

Cooper James Fenimore

**The Spy: Condensed for use
in schools**



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INTRODUCTION

James Fenimore Cooper was born in Burlington, N. J., in 1789 – the year in which George Washington was inaugurated first President of the United States. His boyhood was passed at Cooperstown, N. Y., a village founded by his father. After completing his studies at Yale, young Cooper entered the American navy as midshipman, subsequently obtaining the rank of lieutenant. He also made some voyages in a merchant vessel, and in this service acquired that knowledge of sea life of which he made good use in many of his novels.

Cooper has been styled the Walter Scott of America. It is hardly an exaggeration to rank him so high, for he has done for America what Scott did for Scotland: he has illustrated and popularized much of its history and many of its olden traditions in stories that will have appreciative readers so long as the English language is spoken. As a recent writer observes, he “wrote for men and women as well as for boys and girls,” and the best of his stories are “purely American, native born, and native bred.”

Another distinction must be assigned to Cooper, and it is a mark of high merit: he was the first American novelist who became widely known and esteemed in foreign countries. “The Spy” appeared in 1821 – a time when American literature was in its infancy. Though but the second of the author’s works, it immediately became popular on both sides of the Atlantic. It was translated into several European languages, and may even, we are told, be read in the Persian tongue.

Other stories quickly followed. “The Pioneer” was published in 1822. This and “The Deerslayer,” “The Pathfinder,” “The Last of the Mohicans,” and “The Prairie” belong to the series known as the Leatherstocking Tales, so called from Leatherstocking Natty, the most celebrated of the characters introduced. These deal with life and adventure among the Indians, in description of which Cooper surpassed all other writers. The sea tales include “The Pilot,” published in 1823; “The Red Rover,” in 1827; “The Waterwitch,” in 1830; “The Two Admirals,” in 1842, and “The Sea Lions,” in 1849. Altogether, Cooper wrote thirty-three novels, many of them universally recognized as entitled to first rank in that field of literature, and all full of interest to the lover of romance.

In 1826 Cooper visited Europe, and remained for several years, continuing his literary work and producing, in addition to novels, some volumes of sketches of European society. He returned to America in 1833. His last book, “The Ways of the Hour,” which deals with abuses of trial by jury, was published in 1850. He died on the 14th of September the following year at Cooperstown.

HISTORICAL NOTE

The events of the patriot Revolution afforded ample and excellent subject-matter for the genius of Cooper; and in “The Spy” he treats his material in a manner which has made the work a favorite with all lovers of fiction. The scene of the story is laid chiefly in that part of New York State lying immediately north and northeast of Manhattan Island. At the period referred to New York was held by the British, under command of Sir Henry Clinton, having been taken after the defeat of the Americans at the Battle of Long Island on August 27, 1776. At the same time the Americans possessed nearly all the rest of the State. The district lying between the British and the American lines, and extending over the greater part of Westchester County, was known as the “neutral ground.” Here the principal events of the story are placed.

This district having then practically no government, the inhabitants suffered much, not only through the military operations of the hostile forces, but from bands of marauders known as

“cowboys” and “skinners.” The latter, professing to be supporters of the American cause, roamed over the neutral ground, robbing Tories (friends of the British) and others who refused to take an oath of fidelity to the new republic, while those consenting to take the oath were attacked and plundered by the cowboys, who carried on their depredations as British partisans.

The hero of “The Spy” is not altogether a fictitious character. In the introduction to one of the editions of the book the author tells us that he took the idea of Harvey Birch from a real person who was actually engaged in the secret service of the American Committee of Safety – a committee appointed by Congress to discover and defeat the various schemes projected by the Tories in conjunction with the British to aid the latter against the republican government. Spies were, of course, employed on both sides during the struggle, and it may readily be believed that among the patriot Americans there were many who were willing, without desire of earthly reward, not only to encounter hardships and danger to life for their country’s cause, but to risk even loss of reputation, as Harvey Birch did.

CHAPTER I. A RURAL SCENE IN 1780

It was near the close of the year 1780 that a solitary traveller was seen pursuing his way through one of the numerous little valleys of Westchester. The county of Westchester, after the British had obtained possession of the island of New York, became common ground, in which both parties continued to act for the remainder of the War of the Revolution. A large portion of its inhabitants, either restrained by their attachments or influenced by their fears, affected a neutrality they did not feel. The lower towns were, of course, more particularly under the domain of the crown, while the upper, finding a security from the vicinity of the Continental¹ troops, were bold in asserting their revolutionary opinions and their right to govern themselves. Great numbers, however, wore masks, which even to this day have not been thrown aside; and many an individual has gone down to the tomb stigmatized as a foe to the rights of his countrymen, while, in secret, he has been the useful agent of the leaders of the Revolution; and, on the other hand, could the hidden repositories of divers flaming patriots have been opened to the light of day, royal protections would have been discovered concealed under piles of British gold.

The passage of a stranger, with an appearance of somewhat doubtful character, and mounted on an animal which, although unfurnished with any of the ordinary trappings of war, partook largely of the bold and upright carriage that distinguished his rider, gave rise to many surmises² among the gazing inmates of the different habitations; and in some instances, where conscience was more than ordinarily awake, to a little alarm.

Tired with the exercise of a day of unusual fatigue, and anxious to obtain a speedy shelter from the increasing violence of the storm, that now began to change its character to large drops of driving rain, the traveller determined, as a matter of necessity, to make an application for admission to the next dwelling that offered.

Sufficient light yet remained to enable the traveller to distinguish the improvements which had been made in the cultivation and in the general appearance of the grounds around the building to which he was now approaching. The house was of stone, long, low, and with a low wing at each extremity. A piazza, extending along the front, with neatly turned pillars of wood, together with the good order and preservation of the fences and out-buildings, gave the place an air altogether superior to the common farm-houses of the country. After leading his horse behind an angle of the wall, where it was in some degree protected from the wind and rain, the traveller threw his valise over his arm, and knocked loudly at the entrance of the building for admission. An aged black soon appeared, and without seeming to think it necessary, under the circumstances, to consult his superiors, first taking one prying look at the applicant by the light of the candle in his hand, he acceded to the request for accommodations. The traveller was shown into an extremely neat parlor, where a fire had been lighted to cheer the dulness of an easterly storm and an October evening. After giving the valise into the keeping of his civil attendant, and politely repeating the request to the old gentleman who rose to receive him, and paying his compliments to the three ladies who were seated at work with their needles, the stranger commenced laying aside some of the outer garments which he had worn in his ride.

