

EXCERPT FROM "THE HOOPLES OF HOOPLES CREEK"

The next night Elinor was wakened by her son Bill. His father had sent him to warn her that Wilkinson had now landed on the Canadian shore a few miles above and was preparing to descend the rapids. He said that John wanted her to take the children back to Henry's out of harm's way, as anything might happen at any moment. Bill couldn't linger as he had to return quickly to his detachment.

Elinor got the children up and explained her plan to save their livestock from being butchered and eaten by the invading army. They set forth at once and a strange procession they made in the moonlight as they followed the winding trail through the forest. In front was Isaiah driving the brood sow ahead of him with a stick. Next came Charlie leading the cow followed by little Susie with the rooster tightly clasped in her chubby arms. Behind her were Kate and Elinor with two hens each.

As they approached the Second Concession they realized that something unusual must be taking place. Although it was midnight the darkness was alive with sounds: dogs barking, cocks crowing and voices calling, while over the road hung a thick cloud of dust.

Henry's Elizabeth and her brother David were in their yard fully dressed as if it were daytime. They helped to put the animals in the barn telling with some excitement as they did so what had been happening. The Militia, it seems, had been up and down the road asking for teams and wagons to move the government supplies at Cornwall inland five miles or so to safety. They needed 150 wagons for the job and twelve-year-old Mike had just driven off with their team to join the cavalcade.

Mary met them at the full of the latest news. The word was that a second American general named Brown had now crossed the river with another 3,000 men and, of all things a troop of cavalry. These mounted troops could move so fast that even Cornwall was no longer safe. The women talked for a while and then Elinor asked Mary to keep the children for her while she and Kate went back to the Front. She said she feared the invaders would burn the house if they found it empty.

When Elinor and Kate reached the cabin they were startled to see dark shapes moving about near the creek and to hear strange thudding noises. They stood still, horrified. Had the enemy already arrived? Then Elinor recognized the sound of wood on wood for what it was; their own men destroying the bridge to delay the American advance.

She put a lighted candle in the window and soon John came up to the house, distressed to find his wife in the danger zone. She explained why she was there and he said no more except to warn her to stay indoors for there was going to be a battle. The Militia, made up of men from both Stormont and Glengarry, 1,300 strong under Major Dennis, were making a stand as the creek, lying in ambush on the east bank to surprise Brown's cavalry.

The two anxious women found it difficult waiting in the empty house. Dawn came, and daylight, and midmorning but still nothing happened. When they looked across the creek they could hardly believe that the men were really hiding there behind the bushes. To pass the time they made bandages out of whatever cloth they could find in the house.

"There they are!"

The American dragoons came streaming down the King's Road from the west, their plumed brass helmets shining in the sun, their white trousers showing up strongly against the horses' flanks.

Suddenly the east bank of the creek exploded in a wall of fire and the foremost horses reared, screaming and pawing the air. Horses fell rolling on their riders. Riders fell and their horses turned and galloped back the way they had come throwing those behind into confusion. Then the American infantry arrived in a mass, stopping only to fire across the creek where the smoke was rising. There seemed to be thousands of bluecoats surrounding the house and all firing at the east bank which twice more broke out in flame.

There was a heavy knocking at the door and Elinor, frightened though she was, dared not refuse to answer it. An American officer spoke to her, civilly enough. Could he search the house for firearms please? Finding none, he warned her to stay away from the windows for they were setting up two cannon right outside.

O dear God, cannon to shoot her John! She stood frozen with horror, her hand over her mouth. The din outside and the smoke and confusion were appalling. A blast shook the house and the window panes fell inward a heap of splintered glass. Another blast and another. There was steady musketry too, but by whom and at whom it was now impossible to see.

Henry's boy Jake came in through the woodshed. Had she anything for bandages? Peter Eamer was wounded and bleeding to death behind the barn. They gladly gave him the bandages and watched him crawl back across the field between withered cornstalks.

Another blast. The women put their hands over their ears. Elinor shut her eyes and prayed. The next thing she knew Kate was shaking her. "They're going," she said. "It's over." Sure enough all the shooting had ceased, the cannon were being dismantled and the Americans were carrying their wounded to the river and placing them in boats.

They waited until the last American dragoon had found a way over the creek and straggled out of sight along the portage trail to Cornwall and then they went out to reconnoitre, terrified of what they might find.

First they looked behind the barn for Peter Eamer expecting to find him lying there dead. He wasn't there at all, only a few blood soaked bandages showed where he had been. Next they crossed the creek and searched. They found nothing. They recrossed the creek and started up the slope towards the cabin.

"What is that?" Kate grabbed Elinor's arm and the two women stood still listening intently. Then Elinor heard it too, a low moaning sound from somewhere near the fence.

Cautiously they went over to investigate. And that was where they found him, an American soldier desperately wounded, wedged between the sunflower stalks and the stump fence. The sky was now overcast and a heavy rain began to fall so they improvised a stretcher and carried the man into the house where they could nurse him.

Now the eerie silence and emptiness were as hard to bear as they had been before the fighting and Elinor's heart was filled with dread. Where were the Canadians? And what were their casualties? Was her John wounded or John Junior or George or Bill and lying helpless somewhere behind a bush? It looked as if the Americans had won the battle but there was no way of knowing.

At dusk Mary came out to the Front to bring them the news. All their Stormont men were safe, not a single death among them and the only two wounded were Peter Eamer and Finlay Munro who were both recovering.

Peter
EAMER →

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