

The fiddlers played, and there were foot races and shooting matches. Ay, and wrestling matches in the severe manner of the backwoods between the young bucks, more than one of which might have ended seriously were it not for the high humor of the crowd. Tom McChesney himself was in most of them, a hot favorite. By a trick he had learned in the Indian country he threw Chauncey Dike (no mean adversary) so hard that the backwoods dandy lay for a moment in sleep. Contrary to the custom of many, Tom was not in the habit of crowing on such occasions, nor did he even smile as he helped Chauncey to his feet. But Polly Ann knew, and I knew, that he was thinking of what Chauncey had said to her.

So the long summer afternoon wore away into twilight, and the sun fell behind the blue ridges we were to cross. Pine knots were lighted in the big room, the fiddlers set to again, and then came jigs and three and four handed reels that made the puncheons rattle,—chicken-flutter and cut-the-buckle,—and Polly Ann was the leader now, the young men flinging the girls from fireplace to window in the reels, and back again; and when, panting and perspiring, the lass was too tired to stand longer, she dropped into the hospitable lap of the nearest buck who was perched on the bench along the wall awaiting his chance. For so it went in the backwoods in those days, and long after, and no harm in it that ever I could see.

Well, suddenly, as if by concert, the music stopped, and a shout of laughter rang under the beams as Polly Ann flew out of the door with the girls after her, as swift of foot as she. They dragged her, a struggling captive, to the bride-chamber which made the other end of the house, and when they emerged, blushing and giggling and subdued, the fun began with Tom McChesney. He gave the young men a pretty fight indeed, and long before they had him conquered the elder guests had made their escape through door and window.

All night the reels and jigs went on, and the feasting and drinking too. In the fine rain that came at dawn to hide the crests, the company rode wearily homeward through the notches.

## CHAPTER VIII

## THE NOLLICHUCKY TRACE

Some to endure, and many to quail,  
Some to conquer, and many to fail,  
Toiling over the Wilderness Trail.

As long as I live I shall never forget the morning we started on our journey across the Blue Wall. Before the sun chased away the filmy veil of mist from the brooks in the valley, the McChesneys, father, mother, and children, were gathered to see us depart. And as they helped us to tighten the packsaddles Tom himself had made from chosen tree-forks, they did not cease lamenting that we were going to certain death. Our scrawny horses splashed across the stream, and we turned to see a gaunt and lonely figure standing apart against the sun, stern and sorrowful. We waved our hands, and set our faces towards Kaintuckee.

Tom walked ahead, rifle on shoulder, then Polly Ann; and lastly I drove the two shaggy ponies, the instruments of husbandry we had been able to gather awry on their packs,—a scythe, a spade, and a hoe. I triumphantly carried the axe.

It was not long before we were in the wilderness, shut in by mountain crags, and presently Polly Ann forgot her sorrows in the perils of the trace. Choked by briars and grapevines, blocked by sliding stones and earth, it rose and rose through the heat and burden of the day until it lost itself in the open heights. As the sun was wearing down to the western ridges the mischievous sorrel mare turned her pack on a sapling, and one of the precious bags burst. In an instant we were on our knees gathering the golden meal in our hands. Polly Ann baked

journeycakes on a hot stone from what we saved under the shiny ivy leaves, and scarce had I spancelled the horses ere Tom returned with a fat turkey he had shot.

"Was there ever sech a wedding journey!" said Polly Ann, as we sat about the fire, for the mountain air was chill. "And Tom and Davy as grave as parsons. Ye'd guess one of you was Rutherford himself, and the other Mr. Boone."

No wonder he was grave. I little realized then the task he had set himself, to pilot a woman and a lad into a country haunted by frenzied savages, when single men feared to go this season. But now he smiled, and patted Polly Ann's brown hand.

"It's one of yer own choosing, lass," said he.

"Of my own choosing!" cried she. "Come, Davy, we'll go back to Grandpa."

Tom grinned.

"I reckon the redskins won't bother us till we git by the Nollichucky and Watauga settlements," he said.

"The redskins!" said Polly Ann, indignant; "I reckon if one of 'em did git me he'd kiss me once in a while."

