

BOOK II
FLOTSAM AND JETSAM

CHAPTER I

IN THE CABIN

THE Eden of one man may be the Inferno of his neighbor, and now I am to throw to the winds, like leaves of a worthless manuscript, some years of time, and introduce you to a new Kentucky, — a Kentucky that was not for the pioneer. One page of this manuscript might have told of a fearful winter, when the snow lay in great drifts in the bare woods, when Tom and I fashioned canoes or noggins out of the great roots, when a new and feminine bit of humanity cried in the bark cradle, and Polly Ann sewed deer leather. Another page — nay, a dozen — could be filled with Indian horrors, ambuscades and massacres. And also I might have told how there drifted into this land, hitherto unsoiled, the refuse cast off by the older colonies. I must add quickly that we got more than our share of their best stock along with this.

No sooner had the sun begun to pit the snow hillocks than wild creatures came in from the mountains, haggard with hunger and hardship. They had left their homes in Virginia and the Carolinas in the autumn; an unheralded winter of Arctic fierceness had caught them in its grip. Bitter tales they told of wives and children buried among the rocks. Fast on the heels of these wretched ones trooped the spring settlers in droves; and I have seen whole churches march singing into the forts, the preacher

leading, and thanking God loudly that He had delivered them from the wilderness and the savage. The little forts would not hold them; and they went out to hew clearings from the forest, and to build cabins and stockades. And our own people, starved and snowbound, went out likewise, — Tom and Polly Ann and their little family and myself to the farm at the river-side. And while the water flowed between the stumps over the black land, we planted and ploughed and prayed, always alert, watching north and south, against the coming of the Indians.

But Tom was no husbandman. He and his kind were the scouts, the advance guard of civilization, not tillers of the soil or lovers of close communities. Farther and farther they went afield for game, and always they grumbled sorely against this horde which had driven the deer from his cover and the buffalo from his wallow.

Looking back, I can recall one evening when the long summer twilight lingered to a close. Tom was lounging lazily against the big persimmon tree, smoking his pipe, the two children digging at the roots, and Polly Ann, seated on the door-log, sewing. As I drew near, she looked up at me from her work. She was a woman upon whose eternal freshness industry made no mar.

"Davy," she exclaimed, "how ye've growed! I thought ye'd be a wizened little body, but this year ye've shot up like a cornstalk."

"My father was six feet two inches in his moccasins," I said.

"He'll be wallopin' me soon," said Tom, with a grin. He took a long whiff at his pipe, and added thoughtfully, "I reckon this ain't no place fer me now, with all the settler folks and land-grabbers comin' through the Gap."

"Tom," said I, "there's a bit of a fall on the river here."

"Ay," he said, "and nary a fish left."

"Something better," I answered; "we'll put a dam there and a mill and a hominy pounder."

"And make our fortune grinding corn for the settlers," cried Polly Ann, showing a line of very white teeth. "I always said ye'd be a rich man, Davy."

Tom was mildly interested, and went with us at daylight to measure the fall. And he allowed that he would have the more time to hunt if the mill were a success. For a month I had had the scheme in my mind, where the dam was to be put, the race, and the wondrous wheel rimmed with cow horns to dip the water. And fixed on the wheel there was to be a crank that worked the pounder in the mortar. So we were to grind until I could arrange with Mr. Scarlett, the new storekeeper in Harrodstown, to have two grinding-stones fetched across the mountains.

While the corn ripened and the melons swelled and the flax flowered, our axes rang by the river's side; and sometimes, as we worked, Cowan and Terrell and McCann and other Long Hunters would come and jeer good-naturedly because we were turning civilized. Often they gave us a lift.

It was September when the millstones arrived, and I spent a joyous morning of final bargaining with Mr. Myron Scarlett. This Mr. Scarlett was from Connecticut, had been a quartermaster in the army, and at much risk brought ploughs and hardware, and scissors and buttons, and broadcloth and corduroy, across the Alleghanies, and down the Ohio in flatboats. These he sold at great profit. We had no money, not even the worthless scrip that Congress issued; but a beaver skin was worth eighteen shillings, a bearskin ten, and a fox or a deer or a wildcat less. Half the village watched the barter. The rest lounged sullenly about the land court.

