

The whole town of Frederick was upset. The Confederate army, led by Stonewall Jackson, was heading their way.

"This Stonewall Jackson is a devil!" cried one man. "He will burn our houses and shoot us! We have to get out of here!"

Mayor Roberts raised his hands for silence. His voice was low and steady.

"Some of you want to leave town, but I say, stay here. It is true that Jackson is a hard man. But if we act properly toward him and his soldiers, he will spare us.

"Now, what should you do? For one thing, stay off the streets. And take down your flags. If he sees the Stars and Stripes, it will annoy him. It may sound cowardly, but we're not soldiers here. Why ask for trouble? Take down the flags!"

People nodded and obeyed. Some went to take down the flags from the post office and the schoolhouse. Others went home to take down their own flags.

By noon everyone was in his house. Some were hiding in cellars. Some were shaking with fear in closets. The braver ones were quietly looking out from behind their curtains.

Then a dull rumble was heard—the hooves of hundreds of horses, the feet of thousands of men.

There they were—a sea of soldiers in gray uniforms! At their head rode a fierce-looking man with a beard. His eyes were hard and bright, and he sat proudly on a fine horse. He looked every inch a soldier.

The army reached the middle of town and there was still no sign of trouble. The mayor, behind his closed door, smiled a little

in relief. Taking down the flags had certainly been the right idea.

Then suddenly an amazing thing happened. The Stars and Stripes appeared in an attic window! The neighbors couldn't believe their eyes. Who could have put it there? Certainly not the owner of the house. For Barbara Fritchie was a feeble old woman of ninety-six.

As the troops marched up the street, Jackson suddenly saw the flag.

"Halt!" he called. The marching feet stopped.

"Fire!" he cried. Bullets shattered the window, and the flag began to fall. Instantly a thin arm reached out and grabbed it. A little old woman leaned out the window and waved the flag back and forth. It was, indeed, old Barbara Fritchie.

The words she spoke next have never been forgotten. They were set down in a famous poem by John Greenleaf Whittier:

*"Shoot, if you must, this old gray head,
But spare your country's flag," she said.*

The general stared up at the ancient woman. He was deeply moved. Stonewall Jackson was one of the South's finest soldiers. He knew the meaning of bravery—and that was what he saw before him.

There was a moment of silence. Then Jackson gave an order:

*"Who touches a hair of yon gray head
Dies like a dog! March on!" he said.*

The Southern troops began to move again. Old Barbara Fritchie held the flag until the last rebel soldier was gone. An old woman had proved herself the bravest person in Frederick.

CHECK YOUR READING

1. **When Mayor Roberts spoke to the people, he sounded very**
 - A afraid
 - B annoyed
 - C calm
2. **He told the people to**
 - A leave the town
 - B act as usual
 - C stay indoors
3. **The main idea of his speech was:**
 - A Don't act like cowards.
 - B Don't look for trouble.
 - C Don't shame our soldiers.
4. **As he marched into town, Stonewall Jackson looked very**
 - A friendly
 - B proud
 - C worried
5. **When the neighbors saw Barbara Frietchie's flag, they were**
 - A amazed
 - B delighted
 - C angry
6. **Barbara Frietchie grabbed the flag to keep it from**
 - A moving
 - B falling
 - C tearing
7. **She told Jackson he should spare**
 - A their town
 - B her life
 - C the flag
8. **Jackson admired Barbara Frietchie's**
 - A bravery
 - B strength
 - C kindness
9. **Jackson ordered his troops not to**
 - A hurt Barbara Frietchie
 - B march past the flag
 - C obey the mayor
10. **This story was told in John Greenleaf Whittier's famous**
 - A play
 - B poem
 - C song