he at once began to read.

A low whistle escaped his lips as he read, and in a moment he was aware that he had

made a discovery of importance. It was a message unsigned, and neither was there any address given at the heading of the letter, but in it there was clearly unfolded a plan for the assembling of a band of men who on a certain night were to make a descent upon Esopus and attempt to release the prisoners confined there.

The identity of the man before him was not disclosed by the missive, nor was there any way by which he might learn from whom the letter had come. There was no difficulty, however, in understanding what the plan proposed was to be, for Robert was aware that the few prisoners whom the Americans had taken in the region of the Hudson, together with some suspected persons, were held in Esopus, and the only ones who would be likely to strive to set them free would be the enemies of the patriots. The fact, too, that the man had this letter in his possession was almost proof positive that he did not belong to the side on which Robert stood, and without compunction he thrust the letter into his own pocket and then once more glanced down at the prostrate form.

He was startled as he perceived that the man's eyes were open now, and as it was evi-

dent from their expression that consciousness had returned Robert's first feeling was almost one of chagrin. Had the man seen him when he had thrust the letter into his pocket? He could not determine, but the fact that the man had regained consciousness was a solution for one of his perplexing problems, for now he felt that he would be able to leave him and could speedily resume his own journey.

"Are you all right now?" he inquired, bending low as he spoke.

The man did not reply, but the expression in his eyes indicated that he understood what was said.

"I heard you in here," Robert continued, "and I came to see what I could do to help you. I think you'll soon be all right now."

Still the man made no attempt to reply, though it was plain that he understood.

"I'd stay and help you," said Robert, "only I must go on at once. Is there any one near here to whom you would have me take any word? I could do that much for you."

The man shook his head slightly, but it was sufficient to indicate that he had no message which he desired to be carried.

"Do you know what has become of Ha —

of Mrs. Nott? How did the house get on fire? Do you know where Mr. Nott and the boys are?"

There was a flash in the eyes of the man as Robert eagerly made his inquiries, but still he either could not or would not speak.

"Shall I take you out into the open or leave you here?"

The slumbering fire in the man's expression seemed to blaze for a moment, but he made no reply.

"Shall I leave you here?" again Robert inquired.

The man slightly nodded his head and Robert quickly turned away. Hesitating a moment, the young soldier again turned back and said, "I'll fill up the bucket again and leave it where you can get at it. You'll be all right in a little while now anyway, but if I meet or see any one in the road I'll send him to you."

Ignoring the protest in the man's actions, for he had shaken his head very decidedly at the suggestion, Robert hastily refilled the bucket, placed it close to the side of the apparently helpless sufferer, and then at once remounted his horse and began to ride swiftly on his way. But he was far from feeling at



ease. The uncertainty as to the fate of Hannah Nott and her mother, the ruined home, the disappearance of the men, and the presence of the wounded stranger were all perplexing. Had he been free to follow his own inclinations he would instantly have begun a search for some one who might have aided him in obtaining the information he desired ; but his orders were explicit, and he knew also how important it was that he should make the best possible time in returning with the two letters which General Clinton had intrusted to his keeping.

The third letter, the one which he had taken from the pocket of the helpless man, increased his confusion ; for if the attempt to release the prisoners at Esopus should be made soon, then certainly the information which he had secured should speedily be placed in the possession of those to whom the defense of the place had been intrusted. It was true there was no date given in the letter, but the very fact that the man had such a letter in his possession at such a time certainly implied that the execution of the plan was designed to be in the immediate future.

Thoughtfully he drew from his pocket a rude sketch of the roads which General Clinton

had given him at the time of his departure from Fort Montgomery, with the design that if he should choose the back roads, in order to avoid the peril he had met on his way up, he would not be at a loss to decide which to take. And he was now following the suggestions which had been given him, for, instead of returning from the home, or what had once been the home, of Hannah Nott, to the main road which was nearer the river, he had kept on up the hill and was headed now for a region with which he was not so familiar as he was with that in which he had formerly made his journeys. At one place on the map General Clinton had indicated the location of a tavern where he might stop for the first night on his return journey. The keeper of this tavern was Jacob Gunning, a man unknown to Robert, but one in whom the general had implicit confidence, for he had assured the young express that Jacob was a stanch friend of the colonies and that his house was a place where the patriots of the region frequently assembled. However, Jacob Gunning's patriotism was known only to a few, and the general had explained that Robert was to be guarded in what he might say to him in the presence of others, for the man could aid the continentals,

at least for the present, more if his true position was not generally known.

Relying upon General Clinton's assurance, Robert at last decided to push on to Jacob's tavern and intrust to him the letter he had taken, and instruct him to see to it that the message should speedily be sent to those who were most threatened by the plot.

Relieved somewhat when at last this decision had been made, Robert Dorlon strove to banish all other things from his mind save that of arriving at the tavern in the speediest possible time. Nero appeared to realize that he was homeward bound, and required no urging to make him maintain a swift and steady pace. Occasionally when he drew near to some lonely farmhouse Robert's carefulness increased, and he maintained a keen outlook until he had left the place far behind him. Several times he stopped at the springs by the roadside to enable his horse to take a brief rest, and to rest himself; but every time he soon resumed his journey and found but little difficulty in following the directions which he had received at the fort. Only once did he meet any men, and that was when he had mounted Nero after a halt in a secluded spot where he had eaten the food which he had brought

with him. Two men on horseback had approached, but though they had looked keenly at him, they had not spoken save to salute him gravely, and at once passed on. Robert was aware that they were both gazing at him as he rode on up the hill; but he had pushed steadily forward, and was relieved when he perceived that the strangers were not inclined to turn back or to molest him.

It was between five and six o'clock in the afternoon when he arrived at a house by the roadside which he recognized from the description he had received as the tavern of Jacob Gunning. A man was seated on the low piazza, his chair tipped back against the side of the house and his feet braced against one of the low posts. Robert had received no description of Jacob himself, but the man before him certainly did not present the aspect of the ordinary boniface. He was a tall lanky individual, evidently possessed of great physical strength, but his face was almost expressionless and to all appearances devoid of interest in the coming of a possible guest. At all events he did not move from his position when Robert halted directly in front of him.

“I'm looking for Jacob Gunning's tavern,” said Robert. “Is this it?”

"That's the name it goes by," replied the man, without changing his position.

"Then I'll stop here for the night," said Robert, leaping to the ground as he spoke. "Is Jacob Gunning here now?"

"I'm Jake Gunning. Nobody hereabouts ever calls me Jacob."

"Then you're the man I'm after," laughed Robert. "Read that, will you?" he added, holding forth the letter which he had taken from the pocket of the helpless man in the bushes near Hannah Nott's home.

"Read it to me yourself," said Jacob. His voice was deep and guttural, but there was nothing in it to imply any interest in the letter or the stranger.

"I'd rather you would read it," said Robert, glancing uneasily about him.

"Ye need n't be scart. Nobody here'll hurt ye. Read me the letter."

Suspecting that Jacob was not able to read, Robert stepped to his side and in a low voice read the letter through. The man's face was still apparently impassive as he said, —

"What's that to do with me, I'd like to know?"

"I want you to see that the letter gets at once into proper hands."

“Who are you?” demanded Jacob sharply, bringing his chair down upon the floor, and for the first time displaying any interest.

“I’ve just come from Fort Montgomery,” explained Robert.

“Where d’ye get this letter?”

“That does n’t concern you,” returned Robert. “You have the letter now. Will you see that it gets into the hands of those who ought to have it?”

“Put yer horse in the barn and come into the house.” And as he spoke Jacob rose abruptly and entered the open door.

## CHAPTER XV

### UNEXPECTED GUESTS

ROBERT, puzzled somewhat by the actions of the landlord, nevertheless at once led his horse to the low barn in the rear of the tavern, and not finding any one there to aid him, began himself to look after the wants of Nero. Everything about the place was strange, not the least strange being the actions of the boniface. While he was watering and feeding his horse, for he had discovered a bin of oats and had appropriated what he required, Robert was thinking of Jacob Gunning, and had it not been for the positive assurance of the general he would have been inclined to be suspicious of the man.

“Find what ye want?”

Robert glanced up quickly at the unexpected inquiry and beheld Jacob standing on the barn floor and watching him with evident interest. So quiet had been the man's approach that he had not been aware of his presence until Jacob had announced it by his unexpected question.

"Yes, sir, thank you. I've been helping myself to what I could find."

"That's right. My man left me yesterday an' I have n't found one yet to take his place. I want to talk with ye about that letter," he added in a lower voice and drawing nearer to Robert. "When d' ye get it?"

Thus bidden, and recalling General Clinton's confidence, Robert decided to relate what had occurred at the home of the Notts, and in a few words he told the landlord his recent experiences there. Jacob's bearing had changed now and much of his apparent indifference was gone. He did not once interrupt Robert until his story was all told. Then he said abruptly, "Why don't ye take it yerself?"

"I can't do it."

"Why not?"

Robert hesitated a moment and then said, "I must push on for Morristown. Have you heard anything of what our army is doing?"

"Last reports were that 't was n't doin' much of anything. I don't know of but two ways to get this letter where it belongs. One is to take it myself an' t' other is to let my gal take it. I'd go myself but I must n't be away from here for a day or two just now."



"Why not? What's awry?" demanded Robert quickly.

"Nothin' as yet. I'll let Betsey go," Jacob said, after a moment of thought. "When ye goin' to push on?"

"Early to-morrow morning."

"Why don't ye go to-night?"

"I want to give my horse a rest; and then, too, I may be better off myself if I get a few hours of sleep. Why? Is there any special reason why I ought not to stop?"

"I dunno's there is," replied the man hesitatingly. "I've heerd that some o' Claud Brown's gang is hereabouts."

"You have? You have?" demanded Robert quickly. "What are they doing so far back from the river as this?"

"Oh, this is a part o' their stampin' ground. They're first in one place an' then in another, and then again they're somewhere else."

"I don't want to meet any of them," said Robert thoughtfully.

"Ye won't have to if ye push on. Come in an' get some supper, anyway, an' then we can tell afterwards what's best to be done. I don't want to get ye into any trouble."

The man appeared to be sincere, and Rob-

ert was too seriously troubled by what had been said to be unduly suspicious of one whom General George Clinton had declared to be absolutely trusty. He turned away from the barn when the man had gone, hastened to the rear of the house, and, going to the well which stood near the barn, he drew a bucket of water, and using some "soft soap" that was in a near-by keg, he soon removed the traces of his journey from his hands and face. While he was busy with his ablutions he heard the sounds of a horse departing from the yard; and glancing quickly up, perceived that a young girl not more than fifteen years of age was riding from the place on horseback. Doubtless this girl was "Betsey," and she was already started on the journey with the letter he had given to the landlord, he concluded; and when she had disappeared from sight in the road that led into the forest, he entered the tavern, and soon was seated at the table where his supper had been prepared for him. Jacob had not appeared since the interview in the barn, and Robert was left to his own meditations. Before his supper had all been eaten he had decided that he would remain where he was for a part of the night anyway. His horse had had a hard day and needed a rest,

and even if Claudius Brown's gang was in the vicinity, his own safety would be increased if he was with a friend instead of trying to make his way in the darkness over an untried and unfamiliar road.

He was relieved by the decision, and was about to push back his chair from the table when he was startled by the sound of voices of men in front of the tavern.

"Ho, there!" some one called in a voice that seemed to roll through the house and could be heard in every part of the building. "Come out and get our horses! We're waitin', but we shan't wait long!"

Surely he recognized that voice, Robert assured himself, and trembling in his excitement he ran to the door of the room and peered cautiously out at the two men who now had dismounted and were standing on the steps, each holding the bridle of his horse in his hand. One glimpse was sufficient to convince Robert that he had not been mistaken, but his fears increased when he perceived that in addition to "Josh," the huge guard who had kept him in the hut into which the Thirteen had taken him, was Russell, the man whom he left asleep on his blanket in the same hut when he himself had been summoned by

Claudius Brown, and by mistake given the letter which the treacherous Tory was to have received.

In a moment Jacob Gunning appeared, coming from the barn at the boisterous summons, and, almost fascinated by what he saw, Robert still peered forth from behind the door and listened intently to what was being said.

"Well, Jake, got a bite for us?" roared Josh.

"I never turned ye away empty yet, did I?" replied the landlord.

"Jake, we're looking for a man," broke in Russell. "Have you seen him?"

"Well now, that's a little too much. Course I've seen men, but how'd I know it might be the p'tic'lar man you was wantin'?"

"Tell us who has been here," suggested Russell.

"To-day?"

"Yes."

"Let me see, there was two men 'long here 'bout noon. One o' 'em was not named Nott" —

"Have you heard about the Notts?" interrupted Russell.

"Course I have. Ye don't s'pose there's

much goin' on 'tween here an' the Hudson I don't hear 'bout, do ye?"

"You say there were two men here about noon?"

"That's jest what I said."

"Did they stop here?"

"Only long 'nough t' ask th' same questions you're askin'."

"What did you tell them?"

"I told 'em I had n't seen anybody here. Bus'ness has been all-fired poor ever since th' war" —

"Did one of these men have a scar on his left cheek?"

"Yes. I'm not sure 't was th' left cheek, though. Let me see. Yes, I guess 't was th' left cheek, after all. I was n't sure at first."

"That's all right," roared Josh. "We saw both men back here."

"Any one been here since they went away?" demanded Russell.

"Let me see. Yes, there was a man here."

"Young man?"

"He was n't so very old."

"About twenty?"

"I did n't ask him, but I should say he was 'bout that. He was as strong as a young bull an' as full o' grit an' ginger as an egg o' meat.

When I see him I thought he 'd give a lively tussle to 'most any man that took hold o' him."

"Yes, yes," said Russell nervously. He was a slight man in physique, restless, energetic, and alert, and it was evident why he had the huge Josh as a companion. "Is he here now?"

"Th' last I see o' him he was goin' out th' barn door."

"How long ago?"

"Well now, I can't say exactly."

"You know, Jake. Tell us, for it's more important than you think."

"Ye don't say so! I see he was a smart chap, but I did n't know he was so important as all that."

"How long ago was it when he left?" demanded Russell impatiently.

"Well now, 't was quite a spell. Quite a spell, I should say."

"Was it an hour, or two, or three?"

"I'll go an' ask Nancy. My wife always keeps track o' those things better 'n I do. She seems t' have a better head for such things 'n I have."

"Josh, we'll stop here and get some supper," said Russell sharply, turning to his companion as he spoke. "Jake can't tell us much,

but the fellow has been here and we'll get him before it's light. He won't go on very far in the night."

"That suits me," roared Josh. "I'll put out the horses an' you can go in an' get ready for supper. I'm all ready now," and the roaring voice seemed to boom throughout the house.

"I'll go in an' tell Nancy ye're here," suggested Jacob. "You can wait here or go out t' th' well an' wash up."

As Russell started toward the well, Jacob quietly entered the house. In a moment his manner had changed completely, and instead of the lazy appearing, lawless man that he had been a moment before, he was now alert and the expression of his face had become keen and eager. Stepping softly from his hiding-place, Robert held up his hand warningly as the landlord approached, and Jacob quickly nodded his head in token that he understood.

"They'll see yer horse, but Josh is such a lunkhead he may not know it," whispered Jacob. "They're after you though, and no mistake."

"What shall I do?" inquired Robert, in a whisper.

For a moment Jacob hesitated and then said

quietly, "Can ye stand it to stay right here behind this door?"

"Yes."

"Then ye better do it. I'm afraid ye'd be heard or seen if ye was to try to get away now. Besides, ye may hear somethin' to yer advantage."

Robert quickly took a position behind the door which Jacob pushed back against the wall, and then placed a rock, which was used to hold it in place, against it to prevent it from moving from its position. He then went into the kitchen and gave his directions to his wife, who at once began to prepare supper for the latest comers.

A half hour had elapsed when the two men entered the room and seated themselves at the table where Robert himself had recently been, and the boniface remained to attend to the wants of his guests himself. In his hiding-place Robert could hear every word that was spoken, but he knew that his peril would be great if he should be discovered. He had more fear of Russell with his quick ways than of Josh with his great strength but ungainly and awkward form; but at the worst there were only two to be faced, and somehow Robert believed that, in the event of serious trouble,



he might rely upon the landlord himself. However, the young soldier was eager to hear what was being said, and as soon as the two men were seated, Jacob began the conversation.

"What did ye want t' get the young chap for?" he inquired.

"We need him," replied Russell tartly.

"Have you joined the Thirteen?"

"I joined it? Hardly," laughed Russell a bit nervously. "I use it. I am a good friend of theirs and of you, and a good many others."

"Ho, ho!" roared Josh. "What was this trouble at the Nott's?"

"There was n't any trouble."

"I understood their house was burned up."

"It was; but it was n't any trouble to do that."

"What has become o' th' folks?"

"Who?"

"Why, the Notts."

"I can't tell you."

"Don't you know?"

"Yes."

"But ye won't tell? Is that it? Well, all I can say is I'd rather have Johnnie Burgoyne after me than Nott an' his boys."

"The boys are not so bad as the girl."

“Sho! Ye don’t mean it! I did n’t know she was such a tartar.”

“She is now where she” — began Russell, but he stopped and abruptly rose from his seat and quickly ran toward the door.

## CHAPTER XVI

### ROBERT'S WHEREABOUTS DISCOVERED

FOR a moment Robert was convinced that his presence in the room had been discovered. He leaned back against the wall and drew his pistol, resolved to make a desperate attempt to defend himself if he should be attacked. The color had fled from his face, but every nerve and muscle in his body was tense, and he was prepared to exert himself to the utmost.

“Where ye goin’, Russell?” roared Josh.

The man did not respond to the question of his companion, but quickly passed out of the room and advanced to the piazza, and then went on to the barn; but in a brief time he returned and quietly resumed his place at the table. He glanced keenly at Jacob as he did so, but his quiet manner was unchanged, and to all appearances he was still unsuspecting.

“What’s the trouble, Russell?” demanded Josh.

“There does n’t appear to be any particular

trouble, Josh," replied Russell quietly, "and I don't think there will be any if Jacob here is as good a friend to us as he appears to be."

"Oh, Jake's all right," responded the giant with a roar. "It is n't the first time he has helped us to a meal and made no charge for it."

"Jake will be paid this time," said Russell quietly.

The landlord had not spoken during the conversation since Russell had returned to the room, but there was nothing in his appearance to indicate that he was in any way suspicious of his visitors. Robert was still keenly excited, though his first fear of discovery had in a measure departed, and he was listening with bated breath to what was being said.

"Yes," repeated Russell, his voice still not changing in the slightest, "Jake will be paid this time. It's only fair that he should be. I know he's been good to us, and when we've had no money with us he has chalked up the score, but he knew we were men who did n't forget our accounts."

"I have n't asked ye for any pay, have I?" demanded the landlord tartly.

"Not a farthing, Jacob, not a farthing."

"What's all this talk about then, I would like to know?" demanded Jacob.

"Oh, it's all Josh's foolishness," replied Russell lightly. "I say, Josh," he added, turning to his huge companion as he spoke, "have n't you eaten enough?"

"Have I?" responded Josh blankly, pausing in his occupation for a moment.

"Yes, I think you have. We must be pushing on. Better take a look at your pistols before we go. See that the priming is all right." As he spoke Russell drew forth his own weapon, and, apparently examining its priming, placed it on the table before him. His companion followed his example but laughed as he thrust the weapon back into his belt and said, "I don't know 's I care much 'bout such popgun affairs anyhow. As long as I've got *that* 'long with me, I'm not scared o' any mortal man I've ever yet set eyes on." As he spoke Josh held up his immense and shapeless fist for the inspection of the men.

"I'd rather be hit by a bullet than by that bunch of bones, had n't you, Jake?" laughed Russell, turning to the landlord.

"I don't believe I'd choose either one o' 'em," replied Jacob quietly.

"But that's just what you'll have to do,

Jake," responded Russell, grasping his own weapon as he spoke, though the tones of his voice did not change.

"I guess not just yet."

"Yes, you will. I mean just what I say."

Robert could hear the words and instantly was excited, aware that a crisis of some kind was at hand. Josh stared stupidly first at Russell and then at the landlord, but apparently his excitement had deprived him of the power of utterance. Jacob's face slightly changed, but he did not betray any fear, at least by any movement on his part.

"Jake, you know me well enough to understand that I mean what I say, don't you?" began Russell.

"I think I've heard ye talk before, if that's what ye mean."

"Now, Jake, there's just one chance for you. If you take it, all well and good; but if you don't you'll have no one to blame but yourself. Now then, whose horse is that in your barn?"

"You've got one there yourself," responded the landlord quietly.

"That 'won't do, Jake. You must answer my question. No, I'll answer it myself and then I'll ask you another. You have in your

barn the horse that belongs to a young rebel named Robert Dorlon."

"Ye don't say so!" exclaimed Jacob in apparent surprise.

Russell laughed as he said, "That won't do, Jake. I know the horse and I know the man. I've got the horse and what I want now is the man. Where is he?"

"How d' ye s'pose I know?" Still there was no evidence of fear on the part of the landlord and he spoke in the same tones he had used before.

"Where is he, Jake?" demanded Russell.

"I never heerd o' Robert Dorlon in all my life before this minute."

"Where is he?"

There was a moment of intense stillness in the room, which Robert almost felt could be heard, so excited was he in his hiding-place behind the door. By an effort he restrained himself and waited impatiently for the landlord to act, for he could hardly believe that Jacob would quietly submit, when he was aware that help was so near.

"I can't tell ye," said Jacob at last. "I did n't know there was such a man in the world as Robert Dorlon."

"Very well. We'll acknowledge all that.

You did n't know the man's name, but he came here, for his horse is in your barn and he himself can't be very far away. We don't want to make any trouble for you, Jake. As far as I know you've always been a good friend to us. Now, where is he?"

"I can't tell ye."

"Have you any choice between Josh's fist or my pistol?"

"What d' ye mean?"

"Just what I say."

"There was a young chap got supper here," began Jacob.

"Ah, I thought you would begin to recollect," said Russell quietly.

"He put out his own horse. I have n't got any man here now."

"Where is young Dorlon?"

"I did n't see him when he put his horse in the barn. He came into the house and Nancy cooked some supper for him, same's she did for you. He then, 's far 's I rec'lect, went out o' th' room" —

The landlord stopped as a sound was heard outside the room, but though it quickly ceased Russell's suspicions apparently were aroused, for he said quietly to his companion, "Just go out and see what that was" —



"'T was only Nancy," interrupted the landlord.

"Go out and see what it was, Josh," continued Russell, apparently ignoring the interruption, "and while you are out there get the three horses all ready for a start. Jake here seems to prefer my pistol to your fist. I am deeply interested in his story and I doubt not I'll come to the most interesting part in a minute now."

Josh arose and with apparent reluctance departed from the room.

"Now then, Jake," said Russell more sharply when his comrade had gone, "I am not a very patient man, though I might seem to be from the way in which I've been listening to you. What I want of you is for you to tell me right now where young Dorlon is hidden."

"Yes, I think I did hear ye mention that before," drawled Jacob.

"I can put a bullet into you before you can stir a hand. You can see that for yourself, can't you?"

"Well, I s'pose ye could. If ye can hit a barn door at a distance o' two yards ye ought t' be able to hit me. I'll take yer word for it."

"Oh, I mean what I say, Jake."

"So I heerd ye remark before."

"For the last time I'm asking you where he is."

"Where who is?"

Before Russell could reply or act, the door was suddenly pushed back from its place and with a leap Robert Dorlon threw himself upon the man. In the fierceness of his attack the chair in which Russell had been seated was overturned and the man himself was thrown to the floor. With incredible swiftness the landlord also threw himself upon the prostrate man, his hand was held over his mouth, the pistol was wrenched from his hand and the Tory was completely helpless in the grasp of his captors.