The land court—curse of Kentucky! It was just a windowless log house built outside the walls, our temple of avarice. The case was this: Henderson (for whose company Daniel Boone cut the wilderness road) believed that he had bought the country, and issued grants therefor. Tom held one of these grants, alas, and many others whom I knew. Virginia repudiated Henderson. Keen-faced speculators bought acre upon acre and tract upon tract from the State, and crossed the mountains to extort. Claims conflicted, titles lapped. There was the court set in the sunlight in the midst of a fair land, held by the

shameless, thronged day after day by the homeless and the needy, jostling, quarrelling, beseeching. Even as I looked upon this strife a man stood beside me.

"Drat 'em," said the stranger, as he watched a hawk-eyed extortioner in drab, for these did not condescend to hunting shirts, "drat 'em, ef I had my way I'd wring the neck of every mother's son of 'em."

I turned with a start, and there was Mr. Daniel Boone.

"Howdy, Davy," he said; "ye've growed some sence ye've ben with Clark." He paused, and then continued in the same strain: "'Tis the same at Boonesboro and up thar at the Falls settlement. The critters is everywhar, robbin' men of their claims. Davy," said Mr. Boone, earnestly, "you know that I come into Kaintuckee when it weren't nothin' but wilderness, and resked my life time and again. Them varmints is wuss'n redskins,—they've robbed me already of half my claims."

"Robbed you!" I exclaimed, indignant that he, of all men, should suffer.

"Ay," he said, "robbed me. They've took one claim after another, tracts that I staked out long afore they heerd of Kaintuckee." He rubbed his rifle barrel with his buckskin sleeve. "I get a little for my skins, and a little by surveyin'. But when the game goes I reckon I'll go after it."

"Where, Mr. Boone?" I asked.

"Whar? whar the varmints cyant foller. Acrost the Mississippi into the Spanish wilderness."

"And leave Kentucky?" I cried.

"Davy," he answered sadly, "you kin cope with 'em. They tell me you're buildin' a mill up at McChesney's, and I reckon you're as cute as any of 'em. They beat me. I'm good for nothin' but shootin' and explorin'."

We stood silent for a while, our attention caught by a quarrel which had suddenly come out of the doorway. One of the men was Jim Willis,—my friend of Clark's campaign,—who had a Henderson claim near Shawanee Springs. The other was the hawk-eyed man of whom Mr. Boone had spoken, and fragments of their curses

reached us where we stood. The hunting shirts surged around them, alert now at the prospect of a fight; men came running in from all directions, and shouts of "Hang him! Tomahawk him!" were heard on every side. Mr. Boone did not move. It was a common enough spectacle for him, and he was not excitable. Moreover, he knew that the death of one extortioner more or less would have no effect on the system. They had become as the fowls of the air.

"I was acrost the mountain last month," said Mr. Boone, presently, "and one of them skunks had stole Campbell's silver spoons at Abingdon. Campbell was out arter him for a week with a coil of rope on his saddle. But the varmint got to cover."

Mr. Boone wished me luck in my new enterprise, bade me good-by, and set out for Redstone, where he was to measure a tract for a Revolutioner. The speculator having been rescued from Jim Willis's clutches by the sheriff, the crowd good-naturedly helped us load our stones between pack-horses, and some of them followed us all the way home that they might see the grinding. Half of McAfee's new station had heard the news, and came over likewise. And from that day we ground as much corn as could be brought to us from miles around.

Polly Ann and I ran the mill and kept the accounts. Often of a crisp autumn morning we heard a gobble-gobble above the tumbling of the water and found a wild turkey perched on top of the hopper, eating his fill. Some of our meat we got that way. As for Tom, he was off and on. When the roving spirit seized him he made journeys to the westward with Cowan and Ray. Generally they returned with packs of skins. But sometimes soberly, thanking Heaven that their hair was left growing on their heads. This, and patrolling the Wilderness Road and other militia duties, made up Tom's life. No sooner was the mill fairly started than off he went to the Cumberland. I mention this, not alone because I remember well the day of his return, but because of a certain happening then that had a heavy influence on my after life.

The episode deals with an easy-mannered gentleman named Potts, who was the agent for a certain Major Colfax of Virginia. Tom owned under a Henderson grant; the Major had been given this and other lands for his services in the war. Mr. Potts arrived one rainy afternoon and found me standing alone under the little lean-to that covered the hopper. How we served him, with the aid of McCann and Cowan and other neighbors, and how we were near getting into trouble because of the prank, will be seen later. The next morning I rode into Harrodstown not wholly easy in my mind concerning the wisdom of the thing I had done. There was no one to advise me, for Colonel Clark was far away, building a fort on the banks of the Mississippi. Tom had laughed at the consequences; he cared little about his land, and was for moving into the Wilderness again. But for Polly Ann's sake I wished that we had treated the land agent less cavalierly. I was soon distracted from these thoughts by the sight of Harrodstown itself.

