

Then Marched the Brave eBook

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Contents

Then Marched the Brave eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	4
Page 1.....	5
Page 2.....	7
Page 3.....	9
Page 4.....	11
Page 5.....	13
Page 6.....	15
Page 7.....	17
Page 8.....	19
Page 9.....	21
Page 10.....	23
Page 11.....	25
Page 12.....	27
Page 13.....	29
Page 14.....	31
Page 15.....	33
Page 16.....	35
Page 17.....	37
Page 18.....	39
Page 19.....	41
Page 20.....	43
Page 21.....	45
Page 22.....	47

Page 23.....	49
Page 24.....	51
Page 25.....	53
Page 26.....	55
Page 27.....	57
Page 28.....	59
Page 29.....	61
Page 30.....	63
Page 31.....	65
Page 32.....	67
Page 33.....	69
Page 34.....	71
Page 35.....	73
Page 36.....	75
Page 37.....	77
Page 38.....	79

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
THEN MARCHED THE BRAVE		1
CHAPTER I		1
CHAPTER II		5
CHAPTER III		9
CHAPTER IV		15
CHAPTER V		19
CHAPTER VI		22
CHAPTER VII		26
CHAPTER VIII		31
CHAPTER IX		35
THE END		38

Page 1

THEN MARCHED THE BRAVE

CHAPTER I

ANDY McNEAL

It was in the time when the king's men had things pretty much their own way, and mystery and plot held full sway, that there lived, in a little house near McGown Pass on the upper end of Manhattan Island, a widow and her lame son. She was a tall, gaunt woman of Scotch ancestry, but loyal to the land that had given her a second home. She was not a woman of many opinions, but the few that she held were rigid, and not to be trifled with. With all her might she hated the king, and with equal intensity loved the cause of freedom. In the depths of her nature there was a great feeling of shame and disappointment that her only son was a hopeless cripple, and so could not be offered as a living sacrifice to the new cause.

Janie McNeal held it against the good God that she, His faithful servant, must be denied the glorious opportunity of giving her best and all, as other mothers were doing, that the land of the free might be wrested from cruel tyranny.

To be sure, Andy was but sixteen. That mattered little to Janie; young as he was, she could have held him in readiness, as did Hannah of old, until the time claimed him—but his lameness made it impossible. Among all the deeds of courage, he must stand forever apart!

Poor Janie could not conceive of a bravery beyond physical strength. In her disappointment she looked upon pale Andy, and she saw—she hated to acknowledge it—but she saw only cowardice written upon every line of the shrinking features! The patient blue eyes avoided her pitying glance. The sensitive mouth twitched as the boy listened to her oft-repeated laments. Janie had never seen those eyes grow steely and keen; she had never seen the lips draw into firm lines, or the slim form stiffen as the boy listened to the doings of the king's soldiers. When the neighbors came with thrilling tales of daring done by some loved one, Janie made some excuse for sending the boy upon an errand or to bed; the contrast was too bitter.

And Andy, sensitive and keen from suffering, saw through it all and shrank, not from fear or cowardice, but unselfish love, away from the stir and excitement and his mother's sigh of humiliation. He lived his life much alone; misunderstood, but silently brave. His chance would come. Andy never once doubted that, and the chance would find him ready.

And so he waited while the summer of 1776 waxed hotter and hotter, and the king's men, drunken with success after the battle of Long Island, pressed their advantage and

impudence further, as they waited to see what the “old fox,” meaning Washington, meant to do next. What his intentions were, no one, not even his own men, seemed to know; he kept them and himself well out of sight, and the anxious people watched and wondered and grew restless under the strain.

Page 2

Now upon a certain July night Janie McNeal and Andy were sitting at their humble meal. The door of the cottage stood open, and the song of evening birds made tender the quiet scene. Suddenly hurried, yet stealthy, steps startled them. Was it friend or foe?

"'Tis from a secret path, mother," whispered Andy, catching his crutch. He knew the way the king's men came and went, and he knew the paths hidden to all but those who dwelt among them. His trained ear was never deceived.

"'Tis a neighbor," he murmured; "he comes down the stream bed."

Sure enough, a moment later Parson White's wife ran in. Her face was haggard, and her hands outstretched imploringly. With keen appreciation of what might be coming, Janie McNeal put her in a chair, and stood guard over her like a gaunt sentinel.

"To bed, Andy, child," she commanded; "'tis late and you are pale. To bed!"

Andy took the crutch, and, without a word, limped to the tiny room in the loft above. Boy-like, he was consumed with curiosity. He knew that the speakers, unless they whispered, could be overheard, so he lay down upon his hard bed and listened. And poor Margaret White did not whisper. Once alone with her friend, she poured out her agony and horror.

"My Sam," she moaned, "he is dead!"

Janie and the listener above started. For three years Sam White, the erring son of the good parson, had been a wanderer from his father's home. How, then, had he died, and where? The news was startling, indeed.

"Margaret, tell me all!" The firm voice calmed the grief-stricken mother.

"He was coming home to get our blessing. He heard his country's call, when his ears were deaf to all others, and it aroused his better nature. He would not join the ranks until he had our blessing and forgiveness. Poor lad! he was coming down the pass last night, not knowing that it was sentineled by the enemy. He did not answer to the command to halt, and they shot him! Shot him like a dog, giving him no time for explanation or prayer. Oh! my boy! my boy!"

Never while he lived would Andy forget that tone of bitter agony.

"He's dead! My boy for whom I have watched and waited. Dead! ere he could offer his brave young life on his country's altar. Oh! woe is me, woe is me!"

For a moment there was silence, then Janie's voice rang out so that Andy could hear every word.



“As God hears me, Margaret, I would gladly give my ain useless lad, if by so doing, yours might be reclaimed from death. Your sorrow is one for which there is no comfort. To have a son to give; to have him snatched away before the country claimed him! Aye, woman, your load is, indeed, a heavy one. To think of Andy alive, and your strong man-child lying dead! The ways of God are beyond finding out. It grieves me sore, Margaret, that it does. It seems a useless sacrifice, God forgive me for saying it!”

Page 3

The women were sobbing together. In the room above, Andy hid his head under the pillow to shut out the sound. Never, in all his lonely life, had he suffered so keenly. Love, pride, hope, went down before the hard words. In that time of great deeds, when the brave were marching on to victory or death, he, poor useless cripple, was a disgrace to the mother whom he loved.

Where could he turn for comfort? He limped to the window, to cool his fevered face. He leaned on the sill and looked up at the stars. They seemed unfriendly now, and yet he and they had kept many a vigil, and they had always seemed like comrades in the past. Poor Andy could not pray; he needed the touch of human sympathy.

All at once he started. There was one, just one who would understand. But how could he reach her? The women in the room below barred his exit that way. A heavy vine clambered over the house, and its sturdy branches swayed under Andy's window. No one would miss him, and to climb down the vine was an easy task even for a lame boy.

Cautiously he began the descent, and in a few minutes was on the ground. He had managed to carry his crutch under his arm, and now, panting, but triumphant, he went quickly on. A new courage was rising within him—a courage that often comes with despair and indifference to consequences. No matter what happened, he would seek his only friend.

He took to the stream bed. It was quite dry, and the bushes grew close. No prowling Britisher would be likely to challenge him there. Ah! if poor Sam White had been as wise. Andy's face grew paler as he remembered. For a half-mile he pattered on, then the moon, rising clear and silvery, showed a little house near by the stream bed and almost hidden by vines.

Everything about the house was dark and still. Andy paused and wondered if he had a right to disturb even his one true friend. Noiselessly, he drew near, and went around to the back of the house. Something startled him.

"Mother!" It was a young, sweet voice, and it came from the shadow of the little porch.

"'Tis I, Ruth!" faltered Andy.

"You, Andy! And why! Have you heard about our Sam!" The girl came out into the moonshine. She was tall and strong, and her face was very pretty.

"Yes; I've heard, Ruth;" then, coming close, Andy poured out his misery to the girl who had been his lifelong friend and comrade.

She listened silently, once raising her finger and pointing toward the house as if to warn him against arousing the others. When he had finished there was silence. It was not Ruth's way to plunge into reply.



"Come," she whispered presently, "I am going to tell the bees. Hans Brickman told me to-night that 'tis no fancy, but a true thing, that the bees will leave a hive if death come unless they are told by a member of the family. The bee-folk are overwise, I know, and I mean to take no chances of their leaving. With the British at hand, honey is not to be despised. Come."

Page 4

Andy followed, wondering, but biding Ruth's time. She was a strange girl in all her ways.

Without speaking, the two went through the little garden and paused before the row of neat hives. Then Ruth bent before the first.

"Sam's dead!" she whispered, "but do not fear. We need you, so do not leave the hive." From hive to hive she went, quite seriously repeating the sentence in soft murmurings. Andy stood and looked, the moonlight showing him pale and intent. At last the deed was done, and Ruth came back to him and laid her firm, brown hand upon his shoulder. She was a trifle taller than he, so she bent to speak.

"Not even your mother knows you as I do, Andy," she said. "She thinks a lame leg can cripple a brave soul; but it cannot! Why, even being a girl could not keep me back if I saw my chance, and I tell you, Andy, your lameness may serve you well. I have been thinking of that. I do not believe God ever wastes anything. He can use lame boys and—even girls. Sam was not wasted. The call made him brave and good. He was coming home a new creature just because he had heard. When I saw him lying dead, shot by those lurking cowards, something grew in me here,"—she touched her breast. "I have not shed one tear, but I loved him as well as the others. Somehow I knew that since he had been called, it was because he had a work to do, and since he is gone I mean to be ready to do his work. Andy, I am as strong as a boy, but—" here her eyes sought his—"I am a girl for all that, but you and I together, Andy, can do Sam's work!" The young voice shook with excitement.

"I, Ruth? Ah! do not shame me." Andy's eyes fell before the shining face.

"Shame you, Andy? I shame you—I who have loved you next best to Sam! Come. Father has gone to bed, there will be time before mother returns. I want you to see Sam."

With bated breath the two entered the living-room of the cottage. The place had been made sacred to the young hero who was so early called to his rest. Flowers everywhere, and among them Sam lay smiling placidly at his easily won laurels.

For the first time Andy gazed upon the face of death. The gentle dignity and peace of the once wild boy awed and thrilled the onlooker. He was dressed in his Continental uniform that was unsoiled by battle's breath, albeit, an ugly hole in the breast showed where the gallant blood had flowed forth.

"It's—it's wonderful!" gasped Andy.

“But we’re not going to let him be wasted, are we Andy?” There was a cruel break in the girl’s voice. “We’ll do his work, won’t we? We’ll show the Britishers how we can repay, won’t we, Andy?”

“Yes,” breathed the boy, unable to turn his eyes from the noble, boyish face, that was lighted by the gleam of the one lamp; “we’ll show them!”

“See, Andy” (Ruth had gone to a corner cup-board and brought forth a three-cornered cap), “this is Sam’s; I found it in the bushes. Mother says I may have it.” She placed it upon Andy’s head. “It just fits!” she exclaimed. “If the time comes, Andy, you shall wear the cap. It will be proof that I trust you. You will help if you can, won’t you? Promise” Andy.”



Page 5

"I promise, as God hears me, Ruth."

In the stillness the vow sounded awesome. The two clasped hands. All the sting was gone. A great resolve to be ready to dare and die made Andy strong and happy.

"Good-by, Ruth."

"Good-by, Andy, lad."

Out into the still night the boy passed. On the way back he saw Mrs. White, but he hid beneath a bush until she had gone by. He reached home, found the door barred, and so painfully reached his room by the aid of the friendly vine.

