

# A Famous Visitor

**A**bner Doubleday leaned against the fence post and tossed his ball in the air, then caught it without looking. He was watching his friend Charley.

Charley lived across the road from Abner in Auburn, New York, and the two boys often played ball together. Today, however, Charley was sweeping the walk.

Abner's brother Tom was busy too. Everyone in town seemed to be busy on this last day of May, 1825.

Suddenly Abner jumped back as a long gray cat came running through the gate, chased by Abner's dog Brownie.

"Brownie!" Abner shouted. "Come back!"

Brownie looked back at Abner but kept on chasing the cat.

"Oh no!" Abner exclaimed. "Brownie, come back here!"



Suddenly Abner jumped back as a long gray cat came running through the gate, chased by Abner's dog Brownie.

At that moment Tom came running from the barn. "I'm through with my chores, Abner," he called. "I can play ball now."

Abner was glad to see his brother. "I'll stand down here. You stand at the other end of the yard." He tossed the ball to Tom.

Tom caught the ball easily. "You're lucky you're only six and don't have any chores to do!" His voice rose. "Here it comes!" He threw the ball back.

Abner had to leap into the air to catch it. The ball was lopsided. One seam was coming open and the insides were beginning to come through. Abner clasped the ball in his hands and tried to shape it round again, as he would a snowball. He leaned back and threw the ball as hard as he could.

"Ho!" Tom caught the ball easily and started to throw it back, then stopped "It's hard to throw this ball straight," he said. "It's coming apart."

"I know," said Abner. "Maybe Ma will fix it. Throw it to me and I'll go see."

"It hasn't been very long since she made it." Tom pushed the stuffing back in with his finger. "I don't know whether she'll want to fix it or not. She's making a dress for Amanda to wear tomorrow," he said.

Abner looked across the street at Charley, who was still sweeping the walk in front of his house. "Tom, why does Charley have to sweep the walk just because General Lafayette is coming tomorrow?"

"I guess the whole town has to look its best," Tom answered. He looked at Charley, then shook his head and added doubtfully, "I don't think a hero like General Lafayette is going to look at all the walks." He rolled the ball across the grass to Abner. "Go see

what Ma says. Maybe she'll fix it."

It was dark and shadowy inside after the bright outdoors. "Ma!" Abner called. "Ma, where are you?"

"Right here," his mother answered from the kitchen. "What do you want?"

Abner's mother was kneeling on the floor in the kitchen. His sister Amanda was standing on a stool. Mother was pinning the hem of Amanda's new dress with pins from the pincushion on the floor beside her.

Abner ran to his mother and held the ball out. "Ma, would you sew this up again please?"

Mother looked up at the ball but didn't take it. She went on pinning Amanda's dress.

"See, Ma, the stuffing is coming out," Abner poked his finger in the hole. "It won't throw straight."

Ma stopped just long enough to brush up the moist curling hair at her neck. She looked at Abner without a smile. "Don't make it any worse than it is."

Amanda tossed her head and smiled scornfully. "Ma doesn't have time to fix your old ball." Importantly she smoothed down the crisp ruffles of her new dress. "She has to get my dress finished for tomorrow!"

Mother gave Amanda a stern look and said quietly, "All right, Abner, put the ball on the table. I'll try to get to it."

As Abner ran out the front door he yelled, "Tom! Tom! I think Ma will fix it!"

“Now?” Tom asked eagerly.

Abner frowned. “Probably not right now. She didn’t say. She’s fixing Amanda’s dress.”

Tom didn’t wait for all of Abner’s answer. He was looking down the street. “What does Mrs. Scott have?”

Both boys looked to see Mrs. Scott with an arm-load of red, white and blue material. She was walking so fast that it looked as if she were coming along the street on wheels.

She didn’t see Brownie running. Abner did, and he knew Brownie must be chasing the cat again. “No, Brownie, no!” he screamed, but Brownie didn’t hear him. Ears laid flat and tail flying behind, Brownie ran straight in front of Mrs. Scott.

Mrs. Scott was so short and round and her bundle was so large that she never knew what made her fall, but suddenly, without warning, she sat down. The red, white, and blue material billowed in the air and settled on top of her.

Abner and Tom started to laugh. They couldn’t help themselves. Then they did their best to stop laughing and rushed to help Mrs. Scott to her feet.

Brownie came running through the gate. “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself, Brownie,” Abner cried.

“Is that your dog?” Mrs. Scott demanded. Her face was red and her mouth was set in a straight line as

she struggled to untangle herself. "Oh dear!" She tried to brush off her dress. "Where is your Ma? Was that your dog?"

Abner smiled weakly. "We're sorry, ma'am."

"I should think you would be! A beast like that should not be permitted to run loose!" Mrs. Scott frowned and looked very cross. "Go get your Ma!"

"Yes, ma'am." Tom was glad to run after Ma. "I'll get her."

"Abner, help me get all this bunting out of the dirt," Mrs. Scott commanded. "It's for the decorations at the ballroom for General Lafayette, and it will all be ruined!"

Abner helped pick up the material and brushed it off before handing it to Mrs. Scott, who rolled it up in a bundle again.

Ma rushed from the house and down the steps to the walk where Mrs. Scott was standing. "Are you all right?" she asked anxiously.

