

## A TOLL-BRIDGE TALE.

"Abigail, thy father's joy," my mother said one morning, smoothing my hair that vexed me so sorely, for it will never lie smooth as a decorous maiden's should. I felt a bitter pang in my heart when she repeated the meaning of my name, for I knew full well that between my father and me a coldness was growing. Sad that it should be so in such troublous times, and after all my fifteen years of love and reverence. Yet, even my mother, though she always said women should only think as the men folk direct, is in sympathy with our adopted country. Not my adopted country, for I was born in this dear land, and every breath I draw now is a prayer for her safety and triumph. Freedom is in the air here in this refuge for oppressed people. Have I not heard of Polish exiles in Dresden, and of French Protestants seeking refuge in the same quaint town, and I am not so young but that I can see far ahead in the coming years and know that people from every country will turn their weary feet to this safe asylum.

I am old beyond my years, and I listen to the passers on the bridge when they talk to father or mother, when they take the toll, and I know these are dangerous days. I think long thoughts that keep me awake till cockcrow many a morning.

My father looked at me keenly the other day and said I am so quiet and sad I have lost all my childhood.

So this year of our Lord 1775, in the fair month of June, even our quiet town is bewildered and terrified by strange news from Boston, brought by the ships that sail up the wide Sheepscot to beautiful Westport, ten miles away. Our river, known as the Negusset, is divided from the Sheepscot by a long island running away to the sea, but in places the land is low, and from our bridge I can see the masts of the ships and their white topsails, as they glide onward to the town. It seems a link to me with that mysterious world outside. When the tide runs up the Sheepscot, it runs down our river, that is navigable only for small boats, skows, or moving lumber rafts, and is beset with eddies and whirlpools. Our home is in a slightly place, surrounded by fair, green woods, close to the rippling stream, and on either side, the winding road goes into a forest that seemeth to me a very path into fairyland. It is shady and still, except for the song of birds, the murmur of the brooks, and the soft sigh of the pines. Ferns grow high all around, wild flowers nod in the breeze, and long rows of golden-rod bend their soldierly heads before the sun. Over our cottage a woodbine grows that almost covereth our porch, and through my father is never tired of telling of that beautiful England, I know my home is dearer to me.

Once in unseemly anger I said to my father:

"If England be so much fairer and more glorious than our land why came you here at all?"

To turn his hot, quick anger, my mother said, "My child, that was not courteous," and (with a sigh) "one must live, and it is over-crowded there."

"Then," persisted I, "surely to the country that gives so dear a home as ours and room to live and be happy, should not my father give his strength and arm?"

He looks at me darkly, seldom ventures a caress, and my mother weeps often.

On the 20th of June my father and mother were summoned some fifteen miles down the Island, to my Cousin Richard's home. He came from England with my father, and is now on his death-bed. He too, is a Tory, and is greatly attached to my father. I have been often left alone and I fear not. My mother kissed me tenderly when she stepped in the shay; how fair and sweet she is, nothing will change her love, but my father looked at me coldly.

"You will remain in the house, Abigail," he said, "nor spend your time in idle converse with other silly maids. Thy mother has set thee tasks, see to it that thou art not idle."

He kissed me, but without affection, and mine eyes were so dim with tears I could not see his face. As I turned to go he called me back. He held my arm in so tight a grasp I must have screamed with pain, had I not been full of the spirit of our age, when even maids were resolved to be brave.

"Hast thou ever heard at night passers on the bridge, the clatter of many hoofs?"

"I am not deaf, father, and surely so good a company of cavaliers passing would awake any one."

"Hast thou told of their coming?"

"You forbid me to go to the village, father; who indeed should I tell?"

"See that thou art silent for thy life," he said sternly, "and tell them I was summoned out to my cousin's death-bed, or I

would have kept at my post. Be prudent, for a prattling maid is a scourge to any respectable household."

They drove on, leaving me with flushed cheeks and rebellious eyes. As I went back I lifted the cat and held her to my face; there were tears on her grey fur.

"Maltese Matty," I cried, "because your ancestors came from England, do you love the bad King George? Are you not an American cat?"

I laid her on the cushion and went within, where the cool, dark room soothed me. Over our home is the spell of my mother's exquisite neatness. Our floors fairly shine, our mahogany furniture, brought from England, has a bright polish, and our windows are full of flowers, while folks say my mother's china is among the rarest in America. I tiptoed to the high mantel, to the long mirror, and pushing aside the brass candle-sticks, saw a round, rosy face, bright brown eyes, a pouting mouth and curly, rebellious hair.

"For a traitor maid you are rather well favored, Abigail," I said aloud, and then I blushed guiltily at my vanity and put the candlesticks back. Never until a month gone had I thought of my looks at all, and why I did now was that our nearest neighbor's son, John Gardiner Todd, the big, ungainly boy of Captain Todd, went on a voyage to Boston with his father, and told when he returned that I was as fair as Boston girls.