CHAPTER II

A STRANGER IN THE NIGHT

That was to be a night of experiences—the beginning, the real beginning of Andy's life; all the rest had been preparation. After reaching his room, he flung himself wearily upon the bed. How long he slept he could not know, but he was suddenly aroused by a sharp knock on the outer door below stairs. He sat up and listened. All was still except the trickling of a near-by waterfall, which had outlived the dry weather.

For a moment Andy thought the knock was but part of a troubled dream; he waited a moment, then, to make sure, limped over to the stairway and peered down into the room below. A candle stood on the pine table, and, at a chair near-by, knelt Janie McNeal, bowed in prayer. She had heard the knock, but not until the lonely prayer was finished would she rise. That was Janie's way.

A second knock, louder than the first, sounded, and with it the woman's solemn "Amen."

"Be not so hasty, stranger," she muttered, as she withdrew the bar; "learn to wait for your betters."

The door swung back, and into the dim light of the bare room stepped a tall man in Continental dress. His hat was in his hand, and he bowed before Janie as if she were a queen. Andy drew back. No such stranger had ever visited them before, and the boy gazed fascinated.

"Pardon me, my good woman," the rich voice said; "much as I dislike disturbing you, I fear I must crave a few hours' rest and lodging, and the service of one to row me across the river ere break of day. I have been told that you have a son."

Andy quivered.

“A lodging, sir, is yours and welcome,” Janie replied, motioning the stranger toward a chair and closing the door after him. “I ever keep a bed in readiness these troubled times. We are loyal to the cause, and I would serve where I may. I have a son, sir, as you have heard, but, alas! not one who can be of service. He is a cripple. However, rest; you look sadly in need of it. I will hasten to a neighbor’s a mile away, and seek the service you desire.”

“I regret to cause such trouble, but the need is urgent. I sympathize with you in your son’s affliction. It must be a sore grief to the lad to sit apart these stirring times when young blood runs hot, and the country calls so loudly.”

Soon Janie was setting food before the stranger—good brown bread and creamy milk. Andy saw the look of suffering on her face as she bustled about, and he understood. He crept back to bed heavy-hearted. Ruth was wrong; there was nothing for him to do.

Page 6

The hot hours dragged on. Toward morning Andy grew restless, and quietly arose and dressed. The feeling of bravery awakened within him, and a dim thought grew and assumed shape in his brain. He could row strong and well. Few knew of his accomplishment, for his life was lonely and the exercise and practice had been one of his few diversions.

He knew a secret path among the rocks, which led to the river, and at the end of the path was moored his tiny boat, the rough work of his patient hands. Only Ruth knew of his treasure; often he and she had glided away from the hamlet to think their thoughts, or dream their young dreams.

Now, if he could arouse the stranger before his mother had summoned another to do the service, he might share the joy of helping, in a small way, the great cause.

"The need is urgent," smiled the boy; "in that case a lame fellow might not be despised."

He recalled the stranger's face, and his courage grew.

"Chances are so few!" he muttered; "I must take this one."

At the first rustling of the birds in the trees, Andy crept down-stairs. His mother's room and the guest-room both opened from the living-room, but Janie's door was closed, while the stranger's was ajar. Through it came the sound of low-spoken words.

"Accept the thanks of thy servant for all bountiful mercies of the past. Guide his future steps. Bless our enemies, and make them just. Amen."

The boy bowed his head, instinctively. Surely he had nothing to fear from such a man. He went nearer and tapped lightly on the door. Light as was the touch, the stranger started.

"Come!" There was a welcome in the word. Andy stepped cautiously inside.

"Good-morning, sir."

"The same to you, my lad." The keen eyes softened as they fell upon the rude crutch.

"How can I serve you!"

"Sir, I have come to offer my services to you. I heard you tell my mother that you needed some one to row you across the river. I am a good rower."

The man looked puzzled. "You are the widow's son? Is not the task too great?"

"My lameness does not hinder much. I use the crutch mainly to hasten my steps; I can walk without it. I am very strong in other ways. I think I am just beginning to find out

how strong I am, myself. None know the woods better than I. I can take you by a short cut to the river, and I have my own boat moored and ready. It will be a small matter to reach the opposite shore by sunrise if we start at once." Andy was panting with excitement. "Pray, sir, let me do this; there are so few chances for such as I."

The listener smiled kindly.

"You are just the guide I need," he said, and Andy knew there was no flattery in the words. "I must leave it for you to thank your good mother for her hospitality. I have been ready for an hour. Lead on, my boy!"

Silently they stole from the house. The birds twittered as they passed, for the tall man touched the lower boughs and disturbed the nestlings.

Page 7

"Bend low," whispered Andy, "the way leads through small spaces."

On they went, sometimes creeping under the hanging rocks, always clinging to the shelter of trees and bushes. They both knew the danger that might lie near in the form of a British sentinel.

"The path seems untrodden by foot of man," murmured the stranger, pausing to draw in a long breath. "You are a wonderful guide."

"I think no one else knows the way," Andy whispered, proudly; "an Indian showed it to me when I was a child. He was my good friend, he taught me also to row, and shoot with both arrow and gun. He said I should know Indian tricks because of my lameness. They might help where strength failed. He showed me how to creep noiselessly and find paths. I have trails all over the woods. There is one that leads right among the Britishers; and they never know. I do this for sport."

The stranger looked sharply at the gliding form ahead.

"Paths such as this all over the woods?" he repeated. "And have you kept this—this sport secret?"

"That I have!" laughed Andy. "I tell you now because you are upon your country's service. I trust you, and I thought perhaps it might help sometime." The two moved forward for a moment in silence, then Andy laughed in a half-confused way.

"A boy gets lonely at times," he said; "he must do something to while away the—the years. I have practiced and made believe until I am a pretty good Indian. I make believe that I am guiding the great Washington. They do say he ever remembers a favor. I should love to serve him. Had I been like other boys—" the voice broke—"I would have been as near him as possible by this time!"

The hand of the stranger was upon the youth's shoulder. Andy turned in alarm.

"You have a secret which may save your country much!" breathed the deep voice; "guard it with your life. But if one comes from Washington seeking your aid, do whatever he asks, fearlessly."

"How would I know such an one?" gasped Andy.

"That will I tell you later." Again the forward tramp.

"And you have passed, unnoticed, the British line! 'Tis a joke almost beyond belief!" chuckled the stranger. "I should like to see my Lord Howe's face were he to hear this."

"Oh! be silent, sir!" cautioned the guide, "we come to an open space."

Once again beneath the heavy boughs, the boy said:

"I passed the line but yesterday. And I heard that which has troubled me, sorely, yet I could do nothing. But—" here Andy paused and turned sharply—"bend down. Should you know Washington were you to see him?"

"Aye, lad." The two heads were pressed close.

"Would you bear a message, and try to find him?"

"Aye."

"They are planning an attack. I could not hear when or where, for the men moved past. As they came back, and passed where I was hidden, I heard them say that they who are near Washington had best be on watch, poison in the food made no such noise as a gun—but it would serve!"

Page 8

"You heard that?" almost moaned the listener. "My God! could they plan such a cowardly thing?"

"Aye, sir. I am thinking they can. I would warn the General if I could, but you may be luckier. The men said Lord Howe desired the death of every rebel."

"May heaven forgive him!" The words fell sadly from the strong lips.

"And now," again Andy took the lead, "do not speak as we pass here. It is the spot where they shot our pastor's boy, only two days ago. I fear the place. A few rods beyond, we will again strike the thicket, and be under cover until we reach the river."

The solemn quiet that precedes a hot summer dawn surrounded the man and boy. The red band broadened in the east. The birds, fearing neither friend nor foe, began to challenge the stillness with their glad notes, and so guide and follower passed the gruesome place where young Sam White gave up his untried life a few short days ago. The thicket gained, the two paused for breath.

"We must not talk in the boat, sir." They had reached the moored boat now. "Pray tell me how I am to know our General's messenger."

"By this." The stranger detached a charm from a hidden chain and held it in his palm so that the clearer light fell upon it. "I command you to learn its peculiarities well. There must be no blunder."

It was very quaint. Andy's keen eye took in every detail.

"I shall know it," he sighed. And the stranger smiled and replaced it. "And you, sir?" he faltered, for the hour of parting came with a strange sadness; "may I not know your name? You have made me so proud and happy because you accepted my poor service."

"George Washington, and your true friend, Andy McNeal! We are both serving the same great cause. God keep us both!"

The General clasped the boy's trembling hand, and Andy looked through dim eyes into the face of his hero. The hero who for months past had been the imaginative comrade of lonely hours and dreamy play.

[Illustration: "*Andy was at the oars now.*"]

"We shall meet again—comrade!" Washington was smiling and the mist passed. "Never fear death, lad, if you are doing your duty; it comes but once. Row swiftly. Day is breaking. A messenger with a horse awaits me on the further shore. Head for Point of Cedars."

“Good-by, sir; I shall never fear anything again—after this, I think. Good-by!” Andy was at the oars now. He handled them like the master that he was. The old Indian had taught well, and the apt pupil had been making ready against this day and chance.

While Andy kept Point of Cedars in view, he saw, also, the noble figure in the stern. The keen eyes kept smiling in kindly fashion, while the firm lips kept their accustomed silence. To Andy, the future was as rosy as the dawn, and he wondered that he had ever been depressed and afraid.

Page 9

"Death comes but once!" kept ringing in his thoughts; "it shall find me doing my duty. God and Washington forever!" The song of the times had found a resting-place in Andy McNeal's heart at last.

Point of Cedars was safely reached. The general stepped upon the pebbly beach. Almost at once, from among the bushes, appeared a young man in ragged Continental uniform, leading a large, white horse.

Without a word Washington mounted, nodded his thanks to the messenger, and a final farewell to Andy, then he, followed by his newer guide, faded from sight among the forest-trees. Standing bareheaded and alone upon the shore, Andy watched until the last sound of the hoof-beats died away, then, with a sigh of hope and memory mingled, he retraced his way.

Janie McNeal greeted her son at the door-way. "Andy!" she cried, "our guest is gone!" She quite forgot that Andy, presumably, knew nothing of the guest. "He desired a lad to row him across the river. I was going to neighbor Jones's at early dawn to summon James. I should have gone last night, but I was sore tired. When I arose this morning, the stranger was gone. God forgive me!

"The poor gentleman must have thought me a heedless body. I trust he will not think me in league with the Britishers; there is much of that sort of thing going on." Janie shook her head dolefully, not heeding Andy's smile.

"How do we know," she went on, "but that the gentleman was on the great Washington's business? He was an overgrand body himself, and had excellent manners."

"Mother!" the old hesitating tone crept back unconsciously into Andy's voice as he faced his mother; "mother, I rowed the stranger across the river, he is—safely landed. It—was—it—was—Washington himself!"

"Andy!" Janie flung up her hands, and nearly fell from the step; "think, lad, of your words. You look and talk clean daft."

"It—was—Washington!" The boy drew the words out with a delicious memory.

"And—you—rowed—him—across! You—my—poor—lame lad! God have mercy upon me, and forgive me for my doubts!"

"I can help a little, mother." Andy drew near the quivering figure. "I know, mother, and I do not wonder, but there is a place for every one in these days, and I'm going to be ready."

Janie drew herself up, and put a trembling hand on the young shoulder. "Son!" she said, with a sudden but intense pride, "son, get ready, we go to Sam White's burying,

you and I. God be praised! blind as I was, He has opened my eyes to see my son at last!" This was a great deal for Janie McNeal to say, but it did its work.