Whereupon Tom, looking more sheepish still, tried to kiss her, and failed ignominiously, for she vanished into the dark woods.

"If a redskin got you here," said Tom, when she had slipped back, "he'd fetch you to Nick-a-jack Cave."

"What's that?" she demanded.

"Where all the red and white and yellow scalawags over the mountains is gathered," he answered. And he told of a deep gorge between towering mountains where a great river cried angrily, of a black cave out of which a black stream ran, where a man could paddle a dugout for miles into the rock. The river was the Tennessee, and the place the resort of the Chickamauga bandits, pirates of the mountains, outcasts of all nations. And Dragging Canoe was their chief.

It was on the whole a merry journey, the first part of it, if a rough one. Often Polly Ann would draw me to her and whisper: "We'll hold out, Davy. He'll never

know." When the truth was that the big fellow was going at half his pace on our account. He told us there was no fear of redskins here, yet, when the scream of a painter or the hoot of an owl stirred me from my exhausted slumber, I caught sight of him with his back to a tree, staring into the forest, his rifle at his side. The day was dawning.

"Turn about's fair," I expostulated.

"Ye'll need yere sleep, Davy," said he, "or ye'll never grow any bigger."

"I thought Kaintuckee was to the west," I said, "and you're making north." For I had observed him day after day. We had left the trails. Sometimes he climbed a tree, and again he sent me to the upper branches, whence I surveyed a sea of tree-tops waving in the wind, and looked onward to where a green velvet hollow lay nestling on the western side of a saddle-backed ridge.

"North!" said Tom to Polly Ann, laughing. "The little devil will beat me at woodcraft soon. Ay, north, Davy. I'm hunting for the Nollichucky Trace that leads to the Watauga settlement."

It was wonderful to me how he chose his way through the mountains. Once in a while we caught sight of a yellow blaze in a tree, made by himself scarce a month gone, when he came southward alone to fetch Polly Ann. Again, the tired roan shied back from the bleached bones of a traveller, picked clean by wolves. At sundown, when we loosed our exhausted horses to graze on the wet grass by the streams, Tom would go off to look for a deer or turkey, and often not come back to us until long after darkness had fallen.

"Davy'll take care of you, Polly Ann," he would say as he left us.

And she would smile at him bravely and say, "I reckon I kin look out for Davy awhile yet."

But when he was gone, and the crooning stillness set in, broken only by the many sounds of the night, we would sit huddled together by the fire. It was dread for him she felt, not for herself. And in both our minds rose red images of hideous foes skulking behind his brave

form as he trod the forest floor. Polly Ann was not the woman to whimper.

And yet I have but dim recollections of this journey. It was no hardship to a lad brought up in woodcraft. Fear of the Indians, like a dog shivering with the cold, was a deadened pain on the border.

Strangely enough it was I who chanced upon the Nollchucky Trace, which follows the meanderings of that river northward through the great Smoky Mountains. It was made long ago by the Southern Indians as they threaded their way to the Hunting Lands of Kaintuckee, and shared now by Indian traders. The path was redolent with odors, and bright with mountain shrubs and flowers,—the pink laurel bush, the shining rhododendron, and the grape and plum and wild crab. The clear notes of the mountain birds were in our ears by day, and the music of the water falling over the ledges, mingled with that of the leaves rustling in the wind, lulled us to sleep at night. High above us, as we descended, the gap, from naked crag to timber-covered ridge, was spanned by the eagle's flight. And virgin valleys, where future generations were to be born, spread out and narrowed again,—valleys with a deep carpet of cane and grass, where the deer and elk and bear fed unmolested.

It was perchance the next evening that my eyes fell upon a sight which is one of the wonders of my boyish memories. The trail slipped to the edge of a precipice, and at our feet the valley widened. Planted amidst giant trees, on a shining green lawn that ran down to the racing Nollchucky was the strangest house it has ever been my lot to see—of no shape, of huge size, and built of logs, one wing hitched to another by "dog alleys" (as we called them); and from its wide stone chimneys the pearly smoke rose upward in the still air through the poplar branches. Beyond it a setting sun gilded the cornfields, and horses and cattle dotted the pastures. We stood for a while staring at this oasis in the wilderness, and to my boyish fancy it was a fitting introduction to a delectable land.

