THE ONLY WOMAN IN THE TOWN.

Author Unknown

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One hundred years' and one ago, in Boston, at ten of the clock one April night, a church steeple had been climbed and a lantern hung out.

At ten, the same night, in mid−river of the Charles, oarsmen two, with passenger silent and grim, had seen the signal light out−swung, and rowed with speed for the Charlestown shore.

At eleven, the moon was risen, and the grim passenger, Paul Revere, had ridden up the Neck, encountered a foe, who opposed his ride into the country, and, after a brief delay, rode on, leaving a British officer lying in a clay pit.

At mid−night, a hundred ears had heard the flying horseman cry, "Up and arm. The Regulars are coming out!"

You know the story well. You have heard how the wild alarm ran from voice to voice and echoed beneath every roof, until the men of Lexington and Concord were stirred and aroused with patriotic fear for the safety of the public stores that had been committed to their keeping.

You know how, long ere the chill April day began to dawn, they had drawn, by horse power and by hand power, the cherished stores into safe hiding−places in the depth of friendly forest−coverts.

There is one thing about that day that you have NOT heard and I will tell you now. It is, how one little woman staid in the town of Concord, whence all the women save her had fled.

All the houses that were standing then, are very old−fashioned now, but there was one dwelling−place on Concord Common that was old−fashioned even then! It was the abode of Martha Moulton and "Uncle John." Just who "Uncle John" was, is not now known, but he was probably Martha Moulton's uncle. The uncle, it appears by record, was eighty−five years old; while the niece was ONLY three−score and eleven.

Once and again that morning, a friendly hand had pulled the latch−string at Martha Moulton's kitchen entrance and offered to convey herself and treasures away, but, to either proffer, she had said: "No, I must stay until Uncle John gets the cricks out of his back, if all the British soldiers in the land march into town."

At last, came Joe Devins, a lad of fifteen years—Joe's two astonished eyes peered for a moment into Martha Moulton's kitchen, and then eyes and owner dashed into the room, to learn, what the sight he there saw, could mean.

"Whew! Mother Moulton, what are you doing?"

"I'm getting Uncle John his breakfast to be sure, Joe," she answered. "Have you seen so many sights this morning that you don't know breakfast, when you see it? Have a care there, for hot fat WILL burn," as she deftly poured the contents of a pan, fresh from the fire, into a dish.

Hungry Joe had been astir since the first drum had beat to arms at two of the clock. He gave one glance at the boiling cream and the slices of crisp pork swimming in it, as he gasped forth the words, "Getting breakfast in Concord THIS morning! MOTHER MOULTON, you MUST be crazy."

"So they tell me," she said, serenely. "There comes Uncle John!" she added, as the clatter of a staff on the stone steps of the stairway outrang, for an instant, the cries of hurrying and confusion that filled the air of the street.

"Don't you know, Mother Moulton," Joe went on to say, "that every single woman and child have been carried off, where the Britishers won't find 'em?"

"I don't believe the king's troops have stirred out of Boston," she replied, going to the door leading to the stone staircase, to open it for Uncle John.

"Don't believe it?" and Joe looked, as he echoed the words, as though only a boy could feel sufficient disgust at such want of common sense, in full view of the fact, that Reuben Brown had just brought the news that eight men had been killed by the king's Red−coats, in Lexington, which fact he made haste to impart.

"I won't believe a word of it," she said, stoutly, "until I see the soldiers coming."

"Ah! Hear that!" cried Joe, tossing back his hair and swinging his arms triumphantly at an airy foe. "You won't have to wait long. THAT SIGNAL is for the minute men. They are going to march out to meet the Red−coats. Wish I was a minute man, this minute."

Meanwhile, poor Uncle John was getting down the steps of the stairway, with many a grimace and groan. As he touched the floor, Joe, his face beaming with excitement and enthusiasm, sprang to place a chair for him at the table, saying, "Good morning!" at the same moment.

"May be," groaned Uncle John, "youngsters LIKE YOU may think it is a good morning, but I DON'T, such a din and clatter as the fools have kept up all night long. If I had the power" (and now the poor old man fairly groaned with rage), "I'd make 'em quiet long enough to let an old man get a wink of sleep, when the rheumatism lets go."

