

MILES WALLINGFORD

By JAMES FARRISON COOPER

CHAPTER XXVIII

"She had enclosed me in her arms. She pressed me with a meek embrace; and bending back her head, looked up and gazed upon my face."

I saw no one for the next two hours. A window of the parlor, where I was permitted to remain, overlooked the so-called park—or rather Manhattan-district—and it was not long before I caught a glimpse of a man in a black suit, lying off and on, or blockading the jail, lest I should be secretly carried to parts unknown, or some other great evil should approach me from without. What these two honest and affectionate fellows meant by thus maintaining their post, I did not know, it is true; but such was my conjecture. At length, however, when he returned, he had a coil of rope over his shoulder, when the two took a station at a safe distance from my prison, and began to measure off fathoms, to cut, knot, and splice. I was amused with their diligence, which made no abatement until it was interrupted by myself. Of the manner in which that was effected I shall have occasion to speak presently.

About two hours after I was left by Lucy and her father, a keeper came to announce another visitor. I was expecting my own attorney or Mr. Harrison; but the reader will judge of my surprise when Andrew Drewett, covered by a shawl, and accompanied by a man in a black suit, who held a letter in his hand, and who accompanied me by saying,—"Captain Wallingford, I have instructions here to open the door for you—ball has been entered."

The jailer disappeared. "And this I owe to you, Mr. Drewett."

"I wish I could say as much, with all my heart, my dear sir," Andrew replied, taking my hand, and giving it a warm, cordial shake; "but it would not be strictly true. After saving my life I should not have suffered you to lie in jail for want of so small a favor as giving bail for your appearance in court, certainly; but would, and will, gladly be your special bail, at the proper time. Let the credit fall, however, only where it is due. Miss Hardinge asked me to obtain your release, and her wishes are second only to my own gratitude."

This was said in a frank, manly manner; and I wondered, never viewed before. He had impressed in person, bore himself like a gentleman, I now thought, and was every way a pleasing, well-mannered, well-dressed, and intelligent-looking young man. I could do all justice to him but pardon him Lucy's preference.

"Lucy can never forget our childish intimacies," I said, a little confused. "She left me, declaring an intention to do something of the sort; though I confess I was not exactly prepared for this. You are a man to be envied, Mr. Drewett, if any man on earth is."

Andrew looked embarrassed. He glanced at me, looked at the window, then, by a vast effort, seemed to regain his self-command.

"I believe I understand you, Wallingford," he said. "You mean in being engaged to Lucy Hardinge?"

"I can never tell—no, all I hear—all I have seen—this last act, in particular, tells me as much as words."

"All have then told you wrong. I am not so fortunate as to possess the affections of Miss Hardinge; and no man will gain her hand who does not first obtain her heart; ay, and her whole heart, too."

"I was astounded! What! Lucy not engaged to Drewett; and loving him by his own admission, not likely to love him! I believe Andrew had no difficulty in comprehending my feelings in part, for he seemed disposed to continue the subject; and what was infinitely to his credit, to continue it in a way that should leave no unpleasant uncertainty hanging about the real position of the dear girl."

"It is only quite lately," he said, "that I have seen the great injustice that I and my family have unconsciously committed toward Miss Hardinge. As you are an old—a very old friend of hers, I will be explicit with you, and endeavor, in some small degree, to excuse myself; though I feel that I can never be done fully. You tell me, that you have heard I was engaged to Miss Hardinge?"

"Unquestionably; I think it was the opinion of her own father; though he must have believed the promise conditional, as Lucy never would marry without his approbation."

"Mr. Hardinge has then been strangely misled. It is true, Wallingford, that I have long admired Miss Hardinge, and that I offered myself years ago. I was refused from the first. But Lucy had the frankness to own that she was free to dispose of her hand; and I persevered contrary to her advice, her wishes, and, I may say, her entreaties. I think she esteems me; and I know she has a strong regard for my father, who is almost as fond of her as I am myself. This esteem and regard I hoped might ripen into love, and my presumption has brought it into my punishment. It is now about six months—I remember it was shortly after we heard of your probable loss—that I had a final conversation with her on the subject, when I became convinced my prospects were hopeless. Since that time, I have endeavored to conquer my passion; for love unrequited, I suppose you know, will not last forever; and I have so far succeeded, as to tell you all this without feeling the pain it would once have cost me. Still, I retain the deepest respect for Miss Hardinge, and a single encouraging word would even now recall me. I am of opinion, however, she intends never to marry. But, let us quit this place, which has no longer any claim on you."