"Glory be to heaven!" exclaimed Polly Ann.

"It's Nollchucky Jack's house," said Tom.

"And who may he be?" said she.

"Who may he be!" cried Tom; "Captain John Sevier, king of the border, and I reckon the best man to sweep out redskins in the Watauga settlements."

"Do you know him?" said she.

"I was chose as one of his scouts when we fired the Cherokee hill towns last summer," said Tom, with pride. "Thar was blood and thunder for ye! We went down the Great War-path which lies below us, and when we was through there wasn't a corn-shuck or a wigwam or a war post left. We didn't harm the squaws nor the children, but there warn't no prisoners took. When Nollchucky Jack strikes I reckon it's more like a thunderbolt nor anything else."

"Do you think he's at home, Tom?" I asked, fearful that I should not see this celebrated person.

"We'll soon l'arn," said he, as we descended. "I heerd he was agoin' to punish them Chickamauga robbers by Nick-a-jack."

Just then we heard a prodigious barking, and a dozen hounds came charging down the path at our horses' legs, the roan shying into the truck patch. A man's voice, deep, clear, compelling, was heard calling:—

"Vi! Flora! Ripper!"

I saw him coming from the porch of the house, a tall, slim figure in a hunting shirt—that fitted to perfection—and cavalry boots. His face, his carriage, his quick movement and stride filled my notion of a hero, and my instinct told me he was a gentleman born.

"Why, bless my soul, it's Tom McChesney!" he cried, ten paces away, while Tom grinned with pleasure at the recognition. "But what have you here?"

"A wife," said Tom, standing on one foot.

Captain Sevier fixed his dark blue eyes on Polly Ann with approbation, and he bowed to her very gracefully.

"Where are you going, Ma'am, may I ask?" he said.

"To Kaintuckee," said Polly Ann.

"To Kaintuckee!" cried Captain Sevier, turning to

Tom. "Egad, then, you've no right to a wife, — and to such a wife," and he glanced again at Polly Ann. "Why, McChesney, you never struck me as a rash man. Have you lost your senses, to take a woman into Kentucky this year?"

"So the forts be still in trouble?" said Tom.

"Trouble?" cried Mr. Sevier, with a quick fling of his whip at an unruly hound, "Harrodstown, Boonesboro, Logan's Fort at St. Asaph's, — they don't dare stick their noses outside the stockades. The Indians have swarmed into Kentucky like red ants, I tell you. Ten days ago, when I was in the Holston settlements, Major Ben Logan came in. His fort had been shut up since May, they were out of powder and lead, and somebody had to come. How did he come? As the wolf lopes, nay, as the crow flies over crag and ford, Cumberland, Clinch, and all, forty miles a day for five days, and never saw a trace — for the war parties were watching the Wilderness Road." And he swung again towards Polly Ann. "You'll not go to Kaintuckee, ma'am; you'll stay here with us until the redskins are beaten off there. He may go if he likes."

"I reckon we didn't come this far to give out, Captain Sevier," said she.

"You don't look to be the kind to give out, Mrs. McChesney," said he. "And yet it may not be a matter of giving out," he added more soberly. This mixture of heartiness and gravity seemed to sit well on him. "Surely you have been enterprising, Tom. Where in the name of the Continental Congress did you get the lad?"

"I married him along with Polly Ann," said Tom. "That was the bargain, and I reckon he was worth it."

"I'd take a dozen to get her," declared Mr. Sevier, while Polly Ann blushed. "Well, well, supper's waiting us, and cider and applejack, for we don't get a wedding party every day. Some gentlemen are here whose word may have more weight and whose attractions may be greater than mine."

He whistled to a negro lad, who took our horses, and led us through the court-yard and the house to the lawn

at the far side of it. A rude table was set there under a great tree, and around it three gentlemen were talking. My memory of all of them is more vivid than it might be were their names not household words in the Western country. Captain Sevier startled them.

"My friends," said he, "if you have despatches for Kaintuckee, I pray you get them ready over night."

They looked up at him, one sternly, the other two gravely.

"What the devil do you mean, Sevier?" said the stern one.