"Gag him! Be quick! Josh will be back here in a minute," said Jacob, and Robert instantly followed the directions. A cloth was tied about the man's face, his hands were speedily bound, and then with a savage jerk Jacob lifted him to his feet, while he stared into his eyes with a rage that was as great as it was unexpected in a man of the landlord's ordinary calm demeanor.

"Seems t' me," he said in a low voice, "ye wanted t' know where young Dorlon was,

did n't ye?" he repeated, shaking his helpless prisoner savagely as he spoke.

Russell, whose eyes could be seen above the bandage on his face, and in which an expression of great fear had appeared, nodded his head.

"Oh, ye did, did ye? Did ye want to see him real bad?"

Again Russell helplessly nodded his head.

"Well, here he is! Here he stands right in front o' ye. Ye satisfied now?"

The prisoner indicated that his satisfaction was complete.

"Now, then, ye want t' go back, I s'pose t' Claud Brown and his gang. I've a mind t' let ye go, and then ye can tell 'em that ye asked me to tell ye where Robert Dorlon was. Ye might tell 'em, too, that I even went so far 's to stand him right in front o' yer eyes an' that ye did n't 'pear t' be a bit better satisfied then than ye were afore. But I'm not goin' t' send ye back now. Not just now. I can't bear to have ye leave me" —

"Josh will be back here in a minute," interrupted Robert.

"Let him come," said Jacob; "we'll serve him the same way."

"No! no!" protested Robert. He whispered

in Jacob's ear a suggestion that instantly caused the landlord to open the door of a wood-box that had been built into the side of the room, so that wood might be thrown into it from a wagon driven close to the outside of the house. Then lifting Russell bodily in his arms, he threw him into the wood-box and hastily closed the door upon him. Robert quickly took his position again behind the door where he before had been concealed, and the angry Jacob had barely pushed back the stone into its place when the huge Josh reëntered the room.

"Where's Russell?" demanded the giant, as he stared blankly about the room.

"He found the man he was looking for," replied the landlord tartly.

"He did? Well, I thought he'd prevail on ye t' make him show up," and, throwing back his head, Josh laughed loudly. "Where is he now?" he demanded.

"The last I saw o' him, he'd started toward the woods."

"Who? Russell?"

"Yes. He was movin' fast, too."

"Did the young chap get away from him?"

"They were n't far apart when I last see 'em."

"They were n't? What direction did he go in?"

"That way," said Jacob tartly, pointing directly toward the wood-box as he spoke.

But Josh was not interested in the wood-box, for he was looking out into the woods beyond. "I'll go after 'em," he said shortly.

"That's right, Josh," suggested Jacob. "They've got a little th' start o' ye, but if ye do yer prettiest, an' don't give up, ye may be able t' catch up with 'em."

Josh darted out of the house, and as soon as he was gone Robert stepped forth from behind the door.

"Now's yer time. Start, an' don't let th' grass grow under yer feet," said Jacob.

"But I don't want to leave you here" — began Robert.

"Never ye mind me. Russell's where he can't do any harm, and Josh's just like a big boy. I can send him 'bout his business in short order."

"What'll you do with Russell?"

"Don't ye worry 'bout him, nor me either. When ye do start, take all three horses. Ye may find use for 'em, if ye get through all right."

"I'll do it, and I'll tell what you've done,

Jake. You won't lose by it!" Robert turned as if he was about to go, but suddenly he said: "It will be a good thing for me to search that man Russell before I go. I might find a letter or something on him that the general would be glad to get."

"You do it, then. I don't want t' have anything t' do with it."

Robert stepped forward and opened the door of the wood-box, but a cry of dismay escaped him which instantly brought Jacob Gunning to his side.

"He's gone!" gasped Robert.

The fact was too apparent to be denied, and the open door on the outer side of the wood-box left no question as to the exit which the prisoner had employed.

## CHAPTER XVII

### A PLACE OF REFUGE

THE two men stared blankly at each other for an instant, and then the landlord, who apparently was the first to recover from his astonishment, said in a whisper, "Come on! We'll go out to the barn! Come!"

Instantly Robert followed him, and as they started from the house they glanced about them in every direction, but not a glimpse could they obtain of the missing man. Neither had halted to continue the search, and as they entered the barn together a low exclamation of pleasure escaped Robert's lips, for there in the rude stalls before him was his own horse and also those of the recent visitors at the tavern.

"Take all three!" said Jacob quickly. "Take 'em, every one!"

"I don't want to leave you here alone"—began Robert.

"Never ye mind me, as I told ye before! Take the horses and get out; and the sooner the better for me an' you, too!"

Robert hastily complied with the demand, for Russell and his companion might at any moment return now, and he fully understood what such a return would imply. A rope was passed through the bridles of the two horses when they had been withdrawn from their stalls, and then Robert with the end of the rope in his hand leaped quickly upon the back of Nero.

“Get right out o’ here!” exclaimed Jacob, as he struck the rear horses when they passed out from the door.

The horses reared for a moment, but as Nero at once began to run they both responded to the pull upon them, and in a brief time were speeding down the road and soon had turned the bend, when the tavern and Jacob, who had remained standing upon the piazza watching the departure of his recent guest, could no longer be seen.

The night would soon be at hand, and with the oncoming darkness Robert was aware that both his own peril and his chance of escaping were increased. The shadows already were lengthening and the western sky had the deeper glow which indicated that the darkness would not long be delayed. He held his horse to the swift pace at which he was mov-



ing, and was rejoiced to perceive that the other horses were following closely and without any apparent effort. Three miles had been covered before he stopped and permitted the wearied beasts to rest. Not a man had been seen since he had departed from Jacob Gunning's tavern, and though he had maintained a careful outlook, not a sign of peril had been discovered.

A feeling of relief swept over him, and as he started on once more, taking the road that led to the right, in the fork where he had halted, he even began to feel elated. He had escaped his pursuers, and by seizing their horses had deprived them of the means of following him. It was not likely that any of the band of Claudius Brown were in advance of him, for doubtless Russell and his huge comrade had been in the lead of others. What a commotion he could create in the American camp if by any chance he should succeed in returning safely not only with the letter from General Clinton but also with two horses! And there was a need of horses, too, amongst the troops.

His heart was heavy, however, when he thought of Jacob. He had been left to face the anger of Russell and Josh alone. Then

his thoughts turned to the fate of Hannah Nott. What had become of her and her mother? The ruins of the home were not assuring, for, if Mr. Nott and the sons had been unable to prevent that calamity, was it probable that they had been any more successful in driving away the members of the marauding band? Then, too, there was Dirck Rykman and the report of his arrest for leading a band of Tories. Could it be possible that the sturdy young Dutchman had been false to his promises? If he had, then what might befall his little family would not be unlike that which the Notts had been compelled to suffer, though whatever might be done would be done by the men whose sympathies were on the side opposed to those who had harmed the Notts. But suffering was suffering whatever its source might be, and Robert Dorlon was seriously troubled as he rode forward, moving more slowly now that the immediate danger which he most feared, apparently no longer threatened him.

These thoughts were in his mind as he rode slowly up the long hill. When he came to the summit he could see the valley in the dim light stretching away before him, and for a moment his anxiety returned. He could per-

ceive a rude path or roadway leading into the woods by his side, and suddenly he resolved to follow it. He was in need of rest himself, and his horse was even more wearied than he. In the early light of the morning he would be able to resume his journey, and would have less to fear because he would be in better condition, he assured himself, and resolutely he at once acted upon the impulse.

He had advanced not more than two hundred yards into the woods when he perceived the outlines of a rude building before him, and instantly he halted and peered intently at the structure. Not a light was to be seen near or within it, and not a sound broke in upon the stillness of the summer night. Dismounting, he tied Nero's bridle to the projecting limb of a tree and cautiously advanced on foot, but he had not gone far before he was convinced that the building was unoccupied, and yet it seemed strange to him that such a structure should be found in the woods.

More boldly he advanced now, and entering through the open doorway he discovered that there were two bunks on one side of the room, but he was not able to see that they had been used recently. He concluded that the building had been erected to serve as a shelter

for some one who probably had been about to clear the land and build a home on the spot, but like so many others had been compelled to abandon the project when the war had broken out.

With a lighter heart Robert hastened back to the spot where he had left the horses, and soon returned with them to the building. It was but the work of a minute to remove the saddles and tether the animals, and as soon as this had been accomplished he entered the hut and threw himself into one of the bunks and in a brief time was sleeping soundly.

How long he had been asleep he did not know, but he was aroused by a whinny of one of the horses. The call was repeated, but in lower tones, and to Robert it seemed as if it was an evidence that the animal had recognized the approach of some one he knew. Springing from his bunk and thoroughly awake by this time, Robert grasped his pistol and peered out into the night. The whinny had not been repeated and silence was over all. The moon had long since disappeared and the gloom of the woods was unbroken even by any flickering shadows.

For several minutes Robert stood near the doorway listening intently and peering out

into the woods ; but still not satisfied when he had not discovered anything to increase his alarm, he stepped forth into the darkness and cautiously approached the place where he had left the horses.

To his surprise he perceived that one of them was no longer there, though the other two were apparently safe when he examined their straps, as he speedily did. Convinced that the other horse must in some way have broken loose, and that it was by him that the low whinny he had heard had been given, he began at once to search for the missing animal. He decided to move in a circle about the place, and somewhere within it he would doubtless find him.

He had completed the semi-circle and was in the rough path or roadway when he was startled to perceive the horse before him, but his consternation was great when he saw that a man was holding him, standing directly in front of the steed and grasping both sides of the bits. The man's face was turned in the direction where the other two horses were, and it was apparent from his attitude that he was awaiting a signal or the appearance of some one from that direction.

For a moment Robert was too startled by

the unexpected sight to move from the place where he himself was standing, but quickly he recovered and stepped hastily back among the trees, still peering at the man. His first impulse to run to the place where the other two horses had been left he restrained, as he was convinced that his better course was to remain where he then was. If there was another member of the party, as apparently there was, then doubtless the man would come to the place where his companion was awaiting him.

Robert speedily discovered that his conjecture was correct, for in a brief time he perceived a man approaching leading both horses and holding each by the bit as he walked between their heads.

As he drew near Robert could hear him as he said, "I've got 'em both, Joe."

"Did the fellow stir?" inquired the man who had been addressed as "Joe."

"I don't know; I did n't look this time. He was making noise enough when I looked into the hut before. Come on now."

"I don't just like it. We don't know who the fellow is. He may be a good friend to us for all that we know, and if he should turn out to be; why, we might be doing the very

worst thing in taking these horses. We ought to know more about it."

"I tell you I know this horse. I've seen Josh on it too many times to forget it."

"Josh may be here himself for all that we know."

"Then there's all the more reason for us to get out of this. If there really has been any mistake, why, it can be set right; and if there has n't, we'll be mighty glad of the night's work. Come on!"

The two men began to move over the pathway toward the road, leading the three horses with them, and almost mechanically Robert began to follow them, darting swiftly from tree to tree and keeping well back from the path, though he did not lose sight of the men. He was in a whirl of excitement, for he fancied that he had recognized one of the men; but to expose himself suddenly would be likely to bring upon him a shot, as doubtless both men were prepared for quick action.

He waited until they were within twenty-five yards of the place where the pathway joined the road, and then, darting quickly ahead, he gained a shelter behind a huge tree, from which he peered out at the men, who were now almost upon him.

"Halt! Stop a minute," he called in a low voice.

At the unexpected summons both men halted abruptly and, drawing their pistols, stood gazing eagerly all about them. It had been impossible to determine from just what direction the hail had come, and the alarm and consternation were natural. They did not know whether to advance or to go back, and perhaps under other circumstances their predicament might have made Robert laugh.

But he was in nowise inclined now to be light-hearted, for the issue was uncertain, and he had much to lose if his surmise should not prove to be correct.

"Is one of you Joseph Nott?" he inquired, after the brief silence.

"Who are you?" demanded the man in true Yankee fashion, as both faced the direction from which the question had been heard.

"That's not answering my question," responded Robert. "I'm a good friend of his, and if he is there everything will be all right. Here! Keep them covered with your guns, men," he added, as if he was addressing an imaginary company. "Don't let them move till my question is answered!"



"What if Joe Nott is here?" demanded the other man.

"Then there 'll be no trouble."

"What do you want of him?" It was evident that Robert's trick was working well, and that in their uncertainty the two men dared not move, being ignorant of how many rifles might be aimed at them from the surrounding darkness.

"It 'll be time enough to tell when I know he's there."

"Come out and see for yourself."

"All right!" responded Robert instantly, deciding that boldness might be his very best protection. "Keep them covered," he called to his imaginary troops, "and if either tries to get away, shoot him!"

Stepping out into the pathway, Robert approached the two men and instantly perceived that one of them was indeed Joseph Nott, Hannah's brother.

"You're Joe Nott all right enough," he said quietly. "You know who I am?"

"Yes. You're Robert Dorlon," responded the young man, after he had peered into the face of the man before him.

"Well, then, what are you doing with my horses?" demanded Robert.

“Your horses? Are they yours?”

“Yes, or at least one of them is, and the other two are more mine than yours. Have you horses here?”

“Yes, back near the road. What are you doing here? Where are your men?”

“I have n't any men. I'm all alone.”

“What!” exclaimed Joseph. And then he laughed heartily as he said, “It's a good one on us. We'll never hear the last of it. But come along and we'll hear the rest of it. You're going on now, are n't you?”

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A COMPANION ON THE JOURNEY

IN a secluded spot near the road the horses of Joseph Nott and his companion were found, and after a careful inspection, when it was seen that no apparent danger was near, preparations were at once made to depart.

“Where is Hannah, I mean your mother?” inquired Robert.

“Oh, they’re all right,” responded Joseph.

“All right? Why, your home was burned and” —

“Yes, I know that.”

“But” —

“Oh, come along! I’ll tell you about it when we’re started.”

“Are you going my way?” inquired Robert in surprise.

“Just a little. I don’t think I shall go on beyond Morristown, but one never can tell about such things.”

“To Morristown!” exclaimed Robert, completely mystified.

“That’s what I said, was n’t it?” laughed Joseph.

“I don't see” —

“Well, it is n't necessary that you should. It 'll be lighter pretty quick, anyway.” Then turning to his companion, who had seldom spoken since the meeting, Joseph said a few words to him, but they were spoken in so low a tone that Robert was not able to hear what was said. The man, however, at once mounted his horse and started swiftly back over the road by which Robert had come, and in a brief time could no longer be seen.

Turning to Robert, Joseph then said, “Come on. We'll not go so fast that I can't talk to you on the way. Yes, I'm going to Morristown. General Clinton had me start not long after you left. Probably he had some word that came after you went, but I don't know about that. Some one else may be on his way behind us, and we don't want to let him catch up with us the way I did with you.”

“But I thought you went with your father and the boys to look after Hannah and your mother.”

“I did.”

“How did you happen to be back in the fort, then?”

“It did n't take long to look after my mo-

ther and Hannah. They can almost look after themselves without any help from us."

"But the house is burned."

"Yes, it was on fire when we got there. We found mother and Hannah fighting it, but it didn't do any good. It was too late. Claud Brown and his gang had been there and gone. It would have done you good to hear mother tell how Hannah threw a bucket of water on the place where Claud himself started the fire and how he turned on her."

"He did?" exclaimed Robert angrily.

"Oh, yes, but the first he knew she let him have another bucket right in the face. It's a pity that girl is a girl. If she was only a man she'd be worth any dozen men in the whole army. She is n't afraid of anybody: and yet, let me tell you, Robert Dornon, she is the best girl you can find the length of the Hudson River."

"Yes, I think so," responded Robert quietly.

"She certainly helped me out of a bad affair. Where is she now?"

"She and my mother have gone back in the country to my aunt's. They'll stay there for a while. My father is going to try to get hold of Claud Brown."

"He can't leave the fort."

"He won't have to. There are other ways of doing it; but if the men who have been robbed and whose houses have been set on fire by that villain, once lay their hands on him, I would n't give much for his life."

"You seem to take the burning of your home as if it did n't amount to anything."

"Oh, I do, do I?" Joseph, as he spoke, turned sharply to his companion and his voice was harsh and hard, but only for the moment, for quickly he laughed lightly and then said: "We expected when we went into this affair that it would not fill our pockets. We've lost everything except the dirt of our farm, and the only reason why we have n't lost that is because the Tories or the cowboys could n't steal it or burn it. I don't mind the redcoats so much as I do the Dutch butchers, and I can stand them better than I can the Tories, and the Tories are saints in glory compared with the cowboys. If my father and mother did n't whimper when the house was burned, I don't think I've very much call to do it, do you?" he added with a laugh.

"No," replied Robert thoughtfully. "Did you know there was a man, who acted as if he had been hit on the head, in those lilac bushes out behind your house?"

"When?" demanded Joseph, bringing his horse sharply to a standstill.

"Yesterday." And Robert related the story of his own discovery of the man and of the letter which he had found upon him and also how it had been forwarded by Jacob Gunning, who had sent his own daughter with it as the messenger. His own experiences in the tavern were recounted too, and so deeply interested was his companion that not once did he interrupt him till all had been related, even to the way in which he had escaped with the two additional horses which now were with them.

"I wonder if you could n't take my letter to General Washington?" said Joseph abruptly, when all had been told.

"Yes, but what would you do?"

"Go back. There's going to be something going on there, and I'd like to be on hand when it begins. It is n't necessary for both of us to go on. I don't believe that General Clinton would care."

"What was it he told you?"

"He told me to put the letter into the general's hands and not to let any one else even touch it."

"And yet you're going to give it to me."

"No, I'm not," retorted Joseph, with a laugh

that was as welcome as the morning sunshine that now was all about them. "I was only telling you what I'd like to do. But I've no notion of doing it. I've got to obey orders; and then, too, I don't want to tear myself away from such good company as I've fallen in with."

Robert glanced at his companion for a moment and again noted the striking resemblance to Hannah. The same round face, bright blue eyes, light brown hair, and the evidence of abounding health and spirits were as apparent in Joseph as in his sister.

"I know what you're thinking about," laughed Joseph.

"No, you don't," responded Robert, his dark face flushing slightly. "And I don't see what you are laughing about either," he added.

But Joseph laughed again, and then said, "I'm hungry enough to do what Nebuchadnezzar did, if we don't find some place where we can get something to eat pretty soon."

"There must be a place somewhere hereabouts."

"There is. There's one ahead yonder," said Joseph quickly, pointing as he spoke to a log house that could be seen in the distance.



It was evidently occupied too, for a man could be seen in the yard with a yoke upon his shoulders, by means of which he was carrying some buckets to a barn on the opposite side of the road.

"Will it be safe?"

"You don't look as if you ought to be afraid," suggested Joseph, glancing at his stalwart companion for a moment.

Robert laughed as he replied: "I'm afraid for what I've got on me as much or more than I am for myself. Do you know anything about this place or the man who lives there?"

"Not a thing."

"We'll chance it anyway. I have a little money in my pocket. We can pay him for what we get."

"Lucky fellow," murmured Joseph, as they began to quicken the pace at which they were moving.

It became evident that the farmer had discovered their approach, for he had dropped the buckets upon the ground and had seated himself upon the "horse block" by the roadside, and it was plain that he was waiting for the coming of the two men.

"You do the talking," said Robert.

"Will you do the fighting?"

"I'll do my share, but we shan't have any trouble. The old fellow is as mild and gentle as a dove."

Joseph made no response, and in a brief time the young soldiers drew rein on their horses as they halted in front of the man, who was seated on the section of a huge tree that served as a family horse block. He was an old man and his gray hair (he wore no hat) was thin, and one arm was apparently twisted and drawn out of shape. Evidently there was nothing to be feared from the man himself, but Joseph nevertheless was cautious, and after he had given the morning salutation he said, "We want some breakfast."

"Can't say that ye're the first men I've heard of in the same fix."

"Can we get some here? We'll pay for it," Joseph added hastily.

"Pretty good horses ye've got there," replied the man, apparently ignoring the question and glancing at the four horses as if he appreciated every one of their good points.

"Yes. We want them fed, too. Can you give them some oats?"

"Where might ye be goin'?"

"We 'might' be going in a good many ways, but the fact is that just now we don't

want to go anywhere. We want to stay right here and get something to eat and something for our horses."

"Jes' so. So I heard ye remark." The man had not moved from the horse block, nor had he apparently turned his eyes away from the inspection of the animals. "Perhaps ye might want to be sellin' one o' 'em?" he suggested.

"They 're not ours," replied Joseph.

"Ye don't say so. 'T is n't considered safe for ev'rybody to be seen ridin' 'long th' road 's early 's this in the mornin' with horses that don't b'long to 'em."

"We 're not afraid. We 're just hungry," laughed Joseph. "You need n't be afraid of feeding horse thieves either, for we 're not quite in that class, and will pay you for every mouthful you give us."

"Want to put 'em in the barn?" inquired the man, rising for the first time from his seat on the horse block.

"No, I don't think so," spoke up Robert. There was something in the actions of the man that made him uneasy, though he could not explain what it was even to himself.

"Better put 'em in," persisted the man.

"All right. Put them in the barn. I'm the spokesman of the party," said Joseph.

"You show us where to take them and we'll look after them ourselves; and you can go into the house and get some breakfast for us. Your women will want to have a word, I take it."

"There are n't any women here."

"You live here alone?" demanded Joseph, in surprise.

"All alone."

Joseph was prompted to make some further inquiries, but he did not continue his questioning. "Show us where your oats are and then my friend will look after the horses; and I'll go back to the house with you and help you get something for us to eat," he said. "If you're the only one on this place, you'll want some help if you're going to get enough to satisfy two such hungry fellows as we are."

"I've got some eggs."

"Good!"

"And some bacon."

"Better still!"

"An' I s'pose I can cook ye something or other besides."

"Don't tell us any more. I can't stand it," laughed Joseph. "Show us about feeding the horses, and then I'll help you with the breakfast."

The farmer delayed no longer, and as soon as the horses were led into the barn and the oat bins had been pointed out, Joseph left Robert to guard the horses while he himself returned with the man to the house. It was strange, he thought, that there should be such an abundance of oats and yet no horses in the barn, except those which he himself and his friend had brought; but he did not refer to the question in his mind, and in a surprisingly brief time the promised breakfast was ready. Robert had been summoned from the barn, and both young men were soon doing ample justice to the viands which were placed on the rude table. The man watched them with evident interest and apparently no unfriendly feeling, but he seldom spoke. At last when the breakfast had been eaten and the boys were ready to rise from the bench on which they had been seated, the man said, —

“Ye’ve got one horse there I’ve seen before.”

“I guess not,” replied Joseph laughingly, and yet glancing keenly at the man.

“He looks just the same as when Josh was ridin’ him, an’ Josh is lookin’ for him now. He an’ another man were here about half an hour before you two came.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### IN THE AMERICAN CAMP

ROBERT and Joseph were too inexperienced to conceal their astonishment at the man's words. For a moment they gazed at him in silence, and then Robert hastily rising from his seat exclaimed, "Do you mean what you say? Were Josh and Russell really here?"

"Josh was here an' there was a man with him."

"And you think they were looking for us?"

"Accordin' t' th' description they gave of the men an' the horses they were after, I should say they were."

"How long have they been gone?" demanded Joseph.

"They left about a half an hour before ye came."

"Which way did they go?"

"They went on ahead. Now, boys," added the old man, with an abrupt change in his manner, "ye've got t' look out right smart or they'll get ye. Ye can stay here t'day an'

I'll hide ye so 't nobody on earth can find ye, an' probably by to-morrow it'll be safe for ye to go on."

"We can't stay," replied Robert sharply. He was not without his suspicions of the man, though his eagerness to return to the American camp with his letter was the supreme desire in his heart at the time.

