

An excerpt from
The Reb and the Redcoats
by Constance Savery

1: The Youngest Rebel

Charlotte Darrington was writing her copy when her brothers, Joseph and George, pounded up the stairs. They rushed into the schoolroom.

"Charlotte, come to the parlor this instant. Old Harry is back from the American war with a bullet wound in his chest. He has brought a box of gifts from Papa, which is going to be unpacked as soon as Mamma has read Papa's long letters, sheaves of them. And Old Harry has a special gift from himself, for you. Lucky girl, you always were Old Harry's favorite!"

Down went Charlotte's pen, and scamper, scamper went Charlotte's feet, with Joseph and George scurrying after.

There in the parlor sat Old Harry in his red coat, beaming all over his face. He was not really old, but after he went to the war, his place as gardener at Thorndale Hall was taken by his son, Young Harry. Now he was at home again, glad to be in England once more. The box of gifts stood on the table in front of him, and on his knees, in a wrapper of coarse canvas, lay the parcel containing the special gift for Charlotte.

Mrs. Darrington was asking Old Harry questions about his wound, and promising to send to the nearest town for medicines and comforts that could not be obtained in the country. Her eyes kept wandering to the packet of letters she held. Charlotte knew that she was counting the minutes until she was free to read what Papa had written.

Joseph and George began to drum on the box. Mamma said pleasantly:

"After all, we will open the box first. We know that dearest Papa was alive and well when he wrote the letters—and we couldn't wish for better news than that! So you shall not be kept waiting, my dears."

"Thank you, Mamma," said Joseph, George and Kitty the youngest. Charlotte did not speak. She was thinking, Mamma is the kindest, most unselfish person in the world. She puts everybody before herself.

Old Harry made short work of the fastenings. Out of the box came treasures for everyone in Thorndale Hall, from little kitchenmaid, Sukey, to the governess, Miss Pipkin.

The gifts were of fine Indian workmanship: bows, arrows and headdresses for the boys; purses, mats, carved spoons, scarves, bead ornaments and basketry for the rest. Charlotte had a purple-and-white flower basket, with a necklace of purple and white stones to match.

At last the box was empty, and only Charlotte's special present remained to be unpacked. With proud looks, Harry unpicked the stitches round the canvas wrapper. Beneath the canvas was a layer of wadding, and under that was a miniature patchwork quilt. Old Harry unrolled it.

A little waxen face looked up at Charlotte, a resolute little face with a sparkle of defiance about it, despite its dimples and laughter curves. The eyes were brown, and brown too was the straight silky hair that was cut in a fringe across the forehead. Harry drew out the owner of the face, and laid in Charlotte's arms a doll with a small American painted paper flag pinned to the bodice of its brown dress. Its body was of pink kid, with beautifully fashioned hands and feet.

"Oh, Harry, thank you a thousand, thousand times!" exclaimed Charlotte. "This is by far the prettiest doll I ever saw. She's as real as if she were alive. How I shall love her! And what fine shops they must have in America!"

"She didn't come out of no shop," said Harry, grinning. "No, missy, that doll once belonged to a little rebel girl, as lived in Virginy in a big owd house summat like Thorndale Hall, as full of rebels as an egg is full of meat. The family, they had to skip when we British come that way. 'Redcoats,' they call us, or 'Scarlet Lobsters' when they want to be downright insulting. Well, arter we'd rushed the house, we took a look 'round, see? And fust thing I spied was this here little creature a-sitting on a chair staring at me as bold as brass. Oho! says I to myself, this young lady shall up and come along of us Redcoats. She'll suit Miss Charlotte to a T, as the saying goes."

"Oh-h-h!" said Charlotte. She met her mother's eyes, and saw that she too was distressed. Not knowing what next to say, Charlotte kissed the doll.

Harry was delighted. "That's how that should be! I knowed what I wor about when I laid hands on that reb doll!"

At this moment the butler, Gregory, came to say that the rest of the household had assembled in the servants' hall.

"Pooh! What a fuss about a trumpery doll!" scoffed George. "Now if Harry had given you the rebel ball that was dug out of his chest, that *would* have been worth having! He's got it. He asked the surgeon to keep it for him. He's going to have it mounted in crystal and silver, to be an heirloom for Young Harry. I wish it was mine, I do!"

