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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CAESAR RODNEY'S RIDE ***

DRAMATIC HOURS IN REVOLUTIONARY HISTORY

Caesar Rodney's Ride

BY

HENRY FISK CARLTON

Edited by **CLAIRE T. ZYVE, Ph.D.**
Fox Meadow School, Scarsdale, New York

**BUREAU OF PUBLICATIONS
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HOW TO BE A GOOD RADIO ACTOR

The play in this book has actually been produced on the radio. Possibly you have listened to this one when you tuned in at home. The persons whose voices you heard as you listened, looked just as they did when they left their homes to go to the studio, although they were taking the parts of men and women who lived long ago and who wore costumes very different from the ones we wear today.

The persons whose voices you heard stood close together around the microphone, each one reading from a copy of the play in his hand. Since they could not be seen, they did not act parts as in other plays, but tried to make their voices show how they felt.

When you give these plays you will not need costumes and you will not need scenery, although you can easily arrange a broadcasting studio if you wish. You will not need to memorize your parts; in fact, it will not be like a real radio broadcast if you do so, and, furthermore, you will not want to, since you will each have a copy of the book in your hands. All you will need to do is to remember that you are taking the part of a radio actor, that you are to read your speeches very distinctly, and that by your voice you will make your audience understand how you feel. In this way you will have the fun of living through some of the great moments of history.

HOW TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS IN THE PLAY

There are some directions in this play which may be new to you, but these are necessary, for you are now in a radio broadcasting studio, talking in front of a microphone. The word [*in*] means that the character is standing close to the microphone, while [*off*] indicates that he is farther away, so that his voice sounds faint. When the directions [*off, coming in*] are given, the person speaking is away from the microphone at first but gradually comes closer. The words [*mob*] or [*crowd noise*] you will understand mean the sound of many people talking in the distance.

Both the English and the dialect used help make the characters live, so the speeches have been written in the way in which these men and women would talk. This means that sometimes the character may use what seems to you unusual English. The punctuation helps, too, to make the speeches sound like real conversation; for example, you will find that a dash is often used to show that a character is talking very excitedly.

CAESAR RODNEY'S RIDE

[Pg 1]

CAST

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN
JOHN HANCOCK
JOHN RUTLEDGE
THOMAS MCKEEN
URIAH CLARKE
CAESAR RODNEY
PRUDENCE RODNEY
TOM
VOICES

ANNOUNCER

On July 1, 1776, the Continental Congress of the American Colonies faced one of the most important crises this country has ever passed through. Upon what happened that night depended the fate of the resolution before Congress which declared that: "These United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved." This was known as the Lee Resolution, the fate of which was to be decided by one of the most famous rides in history—Caesar Rodney's ride.

Let us begin our story on the morning of July 1, 1776, in the Continental Congress at Philadelphia. For nearly three hours the Lee Resolution has been the subject of furious debate. The members are all excited, anxious, overwrought. The debate has become bitter, for some of the members are unalterably opposed to independence. It is about noon when Dr. Franklin rises to address the Chair:

[Pg 2]

FRANKLIN

Mr. President—

HANCOCK

Dr. Franklin.

FRANKLIN

I have sat uneasily, sir, during the furious debate, hoping that the storm would subside, and the bright sun of reason would shine upon us through the parting clouds. But, sir, I am fearful that the storm is gathering with new fury, and that we may be blown too far from our course to steer safely into harbor. Perhaps, sir, we should end this debate which seems to bid fair to wreck our unity. I move you, sir, that we lay the Lee Resolution on the table.

ALL

No, no, bring it to a vote!
Yes, lay it on the table!
Let's vote on it now!
Have it over with! [*etc.*]

HANCOCK [*sound of gavel*]

Order! Order! Do I hear a second to Dr. Franklin's motion?

VOICE

Second!

HANCOCK

You have heard the motion—are there any remarks?

RUTLEDGE

Mr. President—

HANCOCK

Mr. Rutledge of South Carolina.