I had no sooner ridden out of the forest shade when I saw that the place was in an uproar, men and women gathering in groups and running here and there between the cabins. Urging on the mare, I cantered across the fields, and the first person I met was James Ray.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Matter enough! An army of redskins has crossed the Ohio, and not a man to take command. My God," cried Ray, pointing angrily at the swarms about the land office, "what trash we have got this last year! Kentucky can go to the devil, half the stations be wiped out, and not a thrip do they care."

"Have you sent word to the Colonel?" I asked.

"If he was here," said Ray, bitterly, "he'd have half of 'em swinging inside of an hour. I'll warrant he'd send 'em to the right-about."

I rode on into the town, Potts gone out of my mind. Apart from the land-office crowds, and looking on in silent rage, stood a group of the old settlers,—tall, lean, powerful, yet impotent for lack of a leader. A contrast

they were, these buckskin-clad pioneers, to the ill-assorted humanity they watched, absorbed in struggles for the very lands they had won.

"By the eternal!" said Jack Terrell, "if the year was ter swaller 'em up, they'd keep on a-dickerin' in hell."

"Something's got to be done," Captain Harrod put in gloomily; "the red varmints 'll be on us in another day. In God's name, whar is Clark?"

"Hold!" cried Fletcher Blount, "what's that?"

The broiling about the land court, too, was suddenly hushed. Men stopped in their tracks, staring fixedly at three forms which had come out of the woods into the clearing.

"Redskins, or there's no devil!" said Terrell.

Redskins they were, but not the blanketed kind that drifted every day through the station. Their war-paint gleamed in the light, and the white edges of the feathered head-dresses caught the sun. One held up in his right hand a white belt,—token of peace on the frontier.

"Lord A'mighty!" said Fletcher Blount, "be they Cricks?"

"Chickasaws, by the headgear," said Terrell. "Davy, you've got a hoss. Ride out and look 'em over."

Nothing loath, I put the mare into a gallop, and I passed over the very place where Polly Ann had picked me up and saved my life long since. The Indians came on at a dog trot, but when they were within fifty paces of me they halted abruptly. The chief waved the white belt around his head.

"Davy!" says he, and I trembled from head to foot. How well I knew that voice!

"Colonel Clark!" I cried, and rode up to him. "Thank God you are come, sir," said I, "for the people here are land-mad, and the Northern Indians are crossing the Ohio."

He took my bridle, and, leading the horse, began to walk rapidly towards the station.

"Ay," he answered, "I know it. A runner came to

me with the tidings, where I was building a fort on the Mississippi, and I took Willis here and Saunders, and came."

I glanced at my old friends, who grinned at me through the berry-stain on their faces. We reached a ditch through which the rain of the night before was draining from the fields. Clark dropped the bridle, stooped down, and rubbed his face clean. Up he got again and flung the feathers from his head, and I thought that his eyes twinkled despite the sternness of his look.

"Davy, my lad," said he, "you and I have seen some strange things together. Perchance we shall see stranger to-day."

A shout went up, for he had been recognized. And Captain Harrod and Ray and Terrell and Cowan (who had just ridden in) ran up to greet him and press his hand. He called them each by name, these men whose loyalty had been proved, but said no word more nor paused in his stride until he had reached the edge of the mob about the land court. There he stood for a full minute, and we who knew him looked on silently and waited.

The turmoil had begun again, the speculators calling out in strident tones, the settlers bargaining and pushing, and all clamoring to be heard. While there was money to be made or land to be got they had no ear for the public weal. A man shouldered his way through, roughly, and they gave back, cursing, surprised. He reached the door, and, flinging those who blocked it right and left, entered. There he was recognized, and his name flew from mouth to mouth.

"Clark!"

He walked up to the table, strewn with books and deeds.

"Silence!" he thundered. But there was no need,—they were still for once. "This court is closed," he cried, "while Kentucky is in danger. Not a deed shall be signed nor an acre granted until I come back from the Ohio. Out you go!"

Out they went indeed, judge, brokers, speculators—

the evicted and the triumphant together. And when the place was empty Clark turned the key and thrust it into his hunting shirt. He stood for a moment on the step, and his eyes swept the crowd.

"Now," he said, "there have been many to claim this land — who will follow me to defend it?"