"That my friend, Tom McChesney, is going there with his wife, unless we can stop him," said Sevier.

"Stop him!" thundered the stern gentleman, kicking back his chair and straightening up to what seemed to me a colossal height. I stared at him, boylike. He had long, iron-gray hair and a creased, fleshy face and sunken eyes. He looked as if he might stop anybody as he turned upon Tom. "Who the devil is this Tom McChesney?" he demanded.

Sevier laughed.

"The best scout I ever laid eyes on," said he. "A deadly man with a Deckard, an unerring man at choosing a wife" (and he bowed to the reddening Polly Ann), "and a fool to run the risk of losing her."

"Tut, tut," said the iron gentleman, who was the famous Captain Evan Shelby of King's Meadows, "he'll leave her here in our settlements while he helps us fight Dragging Canoe and his Chickamauga pirates."

"If he leaves me," said Polly Ann, her eyes flashing, "that's an end to the bargain. He'll never find me more."

Captain Sevier laughed again.

"There's spirit for you," he cried, slapping his whip against his boot.

At this another gentleman stood up, a younger counterpart of the first, only he towered higher and his shoulders were broader. He had a big-featured face, and pleasant eyes — that twinkled now — sunken in, with fleshy creases at the corners.

"Tom McChesney," said he, "don't mind my father. If any man besides Logan can get inside the forts, you can. Do you remember me?"

"I reckon I do, Mr. Isaac Shelby," said Tom, putting a big hand into Mr. Shelby's bigger one. "I reckon I won't soon forget how you stepped out of ranks and tuk command when the boys was runnin', and turned the tide."

He looked like the man to step out of ranks and take command.

"Pish!" said Mr. Isaac Shelby, blushing like a girl; "where would I have been if you and Moore and Findley and the rest hadn't stood 'em off till we turned round?"

By this time the third gentleman had drawn my attention. Not by anything he said, for he remained silent, sitting with his dark brown head bent forward, quietly gazing at the scene from under his brows. The instant he spoke they turned towards him. He was perhaps forty, and broad-shouldered, not so tall as Mr. Sevier.

"Why do you go to Kaintuckee, McChesney?" he asked.

"I give my word to Mr. Harrod and Mr. Clark to come back, Mr. Robertson," said Tom.

"And the wife? If you take her, you run a great risk of losing her."

"And if he leaves me," said Polly Ann, flinging her head, "he will lose me sure."

The others laughed, but Mr. Robertson merely smiled.

"Faith," cried Captain Sevier, "if those I met coming back helter-skelter over the Wilderness Trace had been of that stripe, they'd have more men in the forts now."

With that the Captain called for supper to be served where we sat. He was a widower, with lads somewhere near my own age, and I recall being shown about the place by them. And later, when the fireflies glowed and the Nollichucky sang in the darkness, we listened to the talk of the war of the year gone by. I needed not to be told that before me were the renowned leaders of the Watauga settlements. My hero worship cried it aloud within me. These captains dwelt on the border-land of mystery, con-

quered the wilderness, and drove before them its savage tribes by their might. When they spoke of the Cherokees and told how that same Stuart—the companion of Cameron—was urging them to war against our people, a fierce anger blazed within me. For the Cherokees had killed my father.

I remember the men,—scarcely what they said: Evan Shelby's words, like heavy blows on an anvil; Isaac Shelby's, none the less forceful; James Robertson compelling his listeners by some strange power. He was perchance the strongest man there, though none of us guessed, after ruling that region, that he was to repeat untold hardships to found and rear another settlement farther west. But best I loved to hear Captain Sevier, whose talk lacked not force, but had a daring, a humor, a lightness of touch, that seemed more in keeping with that world I had left behind me in Charlestown. Him I loved, and at length I solved the puzzle. To me he was Nick Temple grown to manhood.

I slept in the room with Captain Sevier's boys, and one window of it was of paper smeared with bear's grease, through which the sunlight came all bleared and yellow in the morning. I had a boy's interest in affairs, and I remember being told that the gentlemen were met here to discuss the treaty between themselves and the great Oconostota, chief of the Cherokees, and also to consider the policy of punishing once for all Dragging Canoe and his bandits at Chickamauga.

