

***FREDERICK
WHITTAKER***



***RUBY ROLAND,
THE GIRL SPY;
OR, SIMON
KENTON'S
PROTEGE***

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Frederick Whittaker

Ruby Roland, the Girl Spy; or, Simon Kenton's Protege

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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CHAPTER I. THE RANGER'S RUSE.

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A tall, muscular young fellow, dressed in hunter garb, came silently out of the woods from the north side of the Kentucky river, about a hundred years ago, and pausing by the bole of a gigantic beech tree, scanned the opposite shore with keen, silent attention.

There was a peculiar air of resolute fearless deviltry in the face of the young hunter, coupled with the piercing, roving glances of his intensely black eyes, that showed he was no novice to the trade of hunter and scout. He was in the midst of the hunting-grounds of Shawnee and Delaware, miles away from the then infant settlement of Boonesborough; and he was all alone with his rifle and knife, to take care of himself.

The look of his face abundantly evinced that he felt quite equal to the task, and only the acquired caution of his craft kept him from wading boldly into the river at once.

But as it was, he had learned the lesson of the successful Indian-slayer by hard experience. Therefore, now, it was with a long, deep scrutiny that he scanned the opposite banks, across the first open piece of landscape he had come on in a day's travel. On the opposite bank all was still as death, save for the occasional note of a bird. It was late in May and the forest was all blinded with its canopy of leaves, while game was distant and hiding in the coverts.

As the young hunter looked, a black squirrel, shyest of all its kind, ran out on a limb of a tree on the other side of the

river, and stood, whisking its tail and chattering, before his eyes, above the stream.

“Wal,” muttered the young man, as he stepped boldly out, “thar kurn’t be much to be skeered on when *you’re* thar, my little kuss. Go ahead, Simon.”

Without further ado he descended the bank, deep, brown, and bare, for some sixty feet, and then ran quickly across a bed of sand into the shallow stream.

The Kentucky river, in winter a broad and powerful stream, had dwindled under the summer heats to a rivulet not more than two hundred feet across, running over a sandy rocky bed walled in by high banks.

Into this stream waded the hunter, and soon found himself midway between the banks and up to his armpits in water. He was obliged to lift up rifle and powder-horn over his head as he waded along, and every now and then he would stop to brace himself against the current, and glance anxiously up and down either side of the river, as if anticipating the presence of enemies, ready to take him at advantage.

At last the water began to sink below his arms; and slowly he emerged from the river, strode through the shallows, and stood on the opposite shore.

“By the holy poker!” he muttered, as he climbed the further bank, “that ar’s a bad scrape fur to ketch a kuss in. You’d best git to cover right smartly, Simon, ef you’re the spy you used to was. *Git!*”

And, as he spoke, he hurried up the bank into the woods, and threw himself down under a tree, completely hidden from sight. With the hunter’s instinct, he lay still as death,

listening intently for sounds. The presence of the squirrel had assured him of the quiet of things before, or he would not have ventured where he did. But, the hunter knew too well that a very few minutes were able to change the whole current of events around him, and that the chance passing of a single Indian might render his own situation very perilous.

It was therefore with the keenest attention that he looked and listened in the woods all round, before going further.

Presently came the sweet pipe of a red-bird from a tree not far off, and the hunter muttered:

“All right on *that* side.”

He knew the note, as belonging to one of the most wary of birds. Then several other birds chirped at intervals, and he heard the tiny chatter of squirrels all round him.

“Simon, you blamed ornary kuss, I reckon you kin git,” said the hunter deliberately, and he rose to his feet.

Hardly had he done so, when he sunk down again as if shot, for the loud snap of a dry stick sounded plainly in the air, and it came from the further bank of the river.

“Follered, by the holy poker!” he ejaculated, in a low tone. “Now, who the Old Scratch kin that be?”

As he spoke he threw himself down behind the tree, and, bringing all his intelligence to bear on the north bank, which he had just left, awaited the advance of the stranger.

There was no more noise now. The other, whoever he was, had evidently been startled by his own carelessness. Apart from the snapping of that single stick, there was no further sign of human presence on the north bank.

The man on the south bank lay there watching silently and eagerly, but saw nothing. The usual noises of the woods kept on around him, and he could see squirrels moving on the other side of the river.

There was a small deserted space on either side of him, and a patch of the same breadth on the opposite side that showed him that the wild animals were shy of human creatures, and revealed to him the locality of his enemy.

In those two places all were still, and, as unerringly as if he had seen the strange hunter, Simon guessed that the latter had come to the identical tree by which himself had first scanned the river.