I put on my pink and blue flowered gown—and my mother fashions my clothing so neatly I am the best gown of all the maids in the village, nor does it vex me to know it. Though my father says I gawk at the other maids all the time in church, how can he see when my bonnet hides my face? The world is so beautiful, why should not we who are made to love color and brightness have it about us?

I took my wheel and went out on the porch under the vines where Maltese Matty lay at my feet. Whirr, whirr, whirr, went my wheel and twitter, twitter, twitter, echoed the birds in the old elm by the roadside, while the river danced and murmured in the sunlight. Now and then a passer called me to the bridge to gather toll, which I carefully hid away for fear of thieves. As I sat there I heard a step and a shadow darkened the door, and then there came John Gardiner Todd, the ungainly son of our neighbor.

"Well, Miss Tory, you seem to be all alone," he said, picking up the cat and sitting down on the step.

"I did not ask you in," I cried angrily.

"No; but this is a free country," he answered. I saw that his voyage had bronzed him greatly, making a strange contrast with his fair hair and blue eyes. He is so big he seems to dwarf our very house. He hath outgrown his strength, his mother saith, for he is only in his eighteenth birthday.

"I must work," I said ungraciously.

"The proper thing for silly maids."

So my wheel goes with a whirr, and the birds and the river sounds not an unpleasant rhyme as he sings.

Suddenly he stops and looks tame.

"If you were not a Tory maid," then checks himself.

"Why?" I asked quickly.

"You might help the country that gave you a home. For whatever your father saith, he ill-fared in England, where some great lord cheated him out of all his property. Surely he should have no love for kings."

"You know I told thy mother how my heart is," I said anxiously. "Oh, forget my father, my idle talk. John, let me, a weak maid, if I may, help my dear land. I never had ambition to be great and beautiful as noble ladies are, but when I read of John of Arc's cheeks burn, my heart beats fast, and I cry if only like her I could do something to help a mighty cause."

"Women and girls cannot be trusted," he sighed; "it is not their nature."

Again I grew angry and would not speak.

"But," he said slowly, as he rose to his full height and laid his great hand on my wheel to stop its noise, "there is a story that the Britishers have been landing arms on the island, and the cavaliers that gallop across the bridge of nights go to meetings there, and now this very night they are to move the ammunition and arms inland to secure hiding places. At 12, under a strong guard, the wagons will cross this bridge, and we cannot prevent, for they outnumber us three to one, and have all roads well patrolled."

"Well, what can I do?"

"Nothing, if thy father is at home, for he is a Tory. If he were one of us he would cut the draw before they pass. Couldst thou persuade him?"

"As well move that old boulder in the river."

"There is naught, then, but patience," he said sadly, and went away, not knowing my father was from home.

At dusk I heard the sound of horses' hoofs on the bridge and a number of gentlemen rode by. As I stepped out for the toll one doffed his hat.

"Tav father, is he at hand?"

I told him of my father's departure, and he and his companions conferred awhile; then one of the elderly men rode up to me.

"See that thou sleepest well to-night, Mistress Abigail," he said sternly, "and that thou go no unto or near the village."

A younger gentleman also rode up and looked at me with a familiar smile, at which I gave him such an angry glance that he turned away, saying with a laugh:

"It is well she is on our side, or I should fear her."

I heard them talk as they rode on of a meeting at Brookings woods, some miles away, and that they would return for the wagons at midnight. It grew very quiet after the sound of their horses' hoofs died away. Once in a while a frog croaked or a bird chirped, but at the last the crickets woke up and began their clatter, the ebbing tide grew noisy over the shallows and my heart grew lighter. I walked out on the bridge in the darkness, where the few stars overhead glimmered on the dark water, until I felt in some enchanted land, sky above and below, walking on a bridge of air.

What could I do for the noble cause, I, a poor weak maid? I had no gift, like Joan of Arc, heaven-sent and altogether marvellous.

Soon I felt the lighter resonance of the draw beneath my feet. I laid my hand on the ponderous machinery that moves the bridge, the great bolts and bars that, though my father is a great giant of a man, he finds difficult to move. Could I go and summon John Gardiner Todd and tell him my father was from home? No, that

was impossible; the watcher beyond the bridge would stop my path. I sat down helplessly, my heart beating fast.

How still the night was and so dark. If some one rode on the bridge and the draw lay open, would he not drown in the deep black water between where the tide swirled and roared?

Would I not be a murderer?

But, cried my heart, horses see in the night. I have been told in the French and Indian wars the sagacity of these noble beasts saved many lives by knowing the presence of lurking foes in the forests.

I am so weak, I said, and if the draw lay open would the Whigs know enough to seize the arms on the Island? But again my heart said, they are eagerly watching for some ray of hope, and they would value the arms in their impoverished condition.