CHAPTER III

THE CROWNING OF ANDY MCNEAL

Sam White's burial was a very simple affair. In that time of need and anxiety men were off upon their country's business. Few could stay to mourn. The pastor himself read the simple service in a voice of pride, broken by a father's grief. He said that God would not let the sacrifice pass unheeded. Since Sam had heard the call, and then had been so suddenly taken away, another would be raised up to do his work; another who, through Sam, might be touched more than in any other way.

Page 10

Andy, standing in the little group about the open grave, at this raised his eyes, and he found Ruth's wide, tearless gaze fixed upon him. Andy smiled bravely back at her, for his heart was strong within him.

After it was over and the few neighbors gone, Andy and Ruth remained to scatter flowers upon the young hero's bed, and cover up the bareness of the place.

"Ruth," said Andy in a whisper, "I think my chance has come!"

"Your chance, Andy?"

"Aye. I have been thinking that Sam's being taken has aroused me, and given me courage, just as your father said, and—and last night the chance began!" Then he told her of much that had occurred. Ruth knelt among the flowers, her young face glowing.

"Oh! I shall have some one to watch," she panted, "some one to help while he works. Oh! Andy, you do not know how I long to help, and be part of this great time. I go on long walks, and I hear and see so much. Down on the Bowery I heard a group say the other day that General Washington was going to burn the town and order the people to flee. One man said, did he order such a thing, he, for one, would go over to the British; and, Andy, there was a great shout from the other men! I felt my heart burn, for did our General order *me* to go, then would I go whither and where he ordered; nor would I question, so great is my trust in him. And did he burn all, even my home, yet would I gladly obey, for I would *know* he was doing wisely. So greatly do I honor him that I think, next to God, I trust our General!"

The young face glowed and quivered, and Andy, with the spirit of hero-worship growing upon his recent experiences, panted in excitement as she spoke.

"I, too, would follow, and never question," he said. "Never fear, Ruth; what the General expects of me, that will I do. Not even death do I fear—it comes but once!" The boyish voice rang clear.

Suddenly, Ruth started toward the house. "Wait," she said, "I have something for you." She was back in a moment, bearing Sam's cap. "The time has come," she faltered, and there were tears in her eyes. "I—I want to crown you, Andy McNeal." She removed Andy's rough cap and replaced it with Sam's.

"I'll keep the old one," she said, "and—and if you should fail to do bravely, you can have your own!" Then she dashed away the tears. "Forgive me, Andy McNeal!" she sobbed; "you will never fail. There is hero blood in your body, I know, and it may be that your lameness will aid you in accomplishing tasks that a lusty lad could never attempt."

Andy raised his head proudly and the new crown set not badly on his boyish curls.

“I must go,” he breathed. “I will come every day unless—you know, Ruth?”

The girl nodded, and so they parted silently, Ruth pressing the old hat to her aching heart, and taking up the woman’s part in those troubling times; the part of the watching, waiting one.

Page 11

The days following became filled with one longing for Andy. The longing for Washington's messenger. Unless he came soon, the boy feared that he would be too late. During his own recent explorations beyond the lines, he heard much that warned him that the British were planning something of grave importance.

Andy had told his mother and Ruth nothing of Washington's anticipated messenger. They knew merely that Andy had ferried the great General across the river—was that not enough? Had they known for what the boy was eagerly watching, they could not have done their own daily tasks.

"He has an eager, watchful air," Janie confided to Ruth. "I am thinking the lad expects the General to pass this way again. Lightning and *such* happenings do not strike twice in the same spot."

Ruth smiled gently. "I do not think Andy walks as lame as he did," she mused, watching the boy disappearing down a woody path.

"He is always on the go," Janie broke in. "He practices walking without his crutch more than I think wise; but one can do little with men-folk!" Janie tossed her head proudly. Andy was a growing delight to her.

"It may do him good," Ruth added; "he looks stronger and—and gladder."

"He has gone beyond me," the mother sighed. "I—I begin to know, lass, the happy feeling a mother has when her heart aches with loneliness and—and pride! What ails you, lass?" For Ruth had started and given a short cry.

"Why—why—" laughed the girl, "I am thinking my eyes are playing me false. I was watching Andy up the path, and I saw him as clear as I see you this minute—and then he was gone!"

"Do not get flighty, Ruth." Janie came close, however, and peered up the path. "You and Andy will drive me daft. The path is a straight, clean one; had Andy been on it, he would still be in sight. I'm thinking he turned before he came to the brook bed. You did not notice, but your thoughts kept agoing on."

"Perhaps," nodded Ruth, but Janie knew she was unconvinced.

On her way home soon after, Ruth began to ponder. Once clear of Janie's observant eye, the girl turned back through the shrubbery, and ran to the spot where she had last seen Andy. All was as silent as a breathless summer day could make it. There was no side-path; no broken bushes.

"He was here," breathed the girl, "and he disappeared like a flash!"



Then she knelt down and tried to trace footprints in the mossy earth. “Ah!” she smiled, for there was a crushed space at the edge of a brambly cluster of bushes. She quietly drew aside the branches, and a look of wonder grew in the bright eyes. So cunningly concealed, that even her native-bred keenness might never have espied it, lay a path, and among the bushes, Andy’s crutch! Should she follow? In the old days Ruth would not have paused. But these were not play-days; Andy might be upon grave business. Reverently she drew back, and replaced the disorder she had caused among the parted leaves. Suddenly a step startled her. She turned sharply. Up the path came a British soldier, whistling a gay tune and eyeing her boldly.

Page 12

More than once had Ruth encountered these most ungallant gentlemen, and she was alert at resenting any familiarity, but a fear grew in her heart now. Andy's path must not be discovered! She must do her part.

"Good-day, my pretty lass!" The man halted. Under ordinary circumstances Ruth would have taken to her fleet feet at this, but Andy might return too soon, and emerge while yet the enemy could discover him.

"Berrying?" grinned the fellow; "August is early for berries, is it not? The man was suspicious, perhaps, and Ruth was on guard.

"For some kinds," she answered, lightly.

"What kind are you hunting?"

"One that you British do not know," she replied; "it's a kind that grows only in America and thrives upon freedom."

The soldier leered unpleasantly. "Come, I will help you hunt," he cried; "if we find a berry I cannot name, you may ask what reward you choose, and if I succeed then will I take a kiss from your red lips, eh, my girl?"

Ruth darted an angry look upward. If they hunted, the cane would be discovered, and yet if she refused—well, she must act quickly.

"Is it a bargain?"

"Yes;" the word came bravely from a trembling courage.

[Illustration: "*Good day, my pretty lass.*"]

The two knelt and began the search. Ruth pressed the bushes so as to cover Andy's cane, but as her keen eyes fell upon the spot where it had been, to her surprise and joy, she saw that it was gone!

A cry broke from her, for, as she realized that that danger was past, she saw, near at hand, a plant so rare even to her woodland eyes, that it was precious. Thanks to her learned father, she knew its name, and the spray of waxen berries was her salvation.

"See!" she cried, "you have brought good luck. 'Tis a rare find. Now I pray you, sir, name the berry I hold in my hand."

The man was searching the underbrush, and turned half angrily. "What have you?" he snarled. Ruth knew that Andy was near, but no breath was heard.



"Name the berry, sir, or I claim my advantage!" Ruth stood upright with the spray in her hand.

"Wintergreen," ventured the fellow, wildly.

"Wrong!" sneered Ruth, "and there is no second trial."

"How can you prove me wrong?" jeered the man, coming insolently close; "who is to decide?"

"Your head officer, sir," flashed Ruth; "lead on, I will gladly leave it to him. After he has heard the tale from me—from *me*, mark—I will leave it to him. Perhaps there is one gentleman in the king's troops. Lead on! Why stand staring when your stake is so high!" A dignity and fearlessness came to the angry girl.

"Do you lead, or shall I?" she asked.

"I—I beg your pardon!" cringed the fellow, "I will abide by your decision."

"Go, then!" cried Ruth, her temper breaking bounds, "and if you are a sample of my Lord Howe's men, I am thinking our General will have but a short tussle. Go!"

Page 13

The man retraced his steps, sulkily. He had been foraging on his own account, and had unearthed bigger game than he could manage.

Ruth watched the man until he passed from sight. As she turned about she faced Andy sitting among the bushes. She jumped, then laughed nervously.

"How did you get your cane?" she asked.

"I was not six feet away." Andy's voice was strangely calm. "I hope you know, Ruth," he faltered, 'that had things turned out differently, I would have been with you. You know that?"

"Yes, Andy." A flush came to the pale face. "I think I feared you would come more than anything else. But I do not trust that fellow. He will come back. I know he was suspicious. Choose another way—next time!"

"Aye, and I'll stop up this trail. Good-by, Ruth. Hurry, I will wait until you are safe, and this passage made harmless."

For a few days longer Andy remained near home, not caring to run the risk of seeking the longer path of which he knew, while the Britisher's suspicions might still be alert. Once or twice he had met the fellow on the public highway, and he feared to arouse any further cause for watchfulness. He had discovered, also, that the man had gone back to the spot where he had encountered Ruth, but Andy laughed, when he recalled how cunningly he had hidden the trail. But now the boy could wait no longer, he must try to get near the lines and listen.

Taking the longer way, he left his crutch hidden inside a cave-like opening. He would never again trust the outside. Then in true Indian fashion he crept along through the rocky passage. He reached the other end and for an hour or more waited patiently, but only the passing of a lonely sentinel rewarded him, and he guessed that no news would come that way.

He dared not emerge from his shelter, for the day was too bright and clear, the sentinel would surely spy him, and better no news than to give away the secret of the passage. Disappointedly he crept back, and at the other end put his hand cautiously forth to grasp his crutch. Then he became instantly aware that he was discovered, for his hand was grasped in a firm, unyielding clutch.

Andy's heart stood still. He had no doubt but that Ruth's annoyer had dogged his steps and had captured him. But there was little of the coward about Andy; he would face the worst. He pushed through the tangle of leaves, trying to free his hand, but the clasp was like iron. The captor was not the Britisher, but a man of quite another sort. He was young, handsome, splendidly formed. As he lay at full length upon the moss Andy



thought he had never seen so tall a man. He wore velvet knee-breeches, long blue coat, and a wide-brimmed hat, which shielded a pair of friendly, laughing eyes. One glance and Andy lost all fear.

“Now that you have come from your hole, you young mole, good-morning to you, and where have you fared?” The voice was ringing and full of cheer.

Page 14

"Good-morning, sir," Andy made answer.

"And where have you fared?"

"That I cannot tell you, sir."

"You cannot tell me!" the man sighed, impatiently. "Now, do you know, for a moment I fancied that you were just the lad who could guide me over your interesting island. What with all this excitement, a peaceful traveler has no show above-ground. I hoped you might lead me mole-fashion."

"I will gladly show you through the pass, sir, as far as the gate a mile or so below."

"As far as the gate! Always as far as something! I want to go beyond—'as far!' What care I for countersigns and passports. I want the freedom of the island, and a chance to study its rocks and flowers and very interesting weeds. Boys often know paths unknown to any one else—except Indians!"

"But I am a lame boy much dependent upon a crutch."

"You can dispense with it at times," laughed the stranger. "For a good two hours you did without it to-day. It and I have been keeping company. I followed you at a distance, thinking easily to overtake you, when piff! you were gone, and I and the crutch—for you see I searched the hole—were alone!"

For some moments Andy's hand had been free, and now as he looked at the speaker he saw that he was holding in his open palm the charm which last he had beheld that glorious morning by the riverside.

With a glad cry he sprang up. "I am Andy McNeal!" he said, and he doffed Sam's hat, which was his only martial possession.