"I'm real sorry for you," said Joe, "but you don't know the news. The king's troops, from camp, in Boston, are marching right down here, to carry off all our arms that they can find."

"Are they?" was the sarcastic rejoined. "It's the best news I've heard in a long while. Wish they had my arms, this minute. They wouldn't carry them a step farther than they could help, I know. Run and tell them mine are ready, Joe."

"But, Uncle John, wait till after breakfast, you'll want to use them once more," said Martha Moulton, trying to help him into the chair that Joe had placed on the white sanded floor.

Meanwhile, Joe Devins had ears for all the sounds that penetrated the kitchen from out of doors, and he had eyes for the slices of well−browned pork and the golden hued Johnny−cake lying before the glowing coals on the broad hearth.

As the little woman bent to take up the breakfast, Joe, intent on doing some kindness for her in the way of saving treasures, asked, "Shan't I help you, Mother Moulton?"

"I reckon I am not so old that I can't lift a mite of cornbread," she replied with chilling severity.

"Oh, I didn't mean to lift THAT THING," he made haste to explain, "but to carry off things and hide 'em away, as everybody else has been doing half the night. I know a first−rate place up in the woods. Used to be a honey tree, you know, and it's just as hollow as anything. Silver spoons and things would be just as safe in it—" but Joe's words were interrupted by unusual tumult on the street and he ran off to learn the news, intending to return and get the breakfast that had been offered to him.

Presently he rushed back to the house with cheeks aflame and eyes ablaze with excitement. "They're a coming!" he cried. "They're in sight down by the rocks. They see 'em marching, the men on the hill, do!"

"You don't mean that its really true that the soldiers are coming here, RIGHT INTO OUR TOWN," cried Martha Moulton, rising in haste and bringing together with rapid flourishes to right and to left, every fragment of silver on the table. Uncle John strove to hold fast his individual spoon, but she twitched it without ceremony out from his rheumatic old fingers, and ran next to the parlor cupboard, wherein lay her movable valuables.

"What in the world shall I do with them," she cried, returning with her apron well filled with treasures, and borne down by the weight thereof.

"Give 'em to me," cried Joe. "Here's a basket, drop 'em in, and I'll run like a brush−fire through the town and across the old bridge, and hide 'em as safe as a weasel's nap."

Joe's fingers were creamy; his mouth was half filled with Johnny−cake, and his pocket on the right bulged to its utmost capacity with the same, as he held forth the basket; but the little woman was afraid to trust him, as she had been afraid to trust her neighbors.

"No! No!" she replied, to his repeated offers. "I know what I'll do. You, Joe Devins, stay right where you are till I come back, and, don't you ever LOOK out of the window."

"Dear, dear me!" she cried, flushed and anxious when she was out of sight of Uncle John and Joe. "I WISH I'd given 'em to Col. Barrett when he was here before daylight, only, I WAS afraid I should never get sight of them again."

She drew off one of her stockings, filled it, tied the opening at the top with a string−plunged stocking and all into a pail full of water and proceeded to pour the contents into the well.

Just as the dark circle had closed over the blue stockings, Joe Devin's face peered down the depths by her side, and his voice sounded out the words: "O Mother Moulton, the British will search the wells the VERY first thing. Of course, they EXPECT to find things in wells!"

"Why didn't you tell me before, Joe? but now it is too late."

"I would, if I'd known what you was going to do; they'd been a sight safer, in the honey tree."

"Yes, and what a fool I've been—flung MY WATCH into the well with the spoons!"

"Well, well! Don't stand there, looking," as she hovered over the high curb, with her hand on the bucket. "Everybody will know, if you do, there."

"Martha! Martha?" shrieked Uncle John's quavering voice from the house door.

"Bless my heart!" she exclaimed, hurrying back over the stones.

"What's the matter with your heart?" questioned Joe.

"Nothing. I was thinking of Uncle John's money," she answered.