Can they not cross the river first, having the boats and knowing its dangers best, and be safe with their prize before the Tories can prevent? While I thought I struggled with the machinery and there was a strange fascination in it. The sense of danger I discovered, the joy it I succeeded; the feeling that grown men would praise me, and John be sorry he had called me a Tory maid.

Oh, these heavy bolts, the crank that turned so hard and the creaking sound that might tell the watcher beyond the bridge and make him send a bullet at any moment. Suddenly, with a quick snap, the chain broke and slipped out of my bleeding hands, and whereas the draw was always opened slowly with caution, it now fell wide apart with a sounding crash, and at my feet yawned the great black gulf of seething water. I heard a shout and some one running on the bridge.

Mad with terror, I stood one moment on the brink, and then, with a prayer to the Father I fell forward into the swift-flowing tide.

For a moment I knew nothing only the roaring of water and darkness, then there awoke in me the strong instinct of a swimmer for self-preservation. I blessed my father who had taught me to breast the waves, and I took up hope and struggled bravely. The current dragged me hither and thither, great giant arms seemed reaching from the depths to pull me down, strange eddies and whirlpools turned me about and twisted my hands and feet, and as I strove to rise, monstrous weights seemed pressing me down. Once I saw the bridge far behind me as I was swept along, and heard a voice calling, "Who has done this?" and felt a bullet whizz along the water. Then I gave up hope and let myself lie quiet, a calmness coming like a child's going to sleep. "It means death and unconsciousness," I murmured. Then a strong arm seized me and a kind voice said in a whisper:

"Be quiet and I will take you safe to shore."

I knew it was John, but how I never yet could tell. I sank again into that dream, and only came to reason when I heard a confused murmur of voices and a light flashed in my eyes. I was on the shore, and Captain Todd, his long, white beard sweeping my face, was kneeling by me forcing something bitter and burning into my rigid mouth.

"The arms are unguarded," I cried.

"I have opened the bridge; the Tories are on this side." And as I faintly again I heard the sound of other voices and the preparations for departure.

When next I knew life again I was lying in Mrs. Todd's big bed, where the four tall posts took on strange shapes of demons and goblins and the curtains swinging in the breeze seemed vaporous wings. I screamed; then into the darkness came a broad beam of gracious morning light, and Mrs. Todd stepped softly to the bed and kissed me.

"Brave little Abigail," she whispered, "heaven be praised, you are well and safe."

"And what of the arms," I asked; "was my deed done in vain? Oh, my father's bitter anger."

"He shall not be told, only a few of the neighbors know thy heroism."

"The Tories suspect some man. The arms and ammunition are in our possession, for the wagons were poorly guarded, the men overpowered and the prize secured, before the Tories could prevent. The draw-bridge being broken they could not cross. Surely the Lord is on our side; but let us pray, Abigail, the time may never come when our men will be forced to take the blood of the British, and that all our troubles will be settled peacefully."

"And we give in to the king," I cried.

"Indeed not," she said, sitting up very straight and defiant, "he gives in to us."

That afternoon when I went forth to return to my home, Captain Todd made me a courtly bow, and said many kind things of my courage, and that his son John was proud and happy that he had saved my life. John accompanied me home, very reared lest I being still weak, should fall, and so gentle and kind in his speech that I could not resist saying:

"You are very careful of a Tory maid, John."

"A Whig heroine," he answered; "and some day that deed of thine will be known, and people will praise you far and near. I being so delighted with his praise alone, said nothing at all."

At home, what dreary days followed, for though my father proved his innocence that night and his absence, Tory influence took the place of toll-keeper away and we lost our happy home. He suspected me, though he said naught, but often looked at me with frowning brow. When war was upon us he went and joined the British army to fight against the land that treated him so well, yet as I grow older I can understand his loyalty to the king. It was early taught him, and there was something brave and honorable in his faith to his home country in the face of the bitter hatred of his neighbors and friends.

When he was gone Mrs. Todd was very good to my mother and me, but for her—our neighbors disliking my father so intensely—we should have gone hungry many a day. There was one Sabbath at out that time that I shall never forget, and it was a great pleasure to me to have done a brave deed, for we were almost persecuted by our neighbors then, for the Americans were victorious. It was after the service, as the folks were about to go, when Mrs. Todd rose in her pew, a most uncommon thing for a lady to do, and spoke aloud in meeting. She said would they listen a few moments to the story of a noble maid, and then went on and told how I opened the draw-bridge that night, and all the events

of my escape from death. I had hardened my heart from pride, and bore our neighbors' coldness in silence, carrying my head very high, but now as on each face came an expression of tender pity and praise, my heart softened and my lips trembled.

"See, on her hands are the scars yet," cried Mrs. Todd, drawing me to her, and of a truth they were and will be all my life, but the one who loves me best says they are noble wounds, like a soldier's in battle, and I am so glad time has not erased them.

