

# THE BETTER WAY *By William MacLeod Raine*

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"GIVE you your choice," said the Hessian officer, brusquely. "Either you take oath never to marry the France girl, or else you hang to-morrow. Faith 'tis small choice you have, but the decision should be all the easier made."

The American major shrugged his shoulders placidly. "There are worse things than to be hanged."

"Worse things than to be hanged for a spy?"

"Yes."

The other laughed harshly. "Possibly. It is a matter of taste, I suppose. Not many things worse, one might hope."

"Many. For one thing, to pledge myself to what you ask were worse."

"Zounds, man! You take it the wrong way. Dead you cannot marry her. That is true. Whether you give way now and save your life or play the obstinate fool and lose it, the girl is not for you. 'Tis all one."

"Pardon me, sir. I do not think 'tis all one. To be sure I cannot marry the lady in either case, but if I choose death I shall still have her respect—and my own."

The red-coated officer stopped in his walk to look down on the American with a sneer on his handsome face.

"Well, major, every man to his own taste. For me, I prefer to be alive in a world where there are horses, wine and women, but all men are not made alike."

"I thank God for that," returned the other quickly, with a flicker of steel in his gray eyes.

The Dutchman flushed at the home thrust.

"I see. You are one of those fools who think it better to be divorced from life than from honor. The greater booby you! What is honor but a name? Will it bring back the breath of life into your body after they have hanged you in the orchard to-morrow morning? Himmel, no! 'Tis naught but a man-made convention to be abided by when the wind blows fair—not otherwise."

"'Tis a thing a man may carry with him into the next world along with a good conscience," answered the other evenly.

Humburg paced up and down the cell with furrowed brow. He wanted to rid himself of his rival, but he preferred to accomplish his end without sacrificing the life of the American. The Hessian captain held in his hands the proofs that Major Arundel was not a spy. He knew the Virginian had ventured thru the British lines only because the report had reached him that Kate France was dying from wounds received in a runaway accident, and that he, Fritz Humburg, had it in his power to make this clear to the commanding general. The captain was not heartless by any means, but he was unscrupulous, and he meant to make this stubborn colonial step aside in the race for the hand of Catherine France.

"Man, y'are a fool! To-morrow you may walk out an exchanged prisoner, into the warm sunshine. If for once you yield on a point of honor, as you call it, none need ever know."

"I shall know."

"Well, and if you do? A man must bend to the wind when it blows against him overhard. There come times when it were the worst of folly to stand hard and fast on the narrow line of conduct which at other times rules him. When life and death are in the balance nice points of honor must go by the board."

Arundel smiled. "Must they?"

The Hessian turned on him with a face hard as iron. "They must, or you must hang," he returned brutally.

"Which brings us back to the point from which we originally started. We must agree to disagree, I fear."

"Then you will die a fool."

"I believe you mentioned that before," retorted the American, quietly. "I have no answer for it, except that I had rather die a fool than live a knave. May I offer you a glass of wine before you leave? General Howe has kindly supplied me with enough to last me till I shall no longer need any. No? The saying is current in our army that a Hessian is always thirsty. I shall brand it a libel—or rather I should if I were going to rejoin the army," he finished with his easy, rather wistful smile.

Humburg did not rise to the occasion. His instinct told him that this colonial officer who was to be hanged on the morrow was of the stuff out of which gentlemen are made, and that he himself was fashioned of a different warp and woof. His rage cropped out and mastered him.

"Donner! Your blood be on your own head!" he cried. "I have given you your chance; if you are gawk to let it slip Fritz Humburg is not to blame."

"So that you will now be able to sleep with an unruffled conscience. I have had my chance; I reject it; one cannot expect more of you," answered the major with a gentle, bitter irony. "Don Quixote himself could do no more. I have made my bed; to-morrow I lie in it. If it be somewhat over-narrow for comfort are you to blame?"

The Hessian laughed, and in the sound was something sinister and cruel.

"It pleases you to make sport of me, Major Arundel. Very well. I advise you to laugh while you can, for by Himmel! this time to-morrow you will be beyond all laughter."

"As God pleases. Neither you nor I know which of us will then be alive, Captain Humburg," said the American lightly.

"I can guess," retorted the other brutally.

And with that he turned on his heel. But even as he wheeled around, the door swung open to let in a cloaked and hooded lady. In the darkness neither of the men recognized her for the moment. She stood in the doorway, blinking in the uncertain light.

"Kate!" cried Arundel in glad amazement, while the Hessian let slip out a Dutch oath between his set teeth.

She went straight toward her lover's outstretched arms as a tired child to his mother. He tried to comfort her, not with speech—he dared not trust himself to speak—but in the sweet ways a lover has at command. Presently she explained in a pathetic little, broken voice:

"I made General Howe give me a pass into the prison. 'Twas all he would do. He will not believe that—Oh! Will, why did you come?"

"'Twas reported you were dying from the accident. I came to see you."

"And 'tis you will die—not I. Oh, would to God 'twere I!" she moaned.