"And I—am the schoolmaster!"

The two clasped hands. That was the beginning. Through the following days the master abode in Janie's house. The good woman asked no questions. Her curiosity burned and burned, but wisdom held it in check. Enough that Andy was the companion of this mighty person. Enough that her humble roof sheltered him, and her able hands served him faithfully. It was wonderful, and—enough. Ruth, too, throbbed with excitement, but went her ways calmly as if it were a common enough thing for a splendid schoolmaster to suddenly undertake Andy's neglected education, and pay for his lodging and board by instructing the hostess's son.

This was what was going on. Book in hand the two walked abroad quite openly. Sometimes it would be rocks or flowers they were bent upon understanding, at other

times the intricacies of the English language were the paths they followed. Occasionally Ruth would be asked to join in the walks and talks, but oftener they were alone. There were real lessons. Andy pondered upon them deeply, and his hungry mind fed upon the feast. Of course, so fine a master walking abroad with the lame boy, aroused the notice of the sentinels, but to their questions he answered so glibly, that there remained nothing to do but ask more. The game became tiresome.

The tutor and his pupil kept within bounds, so there was no excuse for interference. But one day, quite lost in abstraction, the two passed beyond the gate at the end of the pass, and strolled down the road patrolled by the British. Suddenly a loud "Halt!" made Andy jump. A look of surprise passed over the master's face as a bayonet was thrust in front of him.

Page 15

The soldier was the one who had accosted Ruth; Andy knew him at once.

"Dear me! dear me!" cried the master, querulously, "after seeing us pass to and fro so often, one would not think it necessary to resort to such rudeness. Pray, good fellow, is not this his Majesty's highway, and free to all?"

"No," grumbled the sentinel, lowering his weapon; "what's your business?"

"Schoolmaster."

"I do not mean that. I see you prodding around rocks and weeds with your noses in books, but I want to know what you mean on this road?"

"I desire to take a walk on it. I have no weapon, I am a peaceful person. May I pass?"

"You better turn back. This road is sentineled all the way to camp. You're too simple to go alone. You are an American?"

"Certainly. Born and bred in the colonies."

"A rebel?"

"Sir!"

"A rebel, I say?"

"I am loyal to the heart's core!" the master replied. "Come, Andy, the way back is doubtless more pleasant for peaceful folk than the way before. Conjugate to live, Andy."

Once beyond sight and hearing of the foe, the master bared his head. "Loyal we are, and we know to whom! But how long it takes to disarm their doubts!"

CHAPTER IV

THROUGH THE CAVE

That same night, as Andy lay sleeping, a strange sound startled him. In an instant he was out of bed, and limping toward the window. Again came the plaintive sound. It was some one mimicking a night-owl, and doing it very badly, as the boy's true ear detected at once.

Andy replied, in a much better imitation; then, from out the shrubbery beneath the window, the master stepped forth in the moonlight. He beckoned to the boy, and then moved back into the shadow of the trees.

Always, with Andy, there was the struggle between the quick, alert mind and will, and the weaker body. However, with trembling fingers, he dressed as rapidly as possible, gladly remembering that he could reach the ground by the vine, thus saving time, and making sure that his mother would not be disturbed.

In a few moments he was ready. He dropped his crutch cautiously from the window, and began to descend himself. The man among the shadows did not move, though his expectant eyes were on the watch. Andy, keeping well in the shelter of the shade, reached his friend.

"That fellow we met to-day was prowling about the house an hour ago," whispered the master; "he looked boldly into my window. I was awake and saw his features distinctly, though I fancy he thought me unconscious. I saw him leave by the stream path. He thinks me safe for to-night, but they are suspicious, those Britishers, and you and I must get through the passage to their lines to-night. I believe something is afoot, and they do not wish to run any chances. Lead on, Andy McNeal; before break of day I must know all, all that is possible, and be away."

Page 16

"Follow!" said Andy, trembling with excitement, but losing no time. Down upon hands and knees they went, and no creatures of the wood and night could have been more silent.

"All's well!" came from a far-off sentry; and the man and boy breathed quicker. A moment of rest at the opening of the cave-like path where Andy and the master had first met, then into the narrow gloom toward the danger line.

"The way is narrow," whispered Andy, "but it leads out just behind the British tents."

"Ah! for Vulcan's hammer!" laughed the master softly; "I'd hew me a broader path, Andy. The width of me suffers sorely for the cause." Andy smiled in the darkness. The mirth in the master's voice gave courage.

"It is broader further on," encouraged the guide.

"God be praised for that!" groaned the man as he came in contact again with the rocks.

The crutch had been left at the entrance, well hidden. Hands and knees were all that were needed on that journey. Once a slimy creature crawled across the master's hand, and he uttered an exclamation.

"Don't do that again!" breathed Andy, in alarm.

The minutes seemed endless, and the progress very slow. The darkness was so intense that it was something of a shock to the master when he suddenly became aware that he could see the outline of his guide's body. There was a small opening ahead, and a gleam of moonlight shot in! Neither spoke. If the British sentry was beyond there was every need of stillness now.

"I hear steps!" said Andy in a breath; "listen!"

The duller ear of the master heard no sound for a moment, then slowly and alarmingly near, he *did* catch the sound of the measured tread of a soldier, and, from the opposite direction evidently, a second man. Near the opening the two met.

"Fine night, Martin; everything quiet?"

"Quiet? Lord, yes! If something does not happen soon, I swear I'll cut and run. It wouldn't take a great deal to make me quit. The pluck of the rebels rather tickles me. I've half a mind to toss my luck among them, and stand or fall with the colonies."

"Better change your mind," laughed the other; "something's going to happen and that pretty quick."

“Is that hearsay, Norton, or authentic? I’ve just come into camp. I’ve been having a picnic over on Long Island—raiding farms and doing a lot of dirty work that sickens me. Clean fighting is what I set out to do, and gad! this kind of thing turns a fellow’s stomach. We’ve been fed on the talk that these rebels are cowards. Cowards, bah! And as for that big, silent general of theirs, he—he rather appeals to me!”

“Don’t be white-livered, Martin!” sneered Norton. “You may get some cold steel from your own countrymen for uttering such sentiments. My information is all right, it comes from his lordship himself. Washington is too dangerous to leave longer alone; should he find out—what was that?”

Page 17

The master, less a child of the woods than Andy, in his excitement had tried to creep closer, and the quick ear of the sentinel had noticed the sound.

"It is this accursed spot again!" muttered Norton; "twice lately I could have sworn I heard breathing among the bushes. I've beaten every inch of ground, and not a living creature have I found. I'm not squirmish, and a rebel now and then don't count, but—well, you know I brought that parson's cub down a bit further back. Lord! how the fellow strutted, and when I called to him he started like a stuck pig. I cannot forget the look on his face as—as I fired.

"I'm agreeing with you, Martin, clean fighting or nothing. I'm not up to this slaughtering of infants myself. I half expect to see that baby playing in the moonlight every time a leaf rustles at night." The man laughed uneasily. "Once I fancied I saw a face—a pale boy-face—shining in the bushes. Lord, it gave me a turn!"

"Could there be a secret passage?" asked Martin in a low voice. "A fellow named Godkin told me an hour ago that he had his eye on a lame chap and a gawk of a schoolmaster who were always skulking around close to the ground. He says the boy lives hereabouts and knows the woods like a snake."

"No fool rebel could keep such a secret from me. Godkin likes to talk and swagger. He feels his oats. Come, just to pass the time, let's beat the bushes."

"Back out!" breathed Andy. There was no time to be lost. But the backward movement was most painfully slow. The men tramping in the bushes, feeling the thing but child-play, laughed and talked loudly.

"How many men has the old fox!" asked Martin, giving a cut to the bushes with his gun.

"Twelve thousand, though he gives out many more."

"He's got grit," rejoined Martin, "with my lord gripping his throat at close quarters with double that number at his heels, to stand still and calm as—as this rock! Gad, I nearly broke my gun! This land produces more rocks than anything else. I heard Washington is planning to get on Long Island again."

"He'll never get there. My Lord Howe—what in thunder!" Norton had slipped and fallen, and as he lay so, his face was on a level with the opening in the rocks!

"Come here!" he gasped. "Got a light! There's a hole here."

Martin struck a light and peered in. As he did so Andy's white, horrified face gleamed forth from the shadow. Without a word the head was withdrawn, and both Andy and the master knew that the man, or both men, would follow at once.

“They are big!” moaned Andy, “and they do not know the way as we do. Oh, hurry!”

The master feared that the sentinel would fire into the cave, but as the moment passed, and he did not, he took heart, and crept backward as fast as he could. Then came the sure sound of the chase. One or both had entered the passage! They had this advantage; they could come straight on, while the pursued were going backward, the master, being the bulkier and more uncertain, barring Andy’s smaller body.

Page 18

"For our lives!" almost sobbed the boy.

The oncoming foe once or twice struck a light, but the curving of the passage hid the prey. However, the sound ahead was enough to guide the Britishers. Then suddenly the master became wedged, and the leader of the pursuers came so near that Andy fancied he felt his breath.

"I don't hear the little scamp!" muttered Norton; "perhaps the passage divides. Wait until I strike a light." In that instant the master extricated himself, and with desperate haste the two backed along, while the light flickered, and then went out, much to the dismay of the foe.

"Hurry!" commanded Norton; "I hear him again; don't fool with the light!" The head man and Andy were not a yard apart now, and the narrowest of the passage was yet to come!

The master realized this, too. He knew if he were to get wedged again all would be over, and Andy was the one nearest the enemy! He paused and Andy came in violent contact with him. The leading Britisher was upon them! The form behind Andy darted forth an arm of steely muscle, and a terrific blow fell sure and sudden on the face of the British sentinel!

"My God!" screamed the fellow, and "The devil!" echoed from his companion.

"Now!" whispered the master, "this is our last fling!"

It was over at last. The entrance was gained. Taking no time to consider how spent Andy was, the master began to pile rocks at the opening. It took not overlong, for the mouth of the cave was small.

"So!" almost laughed the master in his relief, "before my British friend gets his senses back, the way is barred. Good! Here, Andy, lad, give me your hand. To the house, and to bed. Ere daybreak I must be well away from here. They are planning an attack at once, and I know where I can get the plans, methinks. That fellow saw you, and there is no further chance for me here."

"You—you are going?" Andy, leaning on the master and his crutch, was making good headway. "The man saw only me; surely you can stay in safety."

"Andy, do you think the fellow thought you dealt that blow?" The clear laugh was stifled. "No; we are marked men. But I am on the right course now. Washington shall soon have the papers he needs."

"Where do you go?" whispered Andy; "can I not be of use?"

“Not now, my friend, and if we never meet again, Andy McNeal, remember whom we have both served well, and that you have made brighter for me many a weary hour. I care not what the thoughtless may think of me, but I would have you know that what the future holds of seeming dishonor and shame, I assumed in truest loyalty.

“From what I am to do, others shrank. I saw but one way, though, God knows, my heart was wrung. I reserve nothing. Even what seems my honor I give to my country and Washington!”

The master and Andy stood still in the moonlight, and the two young faces gleamed white and troubled. “Good-night and farewell. Thank your mother.” He was gone.



Page 19

Andy painfully and slowly climbed the stairs and entered his bedroom.

His heart was very heavy. He had seemed on the verge of doing a great service, and behold, the chance had fled.

CHAPTER V

A SUSPICION

September dragged wretchedly. There was no need of stealing among the bushes for news or amusement.

Indeed, Andy wisely concluded that to keep to the open, innocent ways would be the only possible thing that could help the absent master.

