

Hearts Courageous

HALLIE ERMINIE RIVES

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CHAPTER XV.

MORE than one along the south road that sultry morning of July 4 turned to gaze after a fair haired girl who passed upon a lead-white horse, with a negro boy behind her astride a sorrel. Yellow dust spotted Anne's olive cloak as she rode into the town, and yellow dust clung to John the Baptist's wool.

How many leagues? She would have been worn but for the purpose that buoyed her up. She rode some way, paying as little heed to the sparse groups along the streets or to the few painted Indians lounging with their peltry in the squares as to the beetle-browed roofs or the wooden statuary in the pretentious yards.

Her thoughts were busy with the past. They flew back to that night at Gladden Hall, her last view of Armand, when Jarrat's troopers had dragged him away; to the flight of Dunmore and his family, his wanton burning of Norfolk with his rabble of runaway slaves, and the last fight at Gwynn's island, whence the impotent earl, with his brutal aid, Captain Foy, sailed away to the north, never again to set foot upon Virginia soil; to her anguished wonder as to Armand's fate meanwhile. Even Henry's return from the Second congress, the news that Colonel Washington had been elected commander in chief of colonial forces and the glorious outcome of his long siege of Boston had not been able to cheer her.

She thought of the long hours she had watched by the bedside of the bondswoman with grave faced Dr. Crank watching her slow return to life; of the still longer days when she had sat by the listless figure who only stared leaden eyed and with brain pitifully dulled to hear asked over and over again with desperate earnestness that same question, "Where is it—ran't you remember?"—a question met always with the same result; of the long, fruitless search, the unreasoning faith in him that would not yield to recital or argument, and finally the lucky accident which had given her the clew to the packet's hiding place.

She had started the selfsame day, taking John the Baptist with her, leaving a hurried message for her uncle and aunt, who were then away in Richmond. And this, the twelfth day thereafter, found her at her journey's end riding into the wide, clean thoroughfares of Philadelphia.

"Mis' Annie"—John the Baptist's solemn drawl broke her reverie—"dat yaller boy at de place whar we stayed las' night say dee gwinter mek ev'body eak. Do dat mean we niggers gwine ter be white lak you, or is y'all gwine ter be black lak me?"

But Anne had no answer. Going toward High street, her course lay by the open green on which the new statehouse fronted. She noticed that the pavements were almost deserted and found herself thinking wonderingly that the streets of Richmond were noisier.

It was with a start of surprise that on turning a corner by the green she pulled up without warning on the skirts of a great hunched crowd, well ordered, moving restlessly under tree that shivered with locusts.

Most of those nearer the front were gentry. They walked back and forth slowly, trampling the blue thistles and whortleberry bushes. Next them was a stratum of the trading and working classes. No wonder the wealthier merchants jeered them, for they wore trousers of coarse drill, even leather jerkins, and some carried tools. Here was a group of weavers from Germantown, and not far away a knot of Swedes from Wicacoa. The older men among these wore leggings and skin coats.

On the outskirts of all, here and there, holding themselves aloof, walked stately, heavier figures in small clothes of rich velvets and satins and wearing powdered wigs.

They carried irritable looks, these "Pennsylvania lords," as the bitter Adams called them. It was bad weather for Tories. From the yard of Clarke's inn, across the street, they looked askance at the workmen, passing sneering allusions to the representatives from Massachusetts, angered at the assumption of legislative powers by men clearly of more humble blood than themselves.

They saw the cannon in position by the statehouse and the Continental flags fluttering from the shipping in the harbor. They knew that in the nearby woods five battalions of Associators, drilled and armed, were awaiting any outcome. They knew that the people were ready, if only their leaders should choose.

Anne upon her tired horse looked with wonder at this earnest, quiet crowd and thrilled with a new sense of the dignity of the assemblage within those brick walls. The heat was shimmering, and she had thrown open the thin cloak she wore, showing a flash of crimson waist with a sheen of metal buttons.

Mordecai Floyd, looking on near by, gazed on her with pursed lips.

"Small wonder," he said grimly, "that unrighteousness doth overwhelm the children of the world and move them to wrath when we see all about us the testimony of unbelief. Lust of the eye,

Friend Joseph; lust of the eye!" Joseph Galloway, standing by him, looked at the girl, so straight and young and bright hued; then his crafty look returned. "Consider the lilies of the field," he quoted with unctious as he took snuff.

"I doubt not," pursued the Quaker, wagging his pow. "'Twas designed to cast a slur upon the vanity of apparel since 'tis a thing of so little estimation in the sight of God that he bestows it in the highest degree upon the meanest of his creatures. 'Tis to be presumed that, were it a thing of worth in itself, instead of bestowing colors, gildings and brocades upon tulips, he had bestowed them upon creatures of higher dignity. To mankind he hath given but sparingly of gaudy features, a great part of them being black, a great part of them being tawny and a great part being of other wan and dusky complexions, showing that 'tis not the outward adornment that he wishes, but the appearing in supplication for the ornamenting of the Spirit."

"Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these!" intoned his companion smoothly. "But I must be going, Mordecai. I have an errand at the tavern."

