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The Mouse In the Clock

It Possessed Important Information For General Washington at Morristown

By JAMES T. BARTON

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Among the curiosities of the Revolutionary war is the headquarters of General Washington near Morristown, N. J. One morning during his occupancy of the premises Lieutenant Edwin Goddard entered the hall when the door of the private office opened and Captain Alexander Hamilton, aid-de-camp to the commander in chief, came out.

"Is the general in his office?" asked Goddard.

"Yes."

"Busy?"

"Always busy."

"Do you think he will receive me?"

"Go in and he will let you know what to expect."

The lieutenant knocked, and the sonorous voice from within called upon him to enter. As he did so the general turned, his face showing a seriousness to be expected in one who was endeavoring to relieve the sufferings of his troops at Valley Forge and elsewhere, but was unable to do so. He was always dignified, and his subordinate approached him with deference.

"General," said Goddard, handing him a letter, "I received this last night from Elizabethtown. It is from Mistress Ruth Grosvenor. Will your excellency be pleased to read it?"

The general took the note, unfolded it and read the few words it contained:

Mistress Ruth Grosvenor presents her compliments to Lieutenant Edwin Goddard and begs that he will favor her with a visit at his earliest opportunity.

The general's brows lowered. "I presume," he said coldly, "that you desire a leave to make this visit. I am astonished, sir, that you should be on such friendly terms with those whom I know to be arrant Tories."

"That her father is a Tory I will not deny, general, but Mistress Ruth Goddard is an ardent patriot."

"Has she any object in meeting you that concerns our cause?"

"I think she has, general. Before this she has given me information that I have transmitted to your excellency anonymously. Yet I am not sure that this is now her object. I confess to you, general, that I am a suitor for her hand. Furthermore, the officer in command of the British troops in the vicinity of Elizabethtown is also a suitor for her hand, and her father desires that she shall accept him."

All the world loves a lover, and the stern expression on Washington's face faded for a gentler one.

"You propose to go to Elizabethtown in citizen's dress?" he asked.

"I do."

"It may be excusable for risking the life of one of my officers attempting

"LEAVE ME," SHE SAID.

to gain information of the enmey, but not that he may visit the lady of his love."

"Then let us assume, general, that Mistress Goddard has information for me."

The general thought a moment, then said, "Go to Captain Hamilton and tell him to grant you a leave of absence and furnish you with the necessary pass."

With this the general turned to his desk, loaded with requests—not to say pleadings—from many quarters, begging for food, clothing, ammunition, medicines—indeed, just those articles which he was the least able to supply.

That same evening a young man in the clothing of a farmer, a basket on his arm, entered the grounds surrounding the Grosvenor home at Elizabethtown and rapped with the brass knocker. A negro woman opened the door, and the young man asked her to say to Mistress Ruth that Abel Barton, a farmer, had come to ask if he might sell her some eggs and poultry. This brought Ruth, who suspected the farmer to be Lieutenant Goddard. Though she recognized him at once, she did not betray the fact before the negress. She inquired the price of his wares and, arguing with him till the woman had withdrawn, then beckoned him into the living room. Once there, she closed the door and said hurriedly:

"Fortunately father has gone to a secret conclave of Tories. Mother is upstairs with the children, though she is on my side, so far as you are concerned, and there is no danger from her. Major Tarrant, who is still devoted to me, has given me some important information regarding the number and distribution of British troops in New Jersey. I have taken notes of what he has told me in different conversations I have had with him, and you will find them on this bit of paper."

She placed it in his hand, and he had only time to put it under the lining of his hat when there was a rap on the outer door.

"Great heavens!" cried the girl, turning pale. "Suppose it should be Major Tarrant!"

Casting about for a hiding place, she noticed the clock standing by the wall. Running to it, she opened the door, exposing its weights and the pendulum swinging back and forth. Goddard knew intuitively what she wished him to do and with difficulty squeezed himself into it. Fortunately he was slenderly made, for the clock, though long, was narrow. Ruth had no sooner closed the clock than the door of the room was opened by the negro servant and Major Tarrant entered.

"Why, Mistress Grosvenor!" he exclaimed. "Where has that becoming color of yours gone? And you are breathing as though you had been running a race."

She made a plea of indisposition to account for her appearance and invited the major to be seated.

"I have today received orders from General Howe," he said, "to march my command to Trenton. I have come for the last time before my departure to ask you if you cannot give me a favorable answer to my suit. You know that I love you and that when this cursed rebellion is over I would gladly take you back to England with me as my wife. Come, Ruth, be kind to me."

He attempted to take her hand, but she drew it away.

Goddard, almost smothered in the clock, was forced to listen to this avowal, though it troubled him to be an eavesdropper. Indeed, cramped as he was and irritated at being placed in such a position, he could not restrain a movement. This swung a weight against the side of the clock.

The major turned and looked at the clock in surprise. Ruth by a great effort retained her equanimity.

"Those horrid mice!" she exclaimed. "They are all over the house. They have gnawed a hole in the bottom of the clock and are making a home there."

"I see—the clock has stopped!" the major remarked thoughtfully.

"That is because I don't dare to wind it. I confess I have a woman's dread of a mouse."

Fortunately Major Tarrant was too intent on his suit to take an interest in the clock, and Ruth was relieved when he repeated his request to give him an answer, and a favorable one, to his suit. For an hour young Goddard was obliged to maintain a constrained position, listening to the officer's pleading. At times it seemed to him impossible to repress another movement. But both the weights and the pendulum hung loose. He remembered how Ruth had saved him on his first movement and dreaded that she might not be able to do so again. On his person were the memoranda in Ruth's handwriting. If he were caught with these he would swing from the end of a rope and no one could tell what punishment would be meted out to the girl who had given him the information.

But maintaining one position for a long while is well nigh impossible for any person, and Goddard was of a nervous temperament. Tired of bearing his weight on his right foot, he attempted to change it to his left. In doing so he joggled the pendulum.

"There is certainly something wrong with that clock," said the major. "I'm going to see what it is."

Ruth, considering her lover lost, fell in a swoon. It was the best thing she could have done. Tarrant forgot the clock in her. Lifting her, he placed her on a sofa and ran out of the room for water to sprinkle in her face. Goddard, hearing the commotion, opened the clock door, looked out, saw his sweetheart lying unconscious and was about to free himself from his prison to go to her when he heard footsteps and, closing the door, remained where he was. Tarrant returned and sprinkled water in Ruth's face. But she had revived immediately and did not need it. Nevertheless she remained immovable, with closed lids, till she had made up her mind what to do.

"Leave me," she said to Tarrant when she opened her eyes. "I should have been in bed this evening. Call the servant, then go away at once. Come tomorrow and I will give you my answer. If I am able to see you I will give it verbally; if not I will write it."

"But this illness!" Tarrant exclaimed anxiously.

"'Tis nothing; merely a weak heart. I think that by tomorrow morning I shall be as well as ever."

The major left her with hope beating high in his heart.

The next afternoon a farmer called at Washington's headquarters and asked to see the general. Captain Hamilton was sent to see what he wanted. Recognizing Goddard, he took him into Washington's office, and the farmer gave him the memoranda he had brought with him.

"This is very important!" exclaimed the general, becoming absorbed in the paper; but, presently looking up, he added, "Captain Hamilton, see that Lieutenant Goddard receives a commission as captain."

Major Tarrant's answer was "No," for Ruth Grosvenor had been married at midnight by a patriot dominie to Edwin Goddard before he stole away to Morristown.

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