As I live, they cheered him. Hands were flung up that were past counting, and men who were barely rested from the hardships of the Wilderness Trail shouted their readiness to go. But others slunk away, and were found that morning grumbling and cursing the chance that had brought them to Kentucky. Within the hour the news had spread to the farms, and men rode in to Harrodstown to tell the Colonel of many who were leaving the plough in the furrow and the axe in the wood, and starting off across the mountains in anger and fear. The Colonel turned to me as he sat writing down the names of the volunteers.

"Davy," said he, "when you are grown you shall not stay at home, I promise you. Take your mare and ride as for your life to McChesney, and tell him to choose ten men and go to the Crab Orchard on the Wilderness Road. Tell him for me to turn back every man, woman, and child who tries to leave Kentucky."

I met Tom coming in from the field with his rawhide harness over his shoulders. Polly Ann stood calling him in the door, and the squirrel broth was steaming on the table. He did not wait for it. Kissing her, he flung himself into the saddle I had left, and we watched him mutely as he waved back to us from the edge of the woods.

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In the night I found myself sitting up in bed, listening to a running and stamping near the cabin.

Polly Ann was stirring. "Davy," she whispered, "the stock is oneasy."

We peered out of the loophole together and through the little orchard we had planted. The moon flooded the fields, and beyond it the forest was a dark blur. I can recall the scene now, the rude mill standing by the water-

side, the twisted rail fences, and the black silhouettes of the horses and cattle as they stood bunched together. Behind us little Tom stirred in his sleep and startled us. That very evening Polly Ann had frightened him into obedience by telling him that the Shawanees would get him.

What was there to do? McAfee's Station was four miles away, and Ray's clearing two. Ray was gone with Tom. I could not leave Polly Ann alone. There was nothing for it but to wait.

Silently, that the children might not be waked and a lurking savage might not hear, we put the powder and bullets in the middle of the room and loaded the guns and pistols. For Polly Ann had learned to shoot. She took the loopholes of two sides of the cabin, I of the other two, and then began the fearful watching and waiting which the frontier knows so well. Suddenly the cattle stirred again, and stampeded to the other corner of the field. There came a whisper from Polly Ann.

"What is it?" I answered, running over to her.

"Look out," she said; "what d'ye see near the mill?"

Her sharp eyes had not deceived her, for mine perceived plainly a dark form skulking in the hickory grove. Next, a movement behind the rail fence, and darting back to my side of the house I made out a long black body wriggling at the edge of the withered corn-patch. They were surrounding us. How I wished that Tom were home!

A stealthy sound began to intrude itself upon our ears. Listening intently, I thought it came from the side of the cabin where the lean-to was, where we stored our wood in winter. The black shadow fell on that side, and into a patch of bushes; peering out of the loophole, I could perceive nothing there. The noise went on at intervals. All at once there grew on me, with horror, the discovery that there was digging under the cabin.

How long the sound continued I know not, — it might have been an hour, it might have been less. Now I thought I heard it under the wall, now beneath the puncheons of the floor. The pitchy blackness within

was such that we could not see the boards moving, and therefore we must needs kneel down and feel them from time to time. Yes, this one was lifting from its bed on the hard earth beneath. I was sure of it. It rose an inch—then an inch more. Gripping the handle of my tomahawk, I prayed for guidance in my stroke, for the blade might go wild in the darkness. Upward crept the board, and suddenly it was gone from the floor. I swung a full circle—and to my horror I felt the axe plunging into soft flesh and crunching on a bone. I had missed the head! A yell shattered the night, the puncheon fell with a rattle on the boards, and my tomahawk was gone from my hand. Without, the fierce war-cry of the Shawanees that I knew so well echoed around the log walls, and the door trembled with a blow. The children awoke, crying.

There was no time to think; my great fear was that the devil in the cabin would kill Polly Ann. Just then I heard her calling out to me.

"Hide!" I cried, "hide under the shake-down! Has he got you?"

I heard her answer, and then the sound of a scuffle that maddened me. Knife in hand, I crept slowly about, and put my fingers on a man's neck and side. Next Polly Ann careened against me, and I lost him again. "Davy, Davy," I heard her gasp, "look out fer the floor!"

It was too late. The puncheon rose under me, I stumbled, and it fell again. Once more the awful changing notes of the war-whoop sounded without. A body bumped on the boards, a white light rose before my eyes, and a sharp pain leaped in my side. Then all was black again, but I had my senses still, and my fingers closed around the knotted muscles of an arm. I thrust the pistol in my hand against flesh, and fired. Two of us fell together, but the thought of Polly Ann got me staggering to my feet again, calling her name. By the grace of God I heard her answer.

"Are ye hurt, Davy?"