If Charlotte had been able to pay attention to anything save the rebel doll, she would have said, "Ugh, how horrid!" But she was still looking sorrowfully into Mamma's sorrowful face.

"I think, my dear Charlotte," her mother said, "that for the present at any rate you must keep the doll. Its poor little owner would prefer to know that her treasure was in loving hands. Perhaps we'll find some way of sending the doll back when this dreadful war comes to an end, as we pray God it may. Carry her up to the schoolroom, my love, and make her acquainted with the other dolls."

"I do believe she understands what you say, Mamma!" said Charlotte. "She looks as if she did. I never saw a doll like her. I am glad her hair is the same color as mine. And she is every bit a rebel, for all she is so young."

"The youngest rebel in the world, I should say," said her mother, smiling.

Charlotte carried the rebel doll to the schoolroom, which was also the playroom.

"My dears," she said to her assembled dolls, "this is a young friend who has come all the way from America to see you. *Friend*, I said, Rosalba! Not enemy," Charlotte added with a stern glance at her biggest doll, who was flopping sideways with her face averted from the stranger.

Rosalba did not respond.

"This is Clarissa, that is Evelina, and here are Susanna and Laurence," said Charlotte.

"Laurence is named for my Uncle Laurence, who was badly wounded in the war last autumn, in a skirmish. He was sent home to England, and since Christmas he has been living at the White Priory in Marton Green with Grandpapa and Grandmamma. The doctors say he will not be fit to rejoin his regiment before the summer. Laurence, how often must I tell you not to slouch? It is most unmilitary."

Charlotte bent forward to straighten Laurence. Then she began to undress the weary traveler.

"I wonder how you lost your shoes and stockings and cap, my dear," said Charlotte; "but I suppose I shall never know. And how *could* your mamma forget you when she and the others escaped from the house? Perhaps the alarm was so sudden that she was hurried away without being allowed a moment to run and fetch you. Oh, poor little girl!"

Charlotte did not like thinking about the American girl. Her eyes filled with tears, and she talked fast to keep herself from crying. "Oh, what's this? I declare, there's writing on the back of the flag, done by a person about as old as I am!"

Charlotte had uninned the flag on the doll's dress. It was painted only on the upper side. On the reverse, she read:

*Go home, Redcoats!
I stand for my country.
Go home, Redcoats!
My name is Patty.
I am Patty's dearest Patty.*

"So you are Patty's Patty," said Charlotte. "What a dear, little funny name! I like it."

The schoolroom windows looked east to the gray sea, foaming under a bitter late February wind. Charlotte turned from the windows to face the west.

"Patty in America," she said aloud, "I am sorry to say that I have your Patty. There's nothing I can do about it, but I promise you that you shall have her again some day, if I can contrive it. In the meantime I will take great care of her."

After that, Charlotte brushed the doll's hair. It was real hair, she noticed. She felt sure that it had once belonged to Patty across the sea.

"There you are, Patty dear," she said, as she tucked the rebel up in the bed that belonged to Rosalba. "All comfy, aren't you? Have a good long rest after your journey." Rebel Patty looked up at Charlotte, a puckish smile on her face.

Charlotte had just gone down to join her mother in the parlor when a maid came bringing a letter from the Rector of Tumblesand Bay, to whom Joseph, George and about a dozen other boys went for lessons every day, as there was no school near Thorndale Hall. He had been ill for a week, unable to teach his pupils.

"Oh, this is frightful!" said Mamma, after she had read the letter. "Mr. Whittaker is so much worse that the doctor has ordered him perfect rest for the next six months. He is going away tomorrow, and in his absence the services will be taken by a clergyman who does not wish to teach boys!"

"Hurrah, hurrah!" shouted Joseph and George. "Holidays for six months! Hurrah!"

Mamma did not echo the "Hurrah!" She looked sober over the thought that the boys would miss so much school.

"I tell you what, Mamma!" said Joseph. "This is all that young rebel's doing. She's plotted it, nobody knows how, just to upset the house!"

That made Mamma laugh, in spite of her trouble.