As we sat at breakfast under the trees, these gentlemen generously dropped their own business to counsel Tom, and I observed with pride that he had gained their regard during the last year's war. Shelby's threats and Robertson's warnings and Sevier's exhortations having no effect upon his determination to proceed to Kentucky, they began to advise him how to go, and he sat silent while they talked. And finally, when they asked him, he spoke of making through Carter's Valley for Cumberland Gap and the Wilderness Trail.

"Egad," cried Captain Sevier, "I have so many times

found the boldest plan the safest that I have become a coward that way. What do you say to it, Mr. Robertson?"

Mr. Robertson leaned his square shoulders over the table.

"He may fall in with a party going over," he answered, without looking up.

Polly Ann looked at Tom as if to say that the whole Continental Army could not give her as much protection.

We left that hospitable place about nine o'clock, Mr. Robertson having written a letter to Colonel Daniel Boone, — shut up in the fort at Boonesboro, — should we be so fortunate as to reach Kaintuckee: and another to a young gentleman by the name of George Rogers Clark, apparently a leader there. Captain Sevier bowed over Polly Ann's hand as if she were a great lady, and wished her a happy honeymoon, and me he patted on the head and called a brave lad. And soon we had passed beyond the corn-field into the Wilderness again.

Our way was down the Nollichucky, past the great bend of it below Lick Creek, and so to the Great War-path, the trail by which countless parties of red marauders had travelled north and south. It led, indeed, northeast between the mountain ranges. Although we kept a watch by day and night, we saw no sign of Dragging Canoe or his men, and at length we forded the Holston and came to the scattered settlement in Carter's Valley.

I have since racked my brain to remember at whose cabin we stopped there. He was a rough backwoodsman with a wife and a horde of children. But I recall that a great rain came out of the mountains and down the valley. We were counting over the powder gourds in our packs, when there burst in at the door as wild a man as has ever been my lot to see. His brown beard was grown like a bramble patch, his eye had a violet light, and his hunting shirt was in tatters. He was thin to gauntness, ate ravenously of the food that was set before him, and throwing off his soaked moccasins, he spread his scalded feet to the blaze, and the steaming odor of drying leather filled the room.

"Whar be ye from?" asked Tom.

For answer the man bared his arm, then his shoulder, and two angry scars, long and red, revealed themselves, and around his wrists were deep gouges where he had been bound.

"They killed Sue," he cried, "sculpted her afore my very eyes. And they chopped my boy outen the hickory withes and carried him to the Creek Nation. At a place where there was a standin' stone I broke loose from three of 'em and come here over the mountains, and I ain't had nothin', stranger, but berries and chainey brier-root for ten days. God damn 'em!" he cried, standing up and tottering with the pain in his feet, "if I can get a Deckard —"

"Will you go back?" said Tom.

"Go back!" he shouted, "I'll go back and fight 'em while I have blood in my body."

He fell into a bunk, but his sorrow haunted him even in his troubled sleep, and his moans awed us as we listened. The next day he told us his story with more calmness. It was horrible indeed, and might well have frightened a less courageous woman than Polly Ann. Imploring her not to go, he became wild again, and brought tears to her eyes when he spoke of his own wife. "They tomahawked her, ma'am, because she could not walk, and the baby beside her, and I standing by with my arms tied."

As long as I live I shall never forget that scene, and how Tom pleaded with Polly Ann to stay behind, but she would not listen to him.

"You're going, Tom?" she said.

"Yes," he answered, turning away, "I gave 'em my word."

"And your word to me?" said Polly Ann.

He did not answer.

We fixed on a Saturday to start, to give the horses time to rest, and in the hope that we might hear of some relief party going over the Gap. On Thursday Tom made a trip to the store in the valley, and came back with a Deckard rifle he had bought for the stranger, whose name

was Weldon. There was no news from Kaintuckee, but the Carter's Valley settlers seemed to think that matters were better there. It was that same night, I believe, that two men arrived from Fort Chiswell. One, whose name was Cutcheon, was a little man with a short forehead and a bad eye, and he wore a weather-beaten blue coat of military cut. The second was a big, light-colored, fleshy man, and a loud talker. He wore a hunting shirt and leggings. They were both the worse for rum they had had on the road, the big man talking very loud and boastfully.