After handing a glass of excellent Madeira to his guest, Mr. Wharton, for so was the owner of this retired estate called, resumed his seat by the fire, with another in his own hand. For a moment he

¹ The term "Continental" was applied to the army of the Colonies, to their Congress, to the money issued by Congress, etc.

² guesses.

paused, as if debating with his politeness, but at length he threw an inquiring glance on the stranger, as he inquired:

“To whose health am I to have the honor of drinking?”

The young ladies had again taken their seats beside the work-stand, while their aunt, Miss Jeanette Peyton, withdrew to superintend the preparations necessary to appease the hunger of their unexpected visitor.

The traveller had also seated himself, and he sat unconsciously gazing on the fire while Mr. Wharton spoke; turning his eyes slowly on his host with a look of close observation, he replied, while a faint tinge gathered on his features:

“Mr. Harper.”

“Mr. Harper,” resumed the other, with the formal precision of that day, “I have the honor to drink your health, and to hope you will sustain no injury from the rain to which you have been exposed.”

Mr. Harper bowed in silence to the compliment, and he soon resumed the meditations from which he had been interrupted, and for which the long ride he had that day made, in the wind, might seem a very natural apology.

Mr. Wharton had in vain endeavored to pierce the disguise of his guest’s political feelings. He arose and led the way into another room and to the supper-table. Mr. Harper offered his hand to Sarah Wharton, and they entered the room together; while Frances followed, greatly at a loss to know whether she had not wounded the feelings of her father’s inmate.

The storm began to rage in greater violence without, when a loud summons at the outer door again called the faithful black to the portal. In a minute the servant returned, and informed his master that another traveller, overtaken by the storm, desired to be admitted to the house for shelter through the night.

Some of the dishes were replaced by the orders of Miss Peyton, and the weather-beaten intruder was invited to partake of the remains of the repast, from which the party had just risen. Throwing aside a rough great-coat, he very composedly took the offered chair, and unceremoniously proceeded to allay the cravings of an appetite which appeared by no means delicate. But at every mouthful he would turn an unquiet eye on Harper, who studied his appearance with a closeness of investigation that was very embarrassing to its subject. At length, pouring out a glass of wine, the newcomer nodded significantly to his examiner, previously to swallowing the liquor, and said, with something of bitterness in his manner:

“I drink to our better acquaintance, sir; I believe this is the first time we have met, though your attention would seem to say otherwise.”

“I think we have never met before, sir,” replied Harper, with a slight smile on his features, rising and desiring to be shown to his place of rest. A small boy was directed to guide him to his room; and, wishing a courteous good-night to the whole party, the traveller withdrew. The knife and fork fell from the hands of the unwelcome intruder as the door closed on the retiring figure of Harper; he rose slowly from his seat; listening attentively, he approached the door of the room, opened it, seemed to attend to the retreating footsteps of the other, and, amidst the panic and astonishment of his companions, he closed it again. In an instant the red wig which concealed his black locks, the large patch which hid half his face from observation, the stoop that had made him appear fifty years of age, disappeared.

“My father, my dear father!” cried the handsome young man; “and you, my dearest sisters and aunt! – have I at last met you again?”

“Heaven bless you, my Henry, my son!” exclaimed the astonished but delighted parent; while his sisters sunk on his shoulders, dissolved in tears.

CHAPTER II. THE PEDDLER

A storm below the highlands of the Hudson, if it be introduced with an easterly wind, seldom lasts less than two days. Accordingly, the inmates of the Locusts assembled on the following morning around their early breakfast, as the driving rain, seen to strike in nearly horizontal lines against the windows of the building, forbade the idea of exposing either man or beast to the tempest. Harper was the last to appear; after taking a view of the state of the weather, he apologized to Mr. Wharton for the necessity that existed for his trespassing on his goodness for a longer time. Henry Wharton had resumed his disguise with a reluctance amounting to disgust, but in obedience to the commands of his parent. No communications passed between him and the stranger after the first salutations of the morning.

While seated at the table, Cæsar entered, and laying a small parcel in silence by the side of his master, modestly retired behind his chair, where, placing one hand on its back, he continued, in an attitude half familiar, half respectful, a listener.

“What is this, Cæsar?” inquired Mr. Wharton, turning the bundle over to examine its envelope,³ and eying it rather suspiciously.

“The ’baccy, sir; Harvey Birch, he got home, and he bring you a little good ’baccy from York.”

“Harvey Birch!” rejoined the master, with great deliberation, stealing a look at his guest. “I do not remember desiring him to purchase any tobacco for me; but as he has brought it, he must be paid for his trouble.”

Sarah Wharton bade the black show Birch into the apartment; when, suddenly recollecting herself, she turned to the traveller with an apologizing look, and added, “If Mr. Harper will excuse the presence of a peddler.”

Harvey Birch had been a peddler from his youth; at least, so he frequently asserted,⁴ and his skill in the occupation went far to prove the truth of the declaration. He was a native of one of the Eastern colonies; and, from something of superior intelligence which belonged to his father, it was thought they had known better fortune in the land of their nativity. Harvey possessed, however, the common manners of the country, and was in no way distinguished from men of his class but by his acuteness,⁵ and the mystery which enveloped his movements. Ten years before, they had arrived together in the vale, and, purchasing an humble dwelling, continued peaceful inhabitants, but little noticed and but little known. Until age and infirmities had prevented, the father devoted himself to the cultivation of the small spot of ground belonging to his purchase, while the son pursued with avidity⁶ his humble barter. Their orderly quietude had soon given them so much consideration in the neighborhood as to induce a maiden (Katy Haynes by name) of five-and-thirty to forget the punctilio⁷ of her sex, and to accept the office of presiding over their domestic comforts.