"I thought likely that was what ye'd say. I don't know's it's the best thing, but it's nat'ral for boys like you. Now I'll point out to ye a way ye can go without hitting the road for fifteen miles. Whether it'll take ye out o' the way these men are followin' or not, I can't say. I'm a good friend t' th' Americans," he added. "I ought t' be, seein' as how I've got two boys with General Clinton."

"What's their name?" demanded Joseph quickly.

"Brokaw."

"I know them. They're good men, too. We'd better let this man show us the way," Joseph said to Robert. "It'll be better for everybody."

As Robert quickly agreed, all three went out to the barn, and the old man mounted one of the horses while the young men leaped upon the backs of their own, and the little

party at once departed. Near a brook that crossed the road their leader turned into the woods, and for nearly three hours led the way through an apparently pathless wood. Up the hills and through the heavily-wooded valleys they journeyed, seldom speaking and all the time keeping a careful lookout all about them.

At last they could once more see the road before them, and the old man leaping from his horse said to them, "Now I think ye'll have no difficulty unless ye happen to run across Josh or some o' Claud Brown's men. I knew ye were bound for Morristown as soon as I set eyes on ye, an' I don't think ye'll lose the way. Keep your eyes open for Josh."

"I did n't know the Thirteen came as far back as this," said Joseph.

"They go ev'rywhere. They have a place up here in the Ramapo Pass where they meet their friends, an' my advice to ye is not t' go that way. Can ye find yer way 'cross the country?"

"Yes," said Robert. "We can do that, I know. But if we happen to fall in with Josh or any of Claud Brown's gang" —

"Ye must n't fall in with 'em! That's what I'm tellin' ye not to do."



“But you say they’re up here, too,” suggested Joseph.

“Yes. I’m tellin’ ye they’re everywhere, ’most, clear up t’ Morristown. They’re like a roarin’ lion goin’ about seekin’ whom they may devour. Don’t ye let ’em set eyes on ye, much less their hands.”

“How are you going back to your home?” inquired Robert.

“Walk.”

“It must be fifteen miles.”

“So it is, but it won’t be th’ first time I’ve done it. Now ye’d better start, an’ for a while I would n’t let the grass grow under my feet either.”

The boys expressed their thanks for his aid and then swiftly resumed their journey. For a time their fears made them watchful, but when two hours had elapsed and not a sign of the presence of their enemies had been discovered, a measure of confidence returned, and they soon halted for their midday meal.

The journey was speedily resumed, and when they had gone on until they were again slowly climbing one of the numerous long hills, Robert said to his companion, “You never told me how it was that you happened to be in that hut last night, nor who the man was with you.”

"Did n't I?" laughed Joseph. "That's too bad. Seems to me, though, that you never explained how it was that we caught you there either."

"You never asked me."

"Well, I'll tell you. I won't ask you if you won't ask me. I'm under promise not to tell, though in a week or two I'll let you know all about it."

"I'm agreed."

"You can't keep a secret, though."

Robert laughed and made no response. "I tell you you can't," added Joseph.

"Why? What do you know about it?"

"Hannah told me."

"Hannah?"

"Yes, my sister. You've met her, I think."

"I don't see" —

"No, of course not. I hope we'll come back together, and then I'll tell you what I mean. We'd better put in our good work now."

Silence returned as the boys increased their speed. There were times when they met some of the country people, who stared blankly at them, but the riders gave no opportunity for questioning and speedily passed on.

On the third day they arrived safely in the

camp they were seeking, and the letters they had brought were delivered into the hands of those for whom they were designed. It was a relief to Robert to learn that the British had abandoned the attempt to draw the Americans into battle near Brunswick and had returned to New York. Everything was uncertain as to their future movements, however. Rumors were current of Howe's plan to attack Boston, but the report would quickly be denied and another rumor would gain credence that he was about to move up the Hudson to meet the oncoming army of John Burgoyne.

Robert was somewhat chagrined to learn on the morning after his arrival that Joseph had been sent back to Fort Montgomery, but no word was given him as to his own duty. The horses they had succeeded in bringing had been received, but a fear was in the heart of the young soldier that his own failure to deliver to General Clinton the letter with which he had been intrusted had caused a loss of confidence in himself, and as the slow days passed on and still not a word was received, his fears, and his consequent chagrin, increased.

The reports, too, that came with the passing days caused the uncertainty and the

alarm in the American army in New Jersey and on the Hudson to spread among the men, and Robert Dorlon shared fully in the prevailing uneasiness. Even his own feeling that somehow he was looked upon as one who had failed to deliver the letter which had been intrusted to him, though in his heart he knew that he had done well, was in a measure ignored in the prevailing excitement in the camp.

The reports came steadily of the advance of John Burgoyne's army, and of the apparent helplessness of the Americans to check it. From Cumberland Head to the falls of the River Bouquet, where it was reported that Burgoyne in person had welcomed the arrival of his Indian forces and had made an address that had greatly stirred his savage allies, the army had moved without hindrance. Rumors were current that the waters of Lake Champlain "swarmed" with the fleets that were transporting the redcoats and the red men. By the end of June the advancing forces had arrived at Crown Point and were in possession of the place, and then early in July came the most disheartening report of all — that the British had seized Fort Ticonderoga, and that the place had been abandoned by the

Americans, without a single blow having been struck in its defense.

The rumors were conflicting, but there could be no doubt as to the truth of the fall of the fort, and that the troops were scattered, and were retreating before the host that with increasing confidence apparently was sweeping away all opposition on its onward march. At Skenesborough (Whitehall) Burgoyne next made his stand, and then it was soon reported that he had pushed on as far as Fort Anne, and by the first of August had penetrated as far as Fort Edward.

The complaints of the New England men against General Philip Schuyler, the failure of Congress to act and even to provide the necessary means of carrying on the war, the loud threats of Barry St. Leger as to what would befall the people of the Mohawk Valley if they failed to provide for his wants and to rally to the standard of King George, all found eager listeners in the little army under Washington, that was still striving to do its utmost for the cause of the contending colonies.

The desperate determination, however, to do their work did not fail them. Many of the New Jersey people, hopeless now of the

success of Washington, were heeding the somewhat lurid "proclamations" which Howe caused to be scattered among the country districts. The groans of the American prisoners who were suffering in the improvised prisons in New York or on board the foul prison ships found a response in the hearts of the timid, who were eager to abandon the apparently hopeless task. Money was wanting, provisions were scarce, jealousy was rife among the leaders, and even the most devoted friends of the cause were clamoring for some decisive blow to be struck.

In the midst of all these perplexing and distressing problems, Washington found one that was even more trying than any of them, and that was to find out just what Howe intended to do, that is, if the British general did really know himself. In all probability Howe did not know just what he would do, until the summer was well-nigh gone. He was striving to mislead his foxy adversary, and not leave New York too poorly defended if the rebel leader should decide to attack there instead of going up the Hudson to the aid of the Northern army, and at the same time he was holding himself in readiness to go, or send aid, to John Burgoyne, in case his

fellow officer required his assistance, which he still was unable to believe would be in the least necessary.

The ease with which Fort Ticonderoga had been taken, and the apparently futile efforts of the "rebels" to check the invasion, at last convinced Lord Howe that Burgoyne was abundantly able to look after his own interests, and that he himself would be free to adopt such measures for crushing the little rebel army near him as he might deem best. This very confidence, however, in all probability proved the undoing of Howe and Burgoyne. Had Howe gone up the Hudson and placed the ill-trained Continentals between his own forces and those of Burgoyne, there can be little doubt that they would have crushed the "rebels" in the north, and rent the colonies asunder as Burgoyne had planned to do. Confident, however, that Burgoyne required no aid from him, Lord Howe put to sea with a fleet of two hundred and twenty-eight ships, in which he had embarked an army of eighteen thousand men, and sailed to the south. At New York he left Sir Henry Clinton with seven thousand men to defend that place, and then he wrote a letter to John Burgoyne, in which he stated that he was about to sail for

Boston and attack that town. This he intrusted to a messenger, who by design was captured by the Americans, and the message fell into the hands of Washington.

The American leader, the fox, as he was called by the British, was too keen to be deceived by the trick, and kept himself fully informed concerning the movements of his adversary. Accordingly he quickly recalled General Sullivan and General Sterling with their men to the west side of the Hudson, and with the greater part of his own army began to march toward Delaware Bay, whither it was reported that Howe had sailed. And yet it was difficult for Washington to believe that the present move of the British was anything more than one of the numerous tricks they had been trying to play upon him throughout the summer. Sullivan was to advance as far as Morristown and remain there, and every day Washington was expecting to receive word that the British had quickly returned to New York and were advancing with all haste up the Hudson. He could not persuade himself that Howe really was planning to abandon New York, give up all thought of going to the aid of Burgoyne, and make an attack upon Philadelphia, which, though it was the capital of



the new nation, was not looked upon as valuable from a military point of view.

At last, however, he was convinced that the present advance of Howe was no trick, but that the British really were preparing for movements in the vicinity of Philadelphia, and accordingly he himself prepared to act.

At this critical moment Robert Dorlon discovered that he had not been forgotten or ignored as he had feared, and that he was once more to return to the region where he had had his former exciting experiences, which not for a moment had been forgotten in the prevailing excitement of the army.

## CHAPTER XX

### AT JACOB'S TAVERN ONCE MORE

It was a clear morning in August when Robert Dorlon set forth from the American camp again to be the "express" of the commander and to carry a letter to the army in the north. There had come to the leaders an increasing hope that, in spite of the failures and difficulties that thus far had beset the attempts to check the invasion by John Burgoyne, the outlook was not altogether dark, and this feeling almost unconsciously had come to be shared in by the men.

At all events, there was a spirit of determination in Robert Dorlon's heart to do his utmost, and as he entered the wilder region beyond the boundaries of the camp, the very surroundings seemed to stimulate him. Not only had he now the opportunity to redeem his apparent failure in his preceding journey, but there was also an added interest as he thought of the exciting experiences which were likely to be his before he should return ; for, in spite of the perils that must be faced, there was a

glow in his heart such as might come to almost any man of his years at such a time.

Whatever might befall him, the letter which he was carrying this time should not be lost come what might, he assured himself. And yet in the midst of his determination there was also an eagerness to learn what the fate of Dirck Rykman had been. Perhaps, also, he might see Jacob Gunning once more, for he was planning to go by the same route by which he and Joseph had returned to Morristown. The thought of Joseph naturally brought also the thought of his sister Hannah, and though he was aware that there was slight probability of his seeing the eager-hearted, fearless girl on his trip, for he might not stop even to make inquiries, nevertheless he was hoping that somehow he might at least have a word with her before his journey was ended. Then, too, there was the huge Josh and the dastardly leader of the Thirteen, Claudius Brown. Perhaps their evil deeds were at an end now, and they had been seized by the outposts of General Clinton. He heartily wished that it might prove to be so, though in the unsettled condition of affairs in the region of the Hudson there was slight likelihood of such good fortune, especially when they were aided by such

a smooth and keen rascal as he was assured the Tory Russell was.

The early part of his journey was uneventful. Not even did he stop when a heavy thunder shower occurred near nightfall ; but he was nevertheless rejoiced when soon after the skies had cleared he found himself near a farmhouse where he had been directed to stop for the night.

It was nearly noon of the third day when he beheld near the road before him the tavern of Jacob Gunning, and he quickened his pace as he gazed alertly all about him. But the peaceful summer day gave no sign of danger. A haze rested on the valley below, the metallic sounds of the locusts were heard in all directions, and the changing tints of the foliage added a coloring to the quiet scene. Not a person could be seen about the tavern as Robert rode up in front of the piazza, and even his hail at first received no response.

Dismounting, he led his horse by the bridle toward the open door of the barn, but he had not entered when Jacob Gunning himself appeared and without a word gazed at the newcomer. In appearance the landlord was even more lanky than when Robert had last seen him, and somehow it seemed to the young

soldier that Jacob's bearing betokened a nameless anxiety or fear.

"Well, Jacob, here I am again," said Robert cheerily.

"So I see."

"You don't seem to be very glad to see me. Anything gone wrong?"

"Everything," replied Jacob moodily.

"That's too bad. Perhaps it will" —

"How long ye plannin' t' stay here?" interrupted Jacob.

"Not very long. I want to get something to eat and I want to feed my horse. I shan't bother you long."

"I s'pose ye're on th' same bus'ness ye were the last time?" suggested Jacob.

"Yes."

"Jest's I thought." As he spoke Jacob grasped the bridle of the horse, and, glancing sharply up and down the road, quietly and yet quickly led the way into the woods in the rear of the barn.

"What's this for?" inquired Robert, as he followed the landlord.

"'Cause it's best."

"Anything new?"

"No, it's th' same old story. I've had my hands full since you were here."

"What do you mean?"

"Jest what I'm tellin' ye. Business is all gone, an' every day or so there's somebody here that makes me almost decide t' quit an' leave."

"Jacob, did you know that Josh and Russell followed me when I left here?"

"I s'pected they did. In fact, I heard as much."

"How do you think they got horses?"

"Some o' their men were right near here all the time. They prob'ly took their horses and started."

"Has Russell been here since?"

"No. But he's likely to come most any time."

"What makes you think so?"

"I've got my reasons."

"Have you suffered any because you helped me that day?"

"Not yet."

"I hope you won't. Jacob, I won't stop here now if you think I'll be likely to make any trouble for you."

"It'll be time enough t' talk o' that when I begin it myself," said the landlord solemnly. "I have n't turned ye away yet, have I?"

"No; but I don't want to make it any harder for you. If you think" —

"I don't think. I don't do nothin' at all. All I can say is, I wish this pesky war was over. The way some o' my neighbors has been burned out o' house an' home is something I don't like to think about. My turn will come pretty quick, I s'pose. But I'm not complainin'," he added gruffly. "I thought yer horse might be safer here in th' woods 'n it would be in the barn if anybody happened along. Come on, we'll go up t' th' house now an' see if we can get ye somethin' t' eat. Ye won't get much, I c'n tell ye that afore we start."

"I don't want much, and I'd rather not trouble you if it is going to make it any harder for you. I can get something farther on."

Jacob did not reply, and so Robert followed him without a word until they were again near the barn. Here Jacob, as if by sheer force of habit, stopped and peered first down and then up the road by which Robert had come. Suddenly he started and gazed long in the latter direction, and Robert, startled by the landlord's manner, also looked anxiously up the road. A little cloud of dust could be seen in

the distance, and in a moment out from it there emerged the forms of five horsemen, who were riding swiftly.

“Into the barn! Up into the mow! Cover yourself up good with the hay!” exclaimed Jacob, in a low voice.

Robert required no second bidding, and instantly darted into the barn and clambered up the low stationary ladder. Heedless of directions, he threw himself upon the hay and in a moment had burrowed beneath it until he could feel the loose boards under his feet, for the hay was nearly gone, and it was evident that a fresh supply had not been provided during the summer by Jacob, who had been busied in other ways.

Robert had barely settled himself in his hiding-place when he heard the voices of men in the yard in front of the barn. He could see nothing, but the men were speaking loudly, and he fancied that one voice sounded strangely familiar, although he was unable to decide just whose it was.

“Well, Jacob, we’ve run the cub to earth this time. Chased him right into his hole.”

Robert could hear the landlord as he replied, but as he spoke in low tones he could not distinguish what was said.



"Oh, he's here fast enough," roared the man who had first spoken. "We have had word of him for five miles back. Now, will you turn him over to us?"

Again Jacob replied, but Robert still could not hear what was said.

"That won't do, Jake!" almost shouted the first speaker. "We know what we're talkin' about, and the cub either went past here or he stopped here. If he's here, you've got to give him up, an' that's all there is to it!"

There was a silence for a moment, and then the voice of the man became louder and harsher. "I don't wish ye any ill, Jake, though ye have served us a mean trick or two. I'll let that all go if ye give up the cub now. If ye'll say t' me that he went on past here I won't trouble ye any more, for with all yer failin's I never knew ye to lie, Jake, an' that's more 'n I can say o' any other man in the county."

Suddenly Robert started in his hiding-place, for it had come to him in a flash that he knew that voice. It was the voice of Claudius Brown, and there could be no mistaking it now. He did not know how many men were with the leader, and with difficulty Robert restrained

his impulse to leap down from the mow and rush to the aid of Jacob. However, he decided to await developments ; but he lifted his head above the hay and discovered that he could distinctly hear all that was being said.

“ I have n't seen him go past here,” Jacob was saying.

“ That 's as good as sayin' ye have seen him come here. Now where is he, Jake? He 's nothin' to you, an' ye 'll save yerself a heap o' trouble jest by givin' him up.”

Robert's fears returned and he was tempted to try to flee from the barn. He realized how strong was the pressure upon Jacob, and he did not know him well enough to estimate his powers of resistance. If he only knew how many were in the assembly he could better decide. He resolved to creep up nearer to the side of the barn, and perhaps he might be able to find some small opening there through which he could see as well as hear what was occurring outside.

Cautiously he threw back the hay, and crawling stealthily over the mow he began to creep nearer the side he was seeking. In the midst of his endeavors he ceased abruptly as the voice of Claudius Brown suddenly became louder.

"I tell you, Jake, it won't do! We've been on the track o' this fellow an' we're bound t' get him. There's money in it, too, if we find a letter on him, as I make no doubt we shall, an' I don't mind tellin' ye that we'll give you your share. Now, will ye speak up?"

"If I knew, as I'm not sayin' I do, mind ye, ye ought t' know me well enough to understand I'm no Judas!" There was a ring in Jacob's voice that was new to Robert, and the young soldier's heart bounded within him. Come what might, he would not leave the man to fight his battles alone, he resolved. He had found a place through which he could peer forth, and when he perceived that Claudius Brown had four men with him, he quickly decided what plan he would follow if the man persisted in his demand.

"What'll we do?" said Claudius Brown, turning to his companions.

"String him up!" replied one quickly. "That'll make him speak; at least it worked all right back here three miles this mornin'."

"Smoke the fellow out," demanded another.

"Ye hear what my men say, Jake?" said the leader, turning again to the landlord as

he spoke. "Have ye any choice between th' two?"

"I don't seem to have anything t' say 'bout it," replied Jacob quietly.

"Ye have ev'rything t' say, Jake. Jest tell us where the rascal is, an' there won't any harm come to you or to your belongin's."

"I told you, Claud Brown, that I was no Judas," retorted Jacob Gunning boldly. "Do what ye please, ye can't buy me up!" There was a ring in Jacob's voice that was inspiring to Robert, and he made ready to act. Before he moved, however, he decided to wait and see what Brown would do next, for it might still be possible that Jacob's very fearlessness might serve to send the men away. In a moment the problem was decided for him, but in a way of which Robert had never dreamed.

"We'll do both!" shouted Claudius Brown angrily. "We'll string him up an' smoke out the young rascal, too! Two of you," he added, pointing quickly to two of his men, "set fire to his house just as soon as we've tied Jake up! Now then!" and at a signal from the leader all four rushed upon the landlord.

Robert waited to see no more, but rising

hastily from his place he turned toward the border of the mow ; but the hay was light in places, and suddenly the boards tipped and parted beneath his feet, and he was thrown headlong to the floor below.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE SEARCH

It was only a few feet that Robert fell, for the barn was low and the distance between the partitions was slight; but as the young soldier struck the floor beneath him, his hat was flung far from him and for an instant he was almost stunned. A silence had greeted his unexpected appearance, but it was quickly broken when Claudius Brown with a shout called to his men: "There 's the fellow himself! Don't let him get away! Get him! Get him!"

At the words Robert sprang to his feet and seizing the first of the men that rushed upon him, and exerting all his strength, he flung him hard against the side of the barn, where the man fell and did not rise. Desperately he struck the next man to advance upon him, but almost before he was aware of what was being done, the others had fallen upon him and he was borne to the floor, where he was helpless in the grasp of his captors.

"Had enough, young man?" shouted Clau-

dius Brown with a laugh. Apparently the leader was so rejoiced at the unexpected good fortune which had befallen him that he was not mindful of the treatment two of his followers had received at the hands of the powerful young express. "If you have, stand up!" he added.

As Robert did not speak or move, he was roughly seized by the shoulders and lifted to his feet. Jacob Gunning had not moved from his position during the encounter, and as Robert glanced about him, his absolute helplessness was so apparent that he knew that any further attempt at defending himself would only cause him to increase his own peril. Accordingly he stood still and fearlessly looked into the faces of the men before him. Only once did he look at his hat, which had been flung in his fall far to one side of the barn, and quickly he turned his eyes away. Between the folds of his hat the small thin letter which had been intrusted to him had been placed, and for a moment there was a slight hope in his heart that it might not be found. If he should not be able to deliver it into the hands of the one to whom it had been addressed, it would at least be a relief to know that it had not been secured by his enemies.

A shout from Claudius Brown caused the man who had been about to carry out the leader's order to set fire to the house, to return and join his comrades, and at the same time the man whom Robert had thrown violently against the side of the barn slowly arose, and with an expression of rage upon his face advanced upon the helpless prisoner.

"Here! None of that!" said Brown sternly, as he perceived what the man was about to do. "We'll leave all that till we have done our other work." Then turning sharply upon Robert, he said quietly, "Give me the letter, young man."

"What letter?" replied Robert boldly.

"Don't try any dodges. You know what I mean. Give me your letter."

"I have n't any letter. You can search me and see for yourself."

"I don't need you to tell me what I can do. You'll find that out before you are many minutes older." Nevertheless a new expression appeared upon his face at Robert's words, and for a moment he seemed to be abashed by the very calmness of the young man before him. "You brought a letter from the army."

"I know it."



“Where is it now?”

“I can't tell you. All I can say is that I have n't it any longer.”

“What did you do with it?”

“What would I be supposed to do with a letter?” Robert was speaking boldly, for in spite of the fear in his heart he was convinced that his own safety, as well as the safety of the precious letter itself, would be best preserved in this manner.

“We're in no mood to stand any foolishness,” said Claudius Brown sharply. “Will you give me that letter?”

“I told you I did n't have any letter. You can search me and see for yourself.”

“We can do that fast enough,” replied the leader angrily, as he drew a knife from his belt and stepped forward. “Take off his coat!”

Instantly the prisoner's coat was torn roughly from him and cut into slits by the angry man. The search for the missing letter was not rewarded, and Robert again said quietly, “I told you the truth. I have n't the letter, but you won't believe me till you've proved it, so go ahead.”

“Take off his shoes!” ordered Claudius Brown.

Robert's shoes were quickly removed from his feet, and these also were cut into bits, but still the letter was not found.

"Keep it up! We'll find it yet!" ordered the leader.

"You won't find it, simply because it is n't here," said Robert.

Roughly the search was continued, and when at last a half hour had elapsed and still the missing letter was not found, Robert was standing with his clothing in tatters, and the anger of his captors becoming greater with the repeated failures that were made.

"The letter is n't on him. That's as plain as the nose on his face," said Claudius Brown at last. "Now, young man, tell us where it is!" he demanded.

"I shall not tell you what I did with it," replied Robert quietly. "You would n't believe me if I did, any more than you believed me when I told you that I did n't have it."

"Where is it?" demanded Claudius Brown savagely.

"I hope it is where General Clinton will soon get it. If he does n't, I can assure you that it won't be the fault of the man that took it."

"Ask Jake," suggested one of the men. "Perhaps he gave it to him."

"Have you got that letter?" demanded Brown, turning savagely upon the landlord. Jacob Gunning only laughed and did not speak, and the anger of the leader apparently rose at the indifference of the man.

"We'll search you, too, Jake, if you don't speak up!" growled Claudius Brown.

"I can tell you," interrupted Robert quickly.

"Tell, then!"