The Hessian stood in the background, watching their misery stolidly and awkwardly. If he felt emotion his phlegmatic German face gave no hint of it. But he shifted from one foot to the other, and at the sound the girl, look-

ing over her lover's shoulder, recognized him. Her eyes dilated.

"You! You here?" she cried. Then to Arundel. "What is he doing here?"

"He has come to make me an offer."

Something in the constrained manner of the two men puzzled her. She threw back her head and looked at her lover searchingly; then at the Hessian.

"What offer has Captain Humburg to make?" she demanded.

"He proposes a way by which my life may be saved, but to my thinking the terms do not consist with honor," he answered slowly.

"Your life? How can he save your life?"

"He has possession of the papers which would prove me not a spy—the decoy message for one. When he recognized and arrested me this letter was found on me. The captain has not thought it necessary to show this to the general," Arundel explained bitterly.

"Not thought it necessary?" she repeated. "But I do not understand. That letter might save you?"

"So Captain Humburg feared."

She understood then and guessed shrewdly at the terms that had been offered. Mistress Kate freed herself from the arms of her lover and turned to the Hessian, but that officer had decided discretion to be the better part of valor and slipped from the room. It was one thing to discuss such a matter with a condemned rebel; 'twas quite another to front the scorn and despair of the woman he loved.

The girl stood lost in thought for a minute. When at last she spoke it was to promise her lover that she would save him yet. Arundel took her by the shoulders gently and swung her around till the light that filtered thru the barred window shone on her face.

"You will save me? How?" he asked.

For that she had no answer ready. He looked into her eyes steadily till they fell before his searching glance.

"I will not be saved at that price," he cried. "I had rather a thousand times die than see you married to Humburg."

"'Twas to see me you ran into danger. Shall I let you die when I can save you?"

"Yes, by heaven," he told her wildly. "The cost is too great. What do you think me? I should drag out my life in shame. No, no! We shall not add dishonor to our misery. Let us be true to ourselves."

She trembled in his arms like an aspen, and he was quick to press his advantage.

"It has been given to us not to look at life as Humburg does. We know that death is not the evil most to be feared. The harder part is yours, not mine; but you will be brave, Kate," he told his sweetheart sadly but proudly. "So brave that you would have neither of us compromise with dishonor. Is it not so?"

"I shall try, Will. But, oh! it is so hard. I cannot—I cannot let you go."

The jailer opened the door to let them know her time was up. She clung despairingly to her lover, her body all torn with silent sobs. Presently he gently unclasped her arms and led her, almost fainting, to the door.

Dusk had fallen, and the city lights were already twinkling thru the growing darkness when Mistress Kate France came knocking at the door of the house where Captain Fritz Humburg lodged. Her people were Tories, and she had none to look to for help save her own mother wit. She had slipped from home and stolen along the crowded streets to plead with the Hessian officer for this life that meant so much to her. More than one young blood in the king's uniform had attempted familiarity with this lithe, graceful young nightwalker whose face, save for the shining eyes, was hidden in her cloak, but she had hurried past with heart beating fast and cheeks aflame at their gallantries. They might think what they would of her, but she would stop at nothing to gain her end.

The stern-faced keeper of the lodging house looked suspiciously at this night visitor. She had an opinion of young women who came visiting at the rooms of an officer—and after dark. Besides, this particular Miss had already been here twice to-day seeking the captain. Therefore the manner of the woman was something less than civil.

"No, he is not in," she answered shortly.

"Can you tell me when he will be back?" asked the girl timidly.

"No."

"But I must see him to-night—I must!"

Kate saw the last chance slipping from her. If she did not see the captain soon her lover must die. She dared not go home, lest she be locked in for the night, nor could she go wandering thru the streets alone. She resolved to wait for Captain Humburg, and said so.

The woman snorted at the impudence of the brazen hussy.

"That you will not, unless you wait outside, miss."

The girl shrank back as from a blow. Then she cried out desperately:

"Oh, you do not understand. A life hangs on it. I am not—I do not come here to—Oh, you will help me, will you not? I am only a girl, and I have no friends to help me."

The forlorn, pathetic appeal did not soften one line in the hard face.

"You should have thought of that before you got into such a pickle."

"But he is my lover."

"Well, and if he be. This is a decent house, and no place for lovers' meetings."

The girl beat her hand against the door lintel in her despair.

"No, no! Not Captain Humburg. 'Tis an American officer I love, and the captain has the papers that will save his life. Good woman, help me—help me for the love of Christ!"

The woman looked at her keenly.

"The papers that will save his life—how do you mean?" she asked.

"He is to be hanged for a spy, but he is none. On some foolish bet a letter was sent him saying that I was dying, and he broke thru the lines to see me. But General Howe will not believe—and Captain Humburg has the proof."

The keeper of the lodging house drew her into the passage within the shine of the candle. The hood fell back from the fine, white, girlish face, and the woman believed.

"That will I for your own sweet sake, my child. I did not know you were that kind of a lass. Tell the whole story to Meg Wilsey, and if she can do aught for you she will. Don't you be afraid, my pretty. We'll find a way to save your lad yet."

She took the sobbing girl to her breast and soothed her with gentle words and caresses. Margaret Wilsey let rooms to British officers, but her heart was with the ragged continentals.