"Has he got money?" cried Joe. "I thought he was poor, and you took care of him because you were so good"

Not one word that Joe uttered did the little woman hear. She was already by Uncle John's side and asking him for the key to his strong box.

Uncle John's rheumatism was terribly exasperating. "No, I won't give it to you!" he cried, "and nobody shall have it as long as I'm above ground."

"Then the soldiers will carry it off," she said.

"Let 'em!" was his reply, grasping his staff firmly with both hands and gleaming defiance out of his wide, pale eyes. "YOU won't get the key, even if they do."

At this instant, a voice at the doorway shouted the words, "Hide, hide away somewhere, Mother Moulton, for the Red−coats are in sight this minute!"

She heard the warning, and giving one glance at Uncle John, which look was answered by another, "no, you won't have it," she grasped Joe Devins by the collar of his jacket and thrust him before her up the staircase, so quickly that the boy had no chance to speak, until she released her hold at the entrance to Uncle John's room.

The idea of being taken prisoner in such a manner, and by a woman, too, was too much for the lad's endurance. "Let me go!" he cried, the instant he could recover his breath. "I won't hide away in your garret, like a woman, I won't. I want to see the militia and the minute men fight the troops, I do."

"Help me first, Joe. Here, quick now; let's get this box out and up garret. We'll hide it under the corn and it'll be safe," she coaxed.

The box was under Uncle John's bed.

"What's in the old thing any how?" questioned Joe, pulling with all his strength at it.

The box, or chest, was painted red, and was bound about by massive iron bands.

"I've never seen the inside of it," said Mother Moulton. "It holds the poor old soul's sole treasure, and I DO want to save it for him if I can."

They had drawn it with much hard endeavor, as far as the garret stairs, but their united strength failed to lift it. "Heave it, now!" cried Joe, and lo! it was up two steps. So they turned it over and over with many a thudding thump; every one of which thumps Uncle John heard, and believed to be strokes upon the box itself to burst it asunder, until it was fairly shelved on the garret floor.

In the very midst of the overturnings, a voice from below had been heard crying out, "Let my box alone! Don't break it open. If you do, I'll—I'll—" but, whatever the poor man MEANT to threaten as a penalty, he could not think of anything half severe enough to say and so left it uncertain as to the punishment that might be looked for.

"Poor old soul!" ejaculated the little woman, her soft white curls in disorder and the pink color rising from her cheeks to her fair forehead, as she bent to help Joe drag the box beneath the rafter's edge.

"Now, Joe," she said. "we'll heap nubbins over it, and if the soldiers want corn they'll take good ears and never think of touching poor nubbins"; so they fell to work throwing corn over the red chest, until it was completely concealed from view.

Then he sprang to the high−up−window ledge in the point of the roof and took one glance out. "Oh, I see them, the Red− coats. True's I live, there go the militia UP THE HILL. I thought they was going to stand and defend. Shame on 'em, I say." Jumping down and crying back to Mother Moulton, "I'm going to stand by the minute men," he went down, three steps at a leap, and nearly overturned Uncle John on the stairs, who, with many groans was trying to get to the defense of his strong box.

"What did you help her for, you scamp," he demanded of Joe, flourishing his staff unpleasantly near the lad's head.

" 'Cause she asked me to, and couldn't do it alone," returned Joe, dodging the stick and disappearing from the scene, at the very moment Martha Moulton encountered Uncle John.

"Your strong box is safe under nubbins in the garret, unless the house burns down, and now that you are up here, you had better stay," she added soothingly, as she hastened by him to reach the kitchen below.

Once there, she paused a second or two to take resolution regarding her next act. She knew full well that there was not one second to spare, and yet she stood looking, apparently, into the glowing embers on the hearth. She was flushed and excited, both by the unwonted toil, and the coming events. Cobwebs from the rafters had fallen on her hair and home−spun dress, and would readily have betrayed her late occupation, to any discerning soldier of the king.