"He has n't got the letter, and he has n't the remotest idea who has it either."

"Don't you believe him, Claud," said one of the band. "Jake knows all about it, and it's more 'n likely he's got it in his pocket now."

The suggestion seemed to increase the rage of the leader, and at his word two of the men came to his aid, the others being left to guard the prisoner.

"Now see here, Claud Brown," said Jacob slowly. "You know me an' I know you. What's the use o' all this foolishness?"

"Have you the letter, Jake?"

"I did n't know there was any letter; least-wise," he added, "I have n't seen anything o' it."

"You knew he had a letter?"

"Suppose I did? What's that got to do with it?"

"Everything!" retorted Claudius Brown savagely. "We can't hang 'round here all day. We knew this cub here had a letter an' we know he has n't gone on any farther than your tavern. We can't find th' letter on him an' ye act 's if ye knew more 'bout it than ye're willin' t' tell. It'll be all the better for you, Jake, an' for every one concerned, if ye'll own up to it right now."

"What'll ye give me, Claud Brown?" laughed Jacob.

"You know what I'll give ye if ye don't."

Jacob's laugh was irritating, and evidently the leader lost all control over himself. With an exclamation of anger he ordered his men to assist him, and in a few minutes the landlord was standing in tatters not unlike those that partly covered the body of Robert. The longed-for letter, however, was still missing, and the rage of the men now threatened to break all bounds.

"Jake Gunning, will ye own up where th' letter is?"

"No, I won't," said Jacob sturdily.

"He does n't know, I tell you!" interrupted Robert again.

"You keep still! Your goose is n't all cooked yet, my friend!" snarled Claudius Brown, glaring at Robert for a moment. Then turning to Jacob again, he said, "I'll be generous with you, Jake. I was to have five pounds if I got that letter. I'll give you two if you'll give it up."

"Make it two hundred an' I might talk with ye," laughed Jacob.

"He does n't know anything about the letter. Can't you believe me?" said Robert again.

Ignoring the interruption, Claudius Brown said once more to the landlord, "It's yer last chance, Jake. Will ye own up where the letter is?"

"No, I won't," and Jacob laughed as he spoke. Robert was unable to understand the change which apparently had come over the man. All his despondency was gone and he appeared even to be enjoying his present experience, which to his fellow prisoner seemed to be beyond all reason.

"Jake, do ye care more for that letter 'n ye do fer yer house?" demanded Brown.

"My advice to you, Claud Brown, is to leave my house alone," retorted Jacob, for the first time displaying any evidence of anger.

"Will you give up the letter, then?"

"I told you I would n't."

"Burn up his old trap!" shouted Claudius Brown.

At his bidding one of his men ran quickly into the tavern, and it was evident that the command of the leader was about to be obeyed. As if by some prearranged signal both Robert and Jacob strove to throw off the men that held them, but Robert's hands had been securely bound and he was well-nigh helpless, and even the sturdy landlord was powerless in the grasp of the powerful men that held him in the barn.

In a brief time a curl of smoke could be seen issuing from the front door, and within a few minutes it was followed by flames that seemed all at once to envelop the entire building. Robert could see that Jacob's face was deathly pale and that his eyes almost seemed to reflect the blazing fires that were consuming his home, but he did not speak, and to all appearances was not minded to make any further resistance. It was difficult, however, for Robert to follow his example, though he realized that he, too, was as helpless as the landlord. For a moment he was tempted to declare where the letter was, but a brief

reflection caused him to abandon the thought. He did not know what the letter contained, but he had been informed that it was of so great importance that, if it should be found impossible to deliver it, under no circumstances should it be allowed to fall into the hands of the enemy. No, it were better for one to suffer than for many, he assured himself. Better even that Jacob should be the loser than that the redcoats should be the gainer.

The flames had mounted higher and higher, and the little building was almost concealed in the mass. The roar, too, could be plainly heard in the barn, and the dark expression on the face of Claudius Brown, who had remained by Jacob's side, afforded no intimation as to what his plans for the future were.

At last when a half hour had elapsed and the low tavern was hopelessly doomed, the leader turned once more to Jacob and said, "Now ye 'll believe that I mean what I say. Answer me; will you give up that letter now?"

"He has n't got the letter, I told you," interrupted Robert once more.

"You keep still and save your strength! You 'll need it all, young man," said Claudius

Brown to Robert. Then turning again to Jacob, he said, "Your hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you. But you have n't heard me for the last time. Your five pounds won't go far in paying your debt."

"Save your wind, Jacob! If you don't give up that letter you 'll need it all. I'm not going to ask you again, Jake."

"The better for you, then!"

Claudius Brown said no more, but began to search the barn. He passed close to the place where Robert's hat was lying, but though the young express for a moment thought the letter was discovered, the leader passed it, apparently not suspecting its presence. He went into the stalls, and soon returned with two leathern halters in his hand.

Handing one to one of his fellows, he said sharply, pointing at Robert as he spoke: "Tie him to the timber, and tie him so that he can't get away either!"

Helpless, Robert was borne to the edge of the mow and securely fastened to the rude ladder which led to the hay above. His fears had increased keenly, and he fancied that he knew what was about to be done. Yet it seemed to him even then that Claudius Brown could not be such a heartless villain as the



threatening actions proclaimed him to be. It was his last and desperate attempt to make him disclose the secret of the letter.

Turning about, Robert perceived that the other halter had been placed about Jacob's neck, and already he was being led forth from the barn.

On the threshold Claudius Brown stopped for a moment as he glanced back and said, "We 'll swing Jake from his own apple-tree, and then we 'll see how much smoke this barn can make. We have n't got our letter, but we 'll make it a bit easier for the next man to speak when we tell him to."

Then he abruptly departed from the barn, taking Jacob with him, and before Robert could cry out he had disappeared around the corner.

## CHAPTER XXII

### IN PERIL

SOON after the leader had disappeared he returned to the barn, and stopping in front of the place where Robert was tied said to him, "Now, young man, I 'm going to give you one more chance. We 've got your friend Jacob all ready to swing from a tree in front of his old tavern, an' we 've got you here where you 'll be able to report just how hot a barn is when it 's on fire. Will you tell me where that letter is?"

Robert Dorlon gazed into the face of the cowboy, and for a moment did not speak. He could feel that the color had fled from his own face, and the expression on that of Claudius Brown was terrifying. The brutality, cruelty, and anger that were stamped there were only too apparent, and Robert was but too well assured that he would not easily escape from the clutches of this man. It was still impossible, however, for him to believe that even such a villain as Brown certainly was would carry out his threat. It was true the blazing ruins

of Jacob's tavern afforded ample evidence that he was capable of dastardly work, but the threat he was now making to Robert seemed to be beyond the limits of even such villainy as his. Besides, he had given his word that as long as he was alive the letter that had been intrusted to him should not fall into the hands of the enemy.

Resolutely, though his knees trembled while he spoke, he looked into the face of Claudius Brown and said, "I've told you the truth."

"Where is that letter?" shouted Claudius Brown again.

"I have n't it."

"Where is it?"

"I can't tell you."

"You will tell me! Take your choice. I'll set the barn on fire and string up your sneaking friend, or you'll tell me where that letter is."

For a moment almost beside himself with anger and fear, Robert struggled desperately at the cords that held him; but the work had been well done and he was helpless. A smile appeared on the face of the man before him as he watched the futile struggle, and then turning sharply to the man near him he said, "Burn up the old trap and the rat in it!"

Without waiting to see that his order was obeyed he departed from the barn.

Slowly the cowboy drew forth his flint and tinder and apparently prepared to obey the command of the leader. Not even yet was Robert able to believe that Claudius Brown's words would be literally carried out, but he was nevertheless watching every movement of the man, who had scraped together a pile of loose hay near the side of the barn.

"You're not going to set fire to that!" said Robert in low tones.

The man nodded his head but did not speak, and continued his preparations.

"Now, look here!" said Robert more sharply. "You understand what this is you're doing, don't you? Suppose you do burn me up, what good will it do you? You'll be found out, for when I don't report they'll know something has happened to me, and they'll look it up, too."

The man was kneeling before the pile now, but he hesitated a moment, glanced up at the helpless prisoner, and then without a word took up his flint and tinder from the floor beside him.

It was evident to Robert now that it was no idle threat which Claudius Brown had made,

and that his words were to be obeyed literally. A great fear swept over him, and in an agony of terror he shouted: "Don't do that! I beg of you, don't do it! Just think what it is you're doing! Suppose you were here in my place. Suppose you were tied here as I am. Cut this strap if you're bound to set fire to the barn! Give me one chance to get away! Don't, don't leave me here! I'll pay you, I'll pay you well for it! Claud Brown's money won't be half as much as I'll see that you get. If you leave me here you won't get a farthing from him or from anybody else. If you let me go, if you'll cut these straps, you'll be more than twice as well off. Don't do it! Don't do it! I beg of you, don't do it!"

The man looked up from his place, gazed steadily at Robert, and then without speaking struck a spark which fell upon the tinder, and in a moment there was a little curl of smoke and then a tiny blaze could be seen in the bottom of the pile. Robert began once more to strain desperately upon the cords that held him. There still might be a chance that he would be released before the barn was in a blaze, but the fear in his heart now was almost beyond control. Despite his efforts the straps

held firmly, though he pulled upon them till his wrists were bleeding. Apparently the man gave him no thought, for he remained kneeling until he was positive that the fire was well started, and then he arose and walking to the doorway stood peering out as if he was waiting for some signal or the return of the leader.

The blaze was beginning to crackle and the smoke was carried all about the barn now, and Robert could see that the fire was beginning to creep up the side and spread out on the floor toward him. For a moment he ceased struggling and watched the creeping flames almost as if he had no direct interest in them.

The man now turned and, glancing first at the spreading fire and then at his helpless prisoner, placed his finger in his mouth and whistled shrilly.

In response to his call Claudius Brown himself came running swiftly to the barn, but before he entered he stopped abruptly, for there was a sudden shout from the man whom he had left, and a moment later a band of a dozen or more men ran swiftly toward the burning barn. The leader glanced keenly at them, and then, darting into the barn and drawing his knife, quickly severed the straps that bound Robert's hands, and said savagely, "Not a



DESPITE HIS EFFORTS THE STRAPS HELD FIRMLY.





word of this! Don't you lisp a word about what has happened here or it'll be the worse for you!"

There was no opportunity for Robert to reply, for he swiftly darted from the barn, his eyes smarting from the effect of the smoke and his eagerness to escape overpowering every other consideration. In the yard before the barn, however, he quickly stopped, for he instantly perceived that the new-comers were a band of redcoats, and there was a young lieutenant in command.

Evidently the officer was known to Claudius Brown, for he said sharply, "What's this, Brown?"

Before the leader responded, Robert glanced all about him eager to find some opening by which he might escape, but such an attempt would be hopeless, for the men were armed and he would be quickly overtaken. Instantly he darted into the barn again, and seizing the hat which had been lying neglected on the floor he dashed out once more, and stood quietly in the presence of the men, who had scarcely noticed his actions in the intense excitement that prevailed.

As he once more appeared Claudius Brown seized him by the shoulder, and he was com-

pelled to follow, as all the men withdrew from the presence of the barn where the heat was becoming intense. As they came out into the road Robert could see that there were a half dozen more of the redcoats, and they were bending over some object of interest on the ground in front of the smoking ruins of the tavern.

"The man's alive," said some one, looking up as the officer approached.

"Who is he? What is he?"

"I'll tell you who he is," said Brown, stepping forward as he spoke. "He's Jake Gunning, that's who he is. He kept this tavern, and he won't do it again. He's a low down Whig, and his place here was a reg'lar meetin' place for all th' low down men like him. This fellow" — and as he spoke Brown shook Robert by the shoulder upon which his hold had not relaxed — "is an express from the rebels, an' he's stopped more'n once here at Jake's, but he won't do it again."

For a moment the young officer stared at the cowboy, and then without replying he pressed forward and bent low over the prostrate form of the man on the ground whom with a start Robert perceived to be Jacob himself. The cowboys, then, had indeed carried

out their threat, and the landlord had suffered at their hands as Claudius Brown had promised. The sun was low in the western sky, but the blazing barn and still burning house threw a light all about the place that made everything distinct and plain. Not since the war had begun had the sight of the redcoats been a welcome one to Robert Dorlon, but now as he looked about him he rejoiced in their coming almost as if they had been friends. At least they would be protectors against the brutality of the unscrupulous gang of which Claudius Brown was the leader, and if he must fail on his errand, Robert was convinced that his failure would be less bitter if he was taken by the redcoats rather than left in the power of the merciless gang of cowboys. Besides, it was evident that Claudius Brown himself was in some fear of the young officer, who plainly knew him, and there was hope also in that fact. But even these things were for the moment ignored as he leaned forward eager to learn how it fared with Jacob Gunning.

In a moment the young lieutenant arose and said, "He'll be all right in a little while." Then turning to Claudius Brown, he said sternly, "Did you hang him there on that tree, as the men say you did?"

"Well, what if I did? What of it, anyway?" retorted Claudius Brown.

"That will be for Sir Henry to say. Why did you do it?"

"He would n't tell where th' letter was. We were n't goin' t' do more'n twist him a little. We should n't 'a' hurt him. We wanted t' make him own up." The leader's tones and manner had changed, and it was evident that he had no desire to increase the suspicions or anger of the officer.

"What letter?" demanded the lieutenant.

"The letter this man was carryin' t' General Clinton."

"General Clinton!" exclaimed the lieutenant in manifest surprise.

"Th' rebel gen'ral, not Sir Henry."

"Oh, yes, I see. Are you the express? Has this man told the truth?" said the lieutenant to Robert.

"Yes, sir, I suppose he has," replied Robert, who was convinced that his better course would be not to attempt to conceal his identity.

"You don't look like very much of an express," said the lieutenant, smiling dryly as he glanced at the young man's tattered garments.

"I did n't look this way three hours ago."

"Did you bring a letter?"

"I had one, yes, sir," replied Robert quickly, "but because I would n't tell this villain," and he glared at Claudius Brown as he spoke, "to whom I had given it, he cut all my clothes into tatters and then set fire to Jacob's tavern, and not satisfied with that, tied me up in the barn, set fire to it, and hanged Jacob on the tree, where I take it you or your men found him."

"Did you do that? Take your hands off the man!" said the lieutenant to Brown.

"He would n't own up where the letter was. I'd had orders from somebody I don't think even you'd care to dispute." In spite of his manner, it was evident that the leader stood in some fear of what the officer might say or do. "I tried ev'ry way t' get 'em to own up peaceable, but they would n't do it."

"Quite likely," said the young officer dryly. "So you set fire to their buildings and tried to hang the man, did you?"

"I set fire t' th' tavern 'n th' barn. 'T was a nest o' snakes anyway, but I did n't intend t' kill either one o' th' men. I was goin' t' scare 'em into ownin' up where th' letter was."

"You people in the colonies beat me," said the young officer quietly. "I did n't want to

come over here to fight men of my own race, and sometimes I wish I had stood out, as some of my friends did, and not come at all. That was why King George had to get Hessian troops to send over, for his own subjects did n't want to fight, especially when a good many of them thought the colonies were not all wrong either. But that's neither here nor there. I'm a good subject of his Majesty King George, God bless him, — and I don't believe in rebellion anyway, though I may not like the job of helping to put it down. But what beats me is, when I land in America, to find that the very worst and most bitter men are Americans. Why, you could n't find a man in the whole British army who would treat the rebels as you have just served these men — they may be your own friends and neighbors, for all I know. We can't do anything more here, and this man is coming around all right," he added, as he glanced at the burning buildings and then at Jacob Gunning, who now was sitting erect.

"Ye're on yer way to Esopus, are n't ye, Lieutenant?" inquired Claudius Brown.

"Yes. Are you going, too?" responded the lieutenant suspiciously.

"We will if ye want us to. Ye're to wait

for the others down here to th' forks o' the road, are n't ye?"

"Yes. How did you know that?"

"Never ye mind," laughed Claudius Brown, plainly rejoiced to be restored to the good graces of the officer. "We'll go 'long anyway with ye. I s'pose ye'll take this man 'long?" he inquired, indicating Robert as he spoke.

"Yes. There is n't any use in searching him any more for the letter. You've done that well. There is n't a spot as big as a shilling left of his clothes."

"Ye're right, th' is n't," laughed Brown. "The other man, what'll ye do with him?"

"Leave him here. He will be all right soon and can look after himself. He's not a soldier and this man is," and he nodded at Robert as he spoke.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### AT THE FORK IN THE ROAD

"YOU'RE to go with us," said the lieutenant to Robert. "Will you come along as you ought to, or shall I tie your hands?"

"You need n't tie my hands," replied Robert. "There are enough of you to look after me and I'm not armed, for they have n't left me anything to fight with except these," and as he spoke he held his hands up before him.

"You look as if you might be able to make good use of them if occasion required," replied the officer good-naturedly. "We'll chance that, though. We must go on, for we can't do anything more here."

For a moment he paused and looked about him, and Robert almost unconsciously followed his example. The tavern had fallen, though from its ruins the flames were still rising, and a cloud of smoke was borne away by the light wind that was blowing. The rude little barn was a mass of blazing fire, and it was evident that nothing could be done to



save it. Not far from where he was standing Robert perceived Jacob Gunning, who apparently had recovered somewhat from his brutal treatment by the gang of marauders, but there was nothing in his bearing to indicate that he was anything more than a disinterested spectator of the scene before him. His attitude was a source of some surprise to Robert, for he knew that if he himself had been the one to suffer such a loss and endure such treatment as the landlord had been compelled to undergo at the hands of the ruffians, he would not meekly submit as Jacob was doing. His meditations were sharply interrupted by the word of the lieutenant, who said to Claudius Brown, "I want you to go with us."

"I have n't said I would n't," responded the man sulkily.

"I want all your men to go, too."

"They'll go all right."

"We'll leave this fellow here," continued the officer, pointing at the disconsolate figure of Jacob Gunning. "He does n't look as if he'd do any damage anyway; and then, too, I don't want to have too many prisoners — just yet," he added, with a laugh. "One is enough."

Assured now that he was to be taken with the redcoats, Robert attempted to move nearer Jacob. He was eager to speak to him of his horse, which he had left in the woods in the rear of the barn, but the lieutenant, perceiving his action, said hastily, —

“No, I cannot permit that.”

Robert stopped obediently, convinced that he would only increase the suspicions of his captors if he persisted, and, besides, he was confident that if Jacob was left undisturbed he would look to the safety of Nero. Accordingly he turned and quickly took his place in the midst of the band that now prepared to depart, and at the word of the officer the men started on their march.

Robert found himself in the centre, with a double line of men in advance of him and the remainder in his rear, where Claudius Brown and his followers took their places. Not a word was spoken now; the lieutenant, who was in front of the first line, was moving swiftly, and the men were compelled to exert themselves to maintain the rapid pace at which he was advancing.

The sombre shadows of the great trees were almost ghostlike as the force proceeded over the rough way that led through the woods.

The very silence was of itself impressive, and in spite of the feeling of depression that now possessed him, Robert Dorlon soon found himself looking eagerly forward to the time when the other division should be met at the fork in the road. Of the purpose and destination of the band he had no question, for it had been said by the leader himself in his conversation with Claudius Brown that they were bound for Esopus, and Robert was convinced that there could be but one object in such an advance. At Esopus the few prisoners whom the Americans had secured were held; and doubtless the coming of the lieutenant with his redcoats had something to do with a project for their release by their friends. There flashed into his mind the recollection of the letter which he himself had taken from the man whom he had discovered in the bushes in the rear of Hannah Nott's house, and he was striving to think out the possible connection between that fact and the present advance of the band, in the midst of which he was marching. Days had elapsed since his discovery, and Jacob Gunning had sent his own daughter with the letter to parties in whose hands the information would not be permitted to be useless.

Still the men with him swung forward on their march, moving steadily, swiftly, silently, until they almost seemed to be like one body advancing in the night. An hour had elapsed since their departure from Jacob's ruined tavern, when at a low word from the lieutenant the entire band halted. There was a brief whispered conversation between the officer and Claudius Brown, and then the latter glided away and speedily disappeared.

The band meanwhile remained motionless in the road, but the men all apparently understood that Claudius Brown had been sent ahead to ascertain if possible whether or not their friends were waiting for their arrival. It was not difficult for Robert to conclude that they must be near the fork in the road where the expected meeting was to occur, and he was well-nigh as deeply interested as his companions. What the union of the two forces might mean he clearly understood, and he found himself waiting impatiently for the return of the cowboy.

Not many minutes had elapsed when he perceived Claudius Brown coming swiftly back along the road, and the lieutenant hastily advanced to meet him. A low conversation followed, only occasional bits of which could be

heard by Robert, although he listened intently.

"Here?" he heard the lieutenant inquire in apparent surprise.

"No. There," replied Claudius Brown, but Robert could not hear any more.

The conversation was speedily ended and the officer turned back to his men. The word to advance was given, and the march was at once resumed. This time, however, the band proceeded more slowly, and soon Robert could see that they had withdrawn from the sheltering forest and were in an open space. Before him the fork in the road was to be clearly seen, and he looked eagerly for the presence of the men who were to join them. Not one, however, could he see.

On the side of the other road, near where it joined the one over which the band was marching, was a long dark stretch of forest whose borders came close up to the road itself, but of men near by nothing was to be seen. The officer, however, apparently was confident; and as soon as he had led the way to the fork, he turned sharply into the other road and advanced toward the woods, his men still following him obediently. Doubtless the man was about to lead his band into the adjacent woods

and there await the coming of his allies, and Robert concluded that the other expected forces had not as yet arrived.

Almost mechanically he was moving with the men now, but the ever-present purpose to break away from them and strive to escape received a fresh impetus as he thought of the darkness among the great trees in the place to which they evidently were going.

Suddenly the peaceful scene was dispelled, and from the road behind them, from the woods, as well as from the road before them, arose shouts and shots, and almost as if they had sprung from the ground itself men appeared. Despite the sharp call of the lieutenant, who at first bravely stood his ground, the advancing little force of redcoats was thrown into confusion. The men scattered and fled, and the surprise and consternation were complete. But in whichever direction they turned, apparently enemies were there to meet them, and they were turned back only to try to escape by fleeing in another direction. But the shouts and the numbers of the attacking party increased with every passing moment.

Left to himself for the time, Robert Dorton instantly made use of the unexpected opportunity to escape that had presented itself.

As the men broke and fled, for a moment he stood motionless and glanced eagerly all about him, but it was impossible to distinguish friend from foe in the dim light. The shouting was also confusing, and the men appeared to be coming from every side.

Instantly he cast himself upon the ground by the roadside, resolved to lie quiet till the first excitement had passed. That the attacking party consisted of friends he had no doubt, and as soon as the redcoats had fled and the others were masters of the field, he would arise and declare himself. A feeling of exultation possessed him. He had been able to retain the precious letter which had been intrusted to his keeping, and soon he would be able to return and secure his horse, and then could once more push swiftly forward on his way. The shouts and calls of the men sounded almost like music in his ears. The presence of friends at such a moment, of all times, was most welcome. He lifted his head from the ground and gazed about him. He could see the dim outlines of men in the distance, but pursuers and pursued were much alike in the dim light. A half dozen men were coming swiftly up the road toward the place where he was lying, and they were shouting wildly

to those who were far in advance of them. Ignoring his own peril, he raised himself from the ground, and instantly was seen by the approaching men, two of whom stopped and seized him, as one of them shouted, "Here's one! He must have been hit!"

Seizing Robert roughly by the shoulder, he said, "Come along with me, my man! I'll put you where you won't bother the redcoats and Tories at Esopus again!"

Forgetful of the fact that the others did not know him, or could be aware of his presence in the force, perceiving only that his welcome was decidedly lacking in the cordial feeling which he himself had had, Robert roughly flung the man from him as he exclaimed, "Don't put your hands on me!"

