

# 1

*Brooklyn, New York, August 1776*

**T**EN-YEAR-OLD PEGGY VAN BRUNDT pushed back her white cotton cap and wiped her damp forehead as she stared out the window. August was always hot and muggy, but this summer was even worse than usual.

This summer was worse for another reason, too. Peggy used to spend the long, sunny days in her own special place in the

woods, not far from her family's small, white farmhouse. Other summers, after she had finished the morning chores, Peggy would call her dog, Patches, and run to the woods. The best part was wading barefoot in the cool water of the shallow brook. There the two of them would chase frogs and hunt under rocks for crayfish.

But this summer everything was different. Mosquitoes were spreading a terrible disease called malaria. There had even been a few cases of the deadly smallpox. Worst of all, Peggy had heard grown-ups saying that a terrible battle was brewing. For weeks British ships had been arriving in the harbor. The woods in Brooklyn were said to be full of Continental soldiers under the command of General George Washington.

"Mother, please can't I go outside? Just

for a little while?" Peggy begged. It had been nearly a fortnight since her mother had let her out in the fields alone. It was bad enough being cooped up in the house and yard, doing dreary chores like feeding the chickens and churning butter. But now there wasn't even anyone to complain to. Peggy's older brothers, Willie and Jan, who were usually as eager to be done with their chores as Peggy, were spending many of their days in the taverns across the river in New York. When they did come home, all they wanted to do was talk about taxes and battles. They and many of the Van Brundts' neighbors were angry at King George of England and his unfair rules.

"Please, Mother," Peggy tried again. She looked longingly out the window toward the meadow. It was filled with wildflowers and butterflies, and the sky was the same

bright blue as a robin's egg.

"No, Daughter." Mistress Van Brundt playfully tugged on one of the long brown pigtailed that stuck out from under Peggy's cap. "If I let you go, I would worry myself sick about your safety. Besides, your father and brothers will be home for an early supper tonight. Come and help me get it ready."

With a sigh, Peggy followed her mother to the kitchen. She knew her mother had been worried about many things lately, especially Willie and Jan. The boys were anxious to join up with the Continental Army. Peggy kept reminding herself to be extra helpful so her mother would have fewer burdens.

As they stepped into the kitchen, the heat hit Peggy's face. Feeling a bit dizzy, she slumped into the long bench next to

the room's only table. There her mother had laid out the ingredients for the evening meal. A chicken was already roasting on a spit over hot coals in the large cooking fireplace. Her mother would turn it gently every few minutes. The coals hissed as hot fat dripped off the chicken. Mistress Van Brundt put on her long white apron and pushed up the sleeves of her dress.

"Come along, Margaret Anne," she said briskly, using her daughter's first name, "Help me roll out the pastry for the tarts. I will finish the rest of the meal myself. If you promise to be very careful, you may go outside, but just for a very short while. And you must stay near the big oak by the barn."

"Mother, couldn't I take a quick walk down to the brook instead?" Peggy asked. She took her apron from its peg on the