A smile broke suddenly over her face, displacing for a brief second every trace of care. "It's my only weapon, and I must use it," she said, making a stately courtesy to an imaginary guest and straightway disappeared within an adjoining room. With buttoned door and dropped curtains the little woman made haste to array herself in her finest raiment. In five minutes she reappeared in the kitchen, a picture pleasant to look at. In all New England, there could not be a more beautiful little old lady than Martha Moulton was that day. Her hair was guiltless now of cobwebs, but haloed her face with fluffy little curls of silvery whiteness, above which, like a crown, was a little cap of dotted muslin, pure as snow. Her erect figure, not a particle of the hard−working−day in it now, carried well the folds of a sheeny, black silk gown, over which she had tied an apron as spotless as the cap.

As she fastened back her gown and hurried away the signs of the breakfast she had not eaten, the clear pink tints seemed to come out with added beauty of coloring in her cheeks; while her hair seemed fairer and whiter than at any moment in her three−score and eleven years.

Once more Joe Devins looked in. As he caught a glimpse of the picture she made, he paused to cry out: "All dressed up to meet the robbers! My, how fine you do look! I wouldn't. I'd go and hide behind the nubbins. They'll be here in less than five minutes now," he cried, "and I'm going over the North Bridge to see what's going on there."

"O Joe, stay, won't you?" she urged, but the lad was gone, and she was left alone to meet the foe, comforting herself with the thought, "They'll treat me with more respect if I LOOK respectable, and if I must die, I'll die good−looking in my best clothes, anyhow."

She threw a few sticks of hickory−wood on the embers, and then drew out the little round stand, on which the family Bible was always lying. Recollecting that the British soldiers probably belonged to the Church of England, she hurried away to fetch Uncle John's "prayer−book."

"They'll have respect to me, if they find me reading that, I know," she thought. Having drawn the round stand within sight of the well, and where she could also command a view of the staircase, she sat and waited for coming events.

Uncle John was keeping watch of the advancing troops from an upper window. "Martha," he called, "you'd better come up. They're close by, now." To tell the truth, Uncle John himself was a little afraid; that is to say he hadn't quite courage enough to go down, and, perhaps, encounter his own rheumatism and the king's soldiers on the same stairway, and yet, he felt that he must defend Martha as well as he could.

The rap of a musket, quick and ringing on the front door, startled the little woman from her apparent devotions. She did not move at the call of anything so profane. It was the custom of the time to have the front door divided into two parts, the lower half and the upper half. The former was closed and made fast, the upper could be swung open at will.

The soldier getting no reply, and doubtless thinking that the house was deserted, leaped over the chained lower half of the door.

At the clang of his bayonet against the brass trimmings, Martha Moulton groaned in spirit, for, if there was any one thing that she deemed essential to her comfort in this life, it was to keep spotless, speckless and in every way unharmed, the great knocker on her front door.

"Good, sound English metal, too," she thought, "that an English soldier ought to know how to respect."

As she heard the tramp of coming feet she only bent the closer over the Book of Prayer that lay open on her knee. Not one word did she read or see; she was inwardly trembling and outwardly watching the well and the staircase. But now, above all other sounds, broke the noise of Uncle John's staff thrashing the upper step of the staircase, and the shrill tremulous cry of the old man defiant, doing his utmost for the defense of his castle.

The fingers that lay beneath the book tingled with desire to box the old man's ears, for the policy he was pursuing would be fatal to the treasure in garret and in well; but she was forced to silence and inactivity.

As the King's troops, Major Pitcairn at their head, reached the open door and saw the old lady, they paused. What could they do but look, for a moment, at the unexpected sight that met their view; a placid old lady in black silk and dotted muslin, with all the sweet solemnity of morning devotion hovering about the tidy apartment and seeming to centre at the round stand by which she sat, this pretty woman, with pink and white face surmounted with fleecy little curls and crinkles and wisps of floating whiteness, who looked up to meet their gaze with such innocent prayer−suffused eyes.

"Good morning, Mother," said Major Pitcairn, raising his hat.

"Good morning, gentlemen and soldiers," returned Martha Moulton. "You will pardon my not meeting you at the door, when you see that I was occupied in rendering service to the Lord of all." She reverently closed the book, laid it on the table, and arose, with a stately bearing, to demand their wishes.