"Hast thou heard aught more of the message to the congress from France?" the Quaker inquired in a low voice as he clasped the other's fervid palm.

Galloway put his lips closer to the other's ear, and a glutinous chuckle shook his jaw.

"Mordecai," he said, "I dreamed last night that France had an ax to grind. Wouldn't it be curious if the message didn't tickle the congress so much after all? Ho, ho!"

Anne's first inquiry provoked a smile from the bystanders. Dr. Franklin? Yes, he was doubtless in the hall, but to see him! Quite impossible! And a lady too. At a recess she might succeed, but not now. Who could tell but he was on the floor at that moment?

So she rode on. At High street she inquired for an inn, as she had been in the saddle since dawn and the horses were jaded. Learning that the principal ones were all full owing to the presence of the delegates, she found her way to one of the more humble hostels on another street. It was the Red Lion tavern.

The place seemed well nigh deserted. Had she known the significance of this day's sitting of the congress she would have understood. As it was, finding no host in evidence, she went into the parlor and sat down to await his appearance.

And sitting so, from the hall and coming nearer she heard the well remembered voice of Jarrat.

A panic seized her. The packet—it was in the lining of her cloak at that moment. He must not see her! She looked wildly about her, but there was no door of escape. In desperation she ran to the deep set window. It was shut, but there were shallow curtains across the alcove, and she sprang behind them as the door flew open.

Jarrat came in noisily. One of the inn servants was at his heels. "I would speak with monseigneur," he said. "Request him to be so good as to honor me here." He stood smiling rody as the servant went, and Anne watched him from between the curtains with fascinated gaze.

"At last!" he muttered. "The final stroke, and still all goes well. If Armand succeeds for us, then advancement and favor for me. The king must reward me, for the plan was mine alone."

"Armand!" Anne's heart had given a great leap. Jarrat knew where he was, what he did. "If he succeeds for us," What meant those strange words?

Again a step in the hall, again the door opened, a scraping servant scolded, "Monseigneur," and again Anne's heart leaped, for the man who stood on the threshold clad in a full costume of purple velvet was Armand. Armand, but sparer of feature, with shadows beneath the eyes. Yet they looked out with all their old nobility and with a strange fire. She knew now where she had seen that fire—it was in Henry's face—the fire of steadfast purpose that knows no quenching.

Armand! Escaped from Dunmore's clutches, safe and in Philadelphia! She wanted to rush out to him, to cry to him that she had done the best she could, had come to fulfill her promise at last. But what did he with Jarrat?

"So!" the latter said. "As bravely trimmed as ever. 'Tis the dress of a prince."

"My good Phiarne has the best of taste." On Armand's face was a strange smile.

"You have opened him beautifully. I doubt not he expects reimbursement from his king."

"My king," corrected Armand softly. "Keep it up," laughed Jarrat. "'Tis never forgetting makes a good play actor. Faith, it minds me of the old Virginia days. Then you posed as only a marquis. We rise in the world. Yesterday in a prison cell at Halifax, today this little plan, release, and, presto, behold Louis' secret envoy. Well, you are near to the purchase of your pardon. The time is almost here. A half hour more and you will enter the statehouse. You lack not assurance. Here is the letter you will deliver to the congress."

Armand took the paper he handed him and put it in his breast.

"'Tis signed with De Vergennes' name, of course," went on Jarrat, "and 'tis a clever enough forgery to trick even Poor Richard for the time being. Aid in return for territorial compensation—now if 'twere only Louis XV! 'Twould be like the old skinflint. Methinks 'twill be a wet blanket to allay this fever for a Declaration. 'Twill suffice to tide over till these patriot adulle pates come to their senses."

Anne's mind was in a clamor, a hideous, unmeaning clamor of surprises, from which a single fact stood out with the clearness of a black silhouette etched on white paper—Armand, not escaped, but released—released—going before the congress with a lying message, a message of discouragement—going now, this very hour, and the plot was Jarrat's.

It was for a single heart beat as if the sun were darkened, as if all joy were blotted from the universe. Then, peering out, she saw his eyes, and the bitter scene at Gladden Hall rose to her like a vision. She saw him dragged away, and with the vision she felt—strong, triumphant—the terrible, joyful rebellion of her own belief in him that would not doubt.

"I could not have devised it better myself," Jarrat was speaking again. "There is not a soul in congress who could recognize you as the Louis Armand seized at Williamsburg. Luckily, Henry is in the Virginia convention. The devil holds cards with us."

"And this," said Armand, as if to himself, "has been the devil's deal."

"Aye! But 'tis time for us to start. Phiarne will be there by now." He consulted his watch. "Ten minutes to ride thither. I have horses at the door. I shall go with you as one of your suit. Luckily, I shall not be known. I must not miss the delight of recounting this interesting event in detail in Virginia. Can you guess," with a malign smile, "to whom in especial, monseigneur?"

A red flush leaped into Armand's cheek, and his teeth clinched convulsively. It was as if a great wave of passion lashed the man and left him tense and white. His tone, however, remained as low as ever.