So it happened that when Captain Fritz Humburg let himself in with his latch key and walked quietly up the carpeted stairway he found visitors in his outer room. He saw at a glance that one was his landlady and the other Kate France. Instinctively he drew back from the half open door into the shadow without, where he could see, himself unseen.

Mrs. Wilsey was holding a candle above his desk while the girl rummaged his papers. Presently he heard Kate give a little, glad cry.

"This must be it. Yes, it is the letter, and here are the other papers. Oh, let me be gone ere he comes back."

In the darkness outside the captain smiled bitterly, yet with a certain sardonic humor. He knew that what the girl had found were duplicate copies of the papers, not worth a pinch of snuff for her purpose. She would take them to Sir William—and would meet the greatest surprise of her life. The captain hugged himself when he thought of that. It was the one thing that made the situation tolerable to him. His hungry eyes devoured the sweet face and the slender figure of the girl within, and he knew she was not for him. The wild, impotent desire was on him to rush in and snatch her up in his arms, somehow despite herself to win her love by force; but he set his teeth and stole silently down the stairs and out of the house.

When Mistress Kate showed the letter and papers to Sir William Howe that gentleman threw back his head and laughed till she feared apoplexy.

"Egad, y'are too late, Mistress France," he told her thru his tears.

"Too late; do you mean that he has been already—that?" she cried with blanching face.

"Yes, the mischief is done already. 'Tis the best joke."

"Then—he—is—dead?"

"Dead? Zounds, no! I mean you came too late to save him, for he is already saved. While you were rooking his room Captain Humburg was here with the paper which showed Major Arundel to be only a rebel and not a spy. Faith, 'tis a situation for a playwright. I must get Major Andre to write it into a play. You went to his room and stole the villain's papers, ha, ha! Rebel condemned as a spy—loved by Tory maid—saved with the rope already around his neck, just before curtain falls. Gadzooks, 'twill make a hit!"

"And Major Arundel—where is he?"

Sir William's hilarity abated in a measure, tho he continued to chuckle.

"Slife, yes! To be sure. I had forgot the last scene of the play. Happy lovers in each others' arms! Soft music from the wings as curtain falls!"

He tapped the bell and commanded an orderly to fetch the prisoner, who presently appeared in the doorway.

"Good morning, Major Arundel. Glad to see you still in the land of the living. You're in luck, sir, more ways than one to-day. 'Twere worth a bad night to make so fair a lady solicitous on your account. Y'are to be congratulated, major."

The general began to hum merrily a fragment of a Scotch street ballad much in popular favor:

"The cauld blast o' the winter wind,  
That thril'd thru my heart,  
They're a' blown by; I hae him safe;  
Till death we'll never part."

"Egad, the cold blast will thrill no more, major. 'Tis all May and sunshine with you now. But I fear I intrude. Exit Mars, enter Eros."

And General Howe left them alone with the little god.

## HOW TO MANAGE A HUSBAND.

Brooklyn Eagle.

"Why is it," asked the young wife, "that a man will never take his wife's advice?"

"He will," said the more experienced wife.

"Mine won't," replied the other. "I advised him yesterday to give up the house and take a smaller and less expensive one, in which, with the servants we are able to keep, we could be more comfortable, and he just looked at me over the top of his paper and said he guessed he knew what he could afford to do and what he couldn't. But I know he is running behind."

"Suppose," said the elderly matron, "you had drawn your chair up beside his and said, as sweetly as you could: 'George, can you spare me a moment? What would he have done?'"

"Why, he'd have laid aside his paper and said: 'Certainly, my dear; what is it?'"

"Exactly. Now suppose you had told him that his judgment was always so true that you wanted to ask his advice about something. What would he have done?"

"I think he would have kissed me and asked me what worried me. He is always considerate when I'm troubled."

"Quite right. Next suppose you had asked his advice about letting one of the servants go. What then?"

"We'll-I, I think he'd have asked if I could run the house with only one servant."

"Then suppose you had said, 'Well, the house is pretty large and it would be pretty hard, but if you advise it I'll try. When I picked out the house I did not think—'"

"But I didn't pick out the house."

"Of course not, but suppose you had made the error of judgment yours, nevertheless, and said that you hadn't realized how hard it would be to run it in proper style. Would he have suggested a smaller house?"

"He might have. Yes, I think he would. He's grumbled once about getting lost in it. He'd probably have asked me if I could manage with one servant in a smaller house."

"And then suppose you had clapped your hands and exclaimed, 'Just the thing! How clever of you to think of it. Why, we can afford to keep both servants in a smaller house, too, and we can be as comfortable as with six here.' Then suppose you had kissed him and said that he always did know just what to do. What would he have done next?"

"Why, we'd be looking for another house now."

"On his advice or yours?"

"His, I suppose."

"Really?"

"Well, I don't know. He'd think so, anyway."

"Precisely, my dear, precisely. Your idea, his advice. Always let him put the advice in words. There's nothing like understanding man. Now run home, dear, and let him advise you what to do."

The question of alien immigration is now far more serious in London than it ever was in California.