"Afeard to go to Kaintuckee!" said he. "I've met a parcel o' cowards on the road, turned back. There ain't nothin' to be afeard of, eh, stranger?" he added, to Tom, who paid no manner of attention to him. The small man scarce opened his mouth, but sat with his head bowed forward on his breast when he was not drinking. We passed a dismal, crowded night in the room with such companions. When they heard that we were to go over the mountains, nothing would satisfy the big man but to go with us.

"Come, stranger," said he to Tom, "two good rifles such as we is ain't to be thrown away."

"Why do you want to go over?" asked Tom. "Be ye a Tory?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Why do you go over?" retorted Riley, for that was his name. "I reckon I'm no more of a Tory than you."

"Whar did ye come from?" said Tom.

"Chiswell's mines, taking out lead for the army o' Congress. But there ain't excitement enough in it."

"And you?" said Tom, turning to Cutcheon and eyeing his military coat.

"I got tired of their damned discipline," the man answered surlily. He was a deserter.

"Look you," said Tom, sternly, "if you come, what I say is law."

Such was the sacrifice we were put to by our need of company. But in those days a man was a man, and scarce

enough on the Wilderness Trail in that year of '77. So we started away from Carter's Valley on a bright Saturday morning, the grass glistening after a week's rain, the road sodden, and the smell of the summer earth heavy. Tom and Weldon walked ahead, driving the two horses, followed by Cutcheon, his head dropped between his shoulders. The big man, Riley, regaled Polly Ann.

"My pluck is," said he, "my pluck is to give a redskin no chance. Shoot 'em down like hogs. It takes a good un to stalk me, Ma'am. Up on the Kanawha I've had hand-to-hand fights with 'em, and made 'em cry quits."

"Law!" exclaimed Polly Ann, nudging me, "it was a lucky thing we run into you in the valley."

But presently we left the road and took a mountain trail,—as stiff a climb as we had yet had. Polly Ann went up it like a bird, talking all the while to Riley, who blew like a bellows. For once he was silent.

We spent two, perchance three, days climbing and descending and fording. At night Tom would suffer none to watch save Weldon and himself, not trusting Riley or Cutcheon. And the rascals were well content to sleep. At length we came to a cabin on a creek, the corn between the stumps around it choked with weeds, and no sign of smoke in the chimney. Behind it slanted up, in giant steps, a forest-clad hill of a thousand feet, and in front of it the stream was dammed and lined with cane.

"Who keeps house?" cried Tom, at the threshold.

He pushed back the door, fashioned in one great slab from a forest tree. His welcome was an angry whirl, and a huge yellow rattler lay coiled within, his head reared to strike. Polly Ann leaned back.

"Mercy," she cried, "that's a bad sign."

But Tom killed the snake, and we made ready to use the cabin that night and the next day. For the horses were to be rested and meat was to be got, as we could not use our guns so freely on the far side of Cumberland Gap. In the morning, before he and Weldon left, Tom took me around the end of the cabin.

"Davy," said he, "I don't trust these rascals. Kin you shoot a pistol?"

I reckoned I could.

He had taken one out of the pack he had got from Captain Sevier and pushed it between the logs where the clay had fallen out. "If they try anything," said he, "shoot 'em. And don't be afeard of killing 'em." He patted me on the back, and went off up the slope with Weldon. Polly Ann and I stood watching them until they were out of sight.

About eleven o'clock Riley and Cutcheon moved off to the edge of a cane-brake near the water, and sat there for a while, talking in low tones. The horses were belled and spancelled near by, feeding on the cane and wild grass, and Polly Ann was cooking journey-cakes on a stone.

"What makes you so sober, Davy?" she said.

I didn't answer.

"Davy," she cried, "be happy while you're young. 'Tis a fine day, and Kaintuckee's over yonder." She picked up her skirts and sang: —

"First upon the heeltap,  
Then upon the toe."

The men by the cane-brake turned and came towards us.

"Ye're happy to-day, Mis' McChesney," said Riley.