Down the pulpit stairs came the old minister and blessed me, kindly patting my shoulder, while my mother wept, and the people cheered me. There were many soldiers present that night I remember, and Captain Todd, looking very grand in his uniform, gave me his arm. I was glad John was not there, for he was away fighting for his country. I should have died of shame under his eyes. As I left the church an aged man, too old for war, and he was very old, for men needed no urging to obey the battle call in those days, came to me and took my hand.

"Let me kiss the hand of a brave woman," he said, "I am glad I have lived this long—90 years—for I have seen a true daughter of America."

Then I too wept, and leaning on the captain's arm, went to our home, where never again poverty threatened us or unkindness shadowed our days.

Soon, however, grief came, for my father returned sorely wounded, and died in my mother's arms, his hand in mine, forgiving me all, even though I told him tearfully of the bridge.

"Thou art a brave maid," he said, "of the new generation. I am of the old. I only knew but to fight for my king in blind faith. I could not learn the lesson of freedom, but I am glad others can, and that thou and thy children will live in a happier world than mine has been."

Such dear lovers had they been, my father and mother, that she followed him in a week, dying so painlessly, so happily, that I thought her only asleep.

"People do die of broken hearts," said Mrs. Todd at my mother's coffin.

"Abigail, do not wish her back. They are together."

How dreary my home was now, and the time so long. I tried to keep things as she would have had them, and taught a little school in our sitting room where our old furniture was. Round childish faces saw themselves mirrored in the shining mahogany dresser, bright young eyes gazed in awe at the pretty china, or watched with eagerness the solemn-faced old clock that pointed to the hour to escape from tasks, and dimpled childish lips rippled into decorous laughter when Maltese Matty, such an old, old cat, crept slyly into the forbidden precincts of the old school-room.

As time went on the Todds moved to Boston and I heard seldom from them, once in a while of John, that he was winning his way to a high position, well liked by our great Washington and the other generals. As I grew older, and folks set me down as one who would not marry, for I had refused some offers that meant good homes, they gave me the toll-bridge. Once again I returned to the dear old house, where all grew to look as it did in my childhood. I only missed my mother's soft step and her gentle presence. And my father's chair stood empty. How often I knelt by it and prayed him to forgive me, and rejoiced that at the last he had smiled on me as he had when I was a little child.

So years passed and I was twenty-five, ten years from the time I had opened the bridge and saved the arms to the Whigs. I often thought of it when I walked out to the draw at night and listened to the rippling water, or watched the old man hired to tend it, slowly let the sluggishly-moving rafts go through. I seldom heard from the Todds now, for they were grown old and their children married and gone, and even the little ones I had taught were young men and maidens.

One day, thinking of the past, I strolled to the old mirror over the mantel, remembering my girlish vanity that day so long ago. I was taller now, and could see my self better as I pushed the candlesticks aside. My face was no longer round and rosy, but pale and grave. There were shadows in my eyes, but my hair was rebellious yet and my lips had smiles. Though there had not been much sunshine in my life, I would not let myself grow sad.

I sighed at the change and took my wheel out on the vine-shaded porch. I half recalled old times as I looked at a demure descendant of Maltese Matty playing with my yarn. Mingling with the rippling of the river, the song of birds, the whirr of the wheel, I heard the sound of coming horse's hoofs. I waited until the traveller should reach the bridge, but no, he stopped his horse on the turf. Then there was a firm step on the gravel walk, a shadow across the sunshine at the door. I saw the glitter of a uniform, a strange, bearded face with familiar eyes. I heard a voice that had been ringing in my heart all the long, long time, say:

"These weary years I have worked to be worthy of you, Abigail; am I too late?"

I stammered and blushed, but soon he knew he was not too late and I was proud and glad he had tried to give me a high position, not for liking for that, but that he so loved and respected me. Perhaps I wished I had donned a prettier gown or was a fairer woman, but now I know I was the only one he ever thought beautiful, and as his memory had always been in my heart so had my image been in his. It seemed to me as we walked on the old bridge at twilight that the river rippled a benediction on the future that lay before us.

The Abode of a Minor Prophet.

The new minister had arrived at Deacon Clover's house and was to remain a few days. When the evening was far spent, the dominie was escorted to his bedroom by the deacon, who said as he opened the door to the rather small apartment:

"This, Dr. Fourthly, is the prophet's chamber."

"Ah," replied the clergyman as he surveyed its circumscribed dimensions, "it must have been one of the minor prophets."

Gipsies Should Study Law.

Burglar Bill—"These gipsies don't know anything. One of 'em told Gory Gus that he'd die on the gallows."

Dynamite Dan—"Well, didn't he?"

Burglar Bill—"Naw. He died of old age while waiting for a new trial."

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