

However this might be, the man was plainly ignorant of the sentry's proximity. He advanced to the edge of the wood, peered rapidly in every direction, and, running along the shadow, entered the wood again a few yards from where Travers was crouching. Leaping out upon him, Ernest grabbed him with both hands. The man uttered a low, startled yell and struggled desperately to free himself. Back and forth they swayed, the sentry shouting for help until he was borne against a tree with such violence that he was nearly stunned.

Suddenly the man ceased struggling.

'I am lost! Here comes the guard. Don't shout. For God's sake have mercy upon me and let me go,' he supplicated, hoarsely.

Travers started as though he had been shot. Dragging the man into a clearing, where it was light enough for him to see his face, he pushed him away from him after a moment's hesitation and said:

'Run!'

The man needed no second bidding. As he disappeared in the darkness Travers, trying to calm his violent agitation, hurried back toward his post; but ere he had taken many steps a stern voice ordered him to halt, and he found himself surrounded by the guard. One of the soldiers was carrying the musket he had dropped.

'What are you doing off post and without your musket?' demanded the sergeant.

'I—nothing,' stammered Travers, confusedly.

'I saw something run into yonder thicket. Here, Putnam, Van Zandt, Holloway, quick, after him. Get him, alive or dead. Shoot at anything you see moving. You others arrest this fellow and fill him full of slugs if he attempts to break away.'

The three men named darted away into the wood, while the others seized Travers, who offered no resistance. The sergeant struck a light with a tinder box and flint and explored the ground round about.

'I thought I was not mistaken,' he exclaimed.

'Another man has been here. The footmarks are different. Oh, if it were only daylight, so that we could follow his trail! Ah! what is this?'

He picked up a slip of folded paper.

It bore a number of figures and capital letters.

'A cipher message! Oh, ho! We're on a red-hot clue this time, and no mistake.'

'Sergeant,' began Travers, 'I—'

'Silence, traitor!' commanded the sergeant.

'Keep your lies for Col. Dayton and the chief. You'll need to invent a mighty plausible explanation to escape facing a firing party at daybreak.'

The soldiers who had been seen in pursuit of the fugitive presently returned and reported that they had seen nothing of him. The guard then closed around Travers and he was marched back to the main command. The army was already astir and the other sentries had been called in, for Washington was very anxious to put the Delaware between him and the British. Travers' comrades looked wonderingly at him as he was brought in.

Col. Dayton listened to the sergeant's report without saying a word, and taking the cipher message examined it long and intently. His face waxed very pale and hard as he said, shortly:

'Bring the prisoner here.'

Travers, heavily manacled, was brought forward.

The colonel motioned to the sergeant to draw off his men, and the guard, lining up and grounding arms at a respectful distance, left uncle and nephew facing each other.

For a moment neither spoke. Travers, with head erect, eyed the old soldier calmly and waited to be questioned.

'Ernest Travers,' said the colonel at last, and his voice was harsh, 'when you joined the army of liberty you for the time being severed all family ties and became the servant of your country, which you swore to serve faithfully and defend with your life. Remember that you are dealing not with your uncle, but your superior officer, and that claims of relationship cannot be evoked. You are accused of a terrible crime,

the punishment of which is an ignominious death. Unless you can prove to me beyond the shadow of a doubt that you are innocent, the penalty will be inflicted swiftly and pitilessly.

'The charge against you is that you are a spy in the services of your country's enemies; that you have systematically kept them informed of the movements of the army of liberty; that while on outpost duty you were caught holding intercourse with some person or persons unknown, emissary or emissaries of the enemy; that in the confusion caused by the unexpected arrival of the guard you, or the person to whom you had given it, dropped a cipher message written by you, the meaning of which is not yet known to your superior officers, but which is thought to betray military secrets of which you by some means yet to be discovered have obtained possession. What have you to say?'

'That I am innocent, sir.'

'That is no answer. Facts and details are what I want, not empty phrases. I warn you again not to trifle with me. It is a matter of life or death to you.'

'I was on outpost duty and saw a man advancing through the wood. I suspected that he might be a spy and tried to arrest him. He escaped as the guard came up.'

'Your duty was to challenge him and if necessary fire upon him. Did you do that?'

'No, sir. From some cause or other I had fainted a little while previously and dropped my musket some paces from where I fell. When I recovered I saw the man coming through the wood and feared that if I moved to reach my musket he would see me and get away. I sprang out upon him as he passed me.'

'You fainted! A likely story, truly. At any rate, you must have seen the man's face if you struggled with him. Do you know him? Would you know him if you saw him again?'

'It was pitch dark in the wood.'

'Why did you say you did not know what you were doing off post duty when the sergeant caught you?'

'I was probably dazed by a blow received in the struggle, which made my head bleed, as you see.'

'That proves nothing. You may have struck your head against a tree in your precipitation to return on the approach of the guard. What is the meaning of this cipher?'

'I do not know, sir.'

'Who gave it to you?'

'No one; it must have been dropped by the man with whom I struggled.'

'Is that the only explanation you can offer?'

'That is all, sir.'

'What you have told me is a tissue of absurd, patently absurd, falsehoods.'

'I admit that circumstantial evidence is strongly against me, but I assure you on my honor, sir, that I am innocent.'

'The honor of a traitor and a spy!'

'No, sir; the honor of an honest man and a patriot.'

'I do not believe you,' said the colonel, fiercely. The sergeant's account of the circumstances in which he had arrested the young man appeared to leave no room for doubt as to his guilt. He thought upon all that he had done for him. The base ingratitude with which he had apparently been requited and the fact that a member of his family had been the traitor who had so long eluded him and wrought such harm to the patriot army maddened him. For a moment he lost his head, forgot the dignity of his position and struck the prisoner with his clenched fist.

The news of Travers' arrest and of the charge against him had spread through the camp like wildfire and caused the greatest excitement. The men, disregarding for once the authority of their officers, rushed at the prisoner as he was marched through the lines and would have torn him to pieces had they not been beaten back by the guard, who so vigorously used their muskets as clubs. As it was, when, half an hour later, he was taken before the drum-head court-martial, over which Washington himself presided, he was fear-