## ***THE HESSIAN'S SECRET DIARY***

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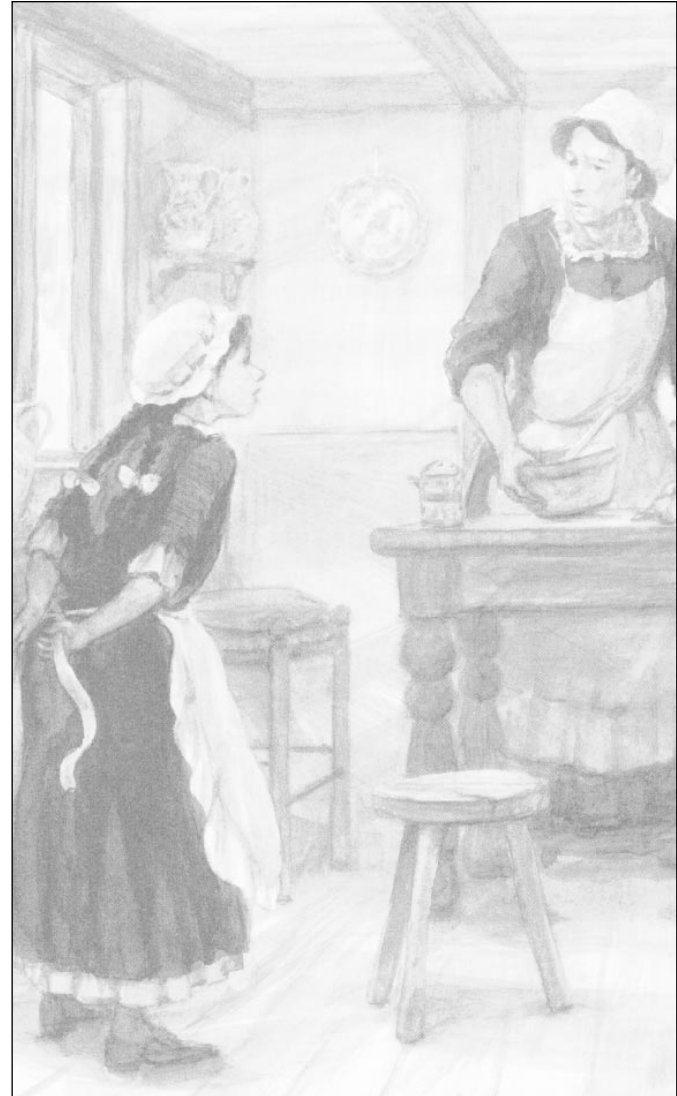
wall and put it on, tying the long strings behind her back. Her ankle-length blue summer dress and petticoat peeked out just below the hem.

“Peggy, you know very well that there are men in the woods all around us. Goodness knows when they will pick up their muskets and begin a battle in earnest.” Mistress Van Brundt shook her head. “I fear that as long as the King’s soldiers remain in Brooklyn, you have to stay close to home.”

“But...” Peggy began.

“Margaret Anne, if you continue with this pestering you will go nowhere at all.” Mistress Van Brundt gave Peggy a stern look and handed her a bowl full of milk and eggs.

“Yes, ma’am,” said Peggy. She beat a wooden spoon around in the bowl with all



her might until her mother raised one eyebrow. Peggy smiled at her weakly and hastily began beating the eggs more gently.

As she stirred the mixture in the big wooden bowl, Peggy gazed out at the meadow again.

Days earlier, she had watched from her bedroom window as red-coated British soldiers and blue-uniformed Hessians marched through her father's fields. The Hessians were soldiers from Europe, many of them German, who were paid by King George to fight in the colonies. Some of the men were on horseback. Some carried muskets and bayonets. A few were lugging huge, heavy cannon.

At first Peggy had found all of the activity exciting to watch, even though she knew that Patriot soldiers—many of them men and boys her family knew—might have to

fight the King's men. But now Peggy wished all of them would just go away. She wanted her life to get back to normal. She wanted to get back to her special place.

Suddenly Peggy had dreadful thoughts: *What if those awful soldiers found it? What if they tromped around in their big heavy boots, stepping on frogs and bugs and crayfish? What if they crushed the wildflowers, dumped rubbish in the brook, and dug up the lovely moss that lined the banks?*

Peggy quickly added flour and salt to her bowl and mixed them into the milk and eggs. She was determined to return to the brook as soon as possible. As soon as the tart was done, she would have her chance.

She mixed even faster, and kept a careful eye on her mother. Soon Peggy was up to her elbows in the dough that she had made. After she smoothed out the pastry

in a thin sheet, she used a metal round to cut it into small crusts. At last the tart pastries were ready to be filled.

“All right, Peggy,” Mistress Van Brundt said finally. “You’ve earned a rest. Run on out to the yard if you’d like.”

She smiled as Peggy tugged at her apron strings, nearly tearing them in her haste to get out of the hot kitchen. In a flash she was on her way out the door.

“Mind you, stay in the yard!” her mother called. But Peggy was already whistling for Patches.

The brown and black dog barked happily and sped ahead of Peggy toward the meadow. He seemed to know exactly where they were headed—and, just like Peggy, he couldn’t wait to get there.

