

THE AMERICAN TWINS OF THE REVOLUTION

CHAPTER I

A SEPTEMBER NIGHT IN THE YEAR 1777

SALLY PRIESTLY woke suddenly out of a sound sleep and sat bolt upright in her little spool-spindled bed. She did not know what had wakened her; she only knew that her heart was beating like a hammer, and that she was trembling with fright. She smothered the sound of her gasping breaths in the gay patchwork quilt which covered her bed, and gazed fearfully about the room.

She could see everything in it quite plainly, for the bright moonlight streamed through the little windowpanes, leaving a checkered

GAY: *cheerful*

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pattern on the floor and bathing the familiar objects in a pale and ghostly light. It touched the brass andirons in the fireplace, and made them gleam faintly against the



blackened bricks of the chimney. The silver candlesticks on her bureau, standing like soldiers on guard before the little swinging mirror, caught a ray from its reflected light and winked it cheerfully back at her. Before the hearth the braided rug lay in its

accustomed spot, and the Windsor chairs stood in a prim row against the wall.

The cool September breeze blowing in at the open window lifted the chintz curtains, but nothing else stirred in the room, and though Sally strained her ears to listen, there was no sound but the solemn ticking of the tall clock on the stair landing, and the faraway sound of a dog barking at the moon.

“What a silly I am!” she said at last to herself, giving her pillow a thump. “Everything is as quiet as a church. I must have had a bad dream.”

She snuggled down under the gay coverlet again, shut her eyes tight, and was just beginning to feel a little drowsy when another sound caught her quick ear. It was the beat of horses' hoofs on the road. Old Sailor, the yard dog, heard it and, springing from his hard bed on the doorstep, dashed down the driveway, barking like mad.

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“Whatever can be the matter with old Sailor?” said Sally to herself, sitting upright again.

The dog soon stopped barking; but strange, stealthy noises now began all about the house. The stairs creaked; she heard soft footfalls, and a door close downstairs. Then to her amazement came the rumble of a low voice from below.

“That’s a man talking,” she said to herself, feeling the hair lift on the back of her neck. “It can’t be father, for he’s far away fighting with General Washington, and won’t be home until the war’s over; and it can’t be Uncle Jude; it’s a different rumble from his; and nobody else has any business in this house.”

She waited a few moments, not daring to scream, and hoping that her mother would come. At last she could stand it no longer.

“I shall die of fright if I just stay here and listen,” she said to herself; and, throw-

ing back the covers, she slid quietly to the floor. She tiptoed across the room and cautiously stuck her curly brown head out of the window, and as quickly drew it back again. There, in the shadow of the stable, she saw a man holding the bridle-reins of two horses standing saddled beside him. Though Sally was frightened, she kept her head and did not scream. She stood still for a moment thinking, then crept as silently as a kitten across the floor and through the door into the room of her twin brother Roger.

“Roger, wake up!” she murmured in his ear, giving him a gentle poke in the ribs. Roger grunted, turned over, and instantly fell asleep again.

“Roger Priestly, wake up do!” she implored, shaking him. “There’s a strange man downstairs. Don’t you hear him talking?”

Roger sat up blinking. “Oh, sis, you’re always getting scared in the night,” he

grumbled, but Sally clapped her hand over his mouth.

“Listen,” she whispered.

Roger listened; then, thoroughly awake at last, he scrambled out of bed and followed her into her room.

“Look,” murmured Sally, pointing out of the window. There stood the man, still holding the horses. He seemed to be watching the house.

“We must wake Mother,” said Roger.

They stepped quickly back out of the moonlight lest the man should see them, and, creeping softly to the door, opened it a crack and peered out. Everything in the wide hall was just as usual. The moonlight lay in square patches on the floor, and the great clock ticked solemnly as always on the landing.

Leaving their own door wide open, they scuttled across the hall, and, finding the one leading into their mother’s room ajar,



they slipped inside. There was no moonlight in this room, and with fast beating hearts they groped their way in the dark toward her bed. They had almost reached it when Roger stumbled over a footstool and plunged headlong into the pillows, pulling Sally after him.

“Mother,—Mother,” they gasped, but there was no answer. Her bed was empty! For an instant they could not believe she was not there. They felt over the mattress with their hands, whispering her name. They even searched about on the floor. Then, more frightened than ever, they made their way back to the door and stood still again to listen. Below the strange voice still rumbled on.

“He doesn’t seem to mind whether people hear him or not,” said Roger, under his breath. “He is talking to someone, so there must be two of them down there, anyway. I wonder if they heard me fall over that plaguey footstool!”

“Maybe they’re Redcoats,” shuddered Sally. “Maybe they’ve got Mother down there! Uncle Jude said he heard the British were coming this way. Oh, what shall we do?”

“Listen,” whispered Roger. “We’ve got to find Mother, and there’s nobody to help us.



Uncle Jude and Aunt Hitty are the only servants in the house, and they wouldn't wake up if it fell about their ears."

"Can't we get any of the other servants?" asked Sally.

"Of course not," said Roger. "We'd have to go right by the man with the horses to get to the quarters. We've just got to find Mother, and we've got to do it alone."

"I'm scared to do it," said Sally.

"I'm more scared not to," answered her brother. "Come along."

He stepped boldly out into the moonlit hall, and, going to the bannister-rail, leaned over and looked down at the floor below. "All clear," he whispered, and hand in hand the two children began to descend the stairs.