I was in a state scarcely to know what I did. It was comparatively little to me to learn I was free myself, after so unexpectedly learning that Lucy was also free. Lucy—whom I had for years supposed to be irrevocably engaged, and whom I had continued to love, even against hope. Andrew Drewett, I fancied, had never loved as I did, or he

would not have made the speech he did; or his love for Lucy had not been a part of his existence from boyhood, as mine had certainly been. While all these thoughts were passing through my mind, I gave a few directions, took Drewett's arm, and hurried out of the jail. I confess that I respired more freely when I found myself in the open air. My companion took my direction, and I led him to the spot where Marble and Neb were still at work on their rope. Great was their surprise on seeing me at large; and I thought the mate looked a little disappointed, though he comprehended the matter at once as soon as he saw Drewett.

"If you had only waited till night, Miles," Marble said, shaking his head as one manaces, "Neb and I would have shown that bloody jail a seaman's fashion of quitting it. I'm almost sorry the occasion is lost, for it would have done their stomachs good to wake up at two o'clock, and their eyes open. I've half a mind to ask you to go back boy!" "But I have no mind to comply with the request; so do me the favor to have my bag carried back to our lodgings, where I intend to swing my hammock again to-night, Mr. Drewett, I must hasten to thank you for what you owe my freedom. Will you accompany me?"

Andrew excused himself; and recieving my thanks once more, and parted with a hearty shake of the hands. I then hastened toward Wall Street, and knocked at Lucy's door (there were knockers to good houses in New York in 1804, a witness to the fact, scarce conscious of the manner in which I had got there. It was near the dinner-hour, and the footman was deprecatingly admitting a sailor-man, who hardly knew what he said, when a little scream from Chloe, who happened to see me, soon disposed of my claim for an entrance.

"Masser Mile!—Masser Mile!—I—so glad—dat feller, Neb, say you come home. Oh! Masser Mile, now I know dat deascal at Clawbonny get driv off!"

This speech, confident as it was, a little cooled my ardor by reminding me I was a beggar in the figurative meaning of the word. Chloe led the way, however, and I was soon in the drawing-room, and in the presence of the youthful mistress of the house. How gloriously beautiful did Lucy then appear! She had dressed for dinner, as usual, but it was in the simplest and neatest manner. Her face was radiant with the glow of feeling me where I was, and excitement had deepened the color on her cheeks, which were never pale, except with emotions. As for her eyes, I can only describe them by the homely phrase that they "danced for joy."

"Now, Miles," she said, holding out both hands to meet me, "this is redeeming your pledge, and behaving as you should. Andrew Drewett was delighted with an opportunity of doing something for the man who saved his life, and my only fear was of your obstinacy."

"After all I have heard from Andrew Drewett, beloved Lucy, you never need fear anything from my obstinacy hereafter. He not only has released my body from prison, but he has released my spirits from the weight of a mountain, by honestly confessing you do not love him."

The play of rosy light on an autumnal sky at evening is not more beautiful, than the changing tints that played over Lucy's beautiful face. She did not speak, at first; but so intent, so inquiring was her look, while at the same time it was so timid and modest, that I scarce needed the question that she finally succeeded in asking.

"What is it you wish to say, Miles?" at length came from her in faltering tones.

"I ask to be permitted to keep these hands forever. Not one, Lucy; one will not satisfy a love like mine, a love that has got to be interwoven with my being, from having formed a part of my very existence from boyhood; yes, I ask for both."

"You have then both, dear, dear Miles, and can keep them as long as you please."

Even while this was in the course of utterance, the hands were snatched from me to be applied to their owner's face, and the dear girl burst into a flood of tears. I folded her in my arms, seated myself at her side on a sofa, and, as if I shall not reveal all that passed during the next quarter of an hour, nor am I quite certain that I could, were I to make the attempt, but I will recollect my arm was around Lucy's slender waist, at the end of that brief period. What was said was not very coherent, nor do I know that anybody would care to hear, or read, it.

"Why have you so long delayed to tell me this, Miles?" Lucy at length inquired, a little reproachfully. "You who had so many opportunities, and might have known how it would have been received! How much misery and suffering it would have saved us both!"

"For that which it has caused you, dearest, I shall never forgive myself; but as for that I have endured, it is only too well merited. But I thought you loved Drewett; everybody said you were to marry him; even your own father believed and told me as much."

"Poor, dear papa! He little knew my heart. One thing, however, he did that would have prevented my every marrying any one, Miles, so long as you lived."

"Heaven forever bless him for that, as well as for all his other good deeds! What was it, Lucy?"