"We're hungry, good woman," spoke the commander, "and your hearth is the only hospitable one we've seen since we left Boston. With your good leave I'll take a bit of this, and he stooped to lift up the Johnny−cake that had been all this while on the hearth.

"I wish I had something better to offer you," she said, making haste to fetch plates and knives from the corner−cupboard, and all the while she was keeping eye−guard over the well. "I'm afraid the Concorders haven't left much for you to−day," she added, with a soft sigh of regret, as though she really felt sorry that such brave men and good soldiers had fallen on hard times in the ancient town. At the moment she had brought forth bread and baked beans, and was putting them on the table, a voice rang into the room, causing every eye to turn toward Uncle John. He had gotten down the stairs without uttering one audible groan, and was standing, one step above the floor of the room, brandishing and whirling his staff about in a manner to cause even rheumatism to flee the place, while, at the top of his voice he cried out:

"Martha Moulton, how DARE you FEED these—these—monsters—in human form!"

"Don't mind him, gentlemen, please don't," she made haste to say, "he's old, VERY old; eighty−five, his last birthday, and—a little hoity−toity at times," pointing deftly with her finger in the region of the reasoning powers in her own shapely head.

Summoning Major Pitcairn by an offer of a dish of beans, she contrived to say, under covert of it:

"You see, sir, I couldn't go away and leave him; he is almost distracted with rheumatism, and this excitement to−day will kill him, I'm afraid."

Advancing toward the staircase with bold and soldierly front, Major Pitcairn said to Uncle John:

"Stand aside, old man, and we'll hold you harmless."

"I don't believe you will, you red−trimmed trooper, you," was the reply; and, with a dexterous swing of the wooden staff, he mowed off and down three military hats.

Before any one had time to speak, Martha Moulton adroitly stooping, as though to recover Major Pitcairn's hat, which had rolled to her feet, swung the stairway−door into its place with a resounding bang, and followed up that achievement with a swift turn of two large wooden buttons, one high up, and the other low down, near the floor.

"There!" she said, "he is safe out of mischief for awhile, and your heads are safe as well. Pardon a poor old man, who does not know what he is about."

"He seems to know remarkably well," exclaimed an officer.

Meanwhile, behind the strong door, Uncle John's wrath knew no bounds. In his frantic endeavors to burst the fastenings of the wooden buttons, rheumatic cramps seized him and carried the day, leaving him out of the battle.

Meanwhile, a portion of the soldiery clustered about the door. The king's horses were fed within five feet of the great brass knocker, while, within the house, the beautiful little old woman, in her Sunday−best−raiment, tried to do the dismal honors of the day to the foes of her country. Watching her, one would have thought she was entertaining heroes returned from the achievement of valiant deeds, whereas, in her own heart, she knew full well that she was giving a little to save much.

Nothing could exceed the seeming alacrity with which she fetched water from the well for the officers: and, when Major Pitcairn gallantly ordered his men to do the service, the little soul was in alarm; she was so afraid that "somehow, in some way or another, the blue stocking would get hitched on to the bucket." She knew that she

must to its rescue, and so she bravely acknowledged herself to have taken a vow (when, she did not say), to draw all the water that was taken from that well.

"A remnant of witchcraft!" remarked a soldier within hearing.

"Do I look like a witch?" she demanded.

"If you do," replied Major Pitcairn, "I admire New England witches, and never would condemn one to be hung, or burned, or—smothered."

Martha Moulton never wore so brilliant a color on her aged cheeks as at that moment. She felt bitter shame at the ruse she had attempted, but silver spoons were precious, and, to escape the smile that went around at Major Pitcairn's words, she was only too glad to go again to the well and dip slowly the high, over−hanging sweep into the cool, clear, dark depth below.

During this time the cold, frosty morning spent itself into the brilliant, shining noon.

You know what happened at Concord on that 19th of April in the year 1775. You have been told the story, how the men of Acton met and resisted the king's troops at the old North Bridge, how brave Captain Davis and minute−man Hosmer fell, how the sound of their falling struck down to the very heart of mother earth, and caused her to send forth her brave sons to cry "Liberty, or Death!"