Harvey was in the frequent habit of paying mysterious visits in the depth of the night to the fire-place of the apartment that served for both kitchen and parlor. Here he was observed by Katy; and, availing herself of his absence and the occupation of the father, by removing one of the hearth-stones she discovered an iron pot, glittering with a metal that seldom fails to soften the hardest heart. Katy succeeded in replacing the stone without discovery, and never dared to trust herself with another visit.

³ wrapper.

⁴ declared.

⁵ sharpness.

⁶ eagerness.

⁷ exactness in conduct.

In a few minutes after receiving the commands of his young mistress, Cæsar reappeared, ushering into the apartment a man above the middle height, spare, but full of bone and muscle. At first sight his strength seemed unequal to manage the unwieldy burden of his pack; yet he threw it on and off with great dexterity,⁸ and with as much apparent ease as if it had been filled with feathers. His eyes were gray, sunken, restless, and, for the flitting moments that they dwelt on the countenance of those with whom he conversed, they seemed to read the very soul. They possessed, however, two distinct expressions, which in a great measure characterized the whole man. When engaged in traffic, the intelligence of his face appeared lively, active, and flexible, though uncommonly acute; if the conversation turned on the ordinary transactions of life, his air became abstract and restless; but if, by chance, the revolution and the country were the topic, his whole system seemed altered – all his faculties were concentrated;⁹ he would listen for a great length of time without speaking, and then would break silence by some light remark that was too much at variance with his former manner not to be affectation. But of the war and of his father he seldom spoke, and always from some obvious necessity. To a superficial¹⁰ observer, avarice¹¹ would seem his ruling passion.

On entering the room the peddler relieved himself from his burden, which, as it stood on the door,¹² reached nearly to his shoulders, and saluted the family with modest civility. To Harper he made a silent bow, without lifting his eyes from the carpet; but the curtain prevented any notice of the presence of Captain Wharton. At length, Sarah, having selected several articles, observed in a cheerful voice:

“But, Harvey, you have told us no news. Has Lord Cornwallis beaten the rebels again?”

The question seemed not to have been heard, for the peddler, burying his body in the pack, brought forth a quantity of lace of exquisite¹³ fineness, and, holding it up to view, he required the admiration of the young lady. Finding a reply was expected, he answered, slowly:

“There is some talk, below, about Tarleton¹⁴ having defeated General Sumpter¹⁵ on the Tiger River.”¹⁶

“Indeed!” cried the exulting Sarah; “Sumpter – Sumpter – who is he? I’ll not buy even a pin until you tell me all the news,” she continued, laughing and throwing down a muslin she had been examining.

For a moment the peddler hesitated; his eye glanced toward Harper, who was yet gazing at him with settled meaning, and the whole manner of Birch was altered. Approaching the fire, he took from his mouth a large allowance of the Virginian weed, and depositing it, with its juices, without mercy to Miss Peyton’s andirons,¹⁷ he returned to his goods.

“He lives among the colored people in the south, and he has lately had a scrimmage with this Colonel Tarleton” —

“Who defeated him, of course?” cried Sarah, with confidence.

“So say the troops at Morrisania.”¹⁸

“But what do *you* say?” Mr. Wharton ventured to inquire, yet speaking in a low tone.

⁸ quickness and skill.

⁹ centred upon one thing.

¹⁰ looking at the surface only.

¹¹ love of gain.

¹² a door cut into halves, upper and lower.

¹³ extreme.

¹⁴ a British colonel.

¹⁵ an American general; also spelled Sumter.

¹⁶ a branch of the Broad, which is a branch of the Congaree River, South Carolina.

¹⁷ irons for supporting wood in a fire-place.

¹⁸ a village in Westchester County, north of the Harlem River.

“I repeat but what I hear,” said Birch, offering a piece of cloth to the inspection of Sarah, who rejected it in silence, evidently determined to hear more before she made another purchase.

“They say, however, at the Plains,”¹⁹ the peddler continued, first throwing his eyes again around the room and letting them rest for an instant on Harper, “that Sumpter and one or two more were all that were hurt, and that the rig’lars²⁰ were all cut to pieces, for the militia were fixed snugly in a log barn.”

“Not very probable,” said Sarah, contemptuously,²¹ “though I make no doubt the rebels got behind the logs.”

“I think,” said the peddler, coolly, again offering the silk, “it’s quite ingenious to get a log between one and a gun, instead of getting between a gun and a log.”

The eyes of Harper dropped quietly on the pages of the volume in his hand, while Frances, rising, came forward with a smile on her face, as she inquired, in a tone of affability²² that the peddler had never witnessed from the younger sister:

“Have you more of the lace, Mr. Birch?”

The desired article was produced, and Frances became a purchaser also.

“So it is thought that Colonel Tarleton has worsted General Sumpter?” said Mr. Wharton.

“I believe they think so at Morrisania,” said Birch, dryly.

“Have you any other news, friend?” asked Captain Wharton, venturing to thrust his face without the curtains.

“Have you heard that Major André²³ has been hanged?”

Captain Wharton started, and for a moment glances of great significance²⁴ were exchanged between him and the trader, when he observed, with affected indifference, “that it must have been some weeks ago.”

“Is there any probability of movements below, my friend, that will make travelling dangerous?” asked Harper, looking steadily at the other in expectation of his reply.

Some bunches of ribbon fell from the hands of Birch; his countenance changed instantly, losing its keen expression in intent meaning, as he answered slowly: “It is some time since the rig’lar cavalry were out, and I saw some of DeLancey’s²⁵ men cleaning their arms as I passed their quarters; it would be no wonder if they took the scent soon, for the Virginia horse are low in the county.”

“Are they in much force?” asked Mr. Wharton.

“I did not count them.”

Frances was the only observer of the change in the manner of Birch, and on turning to Harper, he had resumed his book in silence. She said, blushing with a color that suffused²⁶ her neck:

“I thought the Southern horse had marched towards the Delaware.”

“It may be so,” said Birch; “I passed the troop at a distance.”

