

TIPPECANOE

By SAMUEL MCCOY

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CHAPTER XV—Continued.

With a bound he reached the bank of the stream, leaped down beneath its friendly shelter, and ran on noiseless moccasins along the shelving edge, back toward the quarter from which the shot had come; if he were pursued, it would be better to let the chase pass him than to try to outdistance the Indian runners. At last he stopped and inch by inch crawled up to the top of the bank until he could lift his head with infinite caution and peer through the tufts of weeds. No sound broke the stillness. For an eternity of time he lay, clutching his rifle in readiness; but the only sound was the querulous calling of the little woodpecker, high overhead. He waited . . . waited . . . waited.

Fifty yards away a ring snapped under a slow-moving root. David scarcely breathed. A head rose above a fallen giant of the forest, and a crouching shadow flitted from tree to tree, nearer, nearer . . . David raised his rifle ever so little . . . He saw the face of the dread hunter, peering with quick motions of the head from side to side, watchful as the brown water-snake. Nearer he came; the garb was that of an Indian, the face a white man's! David was about to cry out with relief when the glittering eyes were turned full toward him, though they failed to pierce the sheltering covert, and with a sickening horror David recognized the face of Simon Girty, the renegade!

On the instant, David lifted his rifle and fired full at the crouching figure. From Girty's lips broke the roar of an infuriated animal; he staggered back with the impact of the shot, but he did not fall nor yet did he lift his weapon to his shoulder; and David saw that his shot had struck only the lock of Girty's rifle, rendering it useless but leaving the man unharmed. With a bellow of rage, Girty bounded toward him, swinging the broken weapon like a club. There was no time to reload. David leaped to the top of the bank and braced himself for the onset. As the clubbed rifle of the outlaw rose above his head, David swung his own upward to meet it. They crashed together and splintered with a shock; and in the same second, flinging the broken stock away, the mighty arms of Simon Girty flung themselves around David.

With the strength of desperation, David strove to oppose the terrible sinews. Back and forth over the frozen grass the two men fought like beasts, heaving, struggling, stumbling over roots, locked in an embrace as deadly as that of the cougar. But it could not last long; David felt his strength ebbing under the terrific strain and his breath grew short and gasping; when suddenly the earth gave way beneath their feet and with a last despairing effort David twisted himself above as they toppled over the low bluff, and the fight was over. Girty, falling underneath, had struck his head upon a stone; and his arms relaxed their hold.

David stood up, panting.

Girty lay very still. But David knew that he must make sure that the man was dead before he could be safe himself. He felt in his girdle for his

"Save yourself," she murmured faintly, "there are Indians coming!"

He kneeled and cut the thongs that bound her ankles and then those of her wrists. As she tried to stand, she swayed weakly and fainted. There was no time to lose; he lifted her limp form upon his shoulders and ran staggering in the direction of the troops. He could never overtake them—the marching column and the slow-moving wagons must be a mile away by now. He stumbled on with desperate exertion. He reached the winding creek again, laid down his unconscious burden and dashed the icy water in Toinette's face. Her great blue eyes, shadowed by dark circles of exhaustion, opened slowly, looked at him weakly. "Father, help me!" she cried.

He shook her by the shoulders. "Stand up! Try!" The light of consciousness came back into her eyes; she rose trembling and tried to walk. They found a place where the ground gurgled over a stony bar, ankle-deep; crossed it and struggled up the bank on the farther side. As they reached the top there came to their ears the dreadful exultant yell of the Indians, three hundred yards behind. David put his arms around the girl's shoulders and they ran on with palsied limbs. They seemed to be struggling on in that nightmare where the feet are leaden and the pursuers fleet. Nearer and nearer came the fierce yelping.

At last David and Toinette stood still and looked at each other. David drew his knife. She nodded, silently praying him to deliver her with that swift death from the tortures of the savages. "Oh, God, not yet!" he cried; and drew her on in blind haste. Twice he shouted, with all the strength of his gasping lungs. Was it an echo, or an answering shout that came back? And then there came a burst of the sweetest music in the world: the cheers of a score of Harrison's men, crashing through the woods a hundred yards away.

The chase was suddenly reversed. At the first shout of the backwoodsmen, the baffled Indians turned and fled. The rescuing party pursued them but a little way, firing vainly at the fleeing forces dodging among the tree trunks. Young George Croghan, Harrison's aid, was in command of the little squad. They had heard Girty's shot, fired at David, and a little later, David's shot; and had come back from the troops with all speed. Toinette had sunk to the ground, laughing and sobbing; they gathered around her with wild hurrahs, a torrent of eager questions.