## 2

**P**EGGY PICKED UP HER SKIRTS AND RAN until her side began to ache. Finally she had to stop for a moment to catch her breath. She was more than halfway to the woods, but so far she hadn’t seen any sign of soldiers. Glancing back over her shoulder, she thought that her family’s farm looked as peaceful as it always had.

“Mother would be angry if she knew we were out here, but I just have to be sure

everything is all right at the brook,” Peggy told Patches.

The dog was happy to be out for a run. He jumped and barked and tugged at the hem of Peggy’s dress. “All right, all right, you silly dog!” Peggy laughed. Patches seemed even more anxious than *she* was to get to the brook. He was probably very thirsty, too. “But we can’t stay to play now,” Peggy told him. “We will look around quickly and then go straight back home. We mustn’t make Mother worry.”

Patches barked in agreement and the two of them set off again.

As she skipped toward the woods, Peggy thought about her brothers. Much to their parents’ dismay, Willie and Jan had recently declared themselves Patriots. They had even talked of joining the fight as soldiers themselves. So far,

however, talk was all they had done. Peggy’s father did not actually call himself a Loyalist, like some of their neighbors, but he was very much against the colonies’ break with England and the war it was causing. He was worried that his farm would be ransacked—or worse, that he would lose his two strong sons. Life under King George wasn’t perfect, but it hadn’t been as much of a hardship for the Van Brundt family as it had been for others. Peggy herself didn’t really understand what all the fuss was about.

But Peggy’s brothers saw things in a different light. They were committed to the idea of freedom for the colonies. Across the river on Manhattan Island, they had heard rousing speeches in the streets and public houses, which they would, upon their return home, recite the next

day for Peggy. They had even memorized the best parts of a proclamation that some colonial leaders had sent to King George. It was called the *Declaration of Independence*. It said that the colonies had declared themselves “*free and independent states.*”

*Freedom*, Peggy thought, as she skipped and twirled through the field. “*Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness!*” Her special place always made her happy. And she certainly did feel free there. Surely her brothers would understand why she just had to go to the brook, soldiers or no soldiers.

It was well past noon now and the woods were shady. Peggy couldn't wait for a long, cool drink from the brook. Feeling a bit breathless again, she slowed her pace as she continued along the narrow

path. There was still no sign of soldiers: Redcoat, Hessian, or Patriot. In fact, she didn't see anyone at all.

Finally Peggy and Patches arrived at the clearing around the brook. Their special place looked exactly the same as always.

“Oh, Patches, everything is just fine!” Peggy exclaimed happily. She knelt down beside the brook and splashed the cool water on her face. Then she took a refreshing drink and lay down, pleased and exhausted, on the mossy bank.

At least nothing seemed to have been trampled by the troops traveling through. Peggy couldn't help wondering how long it would be until the big battle everyone feared finally began. *Would the soldiers fight in this very place?*

The Patriots had been building earth-

works and forts around the harbor and all around Brooklyn to protect the area. That's what Peggy's brothers had told her, anyway. And though the colonists had won some major battles against the Redcoats up in Massachusetts just a short time ago—even driving the British soldiers from the city of Boston—they would have a very difficult time doing so in New York. Everyone knew that if the British could control Manhattan Island and the Hudson River, the colonies would be divided. That would make the Patriots' fight for freedom much harder.

Patches took a long, noisy drink and then nuzzled Peggy with his wet nose.

"Get away from me!" Peggy laughed. "You're getting my dress all wet! What will Mother say?"

Patches didn't look one bit sorry.

"It wouldn't hurt to do one little sketch before we go back home, would it?" Peggy asked her dog. He wagged his tail and licked her cheek. "All right, then." She patted Patches on the head and pulled out the small, old sketchbook that she always carried in her pocket. Mister Van Brundt had once used it to keep accounts for the farm. A small stub of charcoal was stuck between the pages, wrapped in a square of cloth so it wouldn't smudge.

"Patches, sit!" Peggy said. The little dog immediately sat down and wagged its tail as she began to draw.

Besides Mister Van Brundt's scrawled numbers and notes, most of Peggy's sketchbook was already filled with half-finished sketches of Patches. They weren't very good, but she was getting better. Today she was working on the ears. She



could never seem to get them just right. “Don’t move,” she told the restless little dog. “This will take just a minute, I promise.”