“And by the holy poker, ef that’s so, the kuss kin see my trail,” he grumbled, half aloud. “Simon, Simon, you orter be ashamed of yourself fur leavin’ them huff-tracks in the mud, when ye mout ‘a’ jumped from stone to stone.”

Even while he grumbled, his eyes were fixed on the great beech tree, and the heavy Kentucky rifle he carried was trained on its bole, while he watched with intense gaze for a motion of the foe he guessed to be there.

Suddenly he shifted his gaze and aim to a point on one side of the tree, and fired at something moving there.

Leaping to one side out of the smoke, he distinctly beheld the splinters of bark fly where his bullet struck, and the next moment felt the stinging whiz of a bullet, that grazed his own side, as an answering puff of white smoke came *from the other side of the tree*, followed by the sharp crack of a rifle. The bullet stung him sharply, and he dropped to the earth, catching a glimpse of the vanishing

figure of a man on the other side of the river, flitting from tree to tree.

“By the holy poker, that’s a right smart kuss, whoever he is,” muttered Simon, ruefully, as he rubbed his side, “Who’d ‘a’ thunk he’d ‘a’ fooled me as quick as that, and with sich an old trick. By the holy poker, Simon, you’d better go and soak your head ef you ain’t smarter than that kuss. But, I’ll get even with him. Darn me ef he shall fool me ag’in like that. No, sir. Mister stranger, be you white or red, runnygade or Shawnee, I’ll hev your skulp fur that ar’ shot, or my name ain’t Simon Kenton.”

And the renowned ranger darted from tree to tree on his passage up the river, following the shadowy form of his antagonist, as he caught occasional glimpses of it, and both tending toward a spot a mile further up the stream, where a wooded island reduced the danger of crossing to a less degree.

The two enemies raced for that island, loading as they ran.



CHAPTER II. THE ISLAND.

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In ten minutes more, Kenton reached a bend of the river, in the midst of which stood the little wooded island at which he thought his foe would be likely to try to cross. At that turn he made a discovery which caused him to stop with a gratified chuckle.

He was on the inside of the curve, and the position of the island was such that he commanded the whole of the further side. No human being could cross there by daylight without being seen by an observer at the center of the curve.

Besides this, he could see the further bank of the river beyond for nearly two miles, and his enemy would be obliged to make a large *detour* if he expected to cross at all. That he wished to cross, the hunter felt certain, but he had totally gone out of sight now, and the opposite shore looked as silent and deserted as when Kenton first entered the river.

“By the holy poker, I’ve got ye, middlin’ sure,” muttered the ranger, gleefully. “Ef ye try to move off, I’m arter ye, like a painter arter a young shoat. Ef ye stay thar, durn me ef I kurn’t wait as long as you kin. So now.”

He sheltered himself under a great spreading tree and lay there watching the opposite shore. He knew well enough that his enemy had not gone thence. The practiced senses of the hunter would have detected a moving figure, however it tried to shelter itself among the trees; and moreover, *the*

scouts of nature, the free wild creatures of the forest, served by their actions to indicate the whereabouts of each foe to the other, well used as both were to reading the open book of nature.

From various indications, Kenton came to the conclusion that his enemy was lying down behind the gnarled roots of a huge old oak at the edge of the bank opposite the end of the island; and Kenton was right.

There behind that tree lay his wily foe, watching the very tree at which Simon was posted. As far as woodcraft went, it was diamond cut diamond with the two.

Presently Simon chuckled to himself, as a thought struck him.

“Now ef that ar’s a Shawnee hunter, mebbe I kin fool him yit. He don’t know who the Old Scratch I am, and ef I give a Shawnee signal mebbe he’ll show.”

The hunter rose to his feet behind the tree, and shouted the Shawnee war-cry with the full force of his lungs.

It was instantly answered from the other side of the river, by the peculiar whoop of the Miamis.

In the same instant Simon stuck his cap on the end of his rifle and protruded it from behind his tree.

Hardly had he done so when a bullet whizzed through the cap, with an accuracy of aim that surprised even him.

The ranger stepped from behind the tree, and leveled his rifle at the white puff of smoke on the other side of the river. He saw the form of a man vanish as he fired, and was greeted with a derisive whoop of scorn.

Kenton sunk back to his old position to reload, muttering: “By the holy poker, mister, thur bean’t no discount on you

fur a warrior. Kurn't fool that kuss. He must 'a' seen the cap. That skulp's wuth hav'in'. Reckon it must be old Blackfish or Otter Lifter hisself. No common brave c'u'd be as smart as that."

It certainly seemed as if matters were at a dead lock. Two shots had been fired by Simon Kenton, the best marksman of the border, after Boone, and each had brought nothing but a return as close as his own.