RUTLEDGE

I believe, sir, with Dr. Franklin, that the debate has lasted too long; but, sir, I am hopeful that with only a little more delay we may secure unanimous action on the most important question which has ever been before this body. With Dr. Franklin's permission, I suggest an amendment, sir, that the resolution be laid upon the table until tomorrow morning. [*murmurs and comments*]

[Pg 3]

HANCOCK

Does Dr. Franklin accept the amendment?

FRANKLIN

Mr. President, I have only one desire in this matter, and that is to see this body united and of one mind. If in the peace of a quiet July afternoon and the tranquillity of a night's rest we can find that bond which will unite us and hold us together, I say, yes—I accept Mr. Rutledge's amendment. Let us vote upon the Lee Resolution tomorrow morning.

VOICE

But the first thing tomorrow morning!

FRANKLIN

Yes—the first thing tomorrow morning. [*murmurs of assent*]

HANCOCK [*sound of gavel*]

You have heard the motion. Are there any further remarks?

ALL

Question! Question! Question!

HANCOCK

Those favoring?

ALL

Aye—aye—aye—

HANCOCK

Contrary minded?—Carried! [*sound of gavel*]

[Pg 4]

RUTLEDGE

And now, sir, I move we adjourn until nine o'clock tomorrow morning.

VOICE

Second!

HANCOCK

Before putting Mr. Rutledge's motion to adjourn, I wish to caution all the members to the greatest secrecy. Whatever the outcome of our deliberation, we can only cause harm to ourselves and to our country by divulging what has been done here. The motion to adjourn is before the Congress. Those favoring?

ALL

Aye—aye—aye—

HANCOCK

Contrary minded?—Carried! [*sound of gavel*] Congress is adjourned until nine o'clock tomorrow morning.

ALL [*confusion and noise*]

It can't be done!

It's useless!

We can never get them to vote with us!

We must be united!

We can never unite on independence!
We must bring this thing about!
Will you join me?
We have no power to vote. [*etc.*]

FRANKLIN

Oh, Mr. Rutledge—

RUTLEDGE [*off*]

Yes, Dr. Franklin?

FRANKLIN

Please—may I speak to you?

[Pg 5]

RUTLEDGE [*coming in*]

Of course, Doctor—what is it?

FRANKLIN

Sit down here, my boy.

RUTLEDGE

Thank you.

FRANKLIN

Do you think you can swing the South Carolina delegation for independence?

RUTLEDGE

I don't know, Dr. Franklin, but I've invited them to my lodging to dine with me and talk over the question.

FRANKLIN

Good, good! Often an excellent meal and a taste of fine wine carry more conviction than hours of argument. As I see it now, we must swing South Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Delaware into line before tomorrow morning.

RUTLEDGE

Count on me for South Carolina.

FRANKLIN

And I'll take care of Pennsylvania. I think I'll try your strategy—I'll invite the delegation to dinner.

RUTLEDGE

Then that leaves Delaware.

FRANKLIN

I wonder if McKeen of Delaware, who favors independence—

RUTLEDGE

Yes, I know.

[Pg 6]

FRANKLIN [*going on*]

—can't swing Dr. Reed in the same way.

RUTLEDGE

Perhaps.

FRANKLIN

Oh, there's McKeen now. Call him over here—will you, Rutledge?

RUTLEDGE

Of course. [*calling*] Oh, Mr. McKeen! Mr. McKeen!

MCKEEN [*off*]

Yes?

RUTLEDGE

Come over here a moment—will you, please?

MCKEEN

Why, certainly. [*coming in*] Well, Dr. Franklin, we had a stormy session this morning.

FRANKLIN

All that will be forgotten—

MCKEEN

In victory.

FRANKLIN

If only we can make our victory complete.

MCKEEN

True.

FRANKLIN

What chance is there for Delaware to join us?

MCKEEN

None, I'm afraid. Dr. Reed and I are the only delegates here—and he is as unalterably opposed to independence as I am in favor of it. The vote of Delaware won't count.

[Pg 7]

FRANKLIN

What about getting another favoring delegate here by tomorrow? Could you do that?