Cæsar had now selected a piece of calico, in which the gaudy colors of yellow and red were contrasted on a white ground, and, after admiring it for several minutes, he laid it down with a sigh, as he exclaimed: “Berry pretty calico.”

The party sat in silence for many minutes after the peddler had withdrawn, when the stranger suddenly broke it by saying:

¹⁹ White Plains.

²⁰ regular troops, British.

²¹ with scorn.

²² readiness to converse.

²³ British spy, captured near Tarrytown, and hanged near Tappan.

²⁴ The glances conveyed a hidden meaning.

²⁵ DeLancey was a British officer in command of the Cow-Boys

²⁶ overspread.

“If any apprehensions²⁷ of me induce Captain Wharton to maintain his disguise, I wish him to be undeceived; had I motives for betraying him, they could not operate under present circumstances.”

The younger sister sank into her seat colorless and astonished. Miss Peyton dropped the tea-tray she was lifting from the table, and Sarah sat with her purchases unheeded in her lap, speechless with surprise. Mr. Wharton was stupefied; but the captain, hesitating a moment from astonishment, sprang into the middle of the room, and exclaimed, as he tore off the instruments of disguise:

“I believe you, from my soul, and this tiresome imposition shall continue no longer. Yet I am at a loss to conceive in what manner you should know me.”

“You really look so much better in your proper person, Captain Wharton,” said Harper, with a slight smile, “I would advise you never to conceal it in future. There is enough to betray you, if other sources of detection were wanting.” As he spoke, he pointed to a picture suspended over the mantelpiece, which exhibited the British officer in his regimentals.

“I had flattered myself,” cried young Wharton, with a laugh, “that I looked better on the canvas than in a masquerade. You must be a close observer, sir?”

“Necessity has made me one,” said Harper, rising from his seat.

Frances met him as he was about to withdraw, and, taking his hand between her own, said with earnestness, her cheeks mantling with the richest vermilion²⁸: “You cannot – you will not betray my brother!”

For an instant Harper paused in silent admiration of the lovely pleader, and then, folding her hands on his breast, he replied solemnly: “I cannot, and I will not.” He released her hands, and laying his own on her head, gently, continued: “If the blessing of a stranger can profit you, receive it.” He turned, and bowing low retired, with a delicacy that was duly appreciated by those he quitted, to his own apartment.

The whole party were deeply impressed with the ingenuous²⁹ and solemn manner of the traveller, and all but the father found immediate relief in his declaration.

²⁷ fears.

²⁸ a bright red color.

²⁹ open; frank.

CHAPTER III. THE STRANGER'S WARNING AND THE PEDDLER'S RETURN

On the afternoon of the succeeding day, the party were assembled in the parlor around the tea-table of Miss Peyton, when a change in the weather occurred. The rushing winds had ceased, the pelting of the storm was over, and, springing to the window, Frances saw a glorious ray of sunshine lighting up the opposite wood. The foliage glittered with the checkered beauties of the October leaf, reflecting back from the moistened boughs the richest lustre of an American autumn. In an instant, the piazza, which opened to the south, was thronged with the inmates of the cottage. The air was mild, balmy, and refreshing; in the east, clouds, which might be likened to the retreating masses of a discomfited³⁰ army, hung around the horizon in awful and increasing darkness. At a little elevation above the cottage, the thin vapor was still rushing towards the east with amazing velocity; while in the west the sun had broken forth and shed his parting radiance on the scene below, aided by the fullest richness of a clear atmosphere and a freshened herbage.

“What a magnificent scene!” said Harper, in a low tone; “how grand! how awfully sublime! May such a quiet speedily await the struggle in which my country is engaged, and such a glorious evening follow the day of her adversity!”

“There can be no danger apprehended from such a man,” thought Frances; “such feelings belong only to the virtuous.”

The musings of the party were now interrupted by the sudden appearance of the peddler. “Fine evening,” he said, saluting the party, without raising his eyes; “quite warm and agreeable for the season.”

Mr. Wharton assented to the remark, and inquired kindly after the health of his father. Harvey answered with a slight tremor in his voice:

“He fails fast; old age and hardships will do their work.” The peddler turned his face from the view of most of the family, but Frances noticed his glistening eyes and quivering lips, and for the second time Harvey rose in her estimation.

The valley in which the residence of Mr. Wharton stood ran in a direction from northwest to southeast, and the house was placed on the side of a wall which terminated³¹ its length in the former direction. A small opening, occasioned by the receding of the opposite hill, and the fall of the land to the level of the tide water, afforded a view of the Sound³² over the tops of the distant woods on its margin. The surface of the water, which had so recently been lashing the shores with boisterous fury, was already losing its ruffled darkness in the long and regular undulations³³ that succeed a tempest, while the light air from the southwest was gently touching their summits, lending its feeble aid in stilling the waters. Some dark spots were now to be distinguished, occasionally rising into view, and again sinking behind the lengthened waves which interposed themselves to the sight. They were unnoticed by all but the peddler. He seated himself on the piazza, at a distance from Harper, and appeared to have forgotten the object of his visit. His roving eye, however, soon caught a glimpse of these new objects in the view, and springing up with alacrity³⁴ gazed intently towards the water.

³⁰ defeated.

³¹ ended.

³² Long Island Sound.

³³ waves.

³⁴ readiness.

He changed his place, glanced his eye with marked uneasiness on Harper, and then said with great emphasis:

“The rig'lars must be out from below.”

“Why do you think so?” inquired Captain Wharton, eagerly. “God send it may be true; I want their escort in again.”

“Them ten whaleboats would not move so fast unless they were better manned than common.”

“Perhaps,” cried Mr. Wharton in alarm, “they are – they are Continentals returning from the island.”

“They look like rig'lars,” said the peddler, with meaning.

“Look!” repeated the captain, “there is nothing but spots to be seen.”