"Give up, or I'll blow your brains out!" shouted the man angrily, as he rose from the ground and started again with his companion toward Robert.

The powerful young express seized one of the advancing men by the shoulders and flung him far back from the road, and then turned upon the other who was raising his gun to his shoulder. Leaping upon him, Robert bore him to the ground, seized the gun in his hands, wrenched it from the grasp of the



prostrate man, and instantly turned to face the first man, who had recovered from his fall, and was again about to rush upon him.

“Stand back there! Stop where you are!” he shouted in his excitement. “What do you want to treat one of your own men in this fashion for?”

“You’re a Tory! You’re a redcoat!” shouted the man in reply. “I saw you! You’re one of ’em! Give yourself up or it’ll be the worse for you!” — “Come back here and help us!” he shouted, calling to his companions who had rushed forward. “Come back here! Here’s one of ’em who won’t give himself up!”

Robert did not wait to ascertain what the effect of the call was as he said hastily, “I’m no redcoat. You’ve made a mistake. I’m as good an American as you are. Come on! I’ll go with you.”

“Come on, then!” exclaimed the man, as he rushed forward and roughly grasped Robert by one arm. “Take him by the other arm, Joe!” he called to his companion.

As the second man advanced, Robert peered into his face and exclaimed, “Joe Nott! What are you doing here?”

The man, startled by the unexpected de-

mand, in turn peered into the face of Robert, and said in astonishment, "Are you young Dorlon?"

"I am!"

"Do you know him, Joe? Is he all right?" demanded the other.

"Sound as a button. Of course he's all right. But" —

"Come along then! Don't stand here like a hen with her head cut off! We must help chase the redcoats. Come on! Better keep an eye on him," he added warningly, as all three began to run swiftly in the direction in which their recent companions had disappeared.

Whether it was due to the delay or to the speed at which the surprised men were fleeing Robert did not know, but they were unable to obtain even a glimpse of any of the men who had broken and fled at the sudden attack, and in the course of a half hour all three returned to the fork in the road where it had been agreed that all should assemble after the pursuit of the band of redcoats. Most of the band were already there when the three returned, and it was discovered that five men had been secured and were prisoners in their hands. Robert quickly passed from one to

another, hoping to find Claudius Brown in the number, but the leader of the Thirteen was not to be seen, and evidently he had succeeded in escaping from his pursuers. Then Robert quickly sought out his friend Joseph and said to him, —

“I must go back to the place where I left my horse. Can you come with me?”

“You’re a fine looking object!” exclaimed Joseph, with a laugh. “Your clothes look like a lot of holes tied together.”

“Yours would, too, if you had been through what I have,” replied Robert grimly.

“What’s that?”

“I’ll tell you all about it on our way back, and you can tell me how you happened to be here. It was mighty fortunate that you were, for me, anyway.”

“All right. Come on, I’ll ask Captain Wood.”

The two young men sought the leader of the force of fifty men, and though at first he appeared to be somewhat suspicious of Robert, he was soon convinced by Joseph’s word that he was what he claimed to be. He refused permission for Joseph to return with his friend, however, explaining that his presence might be required at any moment, and

also that, as there was but one horse, there would be a disadvantage in two men going to secure it. Somewhat disappointed, the boys turned away, and Robert prepared to return to Jacob's tavern, or rather to the place where his tavern had stood ; but before he set forth he was surprised as well as pleased by a word which Joseph gave him.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JACOB

"YOU'D better stop and see Hannah," said Joseph, laughing lightly as he spoke.

"Where is she?"

"You know where Dirck Rykman's house is?"

"Yes."

"Well, she and mother are staying now at the first house beyond Dirck's. Don't you tell her that I suggested it, but I really think she'd like to know if you've got all the ashes out of your hair yet."

"I'll try to do it," responded Robert eagerly. "Will you be there, too?"

"Can't tell. I'm likely to be anywhere or nowhere these days."

Robert was eager to question his friend more fully, but the importance of at once returning and securing his horse was too great to admit of any delay, and accordingly he turned away and was soon moving swiftly over the road by which he and the force, that had been planning to rescue the captive redcoats

that were held by the Americans at Esopus, had come. How different everything now was! All danger, it was true, had not departed, but the threatened attack upon Esopus was frustrated, his own letter he had succeeded in retaining, and the chances of his being able to deliver it into the hands of General Clinton had greatly improved. Despite his feeling of weariness, Robert was almost light-hearted as he moved onward through the darkness. It was true that he was now without any means of defense, and his clothing did not permit of his making a very agreeable presentation of himself if he chanced to meet any one, but that meeting for the present was what he most of all desired to avoid.

Even the perplexing questions as to how it chanced that Hannah Nott and her mother should now be where Joseph had declared they were, and whether or not Dirck Rykman had been released by the patrols who had seized him under such suspicious circumstances, would soon be solved, he assured himself, if he could secure his horse again; and in the renewed interest which the conviction afforded he quickened the pace at which he was moving, and in certain parts of the road even found himself running in his eagerness.

At last he arrived at a spot from which he could see before him the ruins of Jacob Gunning's recent home. The smoke was still rising, and even the flames had not entirely died away; but as he approached a new fear arose in his mind that the landlord might already have departed from his ruined home and taken Nero with him.

The fear was speedily relieved, however, when he perceived a man moving about near the smouldering ruins of the barn, and in the dim light Robert recognized him as Jacob himself. Beginning to run, he called out, "Jacob, is that you?"

Apparently no heed was given to his hail, for the man did not even glance toward him. It was strange, Robert thought, but a second look confirmed his conviction that it was indeed Jacob who was wandering about the place, and, hastily approaching him, Robert said as he halted before him, —

"What are you doing, Jacob? Looking for something that was lost?"

The man lifted his head for a moment, gazed at Robert, and then without a word dropped it again and resumed his silent walk.

"Jacob! Jacob!" exclaimed Robert, "what's wrong? What are you doing?"

"Everything is wrong," replied Jacob, in a low voice as he stopped again.

"I know it, Jacob. It's terrible! Every one of the villains ought to hang for it. But you are not the only one to suffer, Jacob," he added, attempting to console him.

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded Jacob harshly.

"Not much, I know. Still, it is n't quite as if you were the only one to suffer, you know."

"I don't see it."

"Have you done anything with my horse?" inquired Robert.

"'Horse?' 'Horse?' What should I be doing with horses at a time like this? Just look at that, will you?" demanded Jacob, his voice breaking as he spoke and a great sob escaping him. "Here I've lived ever since I was married. Here I wanted to live all my days. But the sooner it's all ended now the better for me," he added disconsolately.

"The Notts had their house burned, and by the same rascals, too," suggested Robert.

"That does n't alter my case. I'm sorry for them, but just tell me what I'm to do, will you?" he demanded savagely.

"I don't know, Jacob, unless you do just what the others are doing."



"What 's that?"

"Going into the fight for our liberties. Every man of the Notts is in the army, and even Hannah and her mother are not giving up. At least, that 's what Joseph told me."

"Give up? Who 's been talkin' 'bout givin' up, I 'd like to know. I have n't."

"No, you have n't. That 's so, Jacob," said Robert soothingly.

"I have n't said a word 'bout givin' up," continued Jacob. "I 've been thinkin' an' thinkin' ever since th' men went away what I should do. You went away with 'em, did n't ye? How does it happen that ye 're back here?"

In response to the question, Robert recounted the events that had occurred near the fork in the road, but even his description of the confusion and flight of the band of redcoats apparently did not arouse any enthusiasm in the heart of the landlord. His dejection and despair were too great to be lightly shaken off, and as Robert looked at him his own heart went out in sympathy to the man whose home had been so wantonly destroyed.

"I 'll tell ye what I 'm goin' t' do," said Jacob, in a low, intense voice. "I 've been thinkin' it all out ever since ye left. At first

I thought I 'd put straight for Fort Montgomery an' tell General Clinton I 'd join the army an' fight as I 'll venture t' say—mighty few o' his men 'll fight. I don't know whether t' call him *General* Clinton or Gov'nor Clinton now."

"Why not? What do you mean?"

"Why, General Clinton is the Governor now. Have n't ye heard 'bout it?"

"No, I have n't heard of it."

"Well! he is, whether ye heard of it or not."<sup>1</sup>

"I 'm glad of it."

"So 'm I. But that has n't anything t' do with my plans."

"No," assented Robert.

"What I 'm goin' t' do is to try to run this rascal to his hole."

"Who?"

"Claud Brown."

"How will you do it?"

<sup>1</sup> In 1777, under the new constitution of the State of New York, General George Clinton was elected Governor and Lieutenant-Governor of the newly formed commonwealth. In the former office he continued eighteen years. In 1801 he was again elected Governor of New York, and three years afterward was elected Vice-President of the United States, an office which he was holding at the time of his death in 1812. His chief competitor in his first election was General Philip Schuyler.

“Do it? I don’t know jest how I’ll do it, but I’m not concerned ’bout that. All I know is that ’t will be done, and done afore he’s many days older, too. And I’ll be there,” he added grimly. Then, his voice rising in the excitement that seemed to overpower him, he shouted, “I’ll chase him clear t’ kingdom come, if I have to! I won’t eat nor sleep till I get my hands on him! He’s robbed the widows! He’s turned traitor more times ’n he has hairs on his head! He’s burnt up ’bout all th’ houses that’ll stand burnin’, I’m thinkin’. I’ll leave my family t’ shift for themselves an’ I’ll jest go at it day an’ night till I bring Claud Brown to a place where he’ll quit his doin’s for good an’ all! He’ll find out that his game is n’t all on one side, before I’m done with him!”

“When are you going to begin, Jacob?” inquired Robert.

“‘Begin?’ I’m goin’ t’ begin now, right away! Good-by!” And before his startled companion was fully aware of what was occurring, Jacob Gunning had turned abruptly away, and disappeared as he ran swiftly out into the road in the direction from which Robert himself had just come.

Too surprised to protest, the young soldier

stared at the spot where the landlord had disappeared, and his first thought was to follow the man, who seemed almost to have lost his wits; but in a moment he restrained the impulse, as he was aware that Jacob must go somewhere, for it was impossible for him to remain at his ruined home. Perhaps this departure was what he most needed. At least, it might serve to divert his thoughts in part from the horrible experiences through which he had recently been compelled to go.

Somewhat reassured by the thought, Robert turned hastily into the woods and began to search for his horse, nor was it long before he found him. A low whinny greeted his approach, and Robert could perceive that Nero was greatly excited, a condition which was not in the least surprising to his owner in view of the experiences of the night.

The animal was led from the woods; as soon as the highway had been gained Robert leaped upon his back, and in a moment horse and rider were speeding swiftly along the road into which the excited landlord himself had turned a brief time before. Although Robert kept a careful lookout for the man, nothing had been seen of him when the young express arrived at the fork in the road

where the surprise and rout of the redcoats had occurred.

Even there no traces of the recent excitement were to be found, but in the very stillness there was something almost ominous to the young rider. Almost unaware of what he was doing, he drew the rein more tightly on his horse, and found himself peering intently about him as he moved forward more slowly, fearful of discovering some one near. For a mile or more he cautiously proceeded on his way, but the tense silence of the night was not broken except by the sound of the foot-falls of the horse he was riding. He soon turned into a road which he recognized as one over which he had before passed, and a feeling of increasing confidence returned to him. Perils were by no means gone, but the immediate fear of discovery by Claudius Brown or any of his gang had in a measure departed.

Steadily Robert continued on his way until in the light of the early morning he perceived the familiar little place of Dirck Rykman before him. He was eager to stop to make inquiries concerning his friend, and learn what had become of his little wife and child, but he could see no one about the house, and as he had convinced himself that

it was necessary for him to stop at the house next beyond and at least permit his wearied horse to obtain some much-needed rest, he soon passed Dirck's lonely abode, and in a brief time could see the place where Joseph Nott had informed him that Hannah and her mother were staying.

It was by this time fully light, and the brightness of the early sun was flooding all things with its glory. Myriads of birds were to be heard in the woods and fields as he passed, and something of the peacefulness of the scene crept over Robert's heart. It was good, he thought, even for a brief time to be where the horrors of the sights he had recently seen no longer appeared; and, too, there was an added pleasure in the thought that he might soon see the resolute girl by whose quick wit and prompt action he had before escaped from Claudius Brown and his associates. As he drew near the house he discovered some one in the yard in front picking flowers from the bushes that bordered the walk from the house to the horse block by the side of the road. In a moment he perceived that it was Hannah herself, and he called to her as he leaped from the back of his horse and stopped near the horse block.

"Joe told me you might stop here," she said, as she advanced to greet him.

"Joe? Has Joe been here? Is he here now?"

"I should think you would ask after my mother first," she said archly.

"I beg your pardon. Is your mother here? And is she well?"

"She is quite well, kind sir, and, if you desire, I will at once take you to her. Joseph said you might stop to pay your respects to her."

"I shall, I will, I am," — began Robert in some confusion. Somehow this girl always seemed to deprive him of the ability to say just what he intended.

"I am, thou art, he is," laughed Hannah.

"You did not tell me if Joseph was here."

"He was, but he is not now. He's gone back to the fort."

"Will you give me some breakfast?"

"That I will. You must be hungry and tired after such a night," said Hannah kindly. Then for a moment she stopped, and, looking at Robert, began to laugh.

In some confusion the young express said tartly, "You seem to find me very funny. I don't know that I care to" —

"Oh, Robert!" she said quickly, "if you could only see yourself! Where did you get those clothes?"

Robert, in the excitement of the night, had almost forgotten the condition of his own clothing, and as he glanced down at himself the first feeling of confusion speedily passed, and he, too, laughed at his own woe-begone appearance.

"You poor boy!" said Hannah gently, her eyes filling as she spoke. "You must have had a terrible time somewhere. Are you hurt?"

"No, I'm hungry," laughed Robert, his good humor instantly restored.

"Of course you are. Come right into the house — No, take your horse out to the barn and feed him, and then come in. By the time you are ready we'll have something warm for you to eat."

As she turned and ran into the house, Robert obeyed her suggestion, and taking his horse by the bridle started toward the barn. But he was startled by the sight that greeted him as he entered, and he did not return to the house until Hannah herself came to summon him.



## CHAPTER XXV

### THE COUNTERFEIT MONEY

BEFORE him, kneeling upon the floor of the barn, in front of a low chest or bin, Robert perceived an old man. So engrossed had the man been in his own work, or so quiet had been Robert's approach, that the young express had stepped upon the floor before the other man had been made aware of his coming. An expression of consternation and fear swept over the man's face when he saw that he was discovered, and with a quick motion of his arm he swept something from the top of the chest into his pocket. Quick as was his action, Robert had seen what it was that the man was striving to conceal, and for a moment he hardly dared to trust the evidence of his own eyes, for it was money which the stranger had been examining, and a large roll of bills had been evidently in his possession.

Surprised as Robert was by the unexpected sight, the expression on his face did not change as he led his horse into the barn, and

the old man quickly arose and faced him. Robert could see the manifest fear of the man, and the little eyes and crafty manner at once aroused his suspicions. His first thought had been that the man was indeed fortunate to be the possessor of any money, for the article was exceedingly scarce, as he himself had good reason to know, and even the strange place which the stranger had selected for counting his possessions did not at first make him suspect that anything was wrong. But the moment the man arose and faced him, his expression as well as his manner at once convinced Robert Dorlon that something was amiss. Still, he strove by his own manner to conceal his suspicions, and as he stopped on the barn floor he quietly gazed at the old man, who confronted him.

“Good-day, young sir,” said the old man, with a nervous laugh that was more like a cackle than an expression of pleasure at the meeting.

“Good-day, sir,” responded Robert respectfully, as he quietly returned the look which was given him. Whoever this man was or whatever he might be, he was assured that he himself had nothing to fear from him at the time.

"He, he," tittered the man. "You are an early bird."

Robert did not feel that any response to the assertion was required, so he did not reply.

"Who might you be, young man? Are you?" — The man stopped abruptly and evidently was waiting for Robert to declare who he was and to explain his presence there at that early hour. But Robert had been taught caution, and was convinced that if he replied when he was spoken to he was properly fulfilling the popular requirement of the times.

"Do you come from the fort?" demanded the man.

"No, sir."

"Ah!" responded the old man, with evident relief. "I might have known," he added, as he glanced at Robert's garb, — a glance which Robert himself almost unconsciously followed, — and a smile crept over his face as he took in his somewhat startling appearance in the cut and tattered garments.

"Did you happen to meet with any parties?" inquired the old man. "If you did not come from the fort, doubtless you came from the opposite direction."

"Yes, sir."

"From New York?" inquired the old man quickly.

"I should hardly like to tell you just where I came from," replied Robert, smiling as he spoke.

"I see, I see," responded the old man quickly. "It is well to be cautious in days like these. I was expecting some one this morning. I wonder if you can be the man."

"I stopped here to get some breakfast. I saw a friend of mine in front of the house. Is it your house?" he added.

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir. The house is mine. The Notts have been unfortunate, and my wife insisted that they should come here. I do not altogether approve. Still one must be hospitable. You did not tell me where you came from."

"No, sir," laughed Robert good-naturedly. The old man was a puzzle to him, but if his oddities were all that he had to fear, he need not be alarmed, he assured himself. "If you can give me some breakfast I'll pay you for it," he added.

"Did you see what I was doing when you came into the barn?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was it?"

"You were counting money."

"You have a keen eye. Do you like money?" he demanded abruptly.

"I might like it. I've never had the chance to try," said Robert, with a laugh.

"And you would like the chance?"

"Yes, sir." Robert was becoming interested now, and already his suspicion of the man was assuming a more definite form.

"Ah, yes. Are you going to the fort?"

"I may stop there."

"If I should pay you well for stopping on your way there, would you do me a favor?"

"I fear I shall not be able to stop. I must push on up the river" —

"It will require no time. It can all be done in a minute."

"What is it?"

"You are to leave this at the house of Josh Taggart. Do you know him?"

Robert could perceive that the old man was deeply interested in his reply, and his own suspicions were becoming stronger. The very name "Josh," though a dozen men might claim it, was strongly suggestive.

"Is he with Claud Brown?" he demanded sharply.

"Ah. You do know him, then."

"I have met him."

"Then it may be that I need say no more. Have you had any dealings with him?" The old man's voice dropped and his little eyes seemed to Robert almost to come together, so intense was the expression in them.

"Yes, sir." He decided to try to lead the man on, and it might be that he would learn something which it would be well for the men at Fort Montgomery to know.

"Did he pay you well?"

"Yes, sir, he paid me well," replied Robert warmly.

"You have the 'word,' I see. It is wonderful how many are in this scheme."

"Yes, sir."

"This, then, is what I want you to leave at Josh's house. You may not find him there, but you can give it to his wife. She is a wise woman, and will understand what to do." As he spoke the old man held forth a clipping from a newspaper, and, wondering, Robert took it and read the following:—

"Persons going into the other colonies may be supplied with any number of counterfeited Congress notes for the price per ream. They are so neatly and exactly executed that there is no risk in getting them off, it being almost

impossible to discover that they are not genuine. This has been proved by bills to a very large amount which have been successfully circulated. Inquire for Q. E. D. at the coffee house from eleven p. m. to four a. m. during the present month.”<sup>1</sup>

Robert Dorlon did not change his position while he read the clipping twice through carefully. The first feeling of rage at the treacherous, dishonest man before him gave place to a calmer mind as he endeavored to think out what was best to be done. Of the dastardly work of the counterfeiters, of the false notes scattered throughout the country, he was aware, and he knew too of the sufferings of the people and the straits to which the leaders were put by the action of the unprincipled men who were taking advantage of the weakness of the colonies, not only for their own profit, but also increasing the suffering of the people who were deceived by them and induced to give up their produce or possessions for the worthless paper that was being scattered everywhere. And here was one of the men, who, while pretending to be a friend of the colonies, was engaged in the nefarious work of scattering

<sup>1</sup> An exact reproduction of an advertisement as it appeared in a Tory paper in the year 1777.

and using the counterfeit paper money, which it was said was being provided *by the bushel* in New York and placed where it was most likely to accomplish that for which it had been made.

Somehow he had himself stumbled upon the "word" which served as a password among the trusty, but what it was that he had said he was unable to recall or to conjecture. He resolved to be cautious, and perhaps he might be able to learn more, though he was sincerely troubled by the fact that Hannah and her mother were staying in the house of this man.

"You want me to leave this at Josh's house?" inquired Robert at last.

"Yes, sir, yes. I didn't know at first whether I could trust you or not, but just as soon as you said what you did, then I knew you were one of us, too. Let me show you," and, with trembling fingers, the old man drew forth from his coat a package of bills—doubtless the very ones he had been counting when Robert had surprised him—and held them forth. "Here are eighty-eight Connecticut forty-shilling bills, and here is one of thirty dollars in Continental currency. They are n't so good as some, for they're a bit pale; but most o' the Connecticut bills are



done on copper, and not even George Washington himself could tell 'em from those in his own pocket. I'll give you one o' these for your trouble, that is, if you want it. Probably, though, you've got a good supply on hand yourself."

"I don't look it," replied Robert, gazing ruefully at his torn clothing. He had decided now what he would do, and with his mind once made up, was preparing to carry his plan into action. "Yes, I'll take it. If I just give that piece of paper to Josh he'll know what to do with it, will he?"

"Yes, sir, yes. He'll know; or, if he does n't know, there are those with him who will know."

"You get most of your money, then, from some of Claudius Brown's men, don't you?"

"S-s-s-h!" said the man warningly, glancing timidly about him as he spoke.

"Could I get some at his house?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything about it. All you have to do is to leave that bit o' paper at Josh's. Better put up your horse now and come up to the house for something to eat. You say Hannah told you she was getting you some breakfast?"

"Yes, sir."

As Robert began to lead his horse to the stall, he looked up quickly when he heard the voice of Hannah herself.

"It was breakfast, young man, not dinner, I promised to get you."

"It's too bad, Hannah," laughed Robert. "I didn't know I was so late. I was so interested in what this man — Mr." —

"Mr. Beach?"

"Yes, in what Mr. Beach was saying, that I did not know it was noon yet."

"It is n't, but it will be soon."

"I'll feed my horse and come right up."

"I'm going to wait for you, this time. Mr. Beach," she added, as she turned to the old man, "will you please tell mother that we are ready and she can put the breakfast on the table?"

"Yes, miss, yes."

As the old man departed from the barn, Hannah turned quickly to Robert and said, "There! I've got rid of him! What has he been saying to you, Robert?"

"He's been saying a good many things. He" —

"He's a bad man, Robert! I know he is. I don't know that any good men are left except my father and Joe and the boys."

“My! What is it, Hannah?” Robert had stepped from the stall where he had placed his faithful horse, and as he looked down into Hannah’s face his anger appeared for some reason to be as great as her own.

“Oh, he has n’t hurt me! He would n’t dare to!” and the girl’s eyes snapped as she spoke. “But I just know he’s been doing things no friend of ours would ever do. Last night he and a man were talking for hours, I should say, out by the well.”

“Could you hear them?”

“I could n’t hear what they said, but I could see the man who was there. He was the biggest man I ever saw” —

“Josh!” interrupted Robert sharply.

“I saw the big man give him something that looked like a lot of money. You see, it was moonlight, and I could see everything they did. I don’t know why my father had us come here! I despise this man, but my father thinks it is safer for us here, so I suppose we’ll stay. Oh, dear, I wish we were back in our own home and there was n’t any war.”

“But you’re not back in your own home and there is war, Hannah,” said Robert soberly. “We can’t run from it, you know.”