And the rest of the story; the sixty or more barrels of flour that the king's troops found and struck the heads from, leaving the flour in condition to be gathered again at nightfall, the arms and powder that they destroyed, the houses they burned; all these, are they not recorded in every child's history in the land?

While these things were going on, for a brief while, at mid−day, Martha Moulton found her home deserted. She had not forgotten poor, suffering, irate Uncle John in the regions above, and, so, the very minute she had the chance, she made a strong cup of catnip tea (the real tea, you know, was brewing in Boston harbor).

She turned the buttons, and, with a bit of trembling at her heart, such as she had not felt all day, she ventured up the stairs, bearing the steaming peace−offering before her.

Uncle John was writhing under the sharp thorns and twinges of his old enemy, and in no frame of mind to receive any overtures in the shape of catnip tea; nevertheless, he was watching, as well as he was able, the motions of the enemy. As she drew near he cried out:

"Look out this window, and see! Much GOOD all your scheming will do YOU!"

She obeyed his command to look, and the sight she then saw caused her to let fall the cup of catnip tea and rush down the stairs, wringing her hands as she went and crying out:

"Oh, dear! what shall I do? The house will burn and the box up garret. Everything's lost!"

Major Pitcairn, at that moment, was on the green in front of her door, giving orders.

Forgetting the dignified part she intended to play, forgetting everything but the supreme danger that was hovering in mid−air over her home—the old house wherein she had been born, and the only home she had ever known—she rushed out upon the green, amid the troops, and surrounded by cavalry, and made her way to Major Pitcairn.

"The town−house is on fire!" she cried, laying her hand upon the commander's arm.

He turned and looked at her. Major Pitcairn had recently learned that the task he had been set to do in the provincial towns that day was not an easy one; that, when hard pressed and trodden down, the despised rustics, in home−spun dress, could sting even English soldiers; and thus it happened that, when he felt the touch of Mother Moulton's plump little old fingers on his military sleeve, he was not in the pleasant humor that he had been, when the same hand had ministered to his hunger in the early morning.

"Well, what of it? LET IT BURN! We won't hurt you, if you go in the house and stay there!"

She turned and glanced up at the court−house. Already flames were issuing from it. "Go in the house and let it burn, INDEED!" thought she. "He knows me, don't he? Oh, sir! for the love of Heaven won't you stop it?" she said, entreatingly.

"Run in the house, good mother. That is a wise woman," he advised.

Down in her heart, and as the very outcome of lip and brain she wanted to say, "You needn't 'mother' me, you murderous rascal!" but, remembering everything that was at stake, she crushed her wrath and buttoned it in as closely as she had Uncle John behind the door in the morning, and again, with swift gentleness, laid her hand on his arm.

He turned and looked at her. Vexed at her persistence, and extremely annoyed at intelligence that had just

reached him from the North Bridge, he said, imperiously, "Get away! or you'll be trodden down by the horses!"

"I CAN'T go!" she cried, clasping his arm, and fairly clinging to it in her frenzy of excitement. "Oh stop the fire, quick, quick! or my house will burn!"

"I have no time to put out your fires," he said, carelessly, shaking loose from her hold and turning to meet a messenger with news.

Poor little woman! What could she do? The wind was rising, and the fire grew. Flame was creeping out in a little blue curl in a new place, under the rafter's edge, AND NOBODY CARED. That was what increased the pressing misery of it all. It was so unlike a common country alarm, where everybody rushed up and down the streets, crying "Fire! fire! f−i−r−e!" and went hurrying to and fro for pails of water to help put it out. Until that moment the little woman did not know how utterly deserted she was.

In very despair, she ran to her house, seized two pails, filled them with greater haste than she had ever drawn water before, and, regardless of Uncle John's imprecations, carried them forth, one in either hand, the water dripping carelessly down the side breadths of her fair silk gown, her silvery curls tossed and tumbled in white confusion, her pleasant face aflame with eagerness, and her clear eyes suffused with tears.