He missed the lessons and the exciting comradeship, too; the contrast was painful. Janie saw, but questioned not. It was all beyond her. Ruth was the only relief.

"Fear not, Andy," she would say. "You must bide your time, and wait patiently. 'Tis what Washington is doing. Copy your General in this, as well as other things. One may serve in that way as well as in others. You should hear the tales Hans Brickman tells of the doings in the patriot camp. He carries eggs and honey, you know.

"He says that Washington isn't just fighting or holding in check the king's men; but his own troops are acting shamefully—threatening to desert, and begging for money; complaining all day long. Oh! if I were a soldier I would show them!" The girl flung her strong young arms above her head, and brought down her clenched fists in a laughably vehement way.

"And there sits that great General, never flinching, but writing to Congress to pay the babies; and calming the tyrants with one breath, and shaming them into obedience with the next.

"Hans says he dashes at them sometimes with his sword, and slaps the raw recruits into shape, telling them that if they run when he orders them to advance, he'll shoot them himself. There's a man for you!"

"Indeed there is a man," nodded Andy, and his face grew brighter. "And I should cry shame to myself because I am so impatient of this lameness which holds me back."

"Holds you back! Andy McNeal, that is rank ingratitude. You've been up to some mighty doings, that I know, or you would not be hungering for more glory. Oh, I can see a bit ahead of my nose. Time was when you hung around, not knowing glory because it had not come your way. You've tasted it, Andy, and your thirst grows. I know a thing or



two. You're getting strong, too, Andy; you're an inch taller than I. Father mentioned the fact this very morning. You're taking on airs, but remember, I knew you when you were less a man. Have a care; a woman has a tongue. I'll be calling you down if you carry things with too high a hand."

Andy laughed and stood straighter. Then, very quietly:

"Andy, what was the master's name?"

"Ruth, I do not know."

"Do not, or will not tell?"

"I do not know."

"Can you tell me why he stayed here?"

"I cannot tell you, Ruth. Why do you ask?" The girl paused and dropped her clear eyes.

Page 20

"They do say, the whisper has reached my father, that he was a spy, and—and a dangerous one!"

"They lie!" said Andy, hotly; "he, a spy!" Then the boyish voice fell. The last, sad talk under the stars came clearly back, and in the shock of the memory the boy trembled.

Ruth watched him closely. "I'm not over-curious," she faltered, "but I fear for you. If he—if he were a spy you were seen with him far too often for your good. Father even feared for me."

"Ruth" (Andy's voice had a new tone), "I can believe no dishonor of the master, and I am proud that I walked with him and was his friend!"

"Aye" (Ruth looked doubtful), "but a spy is not a good thing, Andy, no matter what shape it takes."

Old, rigid training held them both, but Andy must defend his friend, though the honest soul of Ruth shone from her eyes, and challenged him.

"It is as a thing is used," he began, lamely, but seeing his way dimly.

"Father does not preach that," Ruth broke in.

"No; nor would I preach it," sighed Andy.

"But you would act it?" Ruth flashed.

"I do—not know. I cannot think the master was aught but honest. If he were—were—" Andy could not use the hard word—"if he were finding things out, you may be sure, Ruth, it was not for his own uplifting. If he gave what other men would call—would call their honor—it was because he held not even *that* from his country. I can—see—how—that could—be!"

Ruth raised her eyes. "Could you, Andy?" she said.

"Yes. I could give it as I could my life. I would take no recompense, I would just give, and do anything. Ruth, suppose you knew a truth about—about—well, about me; a truth that, if it were known, would be the death of me. Would you tell, or—or would you save me?"

It was a rigid moment for the stern little maid. Her eyes fell, then were raised again.

"I—do—not—know," she panted, "but a lie is a lie, and I should expect to be punished."

“So should I for any dishonorable thing,” agreed Andy. “That is just it, but it would be my willingness to do it, and then to suffer, that makes the difference.”

The two were standing near the end of the Pass at a small gate, and as Andy ceased speaking a sound smote their ears that turned them pale. It was the sound of many horsemen galloping wildly onward.

“The king’s men landed at Kip’s Bay this morning,” gasped Andy, clutching the gate, “and they do say that Douglass’s men are not strong enough to defend the point.”

It was Putnam’s five brigades; the boy and girl only knew they were patriot troops. They had been ordered by Washington to make for Manhattanville before retreat was cut off.

Young Aaron Burr was acting as guide. The master had once pointed him out to Andy, and the boy remembered the face well. Boldly and fearlessly he was riding, and Andy’s voice broke into a cheer as he recognized the noble face. The leaders halted. There were several roads ahead; which was safest and quickest? Burr ventured a question.

Page 21

"Which way leads most directly to Manhattanville?" he said.

"Keep close to the river, and make for Kingsbridge, Colonel," Andy answered. "That road is not so carefully watched; it is rougher but safer."

Burr gave him a smile, then galloped ahead. The last weary stragglers were barely out of sight, when again the sound of on-coming horsemen broke the stillness.

"These are king's men!" groaned Ruth, who had stood rigidly silent until now. "Ah! Andy, and the others so little in advance!"

Constantly blowing their bugles and shouting derisively after the fleeing patriots, my Lord Howe's men advanced.

"'Tis a rare fox-hunt!" laughed one.

"But the fox and his mates are out of sight, my lord," cried another.

"For the moment. The ways divide a few rods beyond. Did the rebels pass this way?" asked an officer noticing Andy and Ruth.

[Illustration: "*Burr ventured A question.*"]

"Yes, sir!" answered Ruth, promptly, and for a moment Andy sickened at what he feared she was about to do. It was too late, though, for him to interfere.

"Which road did they take?"

The instant's pause seemed an eternity to Andy. Then calmly and with clear, uplifted eyes:

"The main road, sir, it being the safer and shorter!" Andy felt a moment's dizziness. Then a rough voice startled him:

"I know that boy, my lord; he was the one in the secret passage, about which I told you. I shall not soon forget him."

"I thought you said your companion in the cave was dealt a stunning blow; surely this lad could have done no such thing," answered the Captain.

"I could swear to him, your lordship, though I saw him but for a moment as Martin went down, and the light went out. Hi! there, Martin, come here," he called. A man galloped up, a man with a dark bruise upon his forehead and eye.

“Martin, do you know that boy?” Martin looked, and in the clear light he saw and knew Andy at once; but something staggered him, and he stammered and shook.

“Did you strike this soldier?” asked the Captain impatiently of Andy.

“No, sir!” The words came sharply.

“You do not recognize him?” asked the officer of Martin.

“He—is—the—same!” Martin blurted. “We are losing time, my lord.”

“There is no way to settle the thing here; we are losing time, and your story of that night in the cave is too important to overlook, Norton. If this is the boy we must deal with him later. The young scamp probably knows the roads well. Lead on, you rascal, but if you play any tricks and mislead us, my men shall pin you to a tree.”

Ruth gave one despairing cry:

“He is lame,” she panted. “For shame! How can he lead a mounted troop?”

“We’ll go slowly. The game’s nearly up, my girl,” laughed Norton, “and a prick of the bayonet”—he suited the word with an action, and prodded Andy on the arm—“will hurry the lamest patriot. Lead on, cave-crawler!”

Page 22

Andy gave one look at Ruth. A look of bravery, appreciation, and mute thanks for her part of the work.

"It's all right, Ruth," he called back. "Tell mother I'll lead them straight enough and be home in an hour. Good-by."

By a winding way leading from the main road they went; through Apthorpe's place they cantered at their ease, and so came to the highway a mile beyond.

"There may be a shorter cut, my lord," suggested Norton; then he paused. "Does your lordship observe there are no marks on the road that bespeak the recent passing of a regiment? This should mean the young rebel's death!"

"He's a spy in the old fox's hire!" shouted another.

"String him up, along with the schoolmaster down at the Beekman place to-morrow morning!" roared a third. All was wild commotion in a moment. But in that moment Andy took his chances and made for the thicket, and the hidden path over which he and Washington went that day that now seemed so long ago. A man leaned from a horse and tried to clutch him, lost his balance and tumbled to the ground. Confusion covered Andy's dash.

"He's gone!" yelled the man who had fallen.

"Which way?" shouted several in response.

Which way? Aye, that was the query. Which way!

Andy made for the dry bed of the stream. No rustling leaves must betray him. Not in flight was his safety now, but in silent hiding until darkness should come. Down into the muddy pool of the once rushing brook, rolled the boy. In the distance he heard:

"No trail here, my lord!" and he smiled grimly.

"Well, a lost lame rebel is of less account than the regiments ahead," shouted the Captain. "Bad luck to the young devil. Cut cross country and try the river road!"

"They have an hour to the good!" thought Andy, as he remembered the weary patriots and young Aaron Burr. Soon all was quiet, and with the palpitating silence a new thought grew in Andy's brain. "Better string him up to-morrow with the schoolmaster!" Whom did they mean!

"Schoolmaster! Spy!" The two words struck dully on the aching brain. Suppose! Andy sat up and gazed wildly into the dense underbrush. "Could it be?" But no; the idea was too horrible.

The long shadows began to creep among the rocks they loved so well. Still Andy sat staring into the awful possibility that the words conjured up.

“Schoolmaster! Spy!” He could stand it no longer. Cautiously he crept up the bank. Through all the excitement he had clung to his crutch. It must serve him well now. He set out determinedly toward the highway. Come what might, he must reach the Beekman place as soon as possible, and he hoped that the road was safe, owing to interest being centered elsewhere. In this hope he was right. Below and above him, excitement ran rife, but the highway seemed to belong to him alone.

CHAPTER VI

Page 23

THEN MARCHED THE BRAVE

A terrible storm was coming up, after the sultry day. Andy's whole being centered upon the thought that he must reach the Beekman Place; and the coming storm might delay him. Only so far did it affect him. He felt no hunger; it troubled him a little that his mother and Ruth would worry about him, but nothing mattered so much as the solving of the doubt that was causing his heart and brain to throb.

Strangely enough, his lameness decreased as his excitement waxed greater, or it seemed to, and he considered it less. The birds stopped twittering their vesper songs, and huddled fearfully in their shelters. A peal of thunder was followed quickly by another. The rocks took up the echo and prolonged the sound. Between, the flashes of lightning, the darkness could almost be felt, so tangible and dense it seemed. Once Andy fell and struck his head. The blow made him giddy, but the rain dashing in his face steadied him, and he plodded on. Then a glare in the distance attracted him. It was in the direction toward which he was going.

"A fire!" he muttered. "All the more reason for hoping they will not notice me." The town might burn, what matter, if only the way were free to the Beekman place.

It was still dark when he reached his destination, worn and haggard. Over toward the greenhouse people were stirring about, and Andy rightly guessed that the prisoner, whoever he might be, was there. No luckier place could have been chosen, so far as Andy was concerned. It was surrounded by shrubbery through which he could creep right up to the building, providing, of course, that the sentinels did not see him. But the sentinels were relaxing their watch. The hours of the troublesome spy were nearly ended, and there could be little danger of any further trouble on his account.

Andy crept along, keeping to the bushes. The storm was nearly over, and no lightning could betray his motions now.

Once the glass house was reached, Andy looked eagerly in. There was a pile of rubbish in one corner, and a man was sitting upon a rude bench near it; between him and Andy, however, were two men with their backs to the boy, and they quite hid the face of the man upon the bench. The two were listening, and the third man was speaking. Andy was too far away to hear, but, gaining courage, he crept around to the other side of the house, and so came close to the group within. Something in the attitude of the man upon the bench had caused the boy's heart to leap madly, then almost stop. He raised his eyes slowly—one look was enough!