MCKEEN

Well, Doctor, I'm afraid it's out of the question. Caesar Rodney favors the resolution, I know, but he's at home in Dover, Delaware.

FRANKLIN

Send a postrider for him!

MCKEEN

It's eighty miles.

FRANKLIN

Well, that's not impossible. We have until nine o'clock tomorrow morning—it's now—let's see—just a little after twelve—that's nearly twenty-one hours.

MCKEEN

But Rodney was very ill when he went home last week.

FRANKLIN

Perhaps he's better by now. Write him a letter—send it by the postrider—urge upon him the enormous importance of his getting here by tomorrow morning.

MCKEEN

Well, I can try it.

FRANKLIN

Do, Mr. McKeen, for we must have unanimous action on this question! We must hang together on this, or we'll all hang separately!

MCKEEN

All right, sir, I'll go to the postrider's at once! Good day.

FRANKLIN

Good day. And let us pray that Rodney gets here!

[Pg 8]

ANNOUNCER

So McKeen hurried to the postrider's stable. Now the postrider was to the people of Revolutionary days what the telegraph or the telephone is to us today. He carried messages at a very rapid rate, for those days, by changing horses every ten or fifteen miles.

As McKeen came up to the post stable, he saw the stableman sitting on a bench, hard at work cleaning a saddle.

MCKEEN

Good day, sir.

URIAH

Day to ye.

MCKEEN

I want a postrider.

URIAH

Wal', postriders are all out, sir.

MCKEEN

Oh, too bad! When do you expect one back?

URIAH

Dunno fer certain. Mebbe three or four hours—mebbe longer.

MCKEEN

But look here—I can't wait that long—I want one right away!

URIAH

I'm right sorry, sir, but thar ain't nawthin' I kin do about et. Come back this evenin' and I kin hev a man fer ye, but not before.

MCKEEN

But, look here, my man—

[Pg 9]

URIAH

My name's Uriah Clarke—at yer service.

MCKEEN

All right, Mr. Clarke, I've got to have a postrider to carry a very important message to Dover, Delaware, to get a man back here from Dover by nine o'clock tomorrow morning.

URIAH

Dover, Delaware, and back?

MCKEEN

Yes, by nine tomorrow morning!

URIAH

Why, sir, it's nigh onto eighty mile to Delaware.

MCKEEN

I know it.

URIAH

Eighty mile thar and eighty mile back—why, pshaw, sir, we couldn't do that under a whole day—even ef we hed a rider to send out right now—which we ain't.

MCKEEN

Twenty-five pounds if you'll do it!

URIAH

But how kin we? Ain't I jest told ye we ain't got no riders?

MCKEEN

Why can't you go?

URIAH

Law, sir, I ain't rode a trip like that fer years. It 'ud more than likely kill me.

MCKEEN

Fifty pounds if you'll do it!

[Pg 10]

URIAH

No, sir!

MCKEEN

Name your own sum.

URIAH

Ye couldn't pay me, sir—not fer thet ride. I know thet road like a book—bad, slow, hard on hoss flesh when ye take it easy. I'd stave up half my hosses—not to mention myself, sir, and I hev a mind fer myself, too.

MCKEEN

Change riders—change your horses oftener—but make it you must!

URIAH

Not ef 'twas a matter of life and death, sir.

MCKEEN

It's more than that!

URIAH

Eh? What? What ye talkin' about?

MCKEEN

It's a matter of life and death for a nation—our country!

URIAH

Is et somethin' to do with Congress, sir?

MCKEEN

It is.

URIAH

Wal', sir, I'm a Son of Liberty, and et's my sworn duty to go whar I'm wanted fer liberty, and ef thet's et—

MCKEEN

It is.

[Pg 11]

URIAH

Then I'll go.

MCKEEN

I'll pay your price.

URIAH

Thar won't be no price! I'll git yer man to Philadelphia tomorrow mornin' ef I hev to carry him myself. Who's yer man?

MCKEEN

Caesar Rodney of Dover, Delaware. Here's a letter for him.