"Why shouldn't I be?" said Polly Ann; "we're all a-goin' to Kaintuckee."

"We're a-goin' back to Cyarter's Valley," said Riley, in his blustering way. "This here ain't as excitin' as I thought. I reckon there ain't no redskins nohow."

"What!" cried Polly Ann, in loud scorn, "ye're a-goin' to desert? There'll be redskins enough by and by, I'll warrant ye."

"How'd you like to come along of us," says Riley; "that ain't any place for wimmen, over yonder."

"Along of you!" cried Polly Ann, with flashing eyes.

"Do you hear that, Davy?"

I did. Meanwhile the man Cutcheon was slowly walking towards her. It took scarce a second for me to make up my mind. I slipped around the corner of the house, seized the pistol, primed it with a trembling hand, and came back to behold Polly Ann, with flaming cheeks, facing them. They did not so much as glance at me. Riley held a little back of the two, being the coward. But Cutcheon stood ready, like a wolf.

I did not wait for him to spring, but, taking the best aim I could with my two hands, fired. With a curse that echoed in the crags, he threw up his arms and fell forward, writhing, on the turf.

"Run for the cabin, Polly Ann," I shouted, "and bar the door."

There was no need. For an instant Riley wavered, and then fled to the cane.

Polly Ann and I went to the man on the ground, and turned him over: His eyes slid upwards. There was a bloody froth on his lips.

"Davy!" cried she, awestricken, "Davy, ye've killed him!"

I grew dizzy and sick at the thought, but she caught me and held me to her. Presently we sat down on the door log, gazing at the corpse. Then I began to reflect, and took out my powder gourd and loaded the pistol.

"What are ye a-doing?" she said.

"In case the other one comes back," said I.

"Pooh," said Polly Ann, "*he'll* not come back." Which was true. I have never laid eyes on Riley to this day.

"I reckon we'd better fetch it out of the sun," said she, after a while. And so we dragged it under an oak, covered the face, and left it.

He was the first man I ever killed, and the business by no means came natural to me. And that day the journey-cakes which Polly Ann had made were untasted by us both. The afternoon dragged interminably. Try as we would, we could not get out of our minds the Thing that lay under the oak.

It was near sundown when Tom and Weldon appeared



on the mountain side carrying a buck between them. Tom glanced from one to the other of us keenly. He was very quick to divine.

"Whar be they?" said he.

"Show him, Davy," said Polly Ann.

I took him over to the oak, and Polly Ann told him the story. He gave me one look, I remember, and there was more of gratitude in it than in a thousand words. Then he seized a piece of cold cake from the stone.

"Which trace did he take?" he demanded of me.

But Polly Ann hung on his shoulder.

"Tom, Tom!" she cried, "you beant goin' to leave us again. Tom, he'll die in the wilderness, and we must git to Kaintuckee."

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The next vivid thing in my memory is the view of the last barrier Nature had reared between us and the delectable country. It stood like a lion at the gateway, and for some minutes we gazed at it in terror from Powell's Valley below. How many thousands have looked at it with sinking hearts! How many weaklings has its frown turned back! There seemed to be engraved upon it the dark history of the dark and bloody land beyond. Nothing in this life worth having is won for the asking; and the best is fought for, and bled for, and died for. Written, too, upon that towering wall of white rock, in the handwriting of God Himself, is the history of the indomitable Race to which we belong.

For fifty miles we travelled under it, towards the Gap, our eyes drawn to it by a resistless fascination. The sun went over it early in the day, as though glad to leave the place, and after that a dark scowl would settle there. At night we felt its presence, like a curse. Even Polly Ann was silent. And she had need to be now. When it was necessary, we talked in low tones, and the bell-clappers on the horses were not loosed at night. It was here, but four years gone, that Daniel Boone's family was attacked, and his son killed by the Indians.

We passed, from time to time, deserted cabins and camps, and some places that might once have been called settlements: Elk Garden, where the pioneers of the last four years had been wont to lay in a simple supply of seed corn and Irish potatoes; and the spot where Henderson and his company had camped on the way to establish Boonesboro two years before. And at last we struck the trace that mounted upward to the Gateway itself.