Harvey, disregarding his observation, said in an undertone, “They came out before the gale – have laid on the island these two days – horse are on the road – there will soon be fighting near us.” During this speech, Birch several times glanced towards Harper, with evident uneasiness, who stood in silent contemplation³⁵ of the view, and seemed enjoying the change in the air. As Birch concluded, however, Harper turned to his host, and mentioned that his business would not admit of unnecessary delay; he would, therefore, avail himself of the fine evening to ride a few miles on his journey. Mr. Wharton made many professions of regret, but was too mindful of his duty not to speed the parting guest, and orders were instantly given to that effect.

Every preparation being completed, Harper proceeded to take his leave. There was a mutual exchange of polite courtesy between the host and his parting guest; but as Harper frankly offered his hand to Captain Wharton, he remarked, in a manner of great solemnity:

“The step you have undertaken is one of much danger, and disagreeable consequences to yourself may result from it; in such a case, I may have it in my power to prove the gratitude I owe your family for its kindness.”

“Surely, sir,” cried the father, “you will keep secret the discovery which your being in my house has enabled you to make?”

Harper turned quickly to the speaker, and answered mildly, “I have learned nothing in your family, sir, of which I was ignorant before; but your son is safer from my knowledge of his visit than he would be without it.”

He bowed to the whole party, and without taking any notice of the peddler, other than by simply thanking him for his attentions, mounting his horse, and riding steadily and gracefully through the little gate, was soon lost behind the hill which sheltered the valley to the northward.

All the members of the Wharton family laid their heads on their pillows that night with a foreboding of some interruption to their ordinary quiet. Uneasiness kept the sisters from enjoying their usual repose, and they rose from their beds, on the following morning, unrefreshed and almost without having closed their eyes.

The family were already assembled around the breakfast table when the captain made his appearance, though the untasted coffee sufficiently proved that by none of his relatives was his absence disregarded.

“I think I did much better,” he cried, taking a chair between his sisters, and receiving their offered salutes, “to secure a good bed and such a plentiful breakfast, instead of trusting to the hospitality³⁶ of that renowned corps, the Cow-Boys.”

“If you could sleep,” said Sarah, “you were more fortunate than Frances and myself. Every murmur of the night air sounded to me like the approach of the rebel army.”

³⁵ thinking.

³⁶ entertaining guests without pay.

“Why,” said the captain, laughing, “I do acknowledge a little inquietude³⁷ myself. But how was it with you?” turning to his younger and evidently favorite sister, and tapping her cheek; “did you see banners in the clouds, and mistake Miss Peyton’s Æolian³⁸ harp for rebellious music?”

“Nay, Henry,” rejoined the maid, “much as I love my country, the approach of her troops just now would give me great pain.”

The brother made no reply; when Cæsar exclaimed, with a face that approached something like the hues of a white man:

“Run, Massa Harry, run – if he love old Cæsar, run. Here come a rebel horse.”

“Run!” repeated the British officer, gathering himself up in military pride; “no, Mr. Cæsar, running is not my trade.” While speaking, he walked deliberately to the window, where the family were already collected in the greatest consternation.³⁹

³⁷ disturbed condition of mind.

³⁸ a stringed instrument that is caused to sound by the impulse of the air.

³⁹ fright.

CHAPTER IV. CAPTAIN WHARTON'S CAPTURE

At the distance of more than a mile about fifty dragoons were to be seen, winding down one of the lateral⁴⁰ entrances of the valley. In advance, with an officer, was a man attired in the dress of a countryman, who pointed in the direction of the cottage. A small party now left the main body and moved rapidly toward the object of their destination.

On reaching the road which led through the bottom of the valley, they turned their horses' heads to the north.

Reaching the dwelling of Birch, they made a rapid circle around his grounds, and in an instant his house was surrounded by a dozen sentinels.

Two or three of the dragoons now dismounted and disappeared; in a few minutes they returned to the yard, followed by Katy, from whose violent gesticulations⁴¹ it was evident that matters of no trifling concern were on the carpet. A short communication with the housekeeper followed the arrival of the main body of the troop, and the advancing party remounting, the whole moved towards the Locusts with great speed.

As yet none of the family had sufficient presence of mind to devise any means of security for Captain Wharton; but the danger now became too pressing to admit of longer delay, and various means of secreting him were hastily proposed.

At length his sisters, with trembling hands, replaced his original disguise. This arrangement was hastily and imperfectly completed as the dragoons entered the lawn and orchard of the Locusts, riding with the rapidity of the wind; and in their turn the Whartons were surrounded.

The leader of the horse dismounted, and, followed by a couple of his men, he approached the outer door of the building, which was slowly opened for his admission by Cæsar.

A man, whose colossal⁴² stature manifested the possession of vast strength, entered the room, and, removing his cap, he saluted the family with a mildness his appearance did not indicate as belonging to his nature. His dark hair hung around his brow in profusion, though stained with the powder that was worn at that day, and his face was nearly hid in the whiskers by which it was disfigured. Still the expression of his eye, though piercing, was not bad, and his voice, though deep and powerful, was far from unpleasant. Frances ventured to throw a timid glance at his figure as he entered, and saw at once the man from whose scrutiny Harvey Birch had warned them there was so much to be apprehended.

"You have no cause for alarm, ladies," said the officer; "my business will be confined to a few questions, which, if freely answered, will instantly remove us from your dwelling.

"Has there been a strange gentleman staying with you during the storm?" continued the dragoon, speaking with interest.

"This gentleman – here – favored us with his company during the rain, and has not yet departed."

"This gentleman!" repeated the other, turning to Captain Wharton. He approached the youth with an air of comic gravity, and, with a low bow, continued, "I am sorry for the severe cold you have in your head, sir."

"I!" exclaimed the captain, in surprise; "I have no cold in my head."

⁴⁰ from the side.

⁴¹ signs or motions.

⁴² very great.

“I fancied it, then, from seeing you had covered such handsome black locks with that ugly old wig. It was my mistake; you will please to pardon it.”

Mr. Wharton groaned aloud; but the ladies, ignorant of the extent of the visitor’s knowledge, remained in trembling yet rigid silence. The captain himself moved his hand involuntarily to his head, and discovered that the trepidation of his sisters had left some of his natural hair exposed. The dragoon watched the movement with a continued smile, when, seeming to recollect himself, turning to the father, he proceeded:

“Then, sir, I am to understand there has not been a Mr. Harper here within a week?”