"I shall ask Miss Pipkin to teach you and George for a few days until I can make other arrangements," she said.

Joseph and George looked glum. Miss Pipkin was Charlotte's and Kitty's governess. She was away for the day in Gippeswich, where she was choosing schoolbooks.

Before the boys had opened their mouths to protest, Gregory came in with a letter on a salver. "From Captain Templeton, madam. The messenger is waiting for an answer."

Captain Templeton was Uncle Laurence. Looking a little alarmed, Mamma opened the letter. The children knew why she was alarmed. No sooner were the Christmas holidays over than Grandpapa and Grandmamma had fallen ill. Though not yet recovered from his war wounds,

Uncle Laurence had been nursing them, helped by another married sister, the children's Aunt Sophy, who had left her own home to come to his aid.

"My dears," said Mamma, when she had read the letter, "Uncle Laurence has sent bad news. Aunt Sophy has had to leave the White Priory at a moment's notice, for your poor Cousin Marcus has been thrown in the hunting field and will need his mother for a long while to come. Uncle Laurence cannot manage the nursing all by himself. He wants me. I shall have to go to the White Priory tomorrow, leaving you in Miss Pipkin's care."

A dreadful howl went up. "Leave us with Miss Pipkin, Mamma! Mamma, you can't!"

"I must," said Mamma.

"This is the rebel's work again, I'll be bound!" Joseph shouted, his fist in the air. "She's a menace, that's what she is! Oh, Mamma, tell Uncle Laurence you're stopping here!"

Mamma shook her head and sat down to answer Uncle Laurence's letter.

To lose Mamma for an unknown length of time was a terrible prospect. After they had recovered from the first shock, Kitty, and even George, began to think of the rebel doll with respect mingled with fear.

"I shouldn't wonder," said George, "if there weren't great goings-on in the schoolroom tonight, after the house is asleep. That rebel will get up and fight the other dolls, I'm sure she will. In the morning you'll find legs and arms and flaxen wigs and sawdust and stuffing all over the floor!"

"Do you really think so, George?" asked little Kitty anxiously.

"It might be as well to build a barricade round her for the night," said George, "so that she can't do any harm."

George built the barricade that evening, with help from Joseph, who happened to be at a loss for something to do. Rosalba's bed was put on the floor by one of the windows. In front of it, Joseph and George built a stockade of chairs with legs pointing outward, upward and inward in such a way that the rebel doll would find much difficulty in climbing out to attack the English dolls, and even more difficulty in running for shelter if she should be defeated. For extra security, Joseph and George locked the doors of the clothespress in which the Darrington dolls had been hidden, and they balanced the schoolroom bell and a wooden basin on the top of it so that Patty could not shake the door without sounding an alarm and giving herself a cold bath.

Then they went to bed and to sleep. An hour later they were awakened by a crash, a noise of clattering and rumbling, accompanied by frantic yells.

Joseph and George jumped out of bed and ran to the schoolroom, whence the noise came. Charlotte and Kitty followed, trembling. Mrs. Darrington hurried up the stairs. Men and maids flocked after her, carrying candles and pokers.

A dire sight awaited them. Floundering in a sea of tangled chairs by a badly broken window lay Miss Pipkin, who had come into the room in the dark intending to put a parcel of newly purchased schoolbooks in the press. She was screaming at the top of her voice, and she went on screaming for some time after she had been picked out of the tangle, smoothed down, anointed with arnica, and plentifully supplied with burnt feathers, aromatic essences and glasses of water.

When she stopped screaming, she was so angry that she vowed she would leave the house by the London coach the next morning. Nothing would induce her to remain in a situation where she was so abominably treated. As for teaching and taking charge of those impudent practical jokers, Joseph and George, she would sooner jump over the moon.

The four Darringtons did their best to explain, but Miss Pipkin refused to listen to what they said. Mamma apologized, pleaded, remonstrated, all in vain. Miss Pipkin went to her room in a rage, and they could hear her pulling out boxes and drawers as she packed for going away.

Rebel Patty had not been injured when chairs, bell, basin and Pipkin tumbled around her brown head. Calm and unmoved she lay, with the impish smile still there.

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