URIAH

Caesar Rodney—I'll fetch him!

MCKEEN

Good!

URIAH [*going*]

Hey, Jim! Throw a saddle on thet bay mare! [*orders fade out*]

ANNOUNCER

For our next scene let us look in at the home of Caesar Rodney in Dover, Delaware. It is nearly eight o'clock on the evening of July 1, 1776. Rodney, pale and drawn, with the languid air of a man but recently out of a sick bed, is sitting in an easy chair. Mrs. Rodney is hovering over him with a protecting anxiety—

PRUDENCE

You're sure you feel strong enough to sit up, Caesar?

RODNEY

Yes, yes, Prudence, I'm all right, I tell you.

[Pg 12]

PRUDENCE

You're sure you're not in any pain?

RODNEY

No, no, dear, I'm all right—just weak, that's all.

PRUDENCE

Now, Caesar, you just mustn't overtax your strength—remember this is only the second day you've been out of bed.

RODNEY

Yes, dear.

PRUDENCE

And the physician said you mustn't overdo.

RODNEY

All right, dear. I wonder what's happening in Philadelphia.

PRUDENCE

You must get your mind off Congress. You mustn't worry.

RODNEY

I know, but—what date's today?

PRUDENCE

July first—why?

RODNEY

July first. Why, today the Lee Resolution was to come up for final action! Oh, I'm sorry I wasn't there!

PRUDENCE

What's the Lee Resolution?

RODNEY

It's the most important motion that's come before the Continental Congress in the two years Congress has been sitting.

[Pg 13]

PRUDENCE

What's it about?

RODNEY

Independence.

PRUDENCE

You mean to say they're even considering such a thing?

RODNEY

Of course. It's the only thing left for us. We've got to declare our independence.

PRUDENCE

Well, I'm mighty glad you weren't there today to vote for it.

RODNEY

Why?

PRUDENCE

You'd just have put a rope around your neck.

RODNEY

My dear, I've done that long ago. [*knocking*] See who's at the door, dear.

PRUDENCE

All right. [*knocking*] Yes, yes, I'm coming. [*door opens*]

URIAH [*off*]

Does Caesar Rodney dwell here?

PRUDENCE

Yes, what's wanted?

URIAH

Kin I see him, ma'm?

PRUDENCE

He's just out of a sick bed and not very strong.

[Pg 14]

URIAH

Et's very important, ma'm.

RODNEY [*calling*]

Ask him to come in, Prudence.

PRUDENCE

Well, just a minute—and don't excite him. Right in this way.

URIAH

Be ye Caesar Rodney?

RODNEY

Yes.

URIAH

Here's a letter fer ye.

RODNEY

A letter—where from?

URIAH

Philadelphia. I fetched et all the way since noon today.

RODNEY

Indeed! [*sound of tearing paper*]

PRUDENCE

Now, Caesar, do you think you ought to read that?

RODNEY

Why not?

PRUDENCE

It might be something exciting—something you oughtn't to read—it might upset you—let me read it first!

RODNEY

Oh, nonsense! [*rattle of paper*]

[Pg 15]

PRUDENCE

I do wish people could leave a sick man alone—always bothering you!

RODNEY

Quiet! What's this—what's this? They haven't voted on the Lee Resolution yet! They need me! Prudence, my riding boots!

PRUDENCE

Your riding boots! Have you gone crazy, Caesar?

RODNEY

Don't stand and argue! Please get my boots—there isn't a moment to lose! I've got to be in Philadelphia before nine o'clock tomorrow morning!

PRUDENCE

You can't go! It'll kill you!

RODNEY

Where's my riding coat? Hurry up—get my boots!

PRUDENCE

You shan't go—I won't let you!

RODNEY

I've got to go—I'm needed. If you won't get the boots, I will!

PRUDENCE

Oh, please, sir, whoever you are—

URIAH

I'm Uriah Clarke, ma'm—at yer service.

PRUDENCE

Please, please, don't let him go! He can't stand it—he's too weak. He's been terribly ill—the physician told him he must rest—he could never stand a trip like that!