“Mr. Harper,” echoed the other; “yes – I had forgotten; but he is gone, and if there be anything wrong in his character, we are in entire ignorance; to me he was a total stranger.”

“You have little to apprehend from his character,” answered the dragoon, dryly; “but he is gone – how, when, and whither?”

“He departed as he arrived,” said Mr. Wharton, gathering renewed confidence from the manner of the trooper, “on horseback last evening, and he took the northern road.”

The officer listened with intense interest, his countenance gradually lighting with a smile of pleasure, and the instant Mr. Wharton concluded his laconic⁴³ reply he turned on his heel and left the apartment. In a few moments orders were given to some of the troop, and horsemen left the valley, at full speed, by its various roads.

The suspense of the party within, who were all highly interested witnesses of this scene, was shortly terminated; for the heavy tread of the dragoon soon announced his second approach. He bowed again politely as he reëntered the room, and, walking up to Captain Wharton, said with mock gravity:

“Now, sir, my principal business being done, may I beg to examine the quality of that wig?”

The British officer imitated the manner of the other, as he deliberately uncovered his head, and handing the wig observed, “I hope, sir, it is to your liking.”

“I cannot, without violating the truth, say it is,” returned the dragoon; “I prefer your ebony hair, from which you seem to have combed the powder with great industry. But that must have been a sad hurt you have received under this enormous black patch.”

“You appear such a close observer of things, that I should like your opinion of it, sir,” said Henry, removing the silk, and exhibiting the cheek free from blemish.

“Upon my word, you improve most rapidly in externals,” added the trooper; “if I could but persuade you to exchange this old surtout⁴⁴ for that handsome blue coat by your side, I think I never could witness a more agreeable metamorphosis,⁴⁵ since I was changed myself from a lieutenant to a captain.”

Young Wharton very composedly did as he was required, and stood an extremely handsome, well-dressed young man. The dragoon looked at him for a minute with the drollery that characterized his manner, and then continued:

“This is a newcomer in the scene; it is usual, you know, for strangers to be introduced; I am Captain Lawton, of the Virginia horse?”

“And I, sir, am Captain Wharton, of his Majesty’s Sixtieth regiment of foot,” returned Henry, bowing stiffly, and recovering his natural manner.

The countenance of Lawton changed instantly, and his assumed quaintness vanished. He viewed the figure of Captain Wharton, as he stood proudly swelling with a pride that disdained further concealment, and exclaimed with great earnestness:

“Captain Wharton, from my soul I pity you!”

⁴³ using but few words.

⁴⁴ overcoat.

⁴⁵ change.

“Oh, then,” cried the father, in agony, “if you pity him, dear sir, why molest him? He is not a spy; nothing but a desire to see his friends prompted him to venture so far from the regular army, in disguise. Leave him with us; there is no reward, no sum, which I will not cheerfully pay.”

“Sir, your anxiety for your friend excuses your language,” said Lawton, haughtily; “but you forget I am a Virginian, and a gentleman.” Turning to the young man, he continued, “Were you ignorant, Captain Wharton, that our pickets have been below you for several days?”

“I did not know it until I reached them, and it was too late to retreat,” said Wharton, sullenly. “I came out, as father has mentioned, to see my friends, understanding your parties to be at Peekskill,⁴⁶ and near the Highlands, or surely I would not have ventured.”

“All this may be very true; but the affair of André has made us on the alert. When treason reaches the grade of general officers, Captain Wharton, it behooves⁴⁷ the friends of liberty to be vigilant.”

Henry bowed to this remark in distant silence, but Sarah ventured to urge something in behalf of her brother. The dragoon heard her politely, and answered mildly:

“I am not the commander of the party, madam; Major Dunwoodie will decide what must be done with your brother. At all events, he will receive nothing but kind and gentle treatment. May I presume so far as to ask leave to dismount and refresh my men, who compose a part of his squadron?”

There was a manner about the trooper that would have made the omission of such a request easily forgiven by Mr. Wharton; but he was fairly entrapped by his own eagerness to conciliate, and it was useless to withhold a consent which he thought would probably be extorted; he therefore made the most of necessity, and gave such orders as would facilitate⁴⁸ the wishes of Captain Lawton.

⁴⁶ on the Hudson, forty miles north of New York.

⁴⁷ is the duty of.

⁴⁸ to make easy.

CHAPTER V. DUNWOODIE'S INVESTIGATION

After sufficient time had passed to make a very comfortable meal, a trumpet suddenly broke on the ears of the party, sending its martial tones up the valley, in startling melody. The trooper rose instantly from the table, exclaiming:

“Quick, gentlemen, to your horses; there comes Dunwoodie;” and, followed by his officers, he precipitately⁴⁹ left the room.

With the exception of the sentinels left to guard Captain Wharton, the dragoons mounted, and marched out to meet their comrades.

In the advancing troop, one horseman seemed to be distinguished in particular from those around him. Even the steed of this youthful soldier seemed to be conscious that he sustained the weight of no common man. The dragoon sat in the saddle with a firmness and ease that showed him master of himself and horse, his figure uniting the just proportions of strength and activity, being tall, round, and muscular. To this officer Lawton made his report, and side by side they rode into the field opposite to the cottage.

The officer gave a few hasty orders to his second in command, walked rapidly into the lawn, and approached the cottage. The dragoon ascended the steps of the piazza, and had barely time to touch the outer door, when it opened to his admission.

Frances silently led the way into a vacant parlor, opposite to the one in which the family were assembled, and turning to the soldier frankly, placing both her hands in his own, exclaimed:

“Ah, Dunwoodie, how happy on many accounts I am to see you! I have brought you in here to prepare you to meet an unexpected friend in the opposite room.”

“To whatever cause it may be owing,” cried the youth, pressing her hands to his lips, “I, too, am happy in being able to see you alone. Frances, the probation⁵⁰ you have decreed is cruel; war and distance may separate us forever.”

“We must submit to the necessity which governs us. But it is not love speeches I would hear now: I have other and more important matter for your attention.”