“Who is talking about running, I’d like to

know? I'd have you to understand, Mr. Dorlon, that I'm not, if that's what you mean! Oh, dear me!" she suddenly exclaimed, "there comes the man now!"

And glancing out of the door Robert was alarmed as he beheld the huge Josh himself approaching the barn.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### AN INTERRUPTED MEAL

THE first impulse to flee was restrained as Robert watched the giant drawing near, for though it would be possible for him to dart past the clumsy man, it would be to leave Hannah alone with him, and he was not prepared for that. Besides, his horse was in the barn, and Robert Dorlon had no thought of losing his faithful friend, without at least an attempt to retain him.

As Josh drew near, Robert could perceive that he himself had been recognized, but the great moon-face of the giant did not betray either anger or surprise, and Robert, prepared to act as occasion might demand, waited quietly for the man to enter.

“Ho! ho!” roared Josh. “What’s this I see?”

“Depends upon what you are looking at, I fancy,” replied Robert sharply.

“Ho! ho! So it does! So it does!” shouted Josh. “Going with me?”

“Where are you going?”

"Back to see some o' your old friends."

"No, I am not going," replied Robert, glancing at Hannah, who was standing beside him, and evidently as excited as he by the interview.

"Think ye better go 'long." Whether Josh was threatening or not, Robert was unable to decide, but he was determined not to give up without an effort to go on his way. He had carefully noted what might be done if such a crisis should come, and he was holding himself ready for action at any moment.

The interview was interrupted, however, by the return of Mr. Beach, who hastily said, "Glad to see ye, Josh. He! he! I was just goin' to have this young man leave a notice with ye. It was a bit I had cut out o' the paper, an' I knew 't would interest ye."

"Did you give it to *him*?" demanded Josh sharply.

"Why, yes. He! he! 'T was all right, was n't it? He had th' 'word' all right. I knew ye 'd want it jest as soon as ye could get it, Joshua."

For a moment the huge cowboy glared at the trembling man as if he was minded to deal with him as he deserved. "If I expected to come back into these parts very

soon again, I'd be for having both o' ye follow 'long with me an' let Claud deal with ye as he wanted to. You poor fool, don't you know who this fellow is?"

"No, no, Josh, I can't say that I do. He! he! He is a good friend. He knows the 'word.' He gave it to me himself."

"He's an express from Washington."

"Ye don't say so! He doesn't look it. I'd never 'a' thought it."

In spite of his predicament, Robert smiled as he heard the words, for he was well aware that his own appearance was not such as to inspire respect or even fear in a beholder.

"That's what he is. He's goin' 'long with me, though, so ye'll get off this time. But I can't see how ye came to let him know."

Robert had his own ideas as to whether he would accompany Josh or not, but he did not speak. Had it not been for the presence of Hannah he would at once have made a dash past the clumsy man who was standing in front of him, but if he could avoid a personal encounter it would be better for all concerned, he decided.

"Before any of you go, you'll come up to the house and have something to eat," inter-

rupted Hannah. "I know you are hungry," she added, looking shrewdly at Josh, "and we've just got some breakfast for you. It's all ready now, and you won't have to wait long."

"Thank ye, miss," began Josh dubiously.

"Come on, Robert," said Hannah, quickly giving her friend a keen look as she turned to him for a moment.

"Will ye give me yer word ye won't try t' get away?" demanded Josh dubiously, of Robert.

"I'll give you nothing!" said Robert tartly. "I shan't ask you if I can come or go." His hand was on his pistol as he spoke, and his face was flushed with anger. He would not go with this man, he reasoned, come what might.

"You won't any of you try to get away while you are eating that breakfast. I'm sure you are not afraid of me, and you are not afraid of him, are you?" Hannah demanded of Josh, as she pointed at Robert.

"Ho! ho! Afraid o' him? I'd take three such fellows an' knock their heads together any day o' the week for a half joe!"

There was a threatening movement on Robert's part, for his anger was rapidly mastering



him. There were even thoughts of compelling the huge Josh to accompany him at the point of his pistol, but the expression on Hannah's face was puzzling to him, and, perplexed, he hesitated. There was more in the girl's words than appeared, and his confidence in her was so strong that he resolved to follow the implied suggestion she had given, though he was still at a loss to understand what it meant.

"Robert, you go first," said the girl resolutely, "and we'll follow."

Again the young express glanced at her, but still he was unable to understand. Nevertheless he obeyed and at once followed her suggestion, starting toward the house with the others quickly following. At Hannah's word they all proceeded to the kitchen, where the table had been prepared and food was awaiting their coming.

"Now then, you are n't afraid of him?" demanded Hannah of Josh.

"Ho! ho!" roared the giant.

"And, Robert, you are not afraid of him?" she then inquired of her friend.

"No, Hannah, I'm not afraid of him, but I won't trust him," said Robert.

"Then let me take your pistols, both of

you," she said sharply. "I'll put them on the table, right at the other end, so you can see just where they are. You are not afraid of each other, and you can get them just as soon as you have eaten, but *I'm* afraid of the pistols and of you, too. I am sure I can serve you both better if you will do what I say. Come! Let me have them!" she added, as she held out her hands.

Still unable to comprehend her plan, but trusting her freely, Robert gave her his weapon, and in a moment Josh roared, "I guess I can stand it if he can. Here goes!" and he handed his pistol to Hannah, who took both his and Robert's and placed them at the extreme end of the table. Without departing from the room she called to her mother, and in a brief time the simple breakfast had been placed upon the table.

Despite his own anxiety, Robert at once began to eat, and his huge companion was not slow in following his example. Meanwhile Hannah bustled about the room, never once leaving it, though twice she whispered to her mother and several times seemed to question her with her eyes. Something was being done, Robert was confident, though what it was he was unable to conjecture. Suddenly the girl's

manner changed and she stopped in front of the table and, looking laughingly at Robert, said, "I wish you could see yourself, now."

The face of the young express flushed slightly as he replied, "I'm happy even if my clothes don't look as new as they ought."

"'The beggars are come to town.' I can see some in rags and some in tags, but I don't see any in velvet gowns."

"Ho! ho! ho!" roared Josh.

"Where did you meet with your mishap, kind sir?" inquired Hannah demurely.

"I am indebted to Claud Brown for all that." Robert spoke quietly, but he looked boldly into Josh's face as he spoke.

"I know how, and what for," said the huge man, as if he prided himself upon the keenness of his vision.

"Yes, I have no doubt. And before he's done with it, Claud Brown will be asking himself a hundred times why he ever was so foolish as to do it," spoke up Hannah.

"You can trust Claud Brown. He's cute," said Josh sagely.

"'Trust' him?" retorted Hannah. "I'd as soon trust a rattler or a spotted adder."

"Ho! ho!" roared Josh, leaning back in his chair, which threatened to give way be-

neath him. Suddenly he glanced at the table where the pistols had been placed, and discovered that both were gone.

Leaping to his feet, his rage evident in the expression upon his face, he shouted, "Here now, wench! That 'll never do! None o' yer tricks here! Put those pistols back or it 'll be the worse for you."

"I haven't your pistols," replied Hannah, as she backed toward the door.

"Give me my pistol!" shouted Josh, now thoroughly enraged, and seizing his chair he started toward her.

"Better look at the windows," retorted Hannah, as she darted from the room and hastily closed the door behind her.

Instantly both Josh and Robert glanced at the two open windows behind them, for both men had risen in the excitement and Robert had grasped his chair ready to follow the giant if he should pursue Hannah. At each window two men were standing with rifles at their shoulders, and all four guns were aimed directly at the three men in the room.

"Don't stir!" said one of the outsiders in a low voice. "Keep perfectly quiet and you 'll not suffer any harm."

Robert was too dazed to refuse, but he was

vaguely wondering if this was a part of the intrepid girl's plan. The men wore no uniform, and one glimpse had been sufficient to convince Robert that all four of them were strangers to him. For a moment the very silence itself was as eloquent as it was awkward. Josh's face, too, was as blank as it was huge, but he did not move from his position. He did not know enough to be frightened, was Robert's comment to himself, as he could see the giant's abject helplessness. What his own position was he did not clearly perceive, but his confidence in Hannah, the fact that she had lured them all into the room and that the pistols had been secured, all seemed to him as parts of a scheme from which he had little to fear.

The door into the room was opened at this moment and four men entered, each with a rifle in his hands and ready for use. Three of the men covered the inmates with their guns, and one of them placing his rifle on the floor drew forth from his pocket a long strap with which he advanced upon Josh.

The giant's eyes flashed as he perceived what the purpose of the man was, and drawing back his fist he retreated to the wall and shouted, "I'm not afraid o' the lot! The first man that

tries to lay a hand on me will get his head smashed ! ”

For a moment the man with the strap faltered, the appearance of Josh was so threatening. The giant was at least six feet and five inches in height, and his marvelous strength was manifest in his great shoulders as well as in his brawny arms and threatening bearing.

“ Now look here, my good fellow, ” said one of the men with the rifles, “ we are n’t here to coddle you. You can take your choice between eight chunks of lead or having your hands tied. ”

For an instant Josh gazed stupidly at the speaker and then without a word held forth his hands, which were speedily bound behind his back by the man with the strap, who, although he was by no means small, still appeared almost a pygmy beside his huge captive.

“ Now then, you’re next, ” said the man, approaching Mr. Beach.

“ Me ? Me ? ” screamed the terrified man. “ I have n’t done anything ! I ’m not to blame for these men being here ! This is my house ! ”

“ Hold out your hands ! ” said the man sternly.

“ But I tell you you ’ve made a mistake ! I have n’t done anything ! Don’t take me away ! ”

I'm innocent! What are you taking me for? I never harmed anybody in all my life!" The man's terror was so abject that it was pitiful. He cast himself on the floor and cried aloud as he strove to grasp the knees of the man with the strap.

"What shall I do?" inquired the latter of the leader, hesitating for a moment.

"Tie him up!"

"What for? What for? Tell me what for," pleaded the old man.

"For the counterfeit money you've been scattering," replied the leader sternly. "I doubt not you've some of it about you now."

The face of the old man was drawn and pale as he gazed helplessly at his captors, but he offered no further protest, and in a brief time his hands were securely bound, as Josh's previously had been.

"Now, then, number three," said the man, as he turned to Robert.

"You don't want me and I'll explain if you'll give me a chance," said Robert.

"Don't you believe him," called Mr. Beach. "He's the worst one of all! He's got some of the bills on him now. Search him and see for yourselves. You'll find a Connecticut bill for forty shillings on him now. Search him

and you'll find it just as I have said," he shouted. "You 'll find an advertisement, too, for a place where he can get more. He tried to get me to take it but I would n't. I'm innocent! I'm telling you the truth. He's the only guilty one. Ask Josh! Search him and see if I have n't spoken the truth!"



## CHAPTER XXVII

### TAR AND FEATHERS

“HOLD out your hands, young man!” said the man sternly.

“I’ll do what you say, but if you will give me just a minute to explain I’m sure I can make everything clear to you.” Robert spoke quietly, for he was convinced that it would be useless to protest in the midst of the present excitement. Accordingly he complied with the demand, and his wrists were speedily bound.

The other four men now entered the room, and the thongs were inspected by the one who evidently was the leader. As he approached Robert the young express said eagerly in a low voice, “Take me outside just for a minute. I’ll explain everything to you, or if you are going to the fort, I’ll wait till we get there. But if you’re not, you *must* listen to me.”

“We’re not going to the fort,” said the man dryly.

“Then let me tell you about it!” said

Robert eagerly. "You'll be sorry for your mistake if you don't. It is n't on my account I'm asking it! Hannah will tell you."

"She's gone."

"Gone? Gone where? When did she go?"

"When we came."

"Is her mother here? She'll tell you," said Robert quickly.

"She's gone, too."

"Then you must let me tell you! It's a good deal more important than you think."

The man evidently was impressed, for turning to his men he bade them remain where they were while he led the prisoner outside the house.

"Now, then," he said curtly when they were in the open air, "what is it?"

"I'm an express, and on my way to Fort Montgomery, and then to the army in the north."

"How do I know that?" inquired the man suspiciously.

"Take off my hat. You'll find a letter inside, and the address on it will show you that I'm telling you the truth."

The man at once removed Robert's hat and discovered the letter within. He gazed at the

paper dubiously for a moment, read the address inscribed on it, and then said, "This may be only a trick."

"You can send a man with me to Fort Montgomery," suggested Robert. "That'll show whether I'm telling you the truth or not."

"Can't do that. Can't do it anyhow. I might read this letter," he added thoughtfully.

"You may do as you please about that. I have n't read it myself. I did n't think I had any right to open it. But I'm sure, if it will help me, there would n't be any objection. You must do as you think best."

"How did you happen to be here at this time?" inquired the man, although he made no move to open the letter.

The young express briefly recounted the events of the night and explained the cause of his presence in the house.

"I should think Hannah would have told me," said the man. It was evident that he was hesitating, but was not yet fully persuaded.

"Did she know? Did she expect you?" said Robert quickly.

The man smiled as he said, "I don't mind

telling you it was all a part of the trap. Her father had her and her mother come here just to find out if this old rascal was really handling the counterfeit money, as it was reported that he was doing."

"And that was how you happened to come?"

"Partly," replied the man. "We're out after Claud Brown and his gang. Two hundred of us, men and boys, are scouring the country, and we'll get him if we have to chase him right into the house where Sir Henry Clinton is, or follow him clear to Montauk Point. His work has got to stop, and stop right now!"

"Good! good!" exclaimed Robert eagerly. "He's the man that served me this trick," and as he spoke Robert looked down at his torn and cut garments.

"He did? What for?"

"Trying to find that letter you have in your hands."

"Why did n't he find it, then?"

Robert explained how it was that his hat had escaped the search, and then said eagerly, "If you don't believe me you'll at least send that letter right on to General Clinton, won't you?"

"Have you a horse?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is it?"

"In the barn."

"Young man, you take this letter to General Clinton yourself. I may be a fool for letting you go, but I'm going to do it." Drawing his knife, he quickly cut the thongs by which Robert's hands were bound, and restoring to him the letter which he had taken, he said, "You'd better not waste any time."

"Thank you! Thank you, sir!" replied Robert eagerly, as he grasped the letter. "Where did you say Hannah and her mother had gone?" he inquired, as he prepared to start for the barn.

"I did n't say. If you're bound for Fort Montgomery, it won't make any difference to you anyway. I don't mind telling you that she's at my house. She and my son are" —

"Are *what*?" demanded Robert quickly, as the man paused.

"It does n't concern you what they are," said the man tartly. "If you're as anxious as you pretend to be to get inside the fort, you'll not stop to ask any more foolish questions here. I may change my mind about you

if you don't look out, and decide to take you along with Josh."

Robert Dorlon made no response, but as he turned toward the barn somehow it seemed to him that, in spite of the release he had secured, there was something radically wrong with the day. It was not what the man had said so much as what he had implied that troubled him. It was easy to believe that the resolute girl had taken the part in the detection of the counterfeiter which the man had explained, but what had been implied in his words concerning her and his son? Robert did not even know what the man's name was nor where he lived, but it would be useless to stop longer to make inquiries, for the stranger might do as he had threatened and prevent him from proceeding on his way. It occurred to Robert that he might learn more at the fort if Joseph Nott or his brothers were there, and with this partial satisfaction he quickly led Nero forth from the barn, and leaping upon the back of the faithful animal was soon, despite his own weariness, speeding swiftly on his errand.

The day was bright and cloudless, and the heat of the late summer sun was intense, so that when two hours had elapsed he was glad of the opportunity to stop for a rest both for

himself and for his horse at a sheltered spot by the roadside, where a spring poured its little stream of water into the tiny brook that for a time followed the same course he was pursuing.

As soon as he had quenched his thirst, he threw himself at full length upon the ground, while he permitted his wearied horse to obtain a brief respite as it cropped the grass and bushes by the side of the road. It was good to have a brief rest, he assured himself, and as he glanced for a moment at the sun he was confident that within two hours his letter would be safely delivered into the hands of General Clinton himself. A smile of satisfaction crept over his face at the thought, and somehow the peacefulness of the scene about him imparted something of its own charm to his feelings. Claud Brown and his evil comrades were for the time like the figures seen in a dream. Even the shrill cries of the counterfeiter were unreal. Jacob Gunning's anger and his determination to devote himself to running down the band of cowboys assumed somewhat more distinct form in view of the task of the unknown man and his seven comrades who had seized the huge Josh and the counterfeiter at the latter's home; but all

these things were of minor importance compared with the puzzling part which Hannah Nott and her mother had had in the detection of the traitor.

Where was Hannah now? And what had the leader of the band, whose very name he did not know, implied in his statement concerning her and his son? The questions were troublous ones, but the young express was aroused from his reverie by the sound of a groan that seemed to issue from the bushes on the opposite side of the road.

Startled by the unexpected sound, Robert leaped to his feet, and for the first time realized that he had not secured his pistol when he had left the house where he had been seized. Even then he felt that he was not altogether to blame, for Hannah had removed his weapon when she had taken Josh's, and he had no knowledge where they had been placed.

He was listening intently for the startling sound to be repeated, but several minutes elapsed and the silence was unbroken save by a snort of his horse and the metallic noises of the locusts. And yet he could not persuade himself that he had been deceived, for the groan was by no means faint or indistinct.



At last he took a club in his hands and moved cautiously across the road. He peered into the bushes, but was unable to perceive any cause for the startling sound. With his club he carefully parted the bushes and almost stepped back when he discovered something on the ground before him that instantly assured him his fears had not been without some foundation.

But what was it that he saw? At first Robert was unable in his excitement to determine whether it was the body of a man or of some beast. He thought of the similar experience he had had a few weeks before in the rear of Hannah's home, and grasping his club firmly in his hands pushed his way into the bushes until he stood over the prostrate body. And then he knew, for it was a man lying before him.

The upper part of the body had been stripped, and a thick coating of tar entirely covered it, and upon the tar a sack of feathers evidently had been thrown, so that the appearance of the man was scarcely human. A feeling of anger and of pity swept over Robert's heart; and for a moment, unmindful whether the man was an enemy or a friend, he was striving to think how he might be of

service to the wretched victim of some lawless men.

“Are you hurt?” he inquired in a low voice.

The groan that arose in response to his query left no doubt as to the reply.

“If you can walk, come over here by the spring and I’ll help you.”

A mumbled reply that sounded indistinctly like “I cannot see,” caused Robert to seize one hand of the prostrate man and lift him to his feet.

“There you are!” he said cheerily. “You’re not half dead yet. Come along!”

Groaning pitifully, the man, who apparently was entirely blinded, obeyed, and, clutching Robert’s hand, followed him as he led the way to the spring on the opposite side of the road. For a moment the young express gazed at the abject and wretched victim whose plight certainly was one to move a harder heart than that which he possessed.

“Stand still,” he said quickly. “We’ll see what can be done for you.” Seizing some broken branches, he at once began to scrape the foul mixture from the man’s face, and in a brief time had succeeded in removing enough to enable the man to open his eyes and gaze about him.

"That's right. We'll soon have you in shape again!" said Robert heartily, as he resumed his task.

"I'll have the law on 'em! I'll see that ev'ry one o' the hussies has her due!"

Robert paused abruptly in his task as the unexpected burst of wrath escaped the victim's lips. Robert could see now that the man was young, apparently about his own age.

"When did this happen?" he demanded quietly.

"About an hour ago," responded the young man angrily.

"Where?"

"At Mistress Down's."

"I don't know where that is. Tell me about it," he added gently.

"The hussies were having a quilting frolic there or were doing something of the kind, and I stopped at the house just in a friendly way to see what they were doing."

"And did *they* treat you this way?" demanded Robert.

"They did. They did, indeed."

"I can't understand it. Were they girls or women?"

"Yes, they were."

"No men there?"

"No, I was the only man."

"What made them do it?" said Robert slowly.

"They fancied that I said something against the colonies."<sup>1</sup>

"Did you?"

"Not much. I said that they would be beaten. And I hope they will!"

"And they gave you this coat of tar and feathers?"

"There's more molasses than tar."

"Then all I can say is that they've wasted the tar and molasses and feathers, too."

"Oh! they'll be paid for 'em every farthing's worth. That Hannah Nott" —

"Who?" interrupted Robert sharply.

"That hussy, Hannah Nott. She" —

"Did *she* have a part in this?"

Robert spoke quietly and his voice trembled slightly as he spoke, but his eagerness he could not conceal.

<sup>1</sup> An incident recorded in *Gaines' Mercury* — a newspaper of the times.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE ARMY IN THE NORTH

"SHE was there. She came just as they were pouring the feathers on me, and she laughed, too, the loudest of them all. I'll have the law on her and on the parson's daughter, too. She was the ringleader and the worst one in the company."

"My opinion is that you will make a bad matter worse."

"I did n't ask you what your opinion was, did I?" demanded the young man angrily.

"I can't say that you did."

"What are you doing? You're not going to leave me, are you?" Robert had approached his horse and apparently was preparing to mount and depart.

"My horse won't carry double. I've scraped the tar off your face and you can see to do the rest of it yourself."

"Don't leave me! Don't leave me here alone!" pleaded the man.

"There are n't any girls here. You need not fear," called Robert mockingly as he rode

swiftly away from the place. His sympathy for the unfortunate man was gone and he was disgusted that any one should have taken an opportunity, when the men doubtless had left their homes to engage in the struggle that was becoming narrower in its limits daily, and the girls and women had probably assembled to sew for the soldiers, to declare his distasteful opinions to the patriotic women. He had been treated as he justly deserved, and Robert assured himself that he had done more than could reasonably be expected of him. Perhaps at another time or under other circumstances the young express might have had more generous opinions, but the feeling then was high, and lawlessness was not looked upon as it ordinarily is in times of peace. But afterwards, when he again met Hannah Nott and inquired concerning the treatment of the unknown young man, he received no information, for Hannah refused to explain. Nor did he ever learn who the man was, for he soon disappeared from the region and never returned.

Without further delay Robert Dorlon rode swiftly from the place, nor did he once glance behind him at the unfortunate man, who remained standing beside the spring, or heed the

calls which the man continued to send forth as long as Robert remained within sight.

Fort Montgomery was now not far distant, and Robert's thoughts were of his success in bringing the letter which had been intrusted to him. Even the exciting experiences through which he had been passing were in a measure forgotten, and he was thinking much more of what was still before him than of that through which he had safely passed. His perils became less as he drew nearer the fort, his confidence correspondingly increased, and his exultation was keen when at last he was admitted within the walls of Fort Montgomery and with his own hands delivered his precious letter to General Clinton himself.

On the following morning he was informed by the commander that he was to continue on his way to the army in the north, and with a new outfit of clothing and a pistol for his protection he started on his journey soon after he had received the word.

The unsolved problems that he had left behind him were not forgotten, but there was an added sense of security as he rode forward that was marvelously comforting. Between Fort Montgomery and the northern army, the Tories and the cowboys were less active than they

were in the region below the fort, where the aid of the redcoats themselves was more easily secured. Robert soon discovered that his progress was not impeded, and on the third day he found himself in the midst of the army that was striving to block the advance of John Burgoyne.

Here he was to remain for several days, he soon learned, for important events were in the air, and though daily messengers were sent to the south, the commander requested the young express to remain until the word which he hoped to give might be secured, and then he might go back with a message that would cause the army in the vicinity of Philadelphia to share in the increasing confidence that was daily becoming more manifest among their fellows in the north.