[Pg 16]

URIAH

But, ma'm, he's got to git thar. And I give my word that I'd hev him thar tomorrow mornin'.

PRUDENCE

Your word—what's your word to a man's life!

URIAH

What's a man's life to the life of his country!

RODNEY [*coming in*]

All right, I'm ready—let's start!

PRUDENCE

Caesar!

RODNEY

Good-bye, Prudence.

PRUDENCE

If I can't persuade you to give up this mad—

RODNEY

You can't, my dear—

PRUDENCE

Good-bye, and God be with you. [*door opens*]

URIAH

Here ye be, sir—this is yer hoss.

RODNEY

You'll have to give me a hand up—I'm a little weak.

URIAH

All right, sir. [*sound of mounting horses*] Ready?

RODNEY

Ready!

URIAH

Then we're off. [*horses' hoofs, Prudence's fading "Good-bye, good-bye!"*]

[Pg 17]

ANNOUNCER

And so out into the July night rode Caesar Rodney and the postrider, bound for Philadelphia eighty miles away—an hour—two hours—past the first remount station—it is nearing eleven o'clock. [*sound of horses' hoofs and thunder*]

RODNEY

Is that thunder?

URIAH

Cal'ate thet's what 'tis.

RODNEY

I hope it doesn't rain.

URIAH

'Twon't help us none ef et does.

RODNEY

I don't see how we can ever make it if it starts raining.

URIAH

We got to make et—rain or no rain. I give my word of honor to Mr. McKeen. Git along, boy—tch—tch.

RODNEY

It's sprinkling.

URIAH

I felt et. [*another peal of thunder closer*] [*sound of rain and wind*]

RODNEY

I guess it's on us.

URIAH

Here—draw up yer hoss!

RODNEY

What for?

[Pg 18]

URIAH

Never mind—do what I say! Whoa, boy, whoa! Here, put on my greatcoat!

RODNEY

Oh, no, no!

URIAH

Ye need et. Do as I say. Ye been ill, and I ain't a-goin' to hev ye catchin' yer death o' cold—here ye be—now put et on.

RODNEY [*giving in*]

But—but what will you do—Uriah?

URIAH

I'm rugged—I don't need et. [*exchanging coat*]

RODNEY

Really, you oughtn't to do this.

URIAH

I'm a-doin' et—thar ye be! [*another clap of thunder and storm noises*] She's a-comin' down now! Come on, follow me! Giddap, boy!

RODNEY

Giddap! [*sound of horses' hoofs*]

ANNOUNCER

And on into the storm they rode. Another hour—another change of horses. It is after midnight and they come upon a stretch of good road—

URIAH

Here we be on the turnpike.

RODNEY

Is that as far as we've got?

[Pg 19]

URIAH

It's nigh onto thirty mile.

RODNEY

But we've got fifty miles more! Can we make it?

URIAH

We got to make et. How ye feelin'?

RODNEY

I guess I'll—hold out.

URIAH

Then let's step along a mite and make up some of thet time we lost in the storm.

RODNEY

All right. Tch—tch—come along.

URIAH

Giddap, boy! [*beat of horses' hoofs increases*] [*to himself*] Fifty mile. We got to make et, boy—we got to make et—come on—tch—tch—come on—and don't ye make a misstep.

RODNEY [*off a bit*]

Oh—whoa! Ow! [*thud of falling body, a groan*]

URIAH

Whoa, boy! Hey! What's the matter? What's happened?

RODNEY [*off*]

Quick! Catch the horse—I'm off.

URIAH

Hey! Whoa, thar—whoa, thar—stand still thar, boy! Thar—I got ye! [*calling*] Where are ye, Mr. Rodney? What happened? Be ye hurt?

RODNEY

No—I—I guess I'm all right.

[Pg 20]

URIAH

How'd he throw ye?

RODNEY [*in*]

I don't know—the saddle slipped—then it came clear off and I came with it.

URIAH

Here—hold the hosses, will ye—let me see thet saddle! Ah-ha!—Girth broken!