"When we heard of the supposed loss of your ship, he believed it, but I did not. Why did not believe what all around me thought was true, is more than I can explain, unless Providence humbly sustained me by hope. But when my father thought you dead, in conversing of all your good qualities, Miles—and he loved you almost as well as his daughter—"

"God bless him, dear old gentleman! but what did he tell you Lucy?"

"I will never learn, if you thus interrupt me, Miles," Lucy answered smiling sweetly in my face, though she permitted me still to hold both her hands, as if I had taken possession of them literally with an intent to keep them, blushing at the same time as much with happiness, I thought, as with

the innate modesty of her nature. "Have a little patience, and I will tell you. When my father thought you dead, he told me in the manner in which you had confessed to him the preference you felt for me; and do you, can you think, after I was thus put in possession of such a secret, I could listen to Andrew Drewett, or to any one else?"

I shall not reveal what followed this speech; but I may say that, in the course of the next ten minutes, Lucy mildly reproached me again for having so long delayed my declaration.

"I know you so well, Miles," she continued, smiling—after blushing, that she did nearly the whole of the remainder of the day—"I know you so well, Miles, that I am afraid I should have made the declaration myself, had you not found your tongue. Silly fellow! how could you suppose I would ever love any but you?"

She drew the lockets I had given her from her dress, and placed it in my hands, still warm from lying near her heart; I had no choice but to kiss Lucy again, or to kiss this locket, and I did both, by way of leaving no further grounds for self-reproach. I say, kiss her again, for to own the truth, I had already done so many times in that interview.

At length, Chloe put her head in at the door, having taken the precaution first to give a gentle tap, to inquire if dinner should be served. Lucy dined at four, and it was now drawing toward five.

"Has my father come in?" demanded the young mistress of the mansion. "Not yet, Miss Lucy, but he nebbert 'an' much of dinner, Miss Lucy, ma'am; and Masser Mile been so long a sailor, dat he 'ink he must be hungry. I here dat he had berry hard time dis 'y'ge, Miss Lucy—soo hard for old masser and missus' son!"

"Ay, you have seen Neb, if the truth were told, Miss Chloe, I cried. "He has been charming your ear with Othello tales of his risks and hardships, to make you love him."

I cannot say that Chloe actually blushed, or, if she did, the spectators were none the wiser for the weakness. But dark as was the skin of this honest-hearted girl, she had more of a ruddy feeling, and even her features could betray the emotions she entertained.

"De feller!" she exclaimed. "What Miss please order? Shall I cook dish up?"

"We will have dinner," Lucy answered, with a smile, Chloe's eyes dancing with a sort of delight. "I shall John to send Mr. Harrison to get the house soon. Mr. Harrison will be home soon, in all probability. We shall be only us three at table."

The mentioning of the table caused me to cast an eye at my dress, and in the sight of my mate's attire, neat, and in truth, becoming as it was, to one who had no reason to be ashamed of his figure, caused me to recollect my poverty, and to feel one twinge at the distance that the world might fancy its own opinions placed between us. As for birth, my own family was too respectable, and my education had been too good, to leave me no very keen fear on such a subject in a state of society like ours; but there was truly a wide chasm between the heiress of Mrs. Bradford and a penniless mate of a ship. Lucy understood me, and slipping her arm through mine, she walked into the library, saying archly, as she drew me gently along,—

"It is a very easy thing, Miles, to get skirts made to your roundabout. No doubt, dear Lucy, but with whose money? I have been in such a tumult of happiness, as to have forgotten that I am a beggar; that I am not a suitable match for you! Had I only Clawbonny I should feel less humiliated. With Clawbonny I could feel myself entitled to some portion of the world's consideration."

We were in the library by this time. Lucy looked at me a moment, intently, and I could see she was pained at my allusion. Taking a key from a cabinet where she kept it, she opened a small drawer, and showed me the identical gold pieces that had once been in my possession, and which I had returned to her after my first voyage to sea. I perceived that the pearls she had obtained under Grace's bequest, as well as those which were my own property, if I could be said to own anything, were kept in the same place. Holding the gold in the palm of a little hand that was as soft as velvet, and as white as ivory, she said,—

"You once took all I had, Miles, and this without pretending to more than a brother's love; why should you hesitate to do it again, now you say you wish to become my husband?"

"Precious creature! I believe you will cure me of even my silly pride. Then taking up the pearls, I threw them on her neck, and they hung in a long chain, riveting the skin with which they came in contact. "There, I have said these pearls should be an offering to my wife, and I now make it; though I scarce know how they are to be kept from the grasp of Daggett."