And this air of growing confidence was certainly in evidence, as Robert Dorlon speedily perceived. Already the detachment of Hessians which Burgoyne had sent to Bennington to secure or destroy the stores there had met with an overwhelming defeat, and not the least of the causes of rejoicing was the discovery, which the British general had made, that apparently there were no Tories in the region to rally at his call and provide him with his



much-needed provisions. The problem of supplies for his advancing army was already becoming a serious one for John Burgoyne. General Lincoln, with a resolute force of patriots, was stationed in the rear of the British, to cut off supplies from the north and to prevent any reinforcements breaking through to his aid. Before him was an army undisciplined but resolute, and daily becoming more determined. Not even the jealousies that were prevalent among its leaders or the pettiness of the little General Gates could entirely repress the feelings of the men, who were determined to do their utmost to drive back or at least hold back the invading army.

Another source of the growing confidence in the ranks of the little American army was due to the bravery of young Colonel Gansevoort up in the Mohawk Valley. He had, by the aid of Benedict Arnold and his men, beaten back the army of redcoats and Indians that had advanced from Oswego and planned to sweep on down the valley until they had arrived at Albany, where they had confidently believed that John Burgoyne's victorious army would join them, and together they would meet the force which Howe or Clinton would send up the Hudson to their aid. The result

would be that the colonies would be cut asunder and the "rebellion" speedily be brought to an end.

Colonel Gansevoort had done his best in Fort Stanwix, which had been strengthened and renamed Fort Schuyler, but his force was insufficient to hold the place, his supplies were inadequate; and he had pitifully begged that men and supplies might be sent him from the army under Gates. General Schuyler had earnestly favored granting the request, and had been taunted in return by some of his fellow officers with a desire to weaken the army opposing John Burgoyne and so permit the British to win an easy victory. The taunt stung and hurt the noble man, but he was too much of a patriot to obtrude his own personal sufferings at such a crisis in his country's history, and so suffered in silence. However, Benedict Arnold and a little body of men as resolute as he at once started to the aid of the hard-pressed young colonel. Already the battle of Oriskany had been fought—one of the bloodiest of the Revolution. That sturdy old Dutchman, General Herkimer, had marched from Fort Dayton with a body of farmers and farmers' boys to aid Fort Stanwix, and had halted near where the city of

Utica now stands until word might be received from the fort, to which he had already sent scouts with the promise of his coming; and he was expecting a force to come from the colonel to meet his own advancing troops, and then together they might enter the fort in safety. For he feared, and justly, as the event proved, the ability of his inexperienced followers to withstand an attack if they should be compelled to meet it alone.

Taunted by his over-confident men with cowardice, at last in anger he gave the word to advance; and at Oriskany his men marched into the trap which Brant had laid for them, and there the old general lost his life and many of his men fell. The Indians at last fled when they became alarmed by the rumored approach of a force from Fort Stanwix, but the promised aid to the young colonel did not fully materialize.

It was soon after this that Benedict Arnold with his men drew near, but, mindful of the catastrophe at Oriskany, he hesitated to proceed lest he, too, might be drawn into an ambush similar to that into which General Herkimer's men had fallen. About two miles from Fort Dayton there was living one of the most bitter and treacherous of all the Tories

of the region. This man, Shoemaker by name, had assembled one evening at his house about fourteen of his fellow loyalists, who were trying to devise some means by which they might aid St. Leger, whose loud proclamations had failed to terrify Colonel Gansevoort or bring much assistance from the friends of the king. Word of this gathering having come to the Americans, they sent a small band to seize the men who might be found in Shoemaker's house, and in the success that crowned their efforts they compelled all their prisoners to return with them to Fort Dayton.

Among these prisoners was a well-grown lad, Han Yost Schuyler, who had the reputation of being a half-wit, and had been granted much freedom in both armies. It had been discovered, however, that Han Yost was more a traitor than a fool, for he had been carrying word to St. Leger of the numbers and plans of the patriots. When it was found that Han Yost was among the prisoners secured, he, too, was tried with others by a "drum-head" court-martial which Arnold at once ordered, and with the others was condemned to die.

At once Han Yost's mother and brother made a great outcry. They came to the

American leader, and with tears and entreaties besought that the half-wit might be spared. At the suggestion of Major Brooks, Arnold finally quietly arranged with the mother of the boy that Han Yost's brother should be retained and Han Yost be sent to spread the word among St. Leger's redcoats and Indians that a great force of patriots was advancing to the relief of Fort Stanwix. If Han Yost failed, then his brother was to suffer the penalty that had been determined upon for him. The proposal was eagerly accepted, and, with the scheme known only to a few of the American officers, Han Yost "escaped" from the guard-house, *though his clothing was riddled with bullets in the attempt*, and acting upon the stern command of Benedict Arnold at once started toward the British camps.

By this time Barry St. Leger had steadily drawn nearer the hardly beset little fort, and his lines were within a hundred and fifty yards of its walls. The defenders were as desperate and determined as ever, but even to the sturdy young colonel in command it seemed as if the end was at hand unless aid should speedily arrive from the south. He was aware that men were coming from the army of Gates, but the supreme question was,

would they arrive before a final assault was made?

It was at this very time that Han Yost Schuyler, accompanied by two of the Oneida Indians, — the one tribe that had resisted Brant's appeals and remained friendly to the Americans, — was approaching the camp of St. Leger's Indian allies. As has been stated, Han Yost had been permitted freely to enter either camp, for he was looked upon as a half-wit, at least by the Americans, but his sudden appearance now at once aroused the interest of the red men. It chanced that their medicine men were at this very time consulting the Manitou as to what was best for his red-skinned children to do. Han Yost's unexpected appearance in their midst at once aroused their curiosity, and several of them gathered about him. Half-witted, Han Yost may have been, but he certainly put the half of his wits to good advantage. Thoroughly understanding Indian nature, he did not at once declare his purpose in coming, but began by certain mysterious signs to arouse their interest. And he succeeded. Then he began to explain that great numbers of American soldiers were advancing, and even then were near; and, as he pointed to the bullet holes

in his coat, his words to the simple red men required no further confirmation. In response to their inquiries as to the numbers of their foes, he pointed up to the leaves on the trees, and his task was completed.

The rumor spread like wildfire among the warriors, and the friendly Oneida Indians who had accompanied Han Yost increased the confusion by their own startling words. They declared that the Americans had no desire to visit their vengeance upon their red brothers, but only upon St. Leger and his troops. If the warriors, however, should be found with St. Leger, there would be no doubt that they would be compelled to share his fate.

The alarm had speedily become consternation, and wildly the Indians began to flee. Barry St. Leger, almost in despair, did his utmost to calm them, but in vain. He threatened, he promised fire-water and fire-arms, he pleaded, he begged; but the flight was not stayed. Whenever the speed of the departing men appeared for the moment to slacken, Han Yost and the friendly Oneidas who followed the fleeing army would shout, "They're coming! They're coming!" and the swift pace would be instantly resumed.

Even the white men shared in the panic,

and when at last a measure of order was restored the red men had deserted their allies, and Barry St. Leger and his followers sailed from Oswego and again passed over the beautiful St. Lawrence, and did not stop until they were once more in Montreal itself. Han Yost saved himself, Fort Stanwix, Colonel Gansevoort and his men, by the success of his ruse ; and with the Mohawk Valley once more freed of its foes, Benedict Arnold with his brave and sturdy followers hastened back to rejoin the army which was threatening the invasion of John Burgoyne. Ticonderoga had fallen, the battle of Hubbardton had been lost, the American army had retreated and drawn their enemy on until now, when, if Howe's men from New York could be prevented from coming up the Hudson, there was beginning to be a strong hope that the invasion itself would prove to be most disastrous to those who had planned it. General Putnam had sent up reinforcements from the highlands of the Hudson ; General Washington had sent Morgan with five hundred of his most skillful sharpshooters ; and when Arnold returned it was to learn that the spirits of the soldiers were high and hope was daily becoming stronger. The incompe-



tent dandy, General Gates, had taken the place of honest Philip Schuyler, but not even his pettiness could dampen the ardor of his men. His army was spread out along the western bank of the Hudson from Stillwater down to Half Moon, and Burgoyne's troops were on the eastern bank about thirty miles farther up than the Americans' lines, and extended from Fort Edward to Batten Kill.

All these things Robert Dorlon learned soon after his arrival, but his own personal experiences and what befell him were to be entirely outside the deeds of the heroic little army of patriots.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### BENEATH THE BRUSH HEAP

THE days passed slowly, and still no word was given the young express concerning his return to the army near Philadelphia. Aware as he was of the troubles and jealousies in the northern army, and knowing also, as he did, what must be the anxiety in the heart of the great commander, his own uneasiness increased with the passing days, and was not allayed by the suggestions he received from some of the men, who were specially warm in their feelings toward General Philip Schuyler, that General Gates himself was not too strongly inclined to keep in close touch with Washington. Still Robert knew that messengers had been sent from the northern army to the southward, and several times he endeavored to secure at least the permission he desired to return, even if he was not to be the bearer of a message from General Gates.

At last came the day when as the bearer of a letter from the north he was prepared to set forth on his return. The increasing excite-

ment among the men, the knowledge that sharp and doubtless decisive engagements were soon to occur, and his own eagerness to learn how it fared with the patriots who were doing their utmost to hold General Howe in or near Philadelphia, combined to make Robert Dornon earnest and alert when at last he rode from the camp.

When, two days later, he arrived at Fort Montgomery, he discovered that the same feeling of excitement that he had been aware of in the army was now prevalent in the fort, but as he watched the defenders, his hopes somehow were not strong that they would be able to make a very decided defense of the place if Clinton's men should attack it, as it was daily rumored they were about to do. Already the British had moved up the Hudson, but their actions appeared to be somewhat uncertain, and it was not difficult to conjecture the cause.

On the day following that in which he had entered Fort Montgomery, Robert departed, intrusted with an additional letter for General Washington, and warned repeatedly that in view of the increased and increasing activities in the region below there was need of additional precautions on his own part as well as

the exercise of his utmost discretion in this journey which it was hoped would be the last that it would be necessary for him to make before the results of the campaign would be known. It was a source of some disappointment to him that he had been unable to see Joseph Nott or any of his brothers, and so learn how it had fared with Hannah and various other persons, whose fate and deeds had become of great interest to him.

However, the spirits of the young express were high when he was started on his way, for the early morning air was crisp and cool, and the very excitement under which he was laboring was itself a strong appeal to him. He rode swiftly past some of the places that had become familiar to him in his previous journeys, but he dared not stop, for the command for him to make haste had been imperative, and his fears for his own safety were not lightly to be ignored.

Early in the afternoon the weather changed, a drizzling rain set in, and soon he was wet and miserable; though not for a moment did he abandon the even, steady gait at which he was riding. He had been passing through a long stretch of woods, where the falling leaves and the dreary appearance of the trees

had increased the sense of desolateness that somehow had crept into his heart. It was therefore with a feeling of relief that he perceived before him a clearing, with a little house that was situated on a knoll somewhat back from the roadside. Between the woods and the house the land had been cleared, but stumps and piles of brush disfigured it, and though he peered eagerly before him he was unable to discover any person within sight. He resolved to stop for a moment at the house, and with this thought in his mind he spoke quickly to Nero and prepared to quicken the speed of his faithful beast.

Suddenly, directly in front of him and at a distance of not more than twenty yards, three men stepped into the road, and with their rifles in their hands waited for him to approach. A large dog was with them, and Robert could hear its low growls as it advanced toward him. Instantly he drew rein on his horse, and though he did not stop, he advanced slowly, watching the men keenly and striving to discover if he had ever seen any of them before. They were all three strangers to him, he speedily perceived, but his fears were not allayed by the fact, and their attitude and bearing increased his alarm. Almost

instinctively he concluded that they must have been aware of his coming and had been lying in wait for him, concealed among the trees that were thick and high on the right of the spot where the forest ceased and the new open roadway appeared.

When he had arrived within twenty feet of the men, he stopped, and, striving to appear indifferent, saluted the strangers. The dog was sniffing about his horse's heels, but though its appearance was threatening Robert gave it but slight heed, for he was waiting anxiously for the strangers to declare themselves or explain why they had taken their stand in the wood with the evident intention of blocking his further advance.

"What's the news from up the river?" demanded one of the men.

Almost unconsciously Robert's hand was placed upon his pistol, but he had not drawn the weapon when he replied. "Good news," he said quietly.

"What's going on?"

"They seem to be waiting."

"For what?"

"For each other."

"Young man, we know who you are. There is n't any use in mincing matters. We've had

word of your coming, and we 're here for your letters."

Robert Dorlon felt a shiver sweep over his body as the man spoke, but his attitude for an instant did not change. His hand was still upon his pistol, but he knew that the rifles in the hands of these men, who evidently were his enemies, would be heard before he himself could fire.

There was a gleam in his eyes, however, that did not imply fear or despair as quickly he drew forth the weapon and fired directly at the men ; then he shouted to Nero, pulled savagely upon the rein, turned his horse back into the wood, and prepared to attempt, at least, to escape.

With great leaps Nero responded, and for a moment a slight hope rose in Robert's heart that he might succeed. He had not waited to discover what the effect of his own shot had been, and as his horse bounded forward he leaned low upon the neck of the faithful animal and did not once look behind him. His eyes, too, were closed ; and the seconds seemed to him to be like hours as he waited for the reports of their guns. Nor had he gone far before the loud reports were heard. There was a sharp pain in his shoulder and he was aware that he had been struck by a bullet, but he still clung

desperately to Nero's neck and his heart leaped as he realized that his horse was unhurt, and upon him now depended every hope of escape. Apparently Nero shared in the desire, for he was bounding forward with great leaps, and if his speed could be maintained only for a brief time Robert knew he could have nothing to fear from his foes. Only a few yards remained between him and the seclusion of the forest. Already he was within its borders and his hopes rose high, but they were instantly dashed to the ground when again the loud report of a rifle was heard behind him, and suddenly Nero stumbled and fell forward. The bullet had entered the faithful animal's skull, Robert could perceive even as he fell.

Still desperate and determined in spite of his own suffering, Robert, when he discovered that he himself was unharmed by the fall, started quickly into the woods by the roadside, and summoning all his strength ran swiftly forward. But a fresh source of alarm appeared as he heard the dog approaching from amongst the trees. It was not barking, and so could not reveal its presence by sound ; and stopping for the moment and seizing a club from the ground Robert braced himself against a tree and waited for the dog to approach ; for it was near now,



and the young express instantly decided that his own safety would more likely be secured if he could rid himself of the savage brute. In a moment the huge dog bounded forward, and as it perceived Robert it growled savagely, but did not stop. The brute leaped forward, and Robert, exerting all his strength, brought his club down upon the animal's head. Without a sound the dog dropped to the ground and lay motionless. Again in his desperation Robert struck the animal, and then, flinging the club far from him, resumed his flight. Not a sound had been heard from the pursuing men, but that they were in swift pursuit he had no question.

Suddenly and to his consternation he perceived that he was once more upon the border of the clearing. Before him were the heaps of brush, the charred stumps, and the little house in the distance upon the knoll. His first impulse had been to turn back, and then it occurred to him that greater safety might be found in the clearing than within the borders of the forest. Glancing quickly about him, he ran swiftly forward past the first pile of brush, and then on to the second. With frantic haste he tore apart the branches heaped together there, crawled beneath the pile, and pulled back the branches over him and lay still.

For a brief time his excitement was so intense, and his fear of discovery was so great, that even the sense of his own exhaustion was not realized. As the minutes passed, however, and the silence about him was unbroken, he became conscious of his own weakness and of the pain in his shoulder. The loss of blood evidently had been great, he discovered, and he was powerless to aid himself now ; but, aware that any exertion on his part might increase his danger as well as add to his suffering, he did his utmost to lie still.

The pain was becoming more intense, and soon a thirst was upon him that was well-nigh unbearable. Still he dared not move from his hiding-place, though all his strength of will was required to compel him to remain where he was.

Suddenly he heard a sound near him that caused him to forget his misery for a moment. A dog was sniffing about the brush heap, and as Robert peered out he could see that it was the same dog which he had felled a little while before in the woods. The blows he had given had not been fatal, he concluded with a sinking of his heart, and his present peril was greatly increased by the presence of the dog near his hiding-place. Even then he could see

that the dog had discovered him, for it stood with bristling hair growling and gazing straight at him. The crisis must be met, Robert instantly decided, and, drawing his knife from his pocket, he grasped it in his hand, thrust aside the brushes, and, exposing himself, prepared for the attack.

With a snarl the savage beast rushed upon him, but Robert, who had not risen from the ground, with all the strength he could muster drove the blade into the animal's side. The dog had already seized upon the sleeve of Robert's coat, but instantly relaxed its grasp, a low whine escaped it, and, trembling for a moment, it fell forward upon the ground and did not rise. With a sigh of relief Robert realized that one peril had been removed, but still without rising, and to make assurance doubly sure, he drew the dead body of the dog under the brush, once more covered himself with the protecting branches and resumed his former place.

As soon as he was convinced that his pursuers had not been closely following the dog, and that they apparently were not near, the sense of his former suffering returned with redoubled force. The pain in his shoulder was becoming almost more than he felt he could

endure, and his thirst was now tormenting him. Resolutely he strove to hold himself where he was, though the effort cost him much. He lost all conception of time. The sun sank lower and lower in the western sky, but he was hardly aware that the day was passing. He might have been lying under the brush heap for hours, so far as his own comprehension was concerned.

He roused himself slightly when he heard the sound of voices near him, and peering forth he beheld the three men who had been pursuing him. They were approaching his place of concealment, but somehow even the fear of discovery had become a matter of supreme indifference to Robert. He wondered what they would say when they found him. And would they be angry over the death of the dog? The question amused him, but even while it occurred, the men passed on without stopping, and Robert was dimly aware that his hiding-place had not been discovered after all. The men were gone and he was safe for the present.

As the moments dragged on, his thirst became overpowering. Even life, he persuaded himself, was no longer to be desired if it must be had at the price of such suffering. His lips were parched, his throat burning. At last when

the dusk had deepened, he crept from beneath the pile of brush, and in the distance saw the light from the window of the little house on the knoll. He would seek that, he resolved, and then, with unsteady steps, falling at times and then creeping for a distance, he went slowly forward. Miles must have been covered and days consumed in that tiresome journey, he assured himself ; but at last when he stood by the window and peered into the lighted room, all his fears returned, though he found himself unable to turn and flee from the spot.

## CHAPTER XXX

### MARTHA

WITHIN the room, which was dimly lighted by a candle, Robert could see the three men who had pursued him. They were seated about a table, and the words of their conversation could be distinctly heard by him as he stood by the open window. Not one of the men had he ever seen before that day, he was convinced, but their words for the moment speedily banished even the thought of his own suffering and peril from his mind.

“Russell was right,” one of them was saying.

“Yes, he was right enough ; but what ’ll he have to say for us now, I ’d like to know ? ” responded another.

“We did our best. I can’t see for the life of me what became of the fellow.”

“What’s become of the dog ? ” said one who had been silent.

“That’s so ! ” replied the first speaker, “I ’d forgotten the dog.”

Stepping to the door, the man flung it

open and whistled shrilly. Robert crouched close to the side of the house, fearful lest his presence should be discovered, and watched the man whom he could plainly see waiting for a call to be answered.

In a brief time the man returned to his seat by the table, and the young express breathed more freely. His escape had been a narrow one, but his eagerness to hear what was said prevented him even then from fleeing.

"Strange," said the man. "The dog never did that before."

"We ought to have kept him close to us and followed him," said one.

"We didn't, and we've lost our game," retorted the first speaker. "The question for us to decide now is what we shall do."

"We'd better go down the river and report," suggested the one who had taken but a little part in the conversation.

"Fine report we'll have to make," said one bitterly.

"It'll have to be made."

"Yes, Jack's right. We'd better go, and the sooner the better."

His suggestion was approved, and the three men at once arose. For a moment Robert was

tempted to run, so great was his fear of discovery. His own weakness and his eagerness to learn what they were about to do, however, caused him to delay, and in a moment he perceived that the men were departing by another door in the rear of the little house. He heard the door close behind them, but he still remained in his position, his eyes fixed upon the woman, evidently the wife of one of the men, who remained in the room, and her attitude betrayed the fear or dejection that seemed to possess her.

Suddenly the door was opened again, and one of the men entered. "Martha," he said, "we may not be back till morning, and it may be that we shall be gone several days. Don't look for me till I come."

"Oh, Tom!" she said hastily, "what makes you go? It's nothing to you, anyway!"

"I must, Martha. I don't like to leave you alone, but I hope the dog'll show up pretty soon. If anything happens, you'll know what to do."

"Yes, Tom."

In a moment the door was again closed, and the man was gone. Robert waited where he was, feeling himself almost unable to



move, and in a brief time he heard the sound of the men approaching. Once more he drew closer to the side of the house and threw himself at full length upon the ground, pressing against the wall in his eagerness to conceal his presence. The men, however, passed without perceiving him, doubtless so engrossed with their own purposes that they had no mind to be on the watch for other things at the moment. They advanced into the road, and soon could no longer be heard.

For a time Robert did not move from the position he had taken. There was a sense of relief in the fact that he had not been discovered, but even this was soon lost in the raging thirst that once more became his. He realized that it was useless for him to attempt to flee, and the peril of capture was gone, at least for the moment. He gazed up into the heavens, and the sight of the myriads of twinkling stars seemed only to increase his agony, for they were far away. The pain in his shoulder, too, was intense, and, combined as it was with his thirst, made him almost frantic. It was more than could be endured, and at last Robert arose from the ground and in sheer desperation approached the door. There was no one but the woman

within the house, and he had decided to ask her help even if he should be compelled to declare who and what he was.

His first low rap was unheeded, but when he had repeated his summons the door was suddenly opened and he beheld the woman before him, holding a candle in her hand. Even the expression of alarm visible upon her face was unheeded by the desperate young express, and he said hurriedly, "Will you please give me a drink of water?"

"Who are you?" demanded the woman as she held her candle higher until its light fell full upon his face. "Are you ill?" she inquired in a lower tone.

"Yes, I think I am. I am wounded."

"Come in," she said quickly.

Robert could not have explained even to himself why it was that he obeyed, but he at once entered the room and sank heavily into one of the chairs. His appearance seemed to touch the heart of his hostess, for she instantly took a dipper, and, filling it with water from a bucket that was in the room, handed it to him without a word. It was not returned until Robert had drunk all it contained, and as he looked up he perceived that the woman was gazing intently into his face.

"Are you the man my husband and the others are trying to get?" she inquired. Her voice was not unkind, and suddenly Robert resolved to trust himself to her.

"Yes, madam," he said quietly.

For a moment she did not speak, nor did Robert look up from the floor upon which he had fixed his gaze. He was trembling, for he was fully aware what her reply would mean to him.

"Poor boy!" said the woman at last, sympathetically. "Tom would never forgive me if he knew, but I cannot turn you away. It is n't safe for you to be here, though I don't think the men will come back before morning. You have been shot, you say. Let me help you. Where was it?"

Robert pointed to his shoulder, but could not trust himself to speak. The woman's kindness had touched him deeply, and in his wretchedness he felt that his chin was quivering.

"Come over here," she said gently; and assisting him to stand she led him to a couch in the room, upon which the young soldier was soon lying. Then with deft and gentle fingers she bared his shoulder and examined his wound.

"You have lost a good deal of blood, but I think you will soon be all right again," she said; "the bullet went straight through."

Robert did not reply, but as she bathed his aching shoulder, applied some of the humble lotions to the wound and then bound it up once more, he felt that her skill was almost as great as her kindness had been.

"There," she said, when her task at last had been completed, "I may not have visited my enemy, but my enemy has visited me, and I have done my best for him."

"Shall I go now?" inquired Robert feebly.

For a moment the good woman seemed to hesitate, and then she said in her determined manner, "No, you stay right where you are, for the night, anyway."

"But I don't want them to get me," said Robert simply.

"I don't want them to, either; and what's more, they shan't if I can prevent it. I don't know what Tom would think of me if he knew, but he does n't know; and if he does n't come back pretty soon, he won't know. You lie right where you are and go to sleep, and I'll keep watch."