Sorrow and ill-treatment had done their work, but the dear face was the same! Dauntless, undying courage shone upon the uplifted face.

It was the master! The errand, whatever it had been, was over. Success or failure? Andy could not tell from the calm features. Spy or hero! What mattered? There sat the beloved friend, deserted and forlorn—still unconquered though the fetters bound him close.

Page 24

"I would send, if your kindness will permit, these letters. They will make lighter the sorrow of them I love."

Andy bowed his head and clutched at his throat to stifle the rising cry. A broken pane of glass near-by permitted him to hear clearly every word.

One man on guard had a low, brutal face, the other, Andy noticed, had a more humane look.

"Have you the letters written?" asked the coarse fellow.

"I have." The master drew them from his breast and handed them to the speaker.

"One is to Washington," laughed the man. "Gad, you must take us for raw recruits."

"I shall be beyond harming you soon. That letter refers to personal matters, I swear." There was superb dignity in the voice. "I would have his excellency know that I regret nothing. I would do all over again, did the need arise. Washington would see that my comrades understand that."

The man with the letters gave vent to a brutal oath. Then the quieter man spoke for the first.

"If we read the letters and find them harmless, I am for forwarding them. To whom are the others addressed?"

"One to my family, the other—to the woman I was to have married!" The master, for the first time, bowed his head, as if his burden were too heavy.

"I think we may carry out your request if the contents are what you imply."

"And make a hero of this spy!" snarled the rougher man. "Every word may have a double meaning, Colonel. We have the papers he so carefully hid, but these letters may contain the same information, slyly concealed." He tore the letters across twice, and flung the pieces on the floor. "Death and oblivion to all rebel spies!" he hissed.

The master never flinched, but his pale face grew paler. "Is there anything else we can do for you?" asked the milder voice, "something safer than forwarding letters?"

"I should like to have the right generally granted a dying man, of seeing a minister. One lives a few miles above here. I am sure he would come."

"And hear what you dare not write," sneered the torturer. "You are not the sort to need a death-bed scene; besides, there isn't going to be any death-bed. I dare say the parson

would be glad enough to carry your so-called confession to Washington. Bah! you are crude in your last moments.”

“Come,” impatiently spoke the fellow’s companion, “I have no stomach for your jests and brutality.” Then, turning to the master, he said: “We will leave you for a few hours. It seems the only thing we can do for you. Try to rest.”

Down the greenhouse the two went. The master was alone! He bowed his splendid head, and perhaps tasted, for the first time, the dregs of desolation.

Page 25

Andy, lying low among the bushes, saw that the master's feet were bound. The sight wrung the boy's soul. Perhaps he had wildly hoped that escape were possible, but one glance showed him that the fetters were cruelly strong. What could he do? Near and far he heard the measured tread of sentinels at their posts. He wondered that he had ever gained his present position unnoticed. It was doubtful now that he could make his own escape, for a gray dawn was breaking in the east. But the thought of his own danger troubled the boy little. He was thinking of a peculiar whirring sound that he and the master had once practiced together. A sound like an insect. "Twould be a good signal," the teacher had said. Would he remember it?

Andy pressed close to the broken glass, and chirruped distinctly. The master started and raised his eyes. Was he dreaming! Again Andy ventured. Then a smile flitted across the master's face.

"Andy!" he breathed.

"Here, close to you!"

Slowly, without a suspicious start, the man turned in the boy's direction; and the two brave comrades smiled at each other over the gulf of pain and grief.

"I will try to sleep!" This aloud, to regale the ear of any possible listener other than Andy. With difficulty the master stretched, as best he could, his fettered limbs upon the floor, taking heed to lie as close to Andy as possible.

Silence. Then the man tossed and talked aloud in troubled fashion.

Andy, meantime, with a daring that might risk all, put his hand in the broken pane and drew the bits of paper of the torn letters to him.

"Tell Washington," moaned the voice of the master in a half sleepy whisper, "I regret nothing. Am proud to die and to have given *all*."

"I have the letters!" breathed Andy. "If I live Washington shall have them and know all."

"Thank God!" came from the man upon the floor. "You are a true friend, Andy McNeal."

"Good-by," groaned Andy. "Some one is coming!" The cold perspiration covered the boy's body, for steps were drawing near.

"There could hardly be any one outside," said a loud, rough voice. "Still we must take no chances. The poor devil has reason to toss in his sleep and talk. I doubt if he were doing anything else."

The need was desperate. Andy crawled like a snake through the grasses. Escape seemed impossible. He passed the two searchers in the friendly gloom, and breathed freer. This was a lucky move, for the two men examined thoroughly the spot where Andy had been. They discovered the broken glass, and one remarked that the weeds had been crushed.

“Some animal has been prowling about, there are no footprints,” said the other.

Andy’s Indian training was serving him well. In a few minutes the two passed on. “We’ll walk around the place. Daybreak is near. The dangerous spy’s time is short.”

Page 26

Andy made the most of that time. Stealing cautiously in and out of the shrubbery, he worked his way out of sight of the greenhouse. The chill of the morning made him shiver. How many hours he had passed without food or drink he did not consider; but his heart seemed dead within him.

Painfully he came at last to the shelter of the woods. Then he sat down upon a fallen tree, clutching the scraps of paper against his throbbing breast. In imagination he seemed to see the master being led forth to die. See! the east was rosy. Now, even now, the brave soul was marching on undaunted and undismayed. Andy could see nothing in the brilliancy of that lovely morning light, but the uplifted face of the man he loved. A pride and joy came to the boy. That hero was his friend! The world might call him a spy—but he, Andy McNeal, knew that he had given all for the country's cause, and regretted nothing, even in the face of a dishonored death.

"And Washington shall know!" breathed Andy. "As soon as I can reach headquarters, the General shall have these!" Fiercely he pressed the papers. Then he arose. He was stiff and deadly weary.

"I will go to Ruth!" he sighed. "I must have food and rest. I dare not go to mother. My plight is too sad. I will save her the sight." Bedraggled and blood-stained—for the fall of the night before had left its mark—Andy went on, looking, as indeed he was, a soldier of the cause.

CHAPTER VII

ANDY HEARS A STRANGE TALE

Andy made but poor time to the minister's house. It was well on toward noon when the shouts of the children at play cheered his heart. He had been obliged to rest many times, and once he had fallen asleep and slept longer than he knew.

As he drew near the cottage he saw Ruth kneeling by Sam's grave. It was one of the girl's daily duties of love to bring fresh flowers and cover the mound with the bloom. Glad enough was Andy to see her alone, and in this quiet spot. He went more rapidly; the sight of Ruth gave him new strength. He had no intention of frightening her, he made no attempt to walk quietly, but indeed a look at his haggard face would have caused alarm in any case.

"Ruth!" The girl looked up, stared, but made no cry. She rubbed her eyes feebly as if awakening from sleep, then she grew deadly pale.

"Andy McNeal!" she whispered. "Whatever has happened?"

"I will tell you." He sank down wearily, and took the cap from his head.



"My heart has been filled with horror," Ruth went on, giving Andy time to catch his breath. "I dared not tell any one what really happened. They think you merely went as guide. I never expected to see you alive again. I am not sure that I do now!" She smiled pitifully, and came near Andy to chafe his cold hands.

"I'm alive," the boy faltered. "But, oh! Ruth, I have lived years." Then brokenly, and with aching heart, he told the story of the past hours. Ruth never took her eyes from his face, but her color came and went as she listened. The tale was ended at last, ended with all the tragic detail and the showing of the scraps of paper. Then Ruth stood up.

Page 27

"Andy," she said, in her prompt fashion, "the house is empty. Mother has gone to your home, father will be away until to-morrow. The children are easily managed. Now I want you to go in the upper room after you have eaten. I want you to rest all day and then—then I have something to tell you and—there is more to do."

"Yes; these," sighed Andy, looking at the papers. "I should start at once with these."

"'Twould be folly. There are awful doings afoot, Andy McNeal. It is no time for a mid-day walk to Harlem Heights. You must do as I say. Come in now; you are starved and utterly spent."

Andy followed gladly. It was the course, the only course, of wisdom.

He ate ravenously, and drank a quart of rich milk. Ruth was busied in the room above, and when the meal was finished Andy joined her.

"Now," she smiled, "everything is ready." He found a pail of hot water, and some of the minister's clothing lay on a chair. "They'll have to do, Andy, until I can wash and dry yours," said Ruth.

"What matters?" answered Andy. "If I sleep I shall not mind the rest."

"I know. You must only obey now, Andy. Remember I love to do my share!" Tears stood in her brave eyes, and Andy understood.

Andy fell asleep almost at once. The hot bath took the pain from his sore body, the clean, worn linen was cool and soothing, and the droning of the bees in the near-by hives hushed sorrow and weariness into deep oblivion.

And while he dreamed of peaceful walks with the master under sunny skies, and smiled in the dreaming, Ruth had summoned Janie, and the mother sat waiting patiently the awakening. There was much to tell and more to do. But Andy dreamed on.

Four o'clock! The tall clock in the living-room spoke loudly. Andy stirred and muttered something, then slept again.

Five o'clock! The boy sat up on the narrow bed and stared into his mother's face.

Janie never flinched, though his pallor and the cut on his forehead made her heart ache.

"Mother, I must get to Washington at once. I—I have a message."

"Yes, son."

"I do not fear death. It comes but once!"

“Yes, Andy, lad. But I’m thinking you’ll not be meeting death just now. It looks like you were singled out to live and act for all my old misgivings. God forgive me.”

She bowed her head and it rested on Andy’s shoulder. Stern Janie had never done such a thing before, and even at the moment Andy was touched and moved. He smoothed the hair away from the pale face, and gently, lovingly kissed his mother.

“There are strange happenings, Andy,” she sighed.

“There are, indeed,” he agreed.

“But things about which you know nothing, lad, and—and I must tell you before you go. Get up; dress, son. Ruth and I have made decent your own clothing. I can talk better while you move about. I cannot bear your eyes, my lad.” Andy arose at once and began his dressing, keeping his face turned from his mother, but her own was rigidly set toward the window.

Page 28

"Your father has come back, Andy!"

A strange pause, then:

"My father!" Andy had dropped into a chair. The sentence had deprived him of strength to stand. He knew his mother never wasted words, or made rash statements. His father had come back! And Andy did not know that his father was alive. In fact, knew nothing of him, and that struck him for the first time with stunning force. Janie's back was straight and firm.

"Yes, your father. I kept it all from you. I meant to tell you some day, Andy, but time passed and you asked no questions, and I—I thought everything was past and gone forever. But he has come back."

"Where is he?" asked Andy.

"At home. He has been hurt, and is feverish and ill. He was doing sentinel duty for—for the British, and he received a terrible blow from some one in a cave. I cannot tell what is best to do, Andy, and I must look to you for help."

Somehow Andy had gotten to his feet, and staggered across the little room to his mother. Almost roughly he seized her hand, while the awful truth unfolded itself from the dense darkness of the past.

"Say that again!" he commanded. Janie looked at him in amazement.

"Say what!" she asked.

"That about the blow, and—and the cave!"

Janie repeated it, wondering why that detail should so interest Andy.

"You see," she continued, not heeding his horrified look, "I married your father when I was very young. I look older than I be, lad. He brought me nothing but trouble. He was above me in station. He belonged to his majesty's regiment stationed here, and when the regiment was recalled he went—back! Little he cared for the girl he left or the baby that bore his name! I managed, and neighbors helped me to forget, and—and I could not tell you Andy. I hoped I never would be obliged to."