Thus equipped with facts and feeling, she once more appeared to Major Pitcairn.

"Have you a mother in old England?" she cried. "If so, for her sake, stop this fire."

Her words touched his heart.

"And if I do—?" he answered.

"THEN YOUR JOHNNY−CAKE ON MY HEARTH WON'T BURN UP," she said, with a quick little smile, adjusting her cap.

Major Pitcairn laughed, and two soldiers, at his command, seized the pails and made haste to the court−house, followed by many more.

For awhile the fire seemed victorious, but, by brave effort, it was finally overcome, and the court−house saved.

At a distance Joe Devins had noticed the smoke hovering like a little cloud, then sailing away still more like a cloud over the town; and he had made haste to the scene, arriving in time to venture on the roof, and do good service there.

After the fire was extinguished, he thought of Martha Moulton, and he could not help feeling a bit guilty at the consciousness that he had gone off and left her alone.

Going to the house he found her entertaining the king's troopers with the best food her humble store afforded.

She was so charmed with herself, and so utterly well pleased with the success of her pleading, that the little woman's nerves fairly quivered with jubilation; and best of all, the blue stocking was still safe in the well, for had she not watched with her own eyes every time the bucket was dipped to fetch up water for the fire, having, somehow, got rid of the vow she had taken regarding the drawing of the water.

As she saw the lad looking, with surprised countenance, into the room where the feast was going on, a fear crept up her own face and darted out from her eyes. It was, lest Joe Devins should spoil it all by ill−timed words.

She made haste to meet him, basket in hand.

"Here, Joe," she said, "fetch me some small wood, there's a good boy."

As she gave him the basket she was just in time to stop the rejoinder that was issuing from his lips.

In time to intercept his return she was at the wood−pile.

"Joe," she said, half−abashed before the truth that shone in the boy's eyes, "Joe," she repeated, "you know Major Pitcairn ordered the fire put out, TO PLEASE ME, because I begged him so, and, in return, what CAN I do but give them something to eat. Come and help me."

"I won't," responded Joe. "Their hands are red with blood. They've killed two men at the bridge."

"Who's killed?" she asked, trembling, but Joe would not tell her. He demanded to know what had been done with Uncle John.

"He's quiet enough, up−stairs," she replied, with a sudden spasm of feeling that she HAD neglected Uncle John shamefully; still, with the day, and the fire and everything, how could she help it? but, really, it did seem strange that he made no noise, with a hundred armed men coming and going through the house.

At least, that was what Joe thought, and, having deposited the basket of wood on the threshold of the kitchen door, he departed around the corner of the house. Presently he had climbed a pear−tree, dropped from one of its

overhanging branches on the lean−to, raised a sash and crept into the window.

Slipping off his shoes, heavy with spring−mud, he proceeded to search for Uncle John. He was not in his own room; he was not in the guest−chamber; he was not in any one of the rooms.

On the floor, by the window in the hall, looking out upon the green, he found the broken cup and saucer that Martha Moulton had let fall. Having made a second round, in which he investigated every closet and penetrated into the spaces under beds, Joe thought of the garret.

Tramp, tramp went the heavy feet on the sanded floors below, drowning every possible sound from above; nevertheless, as the lad opened the door leading into the garret, he whispered cautiously: "Uncle John! Uncle John!"

All was silent above. Joe went up, and was startled by a groan. He had to stand a few seconds, to let the darkness grow into light, ere he could see; and, when he could discern outlines in the dimness, there was given to him the picture of Uncle John, lying helpless amid and upon the nubbins that had been piled over his strong box.

"Why, Uncle John, are you dead?" asked Joe, climbing over to his side.

"Is the house afire?" was the response.

"House afire? No! The confounded red−coats up and put it out."

"I thought they was going to let me burn to death up here!" groaned Uncle John.

"Can I help you up?" and Joe proffered two strong hands, rather black with toil and smoke.

"No, no! You can't help me. If the house isn't afire, I'll stand it till the fellows are gone, and then, Joe you fetch the doctor as quick as you can."