RODNEY

Can you fix it?

URIAH

Ain't got time.

RODNEY

I'm afraid I can't—can't keep a seat bareback.

URIAH

Here—you climb on my hoss—I'll take your'n.

RODNEY

But—

URIAH

Not another word—climb aboard, thar. [*sound of getting Rodney on horse*] All right, boy, stand still. Thar we be! Go along with ye!

BOTH

Tch—tch—giddap! [*sound of horses' hoofs*]

ANNOUNCER

And now five miles farther into the next remount station. Rodney and Uriah clatter up to the stable and find the stable closed, with everything dark.

[Pg 21]

URIAH

Whoa, boy! Hm—cal'ate they've all gone to bed. Wal', we'll fetch 'em out. Hold the hosses a minute!

RODNEY

All right.

URIAH

I'll git that lazy stableman out! Here's where he lives. Hey! Wake up! [*knocking*]

Wake up—come on out here. [*knocking*] Come on—we want a pair of hosses—wake up thar.

TOM [*off*]

Hey—what's goin' on out there? What do ye want?

URIAH

We want some hosses—come on out. [*door opens*]

TOM

Who is et?

URIAH

Et's Uriah Clarke of Philadelphia.

TOM

Oh, hello, Uriah. Kinda late fer ye to be out, ain't et?

URIAH

Oh, hello, Tom. I'm in a big hurry—come on—saddle me a couple of yer best hosses!

TOM

Pshaw now, I'm right put out.

URIAH

Eh? What the trouble?

TOM

I let my last hoss go not two hour ago.

[Pg 22]

URIAH

Yer last hoss?

TOM

Yes, sir—my last fresh one.

URIAH

Wal', we've got to have two hosses. Give us what ye got.

TOM

There's nothin' in the stable but two hosses that come in so tuckered out they couldn't hardly eat their corn—ye'll hev to go on with the hosses ye got—less'n ye want to wait until mornin'.

URIAH

We got to be in Philadelphia by mornin'.

TOM

Philadelphia? Ye'll never make et.

URIAH

We got to—I give my word. If ye can't give me a hoss, let me hev a saddle. We broke a saddle girth.

TOM

All right, Uriah—I'll git ye a saddle! Come on—but ye'll never make Philadelphia by mornin'! Not with the roads the way they be!

URIAH

We got to make et.

TOM

Here—git this door open! [*sound of opening door*] There's a saddle fer ye.

URIAH

Come on—give me a hand—git et on this hoss! [*sound of putting saddle on*]

[Pg 23]

TOM

There ye be!

URIAH

All right, Mr. Rodney. Let me give ye a hand up. How ye feelin'?

RODNEY

I guess—I'll make it.

URIAH

Thar! Good-bye, Tom.

TOM

Good-bye—good luck.

URIAH

Tch—tch—giddap! [*sound of horses' hoofs*]

TOM [*off—fading*]

I'll bet ye a new hat ye don't make Philadelphia!

URIAH [*yelling back*]

I'll bet ye a hat and a new pair o' boots—come on, boy! [*sound of horses' hoofs*]

ANNOUNCER

And now two hours later Rodney is riding ahead when his horse stops suddenly—

URIAH [*calling*]

What's the matter?

RODNEY

Listen—[*sound of rushing water*]

URIAH

Pshaw now! Thet brook's kinda doin' business, ain't et?

RODNEY

The storm has turned it into a torrent.

[Pg 24]

URIAH

Wal', we got to git across!

RODNEY

How?

URIAH

Let the hosses swim!

RODNEY

All right.

URIAH

You drive in fu'st! I'll be right behind ye.

RODNEY

Tch—tch—giddap!

URIAH

Lean way over his neck—give him his head!

RODNEY

Tch—tch—get in there, boy! Go on!

URIAH

What's the matter? Is he skittish of the water?

RODNEY

Get in there—go on! He won't go in, Uriah.

URIAH

Here—let me hev the reins. I'll lead him in with my hoss.

RODNEY

Here you are.