Lucy kissed the pearls—I knew she did not do it on account of any love for them—and tears came into her eyes. I believe she had long waited to receive this gift, in the precise character in which it was now received.

"Thank you, dear Miles," she said. "You see how freely I accept your gifts, and why should you hesitate to receive mine? As for this Mr. Daggett, it will be easy enough to get rid of his claim, if I shall be of age before he can bring his cause to trial, as I learn; then nothing will be easier than for Miles Wallingford to pay all his debts, for by that time all that is now mine will be yours. No, no, this Mr. Daggett shall not easily rob me of this precious gift."

"Rupert!"—I said, by way of getting her answer. "Report will not influence my conduct, any further than I shall insist on returning every dollar he has received from you in the name of our sainted Grace. But I hear my father's voice, and speaking to some other person. I had hoped we should dine alone!"

The door of the library opened, and Mr. Hardinge entered, followed by a grave-looking elderly man, of respectable mien, and a manner that denoted one accustomed to deal with matters of weight. I knew this person at once to be Richard Harrison, then one of the most distinguished lawyers in America,

and the gentleman to whom I had been carried by John Wallingford, when the latter pressed me to make my will. Mr. Harrison shook me cordially by the hand, after saluting Lucy, whom he knew intimately. I saw at once that something unusual was working in his mind. This highly respectable advocate was a man of method and of great coolness of manner in the management of affairs, and he proceeded to business at once, using very little circumlocution.

"I have been surprised to hear that my worthy client and friend, Mr. John Wallingford is dead," he observed. "I do not know how his decease should have escaped my notice in the papers, unless it were owing to a pretty severe illness I suffered myself about the time it occurred. My good friend, Mr. Hardinge, told it to me, for the first time, only half an hour since."

"It is true, sir," I answered. "I understand your kinsman died eight months since."

"And he held your bond for \$40,000 at the time he died?"

"I regret to say he did; a bond secured by a mortgage on my paternal place, Clawbonny, which has since been sold, by virtue of the power contained in the clause, under the statute, and sold for a song; less than a fourth of its value."

"And you have been arrested, at the suit of the administrator, for the balance due on the bond?"

"I have, sir; and am liberated on general bail, only within an hour or two."

"Well, sir, all these proceedings can be, and must be set aside. I have received your instructions to prepare an application to the chancellor for an injunction, and, unless your kinsman's administrator is a great dunce, you will be in peaceful possession of Clawbonny again, in less than a month—if a moderately sensible man in less than twenty-four hours."

"You would not raise hopes that are idle, Mr. Harrison; yet I do not understand how all this will be done!"

"Your kinsman, Mr. John Wallingford, who was a much esteemed client of mine, made a will, which I drew myself, and which will, being left in my possession for that purpose, I now put in your hands as his sole executor. By that will you will perceive that he has specially forgiven you the debt of \$40,000, and releases the claim under the mortgage. But this is not all. After giving some small legacies to a few of his female relatives, he has left you the residuary legatee, and I know enough of his affairs to be certain that you will receive an addition to your estate of more than \$200,000. John Wallingford was a character, but he was a money-making character; he had lived twenty years longer, he would have been one of the richest men in the State. He had laid an excellent foundation, but he died too soon to rear the golden structure."

"What a change of circumstance was here! I was contented with my release from debt, but had Clawbonny restored to me, and was master of all I had ever owned, my earnings and the money invested in the Dawn excepted. This last was irretrievably gone, it was true, but in its place I had the ample legacy of John Wallingford as a compensation. The legacy consisted of a large sum in the three per cent, which then sold at about sixty, but were subsequently paid off at par, of good bank and insurance stocks, bonds and mortgages, and a valuable and productive real property in the western part of the State, with several buildings in town. In a word, I was even richer than I was, and no longer considered myself as one living on his generosity. It is not difficult to believe I was made extremely happy by this news, and I looked to Lucy for sympathy. As for the dear girl herself, I do believe she felt anything but pleasure, at this new accession of riches; for she had a deep satisfaction in thinking that she had not only virtually released me from debt, but had Clawbonny restored to me, and was master of all I had ever owned, my earnings and the money invested in the Dawn excepted. This last was irretrievably gone, it was true, but in its place I had the ample legacy of John Wallingford as a compensation. The legacy consisted of a large sum in the three per cent, which then sold at about sixty, but were subsequently paid off at par, of good bank and insurance stocks, bonds and mortgages, and a valuable and productive real property in the western part of the State, with several buildings in town. In a word, I was even richer than I was, and no longer considered myself as one living on his generosity. It is not difficult to believe I was made extremely happy by this news, and I looked to Lucy for sympathy. 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