Reckless as the nature of the ranger was, he began to think that he couldn't afford to try any more risks with such a foe. The chances were too evenly balanced. He threw himself down in a place whence he could command a good view of the north bank, and determined to wait. He was well aware that night would surely bring things to a crisis and end the suspense. For darkness he determined to wait, resolved not to give his foe another chance.

For at least an hour all was profoundly still, and not a motion on either bank betrayed the presence of the two wily antagonists. Then Simon Kenton started violently and muttered to himself:

"By the holy poker, what's that?"

There was a distinct rustling of trees and bushes on the little island in the river.

"Is that kuss the devil himself?" queried Simon, wonderingly. "How in the Old Scratch did he get *thar*?"

The sound of rustling increased on the island, and at last the ranger saw a bush move.

Crack went his rifle on the instant.

It was blended with a report from the opposite side of the river, and Kenton saw the white smoke curl up from the very

place whence his foe had not stirred.

But where went *that* bullet?

The question was answered ere asked.

Both foemen had arrived at the island, and a shower of splintered bark and twigs flew up from the midst of the bush at which both marksmen had aimed!

A loud shriek, in the unmistakable tones of *a woman*, rose from the island, and the rustling of bushes became violent, as some one fell back into cover.

Then all was still again.

Simon rubbed his eyes. For a moment he was so bewildered that he forgot to reload his rifle.

“By the holy poker, it’s a gal on the island, and we must ‘a’ nigh shot her!” he ejaculated, aloud. “Wal, ef this don’t beat cockfightin’, I’m durned. So now!”

The words seemed to relieve him in some way, for the hunter-instinct returned, and he proceeded to reload his rifle.

But as he loaded, he muttered:

“Simon, Simon, go home and soak your head for a durned fool! Three shots fired, and nary hit. What would Boone say ef he knowed it. By the holy poker, I’d as soon face Old Scratch as face the cunnel arter this bout, ef I don’t git that kuss’s sculp. So now.”

He rammed home the bullet with a vicious thump as he said this, and resumed his weary watch. The situation had become more complicated.

A woman was on that island, a white woman, or she would not have shrieked. The squaw is well-nigh as stoical in danger as her warrior husband.

On the other side the river was a merciless savage, who would not hesitate to scalp her if he got a chance. In a moment the native chivalry of the Kentuckian was up in arms, and his face assumed an expression of grim ferocity, such as few men would have cared to face, as he scanned the opposite shore, muttering, as he clenched his rifle:

“Now may I never fire a shot ag’in as long as I live, ef I let you git your claws on that gal, Mister Stranger. Sink or swim I’m a-goin’ fur her jest as soon as it’s dark, an’ ef thar ain’t some clawin’ o’ wool on that there island about the time we git there, wallop me for a skunk. So now.”

He remained at his post, watching his enemy’s tree with a sleepless vigilance and ferocity, that told how much in earnest he was. Hour after hour passed; the sun sunk down to the west and fell behind the curtain of forest; the dark shadows sloped weirdly across the tree-trunks; the deer flitted about through the aisles of the woods, unconscious of the two statue-like figures that lay on the ground, each watching his enemy’s lair like a lurking tiger; squirrel and bird, cicada and snake, fox and rabbit, wandered about the vicinity perfectly undisturbed; for the two men lay so still that the animals had come to the conclusion they must be dead. Then at last the twilight faded into darkness, and the river and banks became indistinct. Suddenly Kenton leaped to his feet and dashed through the cover to a narrow place opposite the island. He used no caution, for now the island sheltered him from view entirely. But, as he dashed into the water, he heard his enemy thunder along on the opposite bank, and knew that it would be a race for the island.

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The sturdy ranger uttered a fierce war-whoop, and struggled through the deep water toward the island.

At the place where he was, the stream was only some twenty feet broad, *but*, it was swimming deep and quite rapid.

On the other side it was five times as broad, but much more shallow, so that his opponent would have that advantage over him. Still, being on the arc of a circle, the distance to be traversed was much greater, and reduced the chances to evenness.

Simon Kenton leaped into the current, rifle in hand, and sunk over his head in a moment, striking out for the opposite shore with desperate energy. Twice the strong current carried him down, and twice he touched a rock and shoved against it so vigorously that he nearly reached the opposite shore. Each time, the weight of his long rifle ducked his head and nearly strangled him, while the struggle became fiercer than ever.

At last, just as he was passing the end of the island, he caught a friendly bough and dragged himself up to shore with dripping weapons, just as he caught sight of the dark figure of his enemy about the middle of the stream in the shallows, but up to his waist in water.

Simon Kenton uttered the Shawnee war-whoop once more and tore through the brushwood to intercept his foe.