URIAH

Come on, boy—come on in—'tain't goin' ter hurt ye! Come on—giddap! [*sound of splashing water—roar of stream rises*]

[Pg 25]

URIAH

Go on—swim fer et! Go et, boy! Hold on tight, Mr. Rodney! Go et, boy—go et! [*sound of water recedes a little—we hear horses' hoofs on solid ground*]

URIAH

Wal'! Thar we be! Made et slicker'n a greased griddle! You all right, Mr. Rodney?

RODNEY

I'm still here.

URIAH

Mite wet?

RODNEY

I've been dryer.

URIAH

All right, take yer reins—we'll ride fast to keep warm. You ready?

RODNEY

All ready.

URIAH

Tch—tch—giddap! Come on, boy!

ANNOUNCER

And now two hours later just as the first streaks of dawn begin to brighten the eastern sky our two riders are pushing their horses over a piece of rough, stony road. Suddenly Uriah pulls up his horse—

URIAH

Whoa, thar, boy! Ah, you've done et now!

RODNEY [*off a little*]

Whoa! What's happened now, Uriah?

[Pg 26]

URIAH

Wal', blamed ef I didn't think thet everything had happened to us thet could happen!

RODNEY [*coming in*]

What's wrong now? Why are you dismounting?

URIAH

This blamed hoss has pulled up lame.

RODNEY

Oh, too bad!

URIAH

Mebbe he's jest got a stone in his shoe—I'll take a look! Here, boy—lift up yer foot! Come on—let

me look at et! Thar! No, 'tain't a stone.

RODNEY

Can't he carry you any farther?

URIAH

No. He can't hardly hobble. I cal'ate ye better go on without me, Mr. Rodney, while I lead this hoss into the next remount station.

RODNEY

I—I'm a little afraid to try it alone.

URIAH

Oh, ye kin make et all right—the hosses know the road.

RODNEY

I know—the horses can make it—but I don't know that I can.

URIAH

Gittin' wore out?

RODNEY

I'm afraid so.

[Pg 27]

URIAH

Wal', ye got to git to Philadelphia—I give my word.

RODNEY

All right—I'll go on—I'll try to make it.

URIAH

Look here—et's six or seven mile to the next remount station—I tell ye what I'll do—I'll tie this lame hoss here—and thet hoss of your'n will hev to carry double thet far!

RODNEY

I guess that's the best thing.

URIAH

Let me hev thet stirrup—

RODNEY

You all ready?

URIAH

Let him go.

RODNEY

Tch—tch—giddap! [*sound of horses' hoofs*]

ANNOUNCER

And now let us leave the two riders and their heroic effort against enormous odds to reach Philadelphia in time to make the decision for independence unanimous. Our next scene is on the steps of the State House, the morning of July 2, 1776. The hour for assembling Congress is drawing near. Thomas McKeen of Delaware is standing on the steps anxiously waiting and watching for Caesar Rodney. Dr. Franklin rides up in his carriage and steps out.

MCKEEN

Good morning, Dr. Franklin.

[Pg 28]

FRANKLIN

Good morning, good morning, my boy. Has Rodney come?

MCKEEN

Not yet. I've been waiting for an hour.

FRANKLIN

Oh, I hope he gets here.

MCKEEN

It is a long, hard ride.

FRANKLIN

This morning our action must be unanimous and final! One dissenting colony and we'll be defeated!

MCKEEN

How is it with Pennsylvania?

FRANKLIN

I was able to persuade Dickinson and Morris—we can count on Pennsylvania.

MCKEEN

You must have given them a good dinner, Doctor.

FRANKLIN

And good advice. [*chuckles*] Oh, here comes Rutledge.

MCKEEN

I hope he's convinced his colleagues from South Carolina.

FRANKLIN

Good morning, Mr. Rutledge.

RUTLEDGE

Good morning, Doctor—good morning, McKeen.

FRANKLIN

I trust, Mr. Rutledge, your dinner of last evening was as productive of good results as mine.

[Pg 29]

RUTLEDGE

You can count on South Carolina.

FRANKLIN

Great news, sir!