From step to creaking step they went, pausing on each one to listen, and at last they stood trembling in the lower hall. Beneath the dining-room door there was a wide crack of light. The steady murmur of the low voice continued, and Roger, creeping softly to the door, slipped to his knees and, laying his head sidewise on the floor, tried to peep through the shining crack, but his nose got in the way and he bumped it against the door instead. To his horror the door, being loose, rattled a little.

Instantly the talking ceased and all was

still. Then the voice began again.

“Did I hear a noise?” it said. There was no reply, and after a moment’s pause the man said, “We can’t be too careful. There are spies everywhere!” He lowered his voice almost to a whisper, and the children, though they listened breathlessly could catch only part of what he said.

“He’s moving the troops farther up the river,” were the next words they heard. “Since the defeat at the Brandywine the army has been discouraged. They tried to stop the British advances, but a drenching rain soaked all the ammunition and stopped the fight before it began. It means everything to the cause to get this money. It should get here tomorrow, and must be sent on with all possible speed. Howe is marching toward Philadelphia. General Washington is not in a position to defend it, and this whole region will probably fall into Howe’s hands.”

At this terrifying news Sally could not help a little soundless sob. "They are Redcoats," she said to herself, clenching her fists in the dark.

The next few words were lost in a low murmur but soon the voice became audible again.

"I grieve to put this danger upon you," it said, "but there seems no other way. The troops must have money, and hard money too. They have lost faith in paper promises."

Just at this point Roger accidentally bumped into the door a second time.

"Who's there?" cried the voice, and before the children could make a move to escape there was a scraping of chair-legs on the floor and the sound of quick steps crossing the room. Frantic with terror, Sally threw herself on the floor beside her brother with her arms around his neck. The door was instantly flung wide open, and two long legs towered before them. From across the room

the children heard their mother's astonished voice cry: "Roger! Sally! What on earth are you doing here?" and at the same moment they felt themselves gathered in their own father's arms and folded in his embrace!

The shock of such happiness when they had expected something so different was too much for Sally. She hid her face in her father's neck and sobbed, while Roger, manfully struggling with a large lump in his throat, clasped the sleeve of his uniform. For a few moments everything was forgotten but the joy of being together again after many months of anxious separation.

"Oh, Father, was it truly you all the time? It didn't sound like your voice at all," said Roger at last.

"We thought you were Redcoats," added Sally, lifting her head from her father's collar.

"But what were you doing on your knees in the hall?" asked their mother again,

as her husband led the way back into the dining-room, and sat down in a chair before the fire with Roger on one side of him and Sally on the other.

“We were listening,” said Roger. “We woke up and heard talking and saw a man outside with some horses, so we went to tell you. You weren’t in your bed, so we came to find you.”

“We thought the Redcoats were in the house and had got you,” added Sally. She stopped to kiss her mother’s hand. “We were so frightened.”

“Never mind about that now,” said their father. “You were outside the door listening; that’s the main point. My time is very short and I have much to say. Tell me, Roger, did you hear all I was telling your mother?”

“Only a little of it, Sir,” answered Roger, “about money, and that General Howe was coming.”

General Priestly looked at his wife, and his brow was furrowed with anxiety.

“Scarcely a secret to entrust to children! I would not have had this happen for anything you could name!” he said.

His wife thought a moment, then she spoke. “It should not have happened, truly,” she said, “but since it has, we must make the best of it. They were surely not to blame, and showed both courage and discretion in trying to find me in the face of what they believed to be danger. I think you may trust them.”

“There is nothing else we can do,” General Priestly agreed, drawing the children to his side. “Listen,” he said to them, “and remember well what I am about to say to you. There has been a battle a little south of here, on the banks of the Brandywine. Our army was defeated and General Lafayette was wounded. We are taking a position now farther up the river, and General

Washington sent me to arrange with your mother to receive money which is coming from Philadelphia to pay the troops and to send it on to him as soon as she can find a trustworthy messenger. It is a dangerous mission, for the country is full of spies, and if the British think there is money going to our army they will move heaven and earth to get it. Half the people want the British to win this war, anyway. Things have not been going well with our army. It is a time of danger and discouragement, and those are the very times when courage and faith are most needed. Your mother has both. There is no one else we dare trust. She is going to stay here, guard that money, and find a way to get it to General Washington. Will you help her?"

"We will! We will!" said the children.

"Remember," said their father, "you must not betray this secret to a living soul. You must not let anyone know that I have been

here. You must do exactly what your mother tells you, and you must not flinch in the face of danger—if danger should arise.”

He put his hands on their shoulders and looked deeply into their clear blue eyes.

“We promise,” said the children, looking bravely back at him.

General Priestly rose to his feet. “Two more soldiers in the service of our country,” he said, and, lifting his hand, he gravely saluted his children. “I haven’t another moment to linger,” he said. “I trust you. May God bless and protect you!”

He gathered his wife and children to his arms in one wide embrace, kissed their upturned faces, held them for a moment to his heart, then strode out of the room and the house.

From the window they watched him mount one of the two horses waiting in the shadow of the stable. The soldier who had been standing guard mounted the

other, and away the two men galloped in the moonlight.

The mother and children watched until they were hidden from sight, and listened until they could no longer hear the beat of the horses' feet, then slowly and sadly they mounted the wide stairs to their rooms. The tall clock on the landing struck four as their mother tucked Sally and Roger once more in their beds, kissed them goodnight, then went to her own room to wait for the morning.