“What can be of more importance than to make you mine by a tie that will be indissoluble!⁵¹ Frances, you are cold to me – me – from whose mind, days of service and nights of alarm have never been able to banish your image for a single moment.”

“Dear Dunwoodie,” said Frances, softening nearly to tears, “you know my sentiments. This war once ended, and you may take my hand forever; but I cannot consent to tie myself to you by any closer union, so long as you are arrayed against my only brother. Even now, that brother is waiting your decision to restore him to liberty, or to conduct him to a probable death.”

“Your brother!” cried Dunwoodie, starting and turning pale; “Frances! what can I do?”

“Do!” she repeated, gazing at him wildly; “would Major Dunwoodie yield to his enemies his friend, the brother of his betrothed wife? Do you think I can throw myself into the arms of a man whose hands are stained with the blood of my only brother!”

“Frances, you wring my very heart; but, after all, we may be torturing ourselves with unnecessary fears, and Henry, when I know the circumstances, may be nothing more than a prisoner of war; in which case, I can liberate him on parole.”

⁴⁹ very hastily.

⁵⁰ trial.

⁵¹ never to be loosened.

Frances now led the way to the opposite room. Dunwoodie followed her reluctantly, and with forebodings of the result.

The salutations of the young men were cordial and frank, and, on the part of Henry Wharton, as collected as if nothing had occurred to disturb his self-possession.

After exchanging greetings with every member of the family, Major Dunwoodie beckoned to the sentinel to leave the room. Turning to Captain Wharton, he inquired mildly:

“Tell me, Henry, the circumstances of this disguise in which Captain Lawton reports you to have been found; and remember – remember – Captain Wharton, your answers are entirely voluntary.”

“The disguise was used by me, Major Dunwoodie,” replied the English officer, gravely, “to enable me to visit my friends without incurring the danger of becoming a prisoner of war.”

“But you did not wear it until you saw the troop of Lawton approaching?”

“Oh, no!” interrupted Frances, eagerly, “Sarah and myself placed them on him when the dragoons appeared; it was our awkwardness that led to the discovery.”

The countenance of Dunwoodie brightened, as, turning his eyes in fondness on the speaker, he listened to her explanation.

“Probably some articles of your own,” he continued, “which were at hand, and were used on the spur of the moment.”

“No,” said Wharton, with dignity; “the clothes were worn by me from the city; they were procured for the purpose to which they were applied, and I intended to use them again in my return this very day.”

“But the pickets – the party at the Plains?” added Dunwoodie, turning pale.

“I passed them, too, in disguise. I made use of this pass, for which I paid; and, as it bears the name of Washington, I presume it is forged.”

Dunwoodie caught the paper eagerly, and stood gazing on the signature for some time in silence, during which the soldier gradually prevailed over the man; then he turned to the prisoner with a searching look, as he asked:

“Captain Wharton, whence did you procure this paper?”

“This is a question, I conceive, Major Dunwoodie has no right to ask.”

“Your pardon, sir; my feelings may have led me into an impropriety. This name is no counterfeit. Captain Wharton, my duty will not suffer me to grant you a parole; you must accompany me to the Highlands.”

“I did not expect otherwise, Major Dunwoodie.”

“Major Dunwoodie,” said Frances, “I have already acknowledged to you my esteem; I have promised, Dunwoodie, when peace shall be restored to our country, to become your wife; give my brother his liberty on parole, and I will this day go with you to the altar, follow you to the camp, and, in becoming a soldier’s bride, learn to endure a soldier’s privations.”

Dunwoodie seized the hand which the blushing girl extended towards him, and pressed it for a moment to his bosom; he paced the room in excessive agitation.

“Frances, say no more, I conjure you, unless you wish to break my heart.”

“Then you reject my proffered hand?” she said, rising with dignity.

“Reject it! Have I not sought it with entreaties, with tears? But to take it under such conditions would be to dishonor both. Henry must be acquitted; perhaps not tried. No intercession of mine shall be wanting, you must well know; and believe me, Frances, I am not without favor with Washington.”

“That paper, that abuse of his confidence, will steel him to my brother’s case. If threats or entreaties could move his stern sense of justice, would André have suffered?” As Frances uttered these words, she fled from the room in despair.

Dunwoodie remained for a minute nearly stupefied; and then he followed with a view to vindicate⁵² himself, and to relieve her apprehensions. On entering the hall that divided the two parlors, he was met by a ragged boy, who looked one moment at his dress, and placing a piece of paper in his hands, immediately vanished through the outer door of the building. The soldier turned his eyes to the subject of the note. It was written on a piece of torn and soiled paper, and in a hand barely legible; but, after much labor, he was able to make out as follows:

“The rig'lars are at hand, horse and foot.”

Dunwoodie started; and, forgetting everything but the duties of a soldier, he precipitately left the house. While walking rapidly towards the troops, he noticed on a distant hill a vidette⁵³ riding with speed; several pistols were fired in quick succession, and the next instant the trumpets of the corps rang in his ears with the enlivening strain of “To arms.” By this time he had reached the ground occupied by his squadron; the major saw that every man was in active motion. Lawton was already in the saddle, eying the opposite extremity of the valley with the eagerness of expectation.

⁵² free from blame.

⁵³ a mounted sentinel.

CHAPTER VI. THE SKIRMISH AND ESCAPE OF CAPTAIN WHARTON

The videttes and patrols now came pouring in, each making in succession his hasty report to the commanding officer, who gave his orders coolly and with a promptitude that made obedience certain.

Major Dunwoodie had received from his scouts all the intelligence concerning the foe which was necessary to enable him to make his arrangements. The bottom of the valley was an even plain, that fell with a slight inclination from the foot of the hills on either side to the level of a natural meadow that wound through the country on the banks of a small stream. This brook was easily forded, and the only impediment it offered to the movements of the horse was in a place where its banks were more steep and difficult of access than common. Here the highway crossed it by a rough wooden bridge.

