

Colonel Clark turned to me with that quiet, jocose way he had when relaxed.

"Davy," said he, "we'll see how much of a general you are. What would you do if a scoundrel named Hamilton far away at Detroit was bribing all the redskins he could find north of the Ohio to come down and scalp your men?"

"I'd go for Hamilton," I answered.

"By God!" exclaimed Clark, striking Mr. Boone on the knee, "that's what I'd do."

CHAPTER XI

FRAGMENTARY

MR. BOONE'S visit lasted but a day. I was a great deal with Colonel Clark in the few weeks that followed before his departure for Virginia. He held himself a little aloof (as a leader should) from the captains in the station, without seeming to offend them. But he had a fancy for James Ray and for me, and he often took me into the woods with him by day, and talked with me of an evening.

"I'm going away to Virginia, Davy," he said; "will you not go with me? We'll see Williamsburg, and come back in the spring, and I'll have you a little rifle made."

My look must have been wistful.

"I can't leave Polly Ann and Tom," I answered.

"Well," he said, "I like that. Faith to your friends is a big equipment for life."

"But why are you going?" I asked.

"Because I love Kentucky best of all things in the world," he answered, smiling.

"And what are you going to do?" I insisted.

"Ah," he said, "that I can't tell even to you."

"To catch Hamilton?" I ventured at random.

He looked at me queerly.

"Would you go along, Davy?" said he, laughing now.

"Would you take Tom?"

"Among the first," answered Colonel Clark, heartily.

We were seated under the elm near the spring, and at that instant I saw Tom coming toward us. I jumped up, thinking to please him by this intelligence, when Colonel Clark pulled me down again.

"Davy," said he, almost roughly, I thought, "remember that we have been joking. Do you understand? — joking. You have a tongue in your mouth, but sense enough in your head, I believe, to hold it." He turned to Tom. "McChesney, this is a queer lad you brought us," said he.

"He's a little deevil," agreed Tom, for that had become a formula with him.

It was all very mysterious to me, and I lay awake many a night with curiosity, trying to solve a puzzle that was none of my business. And one day, to cap the matter, two woodsmen arrived at Harrodstown with clothes frayed and bodies lean from a long journey. Not one of the hundred questions with which they were beset would they answer, nor say where they had been or why, save that they had carried out certain orders of Clark, who was locked up with them in a cabin for several hours.

The first of October, the day of Colonel Clark's departure, dawned crisp and clear. He was to take with him the disheartened and the cowed, the weaklings who loved neither work nor exposure nor danger. And before he set out of the gate he made a little speech to the assembled people.

"My friends," he said, "you know me. I put the interests of Kentucky before my own. Last year when I left to represent her at Williamsburg there were some who said I would desert her. It was for her sake I made that journey, suffered the tortures of hell from scalded feet, was near to dying in the mountains. It was for her sake that I importuned the governor and council for powder and lead, and when they refused it I said to them, 'Gentlemen, a country that is not worth defending is not worth claiming.'"

At these words the settlers gave a great shout, waving their coonskin hats in the air.

"Ay, that ye did," cried Bill Cowan, "and got the ammunition."

"I made that journey for her sake, I say," Colonel Clark continued, "and even so I am making this one.

I pray you trust me, and God bless and keep you while I am gone."

He did not forget to speak to me as he walked between our lines, and told me to be a good boy and that he would see me in the spring. Some of the women shed tears as he passed through the gate, and many of us climbed to sentry box and cabin roof that we might see the last of the little company wending its way across the fields. A motley company it was, the refuse of the station, headed by its cherished captain. So they started back over the weary road that led to that now far-away land of civilization and safety.

During the balmy Indian summer, when the sharper lines of nature are softened by the haze, some came to us from across the mountains to make up for the deserters. From time to time a little group would straggle to the gates of the station, weary and footsore, but overjoyed at the sight of white faces again: the fathers walking ahead with watchful eyes, the women and older children driving the horses, and the babies slung to the pack in hickory withes. Nay, some of our best citizens came to Kentucky swinging to the tail of a patient animal. The Indians were still abroad, and in small war parties darted hither and thither with incredible swiftness. And at night we would gather at the fire around our new emigrants to listen to the stories they had to tell, — familiar stories to all of us. Sometimes it had been the gobble of a wild turkey that had lured to danger, again a wood-owl had cried strangely in the night.

Winter came, and passed — somehow. I cannot dwell here on the tediousness of it, and the one bright spot it has left in my memory concerns Polly Ann. Did man, woman, or child fall sick, it was Polly Ann who nursed them. She had by nature the God-given gift of healing, knew by heart all the simple remedies that backwoods lore had inherited from the north of Ireland or borrowed from the Indians. Her sympathy and loving-kindness did more than these, her never tiring and ever cheerful watchfulness. She was deft, too, was Polly Ann, and

spun from nettle bark many a cut of linen that could scarce be told from flax. Before the sap began to run again in the maples there was not a soul in Harrodstown who did not love her, and I truly believe that most of them would have risked their lives to do her bidding.

Then came the sugaring, the warm days and the freezing nights when the earth stirs in her sleep and the taps drip from red sunrise to red sunset. Old and young went to the camps, the women and children boiling and graining, the squads of men posted in guards round about. And after that the days flew so quickly that it seemed as if the woods had burst suddenly into white flower, and it was spring again. And then—a joy to be long remembered—I went on a hunting trip with Tom and Cowan and three others where the Kentucky tumbles between its darkly wooded cliffs. And other wonders of that strange land I saw then for the first time: great licks, trampled down for acres by the wild herds, where the salt water oozes out of the hoofprints. On the edge of one of these licks we paused and stared breathless at giant bones sticking here and there in the black mud, and great skulls of fearful beasts half-embedded. This was called the Big Bone Lick, and some travellers that went before us had made their tents with the thighs of these monsters of a past age.