MCKEEN

Good!

RUTLEDGE

The members are beginning to assemble.

ALL [*growing from one voice to many*]

Good morning.

How do you do, Doctor?

Good morning, Mr. McKeen.

What news this morning?

Has Rodney come?

How will Pennsylvania vote, Doctor?

Good morning, Mr. Hancock.

Good morning, Dr. Franklin. A fine day, isn't it?

How is it with New Hampshire?

New Hampshire is unanimous, sir.

Good morning, gentlemen.

The hour of assembling is nearly here.

Shall we go in, gentlemen?

How do you do, Dr. Franklin?

Has New York been heard from?

Can we swing Delaware, Mr. McKeen?

Well, it's nearly nine o'clock.

There's no question about it, Mr. Livingston.

No, no, I don't believe we can go so far.

Yes, but we have no alternative. [*etc.*]

[*this thins out but does not stop entirely*]

VOICE [*calling*]

Come on, gentlemen, we must go in! It's nine o'clock. The session will open in a moment.

[Pg 30]

MCKEEN

Doctor, ask the members to delay—hold them a few minutes—don't let a quorum assemble.

FRANKLIN

Yes, yes! [*louder*] Gentlemen, just a moment.

ALL

Yes, Doctor, what is it?
What do you want, Dr. Franklin? [*etc.*]

FRANKLIN

Wait—wait a moment—don't go in just yet—come—do you mind standing here with us—no—perhaps—Mr. Adams, take several members and go up Market Street!

VOICE

Yes, certainly, Doctor—why?

FRANKLIN

Don't ask me why! We must delay the opening of the meeting. Come back in a quarter of an hour!

VOICE

Of course, sir.

FRANKLIN

And Livingston, keep the members here on the steps in conversation—don't let them go in.

VOICE

Certainly, Doctor.

FRANKLIN

Oh, Jefferson, you are always too prompt! My boy, be late this morning—stroll about the Square! Take some of your friends with you—sh—don't ask me why—I might incriminate myself! It's a beautiful morning for a stroll—you need the air, my boy—you need— [*sound of horses' hoofs off, growing louder*]

[Pg 31]

MCKEEN

Oh, Doctor, look!

FRANKLIN

Eh? What?

MCKEEN

Two horsemen coming up Market Street!

FRANKLIN

Is it by any chance—

MCKEEN

Yes, yes, it's Rodney—Rodney and the postrider—they're coming!

FRANKLIN

Good, good! This is a glorious day!

ALL

Here comes Rodney of Delaware!
Good! That swings Delaware into line!
It looks like unanimous action!
Rodney, Rodney—good work!
[*horses' hoofs close, and stop*]

URIAH [*calling*]

Wal', here we be, Mr. McKeen.

MCKEEN

Good! You're just in time!

RODNEY

They haven't voted yet?

MCKEEN

No, no, the session is just assembling. Come, dismount!

You'll have to give me a hand.

URIAH

Here—I'll help ye. [*sound of dismounting*]

RODNEY

I—I can hardly stand.

FRANKLIN

Here, Rodney, take my arm—I seldom have a chance to support young and vigorous men now, but I insist on this!

RODNEY

Thank you, Doctor.

FRANKLIN

Come—let me lead you in a triumphant entry!

RODNEY

I'm glad I got here in time.

FRANKLIN

My congratulations, Rodney—you've ridden to a great victory! Before another hour is passed a new nation will be born! [*members cheer*]

MCKEEN

Mr. Clarke, I want to thank you. I was almost afraid you wouldn't get him here in time.

URIAH

Why, pshaw, Mr. McKeen, I give ye my word, didn't I? I had to git him here!

ANNOUNCER

And so Rodney, with his mud-spattered clothes, booted and spurred as he had ridden, went into the meeting of Congress and secured the adherence of Delaware to the Lee Resolution. When Congress was called to order and the vote taken, every Colony voted for independence, and, as New York did not vote at all, there was not a dissenting voice in the victory!

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CAESAR RODNEY'S RIDE ***

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