"No," said I, "no. And you?"

We drifted together. 'Twas she who had the presence of mind.

"The chest—quick, the chest!"

We stumbled over a body in reaching it. We seized the handles, and with all our strength hauled it athwart the loose puncheon that seemed to be lifting even then. A mighty splintering shook the door.

"To the ports!" cried Polly Ann, as our heads knocked together.

To find the rifles and prime them seemed to take an age. Next I was staring through the loophole along a barrel, and beyond it were three black forms in line on a long beam. I think we fired—Polly Ann and I—at the same time. One fell. We saw a comedy of the beam dropping heavily on the foot of another, and he limping off with a guttural howl of rage and pain. I fired a pistol at him, but missed him, and then I was ramming a powder charge down the long barrel of the rifle. Suddenly there was silence,—even the children had ceased crying. Outside, in the dooryard, a feathered figure writhed like a snake towards the fence. The moon still etched the picture in black and white.

Shots awoke me, I think, distant shots. And they sounded like the ripping and tearing of cloth for a wound. 'Twas no new sound to me.

"Davy, dear," said a voice, tenderly.

Out of the mist the tear-stained face of Polly Ann bent over me. I put up my hand, and dropped it again with a cry. Then, my senses coming with a rush, the familiar objects of the cabin outlined themselves: Tom's winter hunting shirt, Polly Ann's woollen shift and sunbonnet on their pegs; the big stone chimney, the ladder to the loft; the closed door, with a long, jagged line across it where the wood was splintered; and, dearest of all, the chubby forms of Peggy and little Tom playing on the trundle-bed. Then my glance wandered to the floor, and on the puncheons were three stains. I closed my eyes.

Again came a far-off rattle, like stones falling from a great height down a rocky bluff.

"What's that?" I whispered.

"They're fighting at McAfee's Station," said Polly Ann. She put her cool hand on my head, and little Tom climbed up on the bed and looked up into my face, wistfully calling my name.

"Oh, Davy," said his mother, "I thought ye were never coming back."

"And the redskins?" I asked.

She drew the child away, lest he hurt me, and shuddered.

"I reckon 'twas only a war-party," she answered. "The rest is at McAfee's. And if they beat 'em off—" she stopped abruptly.

"We shall be saved," I said.

I shall never forget that day. Polly Ann left my side only to feed the children and to keep watch out of the loopholes, and I lay on my back, listening and listening to the shots. At last these became scattered. Then, though we strained our ears, we heard them no more. Was the fort taken? The sun slid across the heavens and shot narrow blades of light, now through one loophole and now through another, until a ray slanted from the western wall and rested upon the red-and-black paint of two dead bodies in the corner. I stared with horror.

"I was afeard to open the door and throw 'em out," said Polly Ann, apologetically.

Still I stared. One of them had a great cleft across his face.

"But I thought I hit him in the shoulder," I exclaimed. Polly Ann thrust her hand, gently, across my eyes. "Davy, ye mustn't talk," she said; "that's a dear."

Drowsiness seized me. But I resisted.

"You killed him, Polly Ann," I murmured, "you?"

"Hush," said Polly Ann.

And I slept again.

CHAPTER II

"THE BEGGARS ARE COME TO TOWN"

"THEY was that destitute," said Tom, "'twas a pity to see 'em."

"And they be grand folks, ye say?" said Polly Ann.

"Grand folks, I reckon. And helpless as babes on the Wilderness Trail. They had two niggers—his nigger an' hers—and they was tuckered, too, fer a fact."

"Lawdy!" exclaimed Polly Ann. "Be still, honey!" Taking a piece of corn-pone from the cupboard, she bent over and thrust it between little Peggy's chubby fingers. "Be still, honey, and listen to what your Pa says. Whar did ye find 'em, Tom?"

"'Twas Jim Ray found 'em," said Tom. "We went up to Crab Orchard, accordin' to the Colonel's orders, and we was thar three days. Ye ought to hev seen the trash we turned back, Polly Ann! Most of 'em was scared plum' crazy, and they was fer gittin' 'out 'n Kaintuckee at any cost. Some was fer fightin' their way through us."

"The skulks!" exclaimed Polly Ann. "They tried to kill ye? What did ye do?"

Tom grinned, his mouth full of bacon.

"Do?" says he; "we shot a couple of 'em in the legs and arms, and bound 'em up again. They was in a t'arin' rage. I'm more afeard of a scar't man,—a real scar't man—nor a rattler. They cussed us till they was hoarse. Said they'd hev us hung, an' Clark, too."