A danger past is oft a danger forgotten. Men went out to build the homes of which they had dreamed through the long winter. Axes rang amidst the white dogwoods and the crabs and redbuds, and there were riotous log-raisings in the clearings. But I think the building of Tom's house was the most joyous occasion of all, and for none in the settlement would men work more willingly than for him and Polly Ann. The cabin went up as if by magic. It stood on a rise upon the bank of the river in a grove of oaks and hickories, with a big persimmon tree in front of the door. It was in the shade of this tree that Polly Ann sat watching Tom and me through the mild spring days as we barked the roof, and none ever felt greater joy and pride in a home than she. We had our first supper on

a wide puncheon under the persimmon tree on the few pewter plates we had fetched across the mountain, the blue smoke from our own hearth rising in the valley until the cold night air spread it out in a line above us, while the horses grazed at the river's edge.

After that we went to ploughing, an occupation which Tom fancied but little, for he loved the life of a hunter best of all. But there was corn to be raised and fodder for the horses, and a truck-patch to be cleared near the house.

One day a great event happened,—and after the manner of many great events, it began in mystery. Leaping on the roan mare, I was riding like mad for Harrodstown to fetch Mrs. Cowan. And she, when she heard the summons, abandoned a turkey on the spit, pitched her brats out of the door, seized the mare, and dashing through the gates at a gallop left me to make my way back afoot. Scenting a sensation, I hurried along the wooded trace at a dog trot, and when I came in sight of the cabin there was Mrs. Cowan sitting on the step, holding in her long but motherly arms something bundled up in nettle linen, while Tom stood sheepishly by, staring at it.

"Shucks," Mrs. Cowan was saying loudly, "I reckon ye're as little use to-day as Swein Poulsson,—standin' there on one foot. Ye anger me—just grinning at it like a fool—and yer own doin'. Have ye forgot how to talk?"

Tom grinned the more, but was saved the effort of a reply by a loud noise from the bundle.

"Here's another," cried Mrs. Cowan to me. "Ye needn't act as if it was an animal. Faith, yerself was like that once, all red an' crinkled. But I warrant ye didn't have the heft," and she lifted it, judicially. "A grand baby," attacking Tom again, "and ye're no more worthy to be his father than Davy here."

Then I heard a voice calling me, and pushing past Mrs. Cowan, I ran into the cabin. Polly Ann lay on the log bedstead, and she turned to mine a face radiant with a happiness I had not imagined.

"Oh, Davy, have ye seen him? Have ye seen little Tom? Davy, I reckon I'll never be so happy again. Fetch him here, Mrs. Cowan."

Mrs. Cowan, with a glance of contempt at Tom and me, put the bundle tenderly down on the coarse brown sheet beside her.

Poor little Tom! Only the first fortnight of his existence was spent in peace. I have a pathetic memory of it all—of our little home, of our hopes for it, of our days of labor and nights of planning to make it complete. And then, one morning when the three of us were turning over the black loam in the patch, while the baby slept peacefully in the shade, a sound came to our ears that made us pause and listen with bated breath. It was the sound of many guns, muffled in the distant forest. With a cry Polly Ann flew to the hickory cradle under the tree, Tom sprang for the rifle that was never far from his side, while with a kind of instinct I ran to catch the spangled horses by the river. In silence and sorrow we fled through the tall cane, nor dared to take one last look at the cabin, or the fields lying black in the spring sunlight. The shots had ceased, but ere we had reached the little clearing McCann had made they began again, though as distant as before. Tom went ahead, while I led the mare and Polly Ann clutched the child to her breast. But when we came in sight of the fort across the clearings the gates were closed. There was nothing to do but cower in the thicket, listening while the battle went on afar, Polly Ann trying to still the cries of the child, lest they should bring death upon us. At length the shooting ceased; stillness reigned; then came a faint halloo, and out of the forest beyond us a man rode, waving his hat at the fort. After him came others. The gates opened, and we rushed pell-mell across the fields to safety.

The Indians had shot at a party shelling corn at Captain Bowman's plantation, and killed two, while the others had taken refuge in the crib. Fired at from every brake, James Ray had ridden to Harrodstown for succor, and the savages had been beaten off. But only the foolhardy

returned to their clearings now. We were on the edge of another dreaded summer of siege, the prospect of banishment from the homes we could almost see, staring us in the face, and the labors of the spring lost again. There was bitter talk within the gates that night, and many declared angrily that Colonel Clark had abandoned us. But I remembered what he had said, and had faith in him.

It was that very night, too, I sat with Cowan, who had duty in one of the sentry boxes, and we heard a voice calling softly under us. Fearing treachery, Cowan cried out for a sign. Then the answer came back loudly to open to a runner with a message from Colonel Clark to Captain Harrod. Cowan let the man in, while I ran for the captain, and in five minutes it seemed as if every man and woman and child in the fort were awake and crowding around the man by the gates, their eager faces reddened by the smoking pine knots. Where was Clark? What had he been doing? Had he deserted them?

"Deserted ye!" cried the runner, and swore a great oath. Wasn't Clark even then on the Ohio raising a great army with authority from the Commonwealth of Virginia to rid them of the red scourge? And would they desert him? Or would they be men and bring from Harrodstown the company he asked for? Then Captain Harrod read the letter asking him to raise the company, and before day had dawned they were ready for the word to march—ready to leave cabin and clearing, and wife and child, trusting in Clark's judgment for time and place. Never were volunteers mustered more quickly than in that cool April night by the gates of Harrodstown Station.

"And we'll fetch Davy along, for luck," cried Cowan, catching sight of me beside him.

"Sure we'll be wanting a dhrummer b'y," said McCann. And so they enrolled me.