The hills on the eastern side of the valley were abrupt, and frequently obtruded themselves in rocky prominences into its bosom. One of these projections was but a short distance in the rear of the squadron of dragoons, and Dunwoodie directed Captain Lawton to withdraw with two troops behind its cover. Dunwoodie knew his man, and had selected the captain for this service both because he feared his precipitation in the field, and knew, when needed, his support would never fail to appear. On the left of the ground on which Dunwoodie intended to meet his foe was a close wood, which skirted that side of the valley for the distance of a mile. Into this, then, the guides retired, and took their station near its edge, in such a manner as would enable them to maintain a scattering but effectual fire on the advancing column of the enemy.

Dunwoodie's men now sat panting to be led once more against foes whom they seldom charged in vain. A few minutes enabled the major to distinguish their character. In one troop he saw the green coats of the Cow-Boys and in the other the leathern helmets and wooden saddles of the yagers.⁵⁴ Their numbers were about equal to the body under his immediate orders.

On reaching the open space near the cottage of Harvey Birch, the enemy halted and drew up his men in line, evidently making preparations for a charge. At this moment a column of foot appeared in the vale, and pressed forward to the bank of the brook we have already mentioned.

Major Dunwoodie at once saw his advantage, and determined to profit by it. The column he led began slowly to retire from the field, when the youthful German who commanded the enemy's horse, fearful of missing an easy conquest, gave the word to charge. The Cow-Boys sprang eagerly forward in the pursuit; the Hessians followed more slowly, but in better order. The trumpets of the Virginians now sounded long and lively; they were answered by a strain from the party in ambush that went to the hearts of their enemies. The column of Dunwoodie wheeled in perfect order, opened, and, as the word of charge was given, the troops of Lawton emerged from their cover, with their leader in advance, waving his sabre over his head, and shouting in a voice that was heard above the clamor of the martial music.

The charge threatened too much for the refugee troop. They scattered in every direction, flying from the field as fast as their horses could carry them. It was upon the poor vassals of the German tyrant that the shock fell. Many of them were literally ridden down, and Dunwoodie soon saw the field without an opposing foe.

Captain Wharton had been left in the keeping of two dragoons, one of whom marched to and fro on the piazza with a measured tread, and the other had been directed to continue in the same apartment with the prisoner.

⁵⁴ These were Hessian soldiers (from Hesse-Cassel, in Germany) hired by Great Britain. The Cow-Boys were Americans enlisted as soldiers in the British army. On the next page they are referred to as the "refugee troop."

The lawn in front of the Locusts was hidden from the road by a line of shrubbery, and the horses of the two dragoons had been left under its shelter to await the movements of their masters.

At this moment two Cow-Boys, who had been cut off from a retreat to their own party, rode furiously through the gate, with an intention of escaping to the open wood in the rear of the cottage. Feeling themselves in the privacy of the lawn, relieved from any immediate danger, they yielded to a temptation that few of the corps were ever known to resist – opportunity and horseflesh – and made towards their intended prizes by an almost spontaneous movement. They were busily engaged in separating the fastenings of the horses, when the trooper on the piazza discharged his pistols, and rushed, sword in hand, to the rescue.

This drew the wary dragoon in the parlor to the window.

He threw his body out of the building, and with dreadful imprecations endeavored by threats and appearance to frighten the marauders from their prey. The moment was enticing. Three hundred of his comrades were within a mile of the cottage; unriden horses were running at large in every direction, and Henry Wharton seized the unconscious sentinel by his legs and threw him headlong into the lawn. Cæsar vanished from the room, and drew a bolt of the outer door.

Recovering his feet, the sentinel turned his fury for a moment on his prisoner. To scale the window in the face of such an enemy, was, however, impossible, and on trial he found the main entrance barred.

His comrade now called loudly upon him for aid, and forgetting everything else, the discomfited trooper rushed to his assistance. One horse was instantly liberated, but the other was already fastened to the saddle of a Cow-Boy, and the four retired behind the building, cutting furiously at each other with their sabres, and making the air resound with their imprecations. Cæsar threw the outer door open, and pointing to the remaining horse, that was quietly biting the faded herbage of the lawn, he exclaimed:

“Run, now, run – Massa Harry, run!”

“Yes,” cried the youth, as he vaulted into the saddle, “now indeed, my honest fellow, is the time to run.”

When the fortune of the day was decided, and the time arrived for the burial of the dead, two Cow-Boys and a Virginian were found in the rear of the Locusts, to be included in the number.

Wharton’s horse was of the best Virginian blood, and carried him with the swiftness of the wind along the valley; and the heart of the youth was already beating tumultuously with pleasure of his deliverance, when a well-known voice reached his startled ear, crying loudly:

“Bravely done, captain! Don’t spare the whip, and turn to your left before you cross the brook.”

Wharton turned his head in surprise, and saw, sitting on the point of a jutting rock that commanded a bird’s-eye view of the valley, his former guide, Harvey Birch. The English captain took the advice of this mysterious being, and finding a good road which led to the highway that intersected the valley, turned down its direction, and was soon opposite to his friends. The next minute he crossed the bridge, and stopped his charger before his old acquaintance, Colonel Wellmere.

“Captain Wharton!” exclaimed the astonished commander of the English troops.

“Thank God!” cried the youth, recovering his breath, “I am safe, and have escaped from the hands of my enemies.”

The captain briefly explained to the group of listeners the manner of his capture, the grounds of his personal apprehensions, and the method of his escape. By the time he had concluded his narration, the fugitive Germans were collected in the rear of the column of infantry, and Colonel Wellmere cried aloud:

“From my soul I congratulate you, my brave friend; prepare yourself to grant me your assistance, and I will soon afford you a noble revenge.”

“I do not think it altogether prudent to cross this brook into the open plain, in the face of those Virginian horse, flushed as they must be with the success they have just obtained,” returned young Wharton.

“Do you call the rout of those irregulars and these sluggish Hessians a deed to boast of?” said the other.

“And I must be allowed to say, Colonel Wellmere, that if the body-guards of my king were in yon field, they would meet a foe that it would be dangerous to despise. Sir, Mr. Dunwoodie is the pride of Washington’s army as a cavalry officer,” cried Henry, with warmth.

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