"Go on!" Andy still held his mother's hand, but with infinite gentleness now. Tears stood in Janie's eyes, and the human need for sympathy met an answering thrill in the heart of the son.

"He—he saw you yesterday at the pass, Andy, when they made you guide them after the troops, and your face frightened him. He says you look so like his mother, that it is

just terrible. She has recently died, and her memory and the thought that his son might be alive and here, gave him a bad turn. He asked your name, and as I kept my own name after he deserted me, he guessed the truth, and as soon as he could break away from the others he came to me—and—that is all, Andy. But what shall I do?”

Andy tried to think. Tried to bring events into orderly line and coherence, but the more he tried the more detached he felt, and as if the whole matter was one with which he had nothing to do.

“I was so young, Andy, lad, only seventeen!” When had Janie ever pleaded before?

“Yes,” murmured Andy. “I am nearly seventeen now. Seventeen years are long—sometimes. But, of course, you were very young.”

Page 29

"And I had no one to guide me, Andy. I was alone. I have always been alone, and it has been hard." A sob rose to the trembling lips. Andy looked at his mother, and, oddly enough through all the bewilderment, thought that she had a beauty he had never noticed before.

"You were handsome, too," he whispered. Janie started.

"Yes," she replied. "I suppose I was, then. Your voice is like his. It always was, Andy. That was one reason that at times I could not bear it. Oh, Andy! it is no easy matter to be a lonely woman!" The cry smote the listener, and his growing manhood reached out to her.

"Mother, you are not alone. You have me. I will come back to you, stand by you, and we will see what is best to do. I must go on my errand, and I think you ought to go to—to father!" The word nearly choked him.

"But suppose anything should happen to you?" Janie clung to the hand of this new, strange, but well-loved son, "whatever shall I do?"

"I think I shall come back to you. I think I am needed, and it seems clear to me that I shall come back." Andy smiled into the troubled face, and tried to rouse himself into action.

"If you should fall into the hands of the British," whispered Janie, "tell them you are the son of Lieutenant Theodore Martin; it may help you, son."

"Your name is my name!" Andy proudly broke in. "I never shall seek favor through any other. If they take me, they take Andy McNeal, and if I come back I shall come bearing that name, until my mother bids me take another!"

Janie bowed her head. It had been her first, only weak attitude toward her country.

"You are right," she quivered. "But I fear for you."

Presently his mother left him. He and she had work to do, and it must be done apart. A few minutes after she was gone, Ruth came up bearing a tray of food. She was limping painfully, and Andy, sitting by the window lost in thought, got to his feet in alarm. "You are hurt!" he cried. A smile spread over the girl's pale face.

"I'm a depraved sinner!" she said, setting the tray on a stand and dropping into a chair. "After the war is over I shall repent and take up godly ways. For the present I am a lost soul, and given over to Satan. Andy, the lie I told yesterday about the river road was the beginning of my downfall. How easily we glide downhill."

"'Twas the only thing to do, Ruth," nodded Andy. "I think such a lie grows innocent from the start. It was the object, Ruth. What else could you have done? It puzzles me sore to try and explain. I just leave the lie to God. He will understand."

"I have left it there, Andy, and from the joy and gladness I have felt, I believe there was nothing else to do. But this lameness, oh, Andy!"

"How did it happen?"

"Just as the lie did, Andy. This is a bodily lie."

"I do not understand, Ruth."

Page 30

"Eat, and I will explain." Andy began mechanically. He must be ready for his task in any case. Food was the first step.

"I have been reading the Bible to the children, Andy. They wanted the story of David. As I read it seemed as if you were like David. When he went to meet Goliath, how impossible his victory seemed, but the hand that swung the sling was strong enough to win the day. Andy," Ruth bent toward him, her face glowing, "you are strong enough to win against your Goliath!"

"Mine?"

"Yes; all the king's men! You will get to Washington before another day is passed. But—you must let me help you."

Andy set the cup of milk down and stared at the earnest face.

"I'm very dull," he said. "I only know that I must go. I do not see, now, that you can help."

"You must not think of going abroad as Andy McNeal," the girl explained. "They are watching for you. Janie says that more than one Britisher has been to her door."

"Do you know—" Andy began.

"Yes," nodded Ruth, "but he is well hidden. It is you they are after. Then, too, I know what the British expect to do. Hans Brickman found out and he is almost frightened to death with his secret. He thinks the British will see his secret written all over him, and he is afraid to go into camp—the patriot camp, you know. He has honey and butter to sell, and he sells to friend or foe. I've told him I will go with him to-night."

"What secret?" asked Andy, keen to the main point.

"The British war-ships are going up the river!" Ruth was whispering in Andy's ear, not daring to trust her voice even in the little room. "Father says the General does not expect this move, but they are getting ready down by the Battery. Father says the forts cannot stand a river attack."

"But Washington *must* know this. He never is taken off guard." Andy spoke proudly and with assurance.

"Well, any way," said Ruth, "he is preparing for a land attack. It is common talk."

"Just a blind!" Andy broke in. But his face was troubled. "However, I must get these papers to him, and if I can I will speak to him. It can do no harm."

“But you cannot go as you are, Andy.”

“How then?”

“Why,” Ruth went to the door and dragged in a bundle, “in these!” She held up one of her own dresses, a big sunbonnet, and a neat white apron.

“Ruth!” Andy flushed hotly.

“I have sprained my ankle,” Ruth explained with an assumed whimper, “and poor Hans is about distracted. He is afraid to go peddling alone with his secret writ large in both Dutch and English on his foolish face. I have told him I will go lame or no lame. Fortunately he is hard of hearing and stupid as an owl in broad daylight. You might be less like me than you are, and Hans would not know. We have much to be thankful for, Andy.”

“Ruth, I cannot!”

Page 31

"Andy, you shall!" They looked into each other's eyes and then because they were young and brave, they smiled; smiled above the danger and heartache.

[Illustration: "IT TOOK ALL OF ANDY'S COURAGE TO DON THE FEMALE ATTIRE."]

"What a girl you are!" laughed Andy.

"Yes, there are few like me," sighed the girl. "Born to trouble as the sparks fly upward."

"Born to deliver others from trouble, I verily believe," added Andy.

"Not a moment to spare!" commanded Ruth. "You have eaten a noble meal. I must go to my room to suffer now. When Hans bawls from the wagon, be ready, and remember the eggs are a shilling more to his majesty's men than to Washington's."

It took all Andy's courage to don the female attire. He had never done so hard a thing, yet he knew that Ruth was right. If he hoped to reach the patriot camp he must not attempt it as Andy McNeal. "Next best then," he thought, "is to go as Ruth White. God bless Ruth!"

"Hi!" rose shrilly on the soft evening air, "hi! we starts now!"

It was Hans bellowing from the wagon. Andy plunged into the bonnet, whose big, flapping frill almost hid his face. He took his crutch—its aid was not to be despised now—and hobbled down-stairs.

"Washington is in the Morris Mansion!" Ruth whispered as he passed her door.

Under his sunbonnet Andy turned scarlet, but he did not turn toward Ruth.

"There goes our Ruthie to sell eggs," called little Margaret White from over her bowl of milk in the kitchen. "Does your leg hurt awful, Ruthie?"

Mrs. White at the table did not turn, but she said:

"Take heed, Margaret, your milk is spilling. Ruth is all right." As in very truth she was.

"We be late, already," called Hans from his wagon. "Can you get up, miss?"

Andy mounted slowly, and crouched behind Hans among the baskets and pails. The Dutch boy had but recently come over from Long Island to live with the parson. After the battle of Long Island he had fled to what he thought were more peaceful pastures for employment; but he had his doubts. Dangers pursued Hans, and he was sore distressed. It was necessary for him to sell the products of the little farm, and, really, the danger of the parson's daughter going along to straighten matters out, was no great



matter. Peddlers, unless suspected, were allowed to pass the lines, and their wares paid for with more or less honesty.

CHAPTER VIII

AT HEADQUARTERS

"Your excellency, dar am a lame girl, an a fool Dutchman outside. De girl done say, she's got to delibber de eggs to yourself, sah!"

"Eggs!" The tall, anxious man at the table turned sharply. He was writing to Congress, and the interruption annoyed him.

Page 32

"Yas, sah." The colored man bowed humbly. "I'se been tellin' dem we has eggs nouf, but the Dutchman he deaf as a stun wall, an' de girl am dat sot, dat your own self couldn't be sotter, sah. She done say her folks 'prived demselves of food an' drink, sah, to save dese eggs fur your excellency, an' she goes on tu say, sah, dat she done been habbin' de debbil's own time gettin' past de lines wid de eggs. She's been 'sulted by de British and odder hard things. She won't go, sah, till I done tell you all dis rubbish."

"Bring her in," quietly said the listener.

Washington never slighted the humble, and, besides, messages were sent in odd ways. It was always better to be willing to listen. The black man departed, muttering, and presently returned, showing the lame girl in with no very good grace.

"Dat am de General!" he explained, shutting the heavy door after the limping figure.

There was no need of explanation. The eyes under the drooping frill grew joyous at the sight of the honored face. The heart under the coarse cotton frock beat high with pride, and—yes, shame, for how was the boy to make himself known?

"Pray be seated," the deep voice was saying. "You are weary and you have taken chances of danger to reach me with your gift."

Andy sank into the nearest chair.

"I appreciate your devotion and unselfishness, but I would advise no future attempts to pass the British lines for such a thing."

"There were other reasons, sir," said Andy. Washington came nearer.

"I fancied so," he said, "and they are?"

Andy drew the basket of eggs to him, and unwrapped several, handing the papers to Washington. The General took them, crossed to the window, and for a few moments pieced the bits together carefully. Then he read. Andy watched him, remembering that other face in the greenhouse on the never-to-be-forgotten night.

"Where did you get these?" he said suddenly. Andy stood up leaning upon his crutch.

"A messenger, in time of danger, must come as he may, sir," he said, bravely. Then tearing off the bonnet he added:

"Andy McNeal, at your service, sir!" Washington's face never betrayed him, but a glad look came to the overweary eyes. He extended his hand, and grasped Andy's.

"I remember!" he said. "You have been true to your trust. And now for the story."

Sitting in the stately room of the mansion, opposite the great General, Andy McNeal told his story. Try as he might, his voice would break, but he thought no shame of his weakness, for the keen eyes looking into his own were often dim.

“I asked a great thing of Nathan Hale,” said the General at last, “but he gave it willingly. Andy McNeal, you have been a faithful friend to as great a hero as the Revolution will ever know. Many offer their lives. He offered his honor. Willing was he to die, and to die dishonored by the many. Some day his country will understand.”

Page 33

"And, sir, do you know the British are bringing their ships up the river?"

Washington's eyes gleamed. "I have sent men to Frog's Point," he smiled. "They will meet a welcome when they land. Thank you. And now farewell. Take heed as you return. You are safer without a guard."

"Is there no work for me to do? Is there no place in the ranks for such as I?"

The tremendous question broke from Andy's lips. To go back into idleness was his one dread. He longed to follow; to be the humblest, but most patriotic, of the many. Washington understood.

"I must leave here directly," he answered. "Ere another week passes I shall be gone. Where future battles are to be fought, remains to be seen, but always, my first object is to guard the Hudson. I need faithful hearts here. I shall not forget you, Andy McNeal, nor your service. If I can use you, be ready. I shall know where to find you. You are sure to be more useful here than elsewhere. You know your woods as few others do, and I know I can depend upon your courage and faithfulness. Again farewell."

Andy arose, drew on the disguising headgear, not even thinking of it, so full was his heart, and so he departed to face whatever lay before.