"You wound!" he said. "You prowl- ing about of the dark, who know no truth, no trust, no faith; who, being vile, think all else vile the same! Thank God that to that one—to her—my honor was always unstained! She believe you? No! Never! I go alone to the congress! You go no farther with me!"

A facial contortion drew Jarrat's lips from his teeth. He stood in a leaning posture, his knuckles flat upon the table between them, a thriving suspicion

in his look. A fit of shuddering seized Anne as she saw this look change swiftly to conviction—certainty in which rage and shame and hate were black.

"I go no farther!" he repeated. "What say you? Oh, fool, fool that I was to trust you! You have tricked me! You never intended to do it! You will not go—aye, you would go, but wherefore?" His voice had sunk to a metallic dullness, and he eyed the other, breathing hard.

Now his tone leaped again: "I know! The French king had his own mind! He sent your master a message to convey, a message of comfort. Ah, your face says, 'Aye!' 'Twas in the packet you gave to Mistress Tillotson at Gladden Hall! Curse that bondswoman! You have got it! Now that you are false to us, 'tis that message—that message that you would give the congress! And 'twas I brought you from the jail—!"

The last words were a sort of horrible rasping whisper, and as he spoke he came slowly around the table, his fingers clawing at his edge.

"But you shall not! You double traitor! You shall not go! I know you—I alone! I will prevent it!" "You shall never leave this room," said Armand.

Crouched low, holding the shallow edges, Anne saw it all, the breath fro-



Anne saw both blades clang out.

zen in her throat—saw both blades clang out with a single movement, saw Jarrat hurl himself forward, heard the steel meet. Mixed joy and horror held her.

She understood. He had cherished his master's purpose all along, pursued by treachery, meeting cunning with cunning, constrained to deception. It was the true message of the French king that she clasped at that moment under her cloak. To carry this he had won his way from the hands of his enemies and fooled Jarrat to his purpose. And now without the packet his voice would give the message to the congress. She had brought it just in time.

All this came to her at once in a succession of pictures vivid as patches of

night landscape seen by violet lightning and at an instant when horror over-rolled her joy.

The street, the taproom, were so near. Would none come to stop them? She feared to declare herself, for a start, a tremor of the hand, might mean death to her lover.

She saw the quick end, powerless to utter a cry. Armand stiffened suddenly, his left hand fallen low. His blade passed like a needle in sailcloth through the other's body, and Jarrat slipped in a huddle to the floor and lay still.

Anne tried to scream, but her throat only gave forth a whisper. Not till Armand had sheathed his wet sword and the door had closed upon him did she find strength to part the curtains.

She looked upon the prostrate man in a terror. She must summon help and then take the packet to Armand. She realized suddenly that Jarrat was not dead; that his eyes were upon her; that he was struggling to a sitting posture.

"You saw—you heard!" he gasped. "You!"

"Yes," she breathed. "You brought him the packet! My God! To think I never suspected! And he has gone—gone!"

"To his honor."

He stared at her, a slow, ghastly smile coming to wreath his lips. "Honor? Say you so? Wait!"

He made an attempt to unbutton his waistcoat. "The paper in this pocket!" he groaned. "Take it and read. Quick! Quick! Nay, call no one! Men bleed not to death so soon!"

She unfolded the scroll with shaking fingers and read:

I, Louis Armand, released from duress in Halifax, under special instruction from his majesty's government touching the Continental congress, do agree that, in the event that I do not carry out this mission, as ordered, I hold my life forfeit and pledge my honor within one month this hereafter to deliver myself to Lord Chetwynde, whose custody I now leave.

ARMAND. She caught her breath. "Do pledge my honor to deliver myself"—"to hold my life forfeit." He had chosen to give his life to carry the true message. His life! How dear that was to her! He must not do it! Oh, if God would only help her to think! He must not do it! She heard Jarrat's breathing through it all and felt his eyes, flaring, upon her.

A heavy knocking came at the door, and Joseph Galloway entered, his stick in his hand. He made an exclamation as he saw and threw up his hands.

"Galloway!" said the wounded man, his breath rattling with a convulsion as the other bent over him. "He is false to us. Armand—he is false! He—"

—did this. He is gone to the congress. You must stop him!"

"Yes, yes. I will call a leech. 'Tis not a mortal thrust, man. I will go to the hall. But how to do it? Proofs!"

"She"—gasped Jarrat in a final effort, pointing to Anne. "She"—and lapsed into ashen unconsciousness.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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North Carolina Banks.

Raleigh, April 10th.—A statement of the condition of North Carolina State, private and savings banks issued to-day by the Corporation Commission, shows \$31,923,963 assets and liabilities, deposits \$21,886,808; also accrued interest due to depositors, \$36,391, and trust deposits aggregating \$1,400,935. Aggregate capital stock, \$4,916,415.

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Nantasket, Mass., April 10th.—Mrs. Eliza Pickering, aged eighty-eight years, is dead after fasting thirty-eight days. The attending physician gives the cause of her death old age, and says there are no signs that the woman died as a result of her fast. During the fast she also refrained from drinking water.

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