"You are very good to me," murmured Robert. There was a nameless comfort in her

manner, and soon the nearly exhausted young soldier was asleep.

It was daylight before he awoke, and when he opened his eyes he beheld the woman seated in a chair by the window and looking toward the road. For a brief time he did not stir, but lay quietly watching her. He was refreshed by his sleep, but as he tried to move, the pain in his shoulder returned, and he became aware how weak he was.

The woman turned and glanced at him, and perceiving that his eyes were open she came quickly to his side.

"Better?" she inquired simply.

"I think so."

"What do you intend to do now?"

"I must try to go on."

"Where?"

"I — I don't know."

"I've been thinking about you."

"That's good of you." In the clearer light Robert could see that she was a woman in middle life, and as he saw the kindly and motherly expression in her face he was reminded of his own mother back among the hills of Jersey.

"You can't stay here," she said.

"No-o. I don't believe I can."

"And you can't go on."

"No. I can't go on," said Robert simply.

"Then what are you going to do?" she inquired.

"I — I — don't know," he responded hopelessly. Then rousing himself for the moment, he sat up and said, endeavoring to speak bravely, "I must try to go. I'll not give up. Besides, I'll be a trouble to you if I don't go, and if your husband should" —

"Never you mind Tom. I'll look after him," she said lightly, as she arose and came to him.

Once more she bathed and dressed his aching shoulder, and then, working with great haste as Robert thought, she prepared him some breakfast, of which he was able to eat sparingly. Refreshed by what had been done for him, Robert said hastily, "I'll go now."

"You can't go. You're not strong enough."

"But I can't stay," he protested miserably.

"No, you can't stay; that is, you can't stay here. Listen, and I'll tell you what you're to do. Two years ago Tom thought he would make some maple sugar." She stopped for a moment, and Robert gazed at

her, wondering what the making of maple sugar had to do with him in his present state of misery.

"I told him it would n't be any earthly good," she resumed, "and now he knows I was right. Of course I've never referred to it, for, of all things, a man does n't like to hear 'I told you so,' least of all from his wife. He built a little sugar-house back in the woods, but he does n't go near it. I'm going to take you there."

"Will it be safe?"

"Safer than as if you were in Fort Montgomery, according to my way of thinking. No one will be likely to come near this place, and I'll put you there, and look after you, too. Come! We must n't delay, for Tom may come back at any moment now, and what he would say if he should find you here or me taking care of you, I think I can guess. But I don't want to hear it. Come! I'll help you."

Feebly Robert arose from the couch, but he himself was startled as he discovered how weak he was. It seemed to him shameful to be compelled to lean upon the arm of the woman as he did, but nevertheless he did so. Slowly they made their way out of the house

and into the woods, and at last arrived at the little sugar-house of which she had told him.

Leaving him within, she returned to the house and soon came back, her arms laden with blankets, which she spread upon the floor, and made up a rude but not uncomfortable bed, upon which he at once placed himself.

“There!” she said, as she prepared to depart. “Don’t you try to leave till I bring you word, and don’t you be frightened if I don’t come as often as you expect me. I shan’t forget you or neglect you, either. I’ll see that you have enough to eat, and when you’re stronger and the right time has come for you to go, then I’ll let you know, but don’t try to do anything yourself till then. What you’ve got to do is to keep quiet and not give any suspicion that there’s some one in this sugar-house. I don’t know what Tom’ll think of me.”

She was gone before Robert could reply.

The recovery of the young express was much slower than he had hoped. The days dragged on till a week had elapsed, and still the good woman forbade him to try to depart, declaring that he was not strong enough. Daily she visited him and dressed his wound,



and brought him food, but of reports she had heard as to what was being done by redcoats or continentals not a word would she give him. She might be disloyal to "Tom" to the extent of feeding his enemy, but beyond that not a step would she go.

On the eighth day Robert declared that he was fully recovered. His pale face and evident weakness belied his statement, but the good woman nodded her head and said, "Tomorrow you shall go if you desire."

Up to this time no one had come to the shelter except the woman, and, mindful of his promise to her, Robert had not ventured from the little building. After her departure on the day when her consent to his leaving on the morrow had been given, he had left the door partly open to let in the air and shut out a part of the feeling of loneliness. His meditations were sharply interrupted as he heard the low voices of two people approaching, and in his excitement he instantly recognized one as that of Russell.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### A TINY SILVER BULLET

THAT the voice he had heard was Russell's, Robert was convinced, but to attempt to flee was not to be thought of; for the men were near his hiding-place, and to his consternation halted not far from the door.

"Everything is clear up the river now all the way to Albany," Russell was saying.

What could he mean by the words? In spite of his own fears Robert Dorlon found himself listening, breathless with interest, to what was being said. Even his own alarm could not prevent the fear from sweeping over him that misfortunes must have overtaken the patriots, and if the statement was true, then even the forts must have fallen. Could it be true? Breathlessly he listened to the words that were spoken, and in a brief time his worst fears were confirmed.

"Yes," Russell resumed, "Sir Henry did not feel that it was wise for him to leave New York till his reinforcements came, but when they did come he started up the river, and inside a week had cleared the way."

“How many reinforcements did he get?” inquired the other man.

“Three thousand.”

“He did n’t wait long.”

“Not after they came. He started up the river and landed near Peekskill, as I was telling you. It did n’t take him long to outwit old Put,—as the rebels call him, I understand,—and then he kept on to the forts. The rebels put up a pretty good fight, but they could n’t hold out, though they did their best. Sir Henry sent up a messenger before the attack, ordering the Clintons to surrender” —

“It was strange that Clinton should be the name of the commander on each side, was n’t it?”

“Yes, and this George Clinton and his brother are shrewd fellows, too. They kept up the fight till night; but, you see, Sir Henry had the men; then, too, the boats in the river kept up a heavy fire, and at last the rebels were driven out and ran, at least those who were still alive.”

“How many did they lose?”

“About three hundred.”

“How many did Sir Henry lose?”

“About a hundred and fifty.”

“Where is he now?”

“I fancy he is n't very far from Esopus,” laughed Russell. “There won't be much left of the rebel town when he's done with it.”

“Did George and James Clinton both get out of the forts?”

“Yes, worse luck.”

“How many men do you think they have now?”

“A couple of hundred, perhaps. This will be great news for General Burgoyne. He's hard put to it, according to reports.”

“So I hear.”

“Yes, they have given him a hard fight, and his supplies were cut off. But as soon as I get there it'll all be changed,” Russell added lightly.

“How's that?”

“I have the word he's waiting for. And he must get it, too!”

“Will you come into the house? Martha will be glad to have you.”

“No, I thank you; but I'll wait here till it is a little darker, and then I'll push on. The boats have gone up the river; but just as soon as I can get past this part of the country I know where I can get a horse, and I'll make such time that there won't be any more

trouble for Sir John. When he learns that help is right at hand, he'll be all right."

"Shall I go with you?"

"No. Leave me here, and I'll look after myself. Good-night."

Robert was eager to see if the man with Russell, evidently the husband of the good woman who had cared for him, did indeed depart; but he dared not move from his hiding-place. A sudden resolution had been formed by him, and he was determined to do his best to carry it out. If this man was the bearer of information of such vital importance to John Burgoyne, then it was imperative that he should be prevented from going farther on his journey. In spite of the fall of the near-by forts, there still might be hope left, he thought, if only John Burgoyne might be prevented from receiving word of the approach of his allies. Weak as Robert still was, he nevertheless was determined to make the attempt. If Russell should enter the sugar-house he would attack him, and it might be that, taken unawares, the man might be held there, or at least prevented from going farther. Perhaps the message itself might be secured.

In the excitement aroused by the thought, Robert waited a brief time, standing ready

to leap upon Russell if he entered ; but the man did not come, and the silence outside the building was unbroken. Unable to endure the suspense longer, he peered forth ; but as he looked about him he could not see anything of the man whose words he had overheard. Only the tall trees with their sombre shadows were about him. The air was chilly, but Robert was unaware of anything save the unexpected disappearance of Russell.

For a moment he tried to think out clearly what he should do, for he had no thought of abandoning the attempt to follow him. He soon concluded that the man would make for the road and trust to the darkness to protect him. He was by no means assured that he himself could find the road, but instantly decided to make the attempt, and at once started in the direction in which it seemed to him it must lie.

He was rejoiced when in a brief time he came within sight of Martha's house, but had slight fear of being seen, though he passed it at a distance, and then soon found himself in the road he was seeking. There was no question as to the direction Russell must have taken, he hastily concluded, and at once started back in the way from which

he himself had come on that eventful day when he had been shot in the shoulder. He recalled the familiar scenes as he proceeded with all the haste he was able to make, but all the time he maintained a careful outlook for Russell, who he was well assured could not be far in advance of him.

An hour passed, but the longed-for sight of Russell was not obtained. Robert was already feeling severely the strain of the efforts he was making, but he gave slight heed to his own weakness or suffering, so eager was he to prevent the messenger from escaping him. At times he ran till, panting and almost fainting, he was compelled to stop to rest, but every time he speedily resumed his journey, eager to overtake the man who, he was confident, was somewhere not far in advance.

Two hours later Robert perceived the figure of a man in the road ahead of him. He was too far away to be recognized, but his movements were suspicious, and Robert at once concluded that the man whom he was seeking was before him. There was need of increased caution on his own part now, and he kept close to the border of the road, that he might dart into the woods if his presence should be discovered.

With the coming of daylight, a great glow in the sky before him made him realize that there was more than the light of the sun to cause such an appearance. The man before him evidently was impressed by the same fact, for he stopped, peered intently about him, and then began to advance with quickened speed. It was difficult now for Robert to follow. His weakness, and the pain which came with every step he took, seemed almost unbearable; but doggedly he held to his way, though he had no conception of what the blazing sky might portend. The one thought in his mind was that he must not lose sight of Russell, and desperately he held himself to the task.

At last it seemed to him that he could go no farther. The road appeared to rise and fall before him like the waves of the sea. Great weights seemed to be attached to his feet, and with every step his sufferings increased. Suddenly he perceived Russell (if, indeed, the man was Russell) stop abruptly, apparently listen intently, and then dart quickly into the woods.

Startled by the unexpected movement, Robert was at a loss to understand what it meant. He prepared, however, to follow, when



he discovered four men approaching. Evidently the sight of them had alarmed Russell; and if he feared their coming, then it must have been because he had known they were no friends of his. There was comfort in the thought, and instantly Robert shouted to the advancing men.

His voice was too feeble to make them hear at first, but his second attempt arrested their attention, and at once they ran to the place where he was standing. In advance was Joseph Nott, and never had the sight of a face been more welcome to Robert than that of his friend.

“Oh, Joe!” he almost gasped. “There’s a man in there. You must get him.”

“In where?” demanded Joseph quickly.

“In there! Right there!” replied Robert, pointing to the place where Russell had darted into the woods. “You must get him! He must n’t get away!”

The manner of the young express, as well as his words, was sufficiently startling to cause his friend to respond instantly. Bidding Robert wait for their return where he was, Joseph called loudly to his friends, and instantly all four darted into the woods and disappeared from sight.

In breathless suspense Robert waited for their return. He well understood the determination of Russell, and the importance of his present object was so great that the young express knew he would not be taken easily. His surprise was therefore the greater when he perceived the four men returning in a brief time, and in their midst was Russell himself.

“We’ve got him, Robert!” called Joseph as he approached. “We found him hiding behind a stump, and as we all had the drop on him before he could wink, it was n’t any trick at all to make him come with us. Who is he, and what made you say we must get him?”

“He’s a messenger. He’s an express from Sir Henry. He’s got a word on him now for John Burgoyne from Sir Henry.”

Russell stared at Robert as he spoke, as if he could not believe what he had heard; then suddenly wrenching one hand free he thrust it into a pocket, drew forth something which the others could not see, placed it in his mouth, and then with apparent calmness faced his captors.

“He’s swallowed it!” exclaimed Robert aghast. “He’s swallowed it!”

“We’ll take him to the general,” said Joseph quickly. “He’ll know what to do.”

"Is he near here?" inquired Robert.

"Yes, yes, only a little way up the road. The redcoats landed and set fire to Esopus this morning; General Clinton was near by and he rushed up with his men, but it was too late. The town's burned from end to end."

The explanation of the blaze he had seen in the early morning was now clear to Robert, and he said, "Have they gone?"

"The redcoats?"

"Yes."

"Yes, they got back to their boats and have gone up the river."

With all haste the little party started toward the place where General Clinton was to be found, Joseph being compelled to assist Robert at times, so weak had the latter become. It was not long before they arrived, and in spite of the excitement due to the burning town, their explanation of the cause of their desire to see the general at once, speedily admitted them into his presence. There Joseph briefly explained who and what his prisoner was, and also declared that they had seen him hastily swallow something only a few moments before.

General Clinton listened sharply, and then grimly gave an order for an emetic to be admin-

istered to the prisoner. In spite of Russell's protests and struggles the nauseous dose was swallowed, and in a brief time a small silver bullet was disgorge.

An examination speedily revealed that this oval bullet was opened by a tiny screw in the middle, and there within was found a small scrap of very thin paper on which was written: "*Nous y voici*, and nothing between us and Gates. I sincerely hope this little success of ours will facilitate your operations."

"When was this written?" demanded General Clinton of Russell.

"Yesterday."

"Where?"

"At Fort Montgomery after we — our — after Sir Henry captured it."

"John Burgoyne will never see it."

Russell, however, made no response, and was led at once from the presence of the general.

The captors also departed, and Joseph found a place where he could leave Robert for a time, while he himself attended to certain duties that could not be delayed or neglected. It was an hour afterwards when he returned to his friend, and there was an expression on his face such as Robert had never before seen.

"What is it, Joe?" he said hastily.

"Come and see," replied Joseph, in a low voice.

Not a word was spoken by either until they came to the roadside, and there Robert pointed to a lifeless body that was hanging from a limb of an apple-tree.

"It's Russell," gasped Robert.

Joseph silently nodded assent and then said, "That's not all, Robert; I've more and worse than that to tell you about. Come with me."

And, sick at heart, Robert followed his friend.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### CONCLUSION

"HE deserved it," said Robert thoughtfully, his spirits being deeply depressed by the horrible sight he had seen.

"Yes, he did, and more," responded Joseph promptly. "If he's the only one with a word for Burgoyne, we may still be able to win. But things are in bad shape up north, I hear. It's now or never with us."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing, except that the reports are that the redcoats up there are in a trap; and if Clinton does n't get through pretty soon, it'll be all up with them."

"Somebody else may have carried word to him of what Sir Henry is doing and planning to do," suggested Robert somewhat gloomily. His own physical condition was not such as to warrant him in taking a very bright outlook.

"Never give up till you have to!" retorted Joseph. "That's my motto. At all events, the world is rid of Russell and a few other villains like him."

“Who?”

“Claud Brown, Josh, and another man whose name I do not know.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just what I say.”

“Has Claud Brown been caught?”

“Yes, sir. Caught and hanged, and Josh and the other man, too!”

“Hanged?”

“Yes, sir. That’s just what I mean.”

“Tell me about it.”

“There is n’t much to tell besides that. There were a good many up here who had had their barns burned, and had suffered so much that at last they decided to run the rascals down. You know how Josh was taken, but they kept up the chase till they got Claud Brown, too. They had to go clear down to Long Island to get him, though.”

“I should n’t think they’d have dared to go as far as that.”

“Dared? They dared do anything to lay hands on the rascals. Jake Gunning was the leader, and they say he was almost crazy, he was so mad.”

“Yes, I know,” responded Robert quietly. He recalled the time when he had last seen Jacob, and it was not difficult for him to

understand now how the landlord had been among the most active of the outraged men of the region who had at last risen in their wrath and pursued the leaders of the cowboys until they had run them to earth.

"They brought them back to Orange County, and kept them chained in the old jail," explained Joseph. "Chained them to the floor, too, for they did n't intend to let them get away this time. And they did n't," he added significantly.

"Where was it — that it took place?" inquired Robert.

"In the courtyard of the jail. It was just filled with people, who wanted to make sure that they'd seen the last of Claud Brown. They had; but I'm thinking, from what I hear, that there are some others who'll do their best to take up the work he quit then forever."

"Is that so?"

"Yes, I'm told Claud Brown's son Dick is on the war-path, and is furious over his father's death. He'll give us plenty to think of, and to do, too."

"Josh was n't such a bad fellow," suggested Robert.

"He did n't know enough to be very bad.



But he ought to have known enough to keep away from Claud Brown. He was known by the company he kept," retorted Joseph, with a laugh.

It was difficult for Robert to understand how his friend could look upon these events lightly. For himself, the horror of them was so great that it seemed to him the effect would never depart. The very fact that he had had experiences of his own with these outlaws made the fate that had overtaken them the more impressive. It might all be, as Joseph suggested, a part of the expected events of war-time, but the horror of it was none the less real.

"Joe," he said, "do you know what became of Dirck?"

"Dirck Rykman? Oh, he's back in his old home as chipper as ever."

"He is?"

"Yes. That was a mistake about his being taken. Oh, he was taken all right enough, but they found out that he was being used by the Tories and that he did n't understand what it was he was doing. This fellow Russell," he added, "when we took him back there in the woods must have thought at first we were taking him to Sir Henry, for he asked us if we

knew where Clinton was; and when we told him we did, he seemed to be mighty glad. He was n't looking for *the* Clinton we were thinking of, though. His face showed that."

"Yes," assented Robert, whose thoughts were of Dirck. "You say Dirck went back to his home? Did he take his family with him? I should think he'd have been afraid for them. It is n't safe."

"No, it is n't, and that's a fact. But you can't move Dirck by any such little things as that, you know. He's a regular Dutchman and does n't know how to change."

"That's not so bad."

"No. There seem to be plenty, though, who do know how in these days," laughed Joseph. "They're first on one side and then on the other."

"Joe, did they ever do anything with that old man who was doing so much with counterfeit money?"

"No, they did n't do anything, but it was n't because they did n't want to or try to. He was a slippery old fellow, and got away when he found out what was going on. Probably went down to New York."

"He'll be safe there."

"For a while, yes. We're going to have

New York in our own grip before you know it."

"Does n't look very much like it now."

Robert was low spirited. The loss of the forts by the Americans, the burning of Esopus, the confidence of the redcoats, were all to him disheartening. Then, too, his own outlook was not promising. He realized that he was still suffering from the effect of his recent adventure, and the loss of Nero was something not easily repaired. How he was to return to the great commander was a problem yet to be solved. For the present he decided to remain where he then was, and as soon as General Clinton, who had bidden him do this very thing, should learn how it fared with Gates in the north and could find time for other matters, he promised to give his personal attention to the needs of the young express.

Already it was known that a battle had occurred at Bemis Heights (September 19, 1777). But the results had not been decisive. Then had occurred the fight at Stillwater (October 7, 1777); and although victory rested with the sturdy Americans, John Burgoyne's surrender had not as yet been made. Doubtless he was waiting for the arrival of his allies

from New York ; and though his plight was desperate, like the sturdy Briton that he was he was not willing to give up until the last hope was gone.

Down near Philadelphia had occurred the battle of Brandywine, where the Americans had been defeated with a heavy loss, and already some were comparing the defeats which Washington suffered with the success which apparently was following the efforts of General Gates in the north, few realizing how the great-hearted Washington was simply striving to hold Howe's army where it then was to prevent aid being sent to Burgoyne, ignoring any possible reflection that might be made upon his own seeming failure. On October 4th (1777) had occurred the battle of Germantown, where the carefully made plans of Washington and the success that almost crowned his efforts were thwarted by the action of one of his generals on the field, who had gone into the fight intoxicated.

Still, in spite of defeats, Washington had succeeded in holding Howe near Philadelphia and preventing him from sending or going himself to the aid of his comrade-in-arms in the north, whose plight with every passing day became more desperate. Even a retreat

into Canada was impossible for Burgoyne now, for his enemies were in his rear as well as before his face. His sole hope rested upon Clinton, and if he had received the message which had been hidden within the tiny silver bullet that his messenger had vainly endeavored to conceal when he had been made a prisoner, doubtless he would have held out a little longer, and the history of the United States would have been far different from that which it has since become.

In his desperation, with no knowledge of Clinton's approach, and with no word received of his coming, John Burgoyne at last, on the 17th day of October, 1777, surrendered with his entire army, and all fears of his invasion were at an end.

It would be impossible to describe the enthusiasm of the people when news of this great event was received, and nowhere was the excitement greater than in the little force that still remained with General Clinton in Orange County. Even Robert Dorlon apparently forgot his own sufferings, and joined enthusiastically in the celebrations that followed.

"This means that we can go home now," said Joseph joyfully to Robert.

"It means that you can."

"Yes, and you're to go home with me, too."

"No, I must go back just as soon as I can get a horse."

"You are n't fit to," said Joseph eagerly. "Besides, I thought you might be glad to stay a few days with us. Hannah will be there, you know," he added demurely.

"Where?"

"At my uncle's. It is n't more than ten miles from here. And there won't be anything to do but to have a good time—no cowboys, no counterfeiters, no redcoats; just the family, for we'll all be home. Our time is up now."

"I'd like to." Robert hesitated, for the invitation of his friend was appealing to him strongly, and for many reasons.

"You must, and that's all there is to it! Come on. We'll go to see General Clinton this minute!"

Robert followed his friend, and in a brief time they were standing before the general. Joseph was the spokesman, and in his boyish enthusiasm he begged for permission for Robert to accompany him home. He told of his friend's recent adventures and the illness



NO QUESTION AS TO HIS WELCOME.





which had followed, and then repeated his request for the desired permission.

General Clinton smiled, for he was as happy as his men over the surrender of Burgoyne and the return of Sir Henry and his troops to the city. "I think I can give you the permission you desire," he said kindly. "Truly, you do not look as if you were fit to ride to Philadelphia."

"Thank you, General," said Robert quietly. "Have you a horse for me?"

"Yes." General Clinton glanced keenly but not unkindly at the young man as he spoke.

"Then I will start now."

For a moment Joseph stared at his friend as if he were angry, and then without a word both young men passed out.

"I don't understand," said Joseph sharply, when they were outside.

"Yes, you do, Joe. You'd do the same thing if you were in my place. My time is up, but I must report. Then I'll come back and stay till you are tired of seeing me about the house."

Impulsively Joseph turned and grasped his friend's hand, but he did not speak.

It was six weeks later when Robert Dorlon returned to the region. There was a color in

his bronzed face that indicated that he was once more strong and well. Snow was on the ground, but the appearance of his horse showed that he had in nowise suffered from the cold. Robert halted in front of a little clearing which he recognized as the one where he had received aid from the good woman whose husband called her "Martha." Suddenly he decided to go up to the house and thank her for all she had done for him ; but when he rapped loudly upon the door, he discovered that the house was deserted. It was long after the war was ended that he was enabled to thank the good woman for her help, but when and where he met her are outside the limits of this present tale.

Swiftly Robert resumed his journey, and not long afterwards arrived at the house he was seeking. There Joseph and Hannah met him at the door, and after Joseph had warmly greeted his friend, his sister said sharply, "Why did n't you stop here last October, when Joe invited you? Did n't you want to?"

"You know I did, Hannah," replied Robert, with a laugh.

"Why did n't you, then?"

"Because I had to do what I ought to do first. I wanted to stop, but I knew I ought to

go back and report. So I did," said Robert simply.

"Are you glad to come now?"

"I should n't be here if I was n't," laughed Robert.

"Robert Dorlon, if you had stopped then, I should not have been glad to see you at all. You had no business to stop then."

"Are you glad to see me now?" he inquired.

The warm-hearted girl impulsively held forth her hand, and Robert had no question as to his welcome.

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