The immediate thing that faced Andy McNeal was the meeting with his own father. It took all the courage he possessed to do this, and yet he knew that he could not begin to live again until the new complications had been grappled with and readjusted.

After dark of the same day upon which Andy had seen Washington, he reached his mother's little house. Hans and he had had several encounters with the British, but a thickheaded, deaf Dutchman, and a young, frightened lame girl, with a hideous bonnet, served only for a moment's idle sport for the king's gallant men. And after annoying delays they were allowed to pass with a warning to come soon with more food, or their houses would be burned over their heads.

Andy paused outside the cottage. He heard his mother moving about, and the indistinct voice of a man from the guest-room beyond.

"The vine again!" thought Andy. But the ascent in the gown was difficult. "A maid's progress is bitter hard!" smiled he, and he thought tenderly of Ruth.

The little loft-room seemed oddly changed to Andy. He looked about. Everything was the same, and yet—

"It is that voice below-stairs," muttered he. "It alters everything." A feeling of hatred crept in Andy's heart against this man who had suddenly assumed so close a relationship to him.

“What will mother do?” he questioned as he changed his clothing, and put on the decent Sunday-suit that was hanging from the pegs. “What will she do?” And in his heart Andy knew what she would do, what, at least, she would want to do. He had seen it shining back of the trouble in her eyes when she first spoke to him. The want had brought the look of beauty with it, and had banished the marks of the lonely years.

Page 34

"But a Britisher!" moaned the boy, smoothing his hair, "a Britisher for Janie and Andy McNeal! I might forgive him for all else—for mother's sake, but not that, not that!"

"Andy, lad, is it you?" Andy started. His mother was coming up the stairs!

"Yes, mother." She stood before him now. The coarse cotton gown that was familiar to Andy's boyhood was gone. A dull, bluish linen with white cuffs and collar had replaced it, and above the becoming dress shone the face of a new Janie.

A jealous pang struck Andy's heart, and he shivered in spite of himself.

"I thought I heard you, lad. You are safe?"

"Quite safe, mother."

"But sair tired?" she dropped into the Scotch unconsciously.

"Not overtired. I did my errand well."

"And now, Andy, what next?"

"Nothing. Since I cannot follow and fight, I must bide at home and wait. Does any one come here for help from the patriot army we must be ready, mother."

"Aye, surely, lad. You know where my heart lies!"

"But, mother, the—the person below. He is—a deserter if he is found here. What then? And surely not even he must keep us from doing our duty."

"Lad" (Janie came close), "I cannot hope to have you understand. When love comes your way, Andy, it will plead for me. All these years—I have been a starved and forsaken woman, and it has changed me. We all go astray, Andy, and—and your father. Oh! call him that, son, for my sake. Your father has dealt sorely with me and you, but he has come back. He was hunting us long before he found us. He wants to mend the past. Andy, as we hope for mercy from the good God, let us be merciful."

"But a Britisher, mother. An enemy to our cause. Oh, mother!"

"Andy, lad, come!" She put out her hand pleadingly, and Andy followed. There was a candle burning in the guest-room, and by its modest gleam sat the man who, when Andy had seen him last, was proclaiming his own son to be the rebel who had presumably struck one of the king's men in the cave. Very pale was the man now, and the bruise on the forehead shone plain even in the dim light. He looked up at Andy in a curious, interested way, and half extended his hand.

"You do not care to take the hand of a Britisher, I see." The white face relaxed in a faint smile. Andy went nearer.

"For my mother's sake I can take my—my father's hand, though it all seems mighty queer."

"I want you to know," said the man, "that I would not have told my head officer who you were that day, but I was so alarmed at the likeness you bore my mother that I was unaware of what I was doing. It was horrible to realize as I was beginning to do then, that I was probably speaking to my own—son."

"It was more horrible to think that my own father had been struck by a blow dealt in my defense. You must have thought that, too."

Page 35

"No, I did not. Who struck that blow?"

"Nathan Hale."

The man started. "And he?"

"Died the death of a spy two days ago."

"Andy!" It was Janie who cried out. "Was our dear schoolmaster, Nathan Hale, the spy?"

"Nathan Hale, the patriot!" corrected Andy, and his eyes dimmed.

"Oh! how you have suffered, lad."

"Aye." Andy sank into a chair.

His father was looking at him keenly; and a growing expression of admiration was dawning in the searching eyes. Here was a son of whom he might yet be proud.

"Andy," he said, "I can imagine your feeling toward me. I do not say I do not deserve it. But your mother is willing to forgive the past, if you are willing to give me a trial." The thin lips twitched. Martin was a proud man, and his humble diet seemed never to be coming to an end. The hard young face opposite appeared more unrelenting than Janie's had seemed.

"What is best for mother is best for me," said Andy. "I am almost a man. When the war is over I shall try to do a man's part in the world. Each one of us has his life."

Martin again became serious. "I have money, Andy; I can help you, and give you a fair start."

"Your money will make mother's life easier. It has been a hard life."

"There, there, Andy, lad! Do not be bitter, son."

"Not bitter, mother. But I cannot forget. Not just at first."

"I can educate you, Andy," Martin added. "You might take that help from a stranger, and repay it later on."

A hungry look came into the boy's eyes. The teaching of the master had awakened an appetite that would not sleep. "I did without for many years," he replied. But Martin had seen the gleam, and was proud.



"In a day or so, Andy," he went on, "I must ask a favor of you. I want you to guide me to the patriot headquarters." The boy started. "I came half-heartedly to fight against the colonies. It is my desire to throw my lot in with theirs now. You may be able to do me a favor with your General. He will know you. If I come back you may be able to respect your father. If not—your mother has a good son, and Parson White will see that what belongs to you two will be yours."

"Father!" Andy arose, and this time stretched forth his hand gladly. "Father, I will try to be a good son to you, too!"

"Thank God!" sobbed Janie, kneeling by the chair, and drawing Andy within the circle of her new hopes.

The old clock ticked and ticked contentedly. The hissing of the kettle on the fire recalled Janie to her happy tasks, and Martin and his son wondered what the future would bring.

CHAPTER IX

PEACE

"Only the cane now, Andy. The days of crutches are over!"

"Yes, Ruth, the country, the dear free country and I can nearly go alone now." Andy stood up proudly and beamed upon the pretty girl standing by his mother.

Page 36

"I declare!" he laughed, "you look but little older than Ruth, mother!"

"Box his ears well, lass," said Janie, mightily pleased. "He struts, does Andy, and you and I must take him down."

"Come," Andy broke in, "we must start now. Wrap up well, girls," he laughed again, "'tis bitter cold, and the way is long."

"No cold can reach me!" cried Janie, pulling her hood well over her happy face. "Warm hearts make glowing bodies. To think, lad, he will be with us to-night!"

The door of the little house was drawn to and locked. All within was beautiful and ready for the patriot who that night would return full of honors for the part he had played during the last two years.

"Yes. He will be with us, mother," echoed Andy. He looked at Ruth. He had learned to understand his mother now, and Ruth had shown him the way.

"It was no light matter," said the girl, keeping step with Andy over the crisp snow, "for you—your father to be a patriot. He was not only a patriot but a deserter from the king's army. In every battle he had to face that."

"Yes," broke in Janie, "and when he went with Wayne to storm Stony Point, he was nearly captured, as you will remember. And the British yelled at him, 'Don't shoot that deserter, lead's too good for him. We'll try an Indian trick on him!'"

Andy's face grew grave. "He's a brave man," he whispered, and drew Janie's arm within his own. And so the little party came to Fraunce's Tavern, and bided near the room in which Washington and his officers were dining before the General departed for Annapolis, where he was to lay down his commission, for the war was over, and peace had come to the young country.

"Andy," said Janie, closing the door of the small room which had been reserved for them, "'twas great luck that my host's wife and I are friends. Think of us having this to ourselves, and the great General right in the next room. Ruth, lass, there is a communicating door, as true as I live! Andy, draw away the sofa."

"Mother, you would not be an eavesdropper?"

"God forbid! Ruthie, is there a keyhole?"

"No keyhole, but a good generous crack in the panel! Hurry, Andy, with the sofa, the thing weighs a ton. Push!"

"Ruth! We cannot spy upon the General." Andy tried to look severe.

"I can!" laughed the girl, mounting the sofa, and applying her eye to the crack. "I'm afraid the Revolution has demoralized me, but I must see the thing through. Andy, they look—they look magnificent!" Ruth was quivering on her perch. Janie flung prudence and dignity to the winds, and climbed to Ruth's side, and, being taller, gained a portion of the crack above the girl's head.

"I can see no one but the General!" she said. "The crack is over-narrow for such doings!"

"There is no one but Washington!" breathed Andy, and he lifted his head proudly.

Page 37

"Yes, there are others," whispered Ruth, misunderstanding, "and if you run your eye up and down the crack quickly, you can catch a sight of them. The crack is wider in some parts."

"Heaven save us, lass!" (Ruth's head had come in violent contact with Janie's chin). "You have loosened my teeth!"

"They are going to drink a toast!" said Ruth, not heeding the accident, but thrilling with excitement. "Andy, 'tis no wrong we are doing. The General's voice can be heard distinctly, and I vow there are a dozen heads at every window opening on the porch. The crack is fine down here. I can see everything!"

Andy stood still.

"He is raising his glass!" said Ruth near the floor.

"With my heart full of love and gratitude I now take leave of you all. Most devoutly wishing that your latter days may be as prosperous and happy as your former ones have been glorious and honorable."

"His eyes are full of tears!" almost sobbed Ruth, and the eyes of them in the little room were dim. Glasses clinked together, then the full voice went on:

"I cannot come to each one of you and take my leave, but I shall be obliged if you will come and take my hand." They needed no second bidding those comrades, tried and true. One by one, feeling no shame in their manly show of sorrow, they grasped their General's faithful hand and parted from him with bowed heads.

"They are going out!" panted Janie. "Now, Andy, for the hall. We must meet him at the door."

As he came from the banquet room, Washington and his officers met the three. He knew Andy at a glance, and then recognized Janie. He took them by the hand, and bowed in courtly fashion.

"Patriots all!" he smiled. "You well deserve your hard-earned peace."

They joined the throngs which followed Washington to the river. They stood upon the Battery until the barge which bore the gallant figure away faded from sight. So lost were they in admiration that for a moment none of them noticed a tall figure approaching dressed in Continental uniform. Then Janie saw him. Her face flushed like a girl's.

"Andy!" she whispered, pulling her son's sleeve, "see, here is your—"

"Father!" greeted Andy, and stretched out a welcoming hand.

Back to the lonely pass the four went, Janie and Martin on ahead.

“And now,” questioned Ruth in a soft whisper, “what comes next, Andy?”

“I am to study. Ah! Ruth, how I shall study! I mean to learn all that I can and carry the best to them who call me.”

“You really mean to be a minister?”

“That I do, God willing!” answered Andy, reverently.

“Tis a hard life, Andy.”

“For that I love it.”

“Have you thought where you would like to go?”

“Just where the most urgent call comes. Ruth, the life is hard—”

“I know the life, Andy, and love it!”

Page 38

“Could you—could you, Ruth?”

“Keep on living it? Yes, dear. Who so well fitted as I?”

They paused on the snowy path, and looked into each other’s brave eyes.

“I wonder if any life is really hard, dear Ruth, where—”

“Love lifts the burden? I think not, Andy. Love bears the weight. We take the glory. It is a wonderful thing.”

The red glow of the winter sunset seemed to warm the snow-covered earth, and in the still beauty the two followed Janie and Martin.

THE END