Mrs. Scott took a deep breath. "Yes, I think I am," she said, her smooth round face very serious. "But it's lucky I didn't break a leg!" She nodded toward Tom. "Did your boy tell you what happened?"

"Yes, and I'm sorry, Mrs. Scott," Ma said. "Could Tom go along to help you carry your decorations? That's a bulky load for you to handle all by yourself."

Mrs. Scott set her hat straight on her head again

and pinned it firmly with a long straight pin. Her chin lifted as she took another deep breath. "Yes, he can help. Tom, take that end of the bundle." She frowned and turned to Mrs. Doubleday again. "What about that dog?"

"Abner, you go put Brownie in the barn," Ma said firmly.

"All right, Ma." Abner hesitated a moment. "Can't I go too? I could help."

"Yes, Abner, you may go along to help. First, though, put Brownie in the barn. Then you may catch up with Tom and Mrs. Scott."

Abner ran back to the barn. Brownie saw him coming and wagged his tail.

"You're a bad dog!" Abner scolded. "You got us all in trouble."

Brownie's tail dropped limply and he hurried, cowering, to the barn.

"You stay in the barn till I get back!" Abner shouted. Then he wheeled and ran to catch up with Tom and Mrs. Scott.

As he came up behind Tom one end of the bunting blew free.

"Get it, Abner!" shouted Tom. "It's starting to unroll."

Mrs. Scott looked back. "Don't you get any of that on the ground, boys," she cried. "It's dirty enough

already because of that foolish dog of yours.”

Abner caught the free end, which dipped dangerously close to the ground, and gathered it in his arms. “No, ma’am, we won’t!”

Mrs. Scott bustled on, talking the entire way. “Oh my, there’s so much to be done. Everything has to be ready for General Lafayette’s visit tomorrow.” She wagged her head. “It just doesn’t seem real that such a great man is coming to Auburn!”

Abner ran, trying to keep up with Tom. His face was hot and he was out of breath, but it was fun being part of all this excitement. He knew about General Lafayette’s visit tomorrow because Pa had told him. Pa was editor of the newspaper, the *Cayuga Patriot*.

“Look!” Tom tried to point with his big roll of bunting and Abner stared. Big piles of lumber were scattered along the street, and men on ladders were building something.

“What are they doing?” Abner asked.

“They’re building arches across the street,” Tom said wisely. “When they’re finished they’ll be decorated with greens and streamers. Then General Lafayette will ride right through the arches when he rides down Genesee Street.”

Abner was so interested in watching the carpenters that he was walking backwards.

“Abner!” cried Mrs. Scott sharply. “Turn around!”

The bunting will be in the dirt again if you don't watch out. Now hurry!"

Abner turned and trotted along behind Tom until they reached the Exchange Hotel. Here, too, there were men working on ladders all around the ballroom. The chandeliers had been decorated and the walls were being draped with red, white, and blue bunting and flowers and evergreens.

Tom and Abner stood holding their bundle of bunting while Mrs. Scott hurried off to the other end of the room. A workman approached them, but instead of taking the bundle he climbed up on a ladder beside them. A woman hurried past them with a large basket of flowers, but she paid no attention to them.

"Boys!" Mrs. Scott called. "Come here and put the bunting on this table."

Abner and Tom ran to place the bunting on the table, then turned to go.

"You boys go straight home now," Mrs. Scott called after them.

The boys ran down the steps and out the door to Genesee Street. Tom looked at Abner with a grin. "Come on!" he shouted. "Let's go!"

They started to run, but not toward home—only to the first of the arches. When they reached it, Abner had to tilt his head back to look up at the framework arching the street. Two men were fastening evergreen

branches to the arch. One stood by a pile of branches on the ground and handed them up, one at a time, to a man on a ladder. This man threaded the branches through the framework, then fastened them in place with two or three nails.

The man on the ladder looked down at the boys. "Won't this be a sight for Lafayette to see when he comes tomorrow?" He smiled with pleasure. "All these arches standing in a row, all the way down Genesee Street, looking just as if they grew here!"

"Will General Lafayette's coach come right through this arch?" asked Tom.

"Indeed it will," the man answered. "Right down Genesee Street, through the middle of the green arches with their flowers and red, white, and blue streamers. It ought to be a sight to see."

"Tom, what did General Lafayette do?" Abner asked without taking his eyes from the two men working on the arch.

The corners of Tom's mouth turned down in disgust. "Oh, Abner!" he exclaimed. "What did he do! You ought to know!"

Abner shook his head agreeably. "I know, but what *did* he do?"

"During the Revolutionary War General Lafayette came to America and helped the colonies win the war. That's what he did!" Tom took a deep breath and went

on. "That was nearly fifty years ago, when he was young. Now he's visiting the United States again, and he's coming here to Auburn tomorrow."

"That's right, lad," said the man by the pile of branches, smiling and nodding his head. "Everybody is going to be here in Auburn—the Governor of New York, army officers, veterans of the Revolution. There'll be a big parade with a salute of big guns—"

Abner's brown eyes grew wide with excitement. "Guns?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir! A real twenty-four gun salute to the General! This will be a day you'll never forget, mark my words."