"YOU can't get a doctor for love nor money this night, Uncle John. There's too much work to be done in Lexington and Concord to−night for wounded and dying men; and there'll be more of 'em too afore a single red−coat sees Boston again. They'll be hunted down every step of the way. They've killed Captain Davis, from Acton."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, they have, and—"

"I say, Joe Devins, go down and do− do something. There's my niece, a−feeding the murderers! I'll disown her. She shan't have a penny of my pounds, she shan't!"

Both Joe and Uncle John were compelled to remain in inaction, while below, the weary little woman acted the kind hostess to His Majesty's troops.

But now the feast was spent, and the soldiers were summoned to begin their painful march. Assembled on the green, all was ready, when Major Pitcairn, remembering the little woman who had ministered to his wants, returned to the house to say farewell.

'Twas but a step to her door, and but a moment since he had left it, but he found her crying; crying with joy, in the very chair where he had found her at prayers in the morning.

"I would like to say good−by," he said; "you've been very kind to me to−day."

With a quick dash or two of the dotted white apron (spotless no longer) to her eye, she arose. Major Pitcairn extended his hand, but she folded her own closely together, and said:

"I wish you a pleasant journey back to Boston, sir."

"Will you not shake hands with me before I go?"

"I can feed the enemy of my country, but shake hands with him, NEVER!"

For the first time that day, the little woman's love of country seemed to rise triumphant within her, and drown every impulse to selfishness; or was it the nearness to safety that she felt? Human conduct is the result of so many motives that it is sometimes impossible to name the compound, although on that occasion Martha Moulton labelled it "Patriotism."

"And yet I put out the fire for you," he said.

"For your mother's sake, in old England, it was, you remember, sir."

"I remember," said Major Pitcairn, with a sigh, as he turned away.

"And for HER sake I will shake hands with you," said Martha Moulton.

So he turned back, and across the threshold, in presence of the waiting troops, the commander of the expedition to Concord, and the only woman in the town, shook hands at parting.

Martha Moulton saw Major Pitcairn mount his horse; heard the order given for the march to begin,—the

march of which you all have heard. You know what a sorry time the Red−coats had of it in getting back to Boston; how they were fought at every inch of the way, and waylaid from behind every convenient tree−trunk, and shot at from tree−tops, and aimed at from upper windows, and beseiged from behind stone walls, and, in short, made so miserable and harassed and overworn, that at last their depleted ranks, with the tongues of the men parched and hanging, were fain to lie down by the road−side and take what came next, even though it might be death. And then THE DEAD they left behind them!

Ah! there's nothing wholesome to mind or body about war, until long, long after it is over, and the earth has had time to hide the blood, and send it forth in sweet blooms of liberty, with forget−me−nots springing thick between.

The men of that day are long dead. The same soil holds regulars and minute−men. England, who over−ruled, and the provinces, that put out brave hands to seize their rights, are good friends to−day, and have shaken hands over many a threshold of hearty thought and kind deeds since that time.

The tree of Liberty grows yet, stately and fair, for the men of the Revolution planted it well and surely. God himself HATH given it increase. So we gather to−day, in this our story, a forget−me−not more, from the old town of Concord.

When the troops had marched away, the weary little woman laid aside her silken gown, resumed her homespun dress, and immediately began to think of getting Uncle John down−stairs again into his easy chair; but it required more aid than she could give to lift the fallen man. At last Joe Devins summoned returning neighbors, who came to the rescue, and the poor nubbins were left to the rats once more.

Joe climbed down the well and rescued the blue stocking, with its treasures unharmed, even to the precious watch, which watch was Martha Moulton's chief treasure, and one of very few in the town.

Martha Moulton was the heroine of the day. The house was beseiged by admiring men and women that night and for two or three days thereafter; but when, years later, she being older, and poorer, even to want, petitioned the General Court for a reward for the service she rendered in persuading Major Pitcairn to save the court−house from burning, there was granted to her only fifteen dollars, a poor little forget−me−not, it is true, but JUST ENOUGH to carry her story down the years, whereas, but for that, it might never have been wafted up and down the land.