They bore her on their shoulders back to the marching men. How the cheering ran along the line as the men caught sight of her! General Harrison and his staff galloped up one by one and shouted like boys. Old "Wash" Johnston leaned over and kissed her face, stained with happy tears. "I'm old enough, my dear," he said. And the men cheered again.

A dozen times she was obliged to tell the story of her captivity; a dozen times the men lifted David on their shoulders and cheered him to the echo. But through all the rejoicing and the thanksgiving, David's heart remained heavy; for the breach still seemed impossible to bridge. She, too, suffered: tormented by a debt of gratitude due one whose treason to his country must forever bar him from her love.

Treason? Why was it, then, that David seemed such a hero to all his comrades among the militiamen? Why had all of them received him into their hearts like brother? Toinette struggled all through the day with the secret which she thought so horrible. Little by little, she came to the conclusion that David had managed in some way to win a pardon from Governor Harrison, before the trip to the Prophet's camp had been begun.

She went back over the circumstances of that tragic meeting in Corydon, when she and Ike had confronted David and found the proofs of treachery upon him. What had happened after she had left that scene? Perhaps Ike had prevailed on David to renounce his allegiance to England. Perhaps, then, he had interceded with Governor Harrison in his friend's behalf. She pictured the stern young governor as saying that David's life must depend on his faithful service to the territory in the future. Ike had never spoken one word to her about David from that day on. Little by little, as she went over each point in her heart, a sense that she had been tricked out of her love grew on her, a sense that somehow she had cheated herself. In the sleepless hours of the night that followed, she felt her eyes smarting with tears. What could she do? What could she do? The whole world seemed against her!

She could not bring herself to voice her inward trouble to anyone, least of all to David. She watched him striding along, among his comrades, jesting with them as only men who have passed through death together can jest, and her torment almost madened her. What a sorry tangle she had got herself into! What a little fool had been! But David, too, she herself, had been just as unready. She caught the eyes of him who had been her friend, and she thought she had seen a gleam of recognition in his eyes. She had been taken in by his smile, and his smile was terrible.

Accordingly, the little old gentleman, who was sincerely troubled by the evident breach between his daughter and David, got small satisfaction from Toinette when he stuck a cautious finger into the difficulty. There was nothing wrong and she was perfectly happy and if David chose to be a bear with a sore head that was his

This is a story of pioneer days in Indiana, when courageous frontiersmen fought the redskins and the wilderness and won vast territory

concern and not theirs; and Mr. O'Bannon wisely forbore further attempts to effect a reconciliation. Ike Blackford, who remained a staunch friend to each, was likewise constrained to remain in troubled silence, he had opened a well-meaning mouth to each in turn and had got no cakes to fill it at either fair.

And at last her "happiness" was so perfect that she resolved to endure it no longer.

She waited until she found him alone in the shop, the little room which had once meant to him the beginning of life's joyousness and life's hopes; and which was now a prison house whence ghosts of yesterdays mocked him with their memories.

He was about to close his door for the day.

Toinette summoned all her strength. The tower of pride was tottering; it can be sent down in ruins so easily when a girl throws down the weapon of her sex!

"I can't stand it any longer, David," she said breathlessly, "to see you suffer. I know you are suffering, because I—because I—because it hurts me so!"

What a glorious crash the tower made!

David took a quick step toward her. His pulses throbbed ungovernably.

"Toinette, what do you mean?" His face was glorious. "Have you—do you believe in me now?"

"You have blotted out all the past, David," she said simply.

The joy suddenly left his face.

"But the past," he said, in dread of what her answer might be, "the past—have you forgotten why you drove me from you? Have you forgotten what treason you charged me with?"

She waved the words aside. "That is all past now, David. It is the future that is everything. And I know now what you mean to me."

He clenched his hands at his side. He would be patient. Was it possible that she still believed the empty slander against his loyalty?

"No, Toinette," he said, as gently as he could, "I have not forgotten your charge against me. I can never forget it until you say that you were wrong."

The tower of pride reared itself up again from its dust. Why must he ask her to humble herself still further, when she had already said so much? She was silent. He waited for her answer, but none came; and at last, he bowed gravely.

"Then it is useless to talk of—forgetting. Please let us end this foolish play."

He moved as though to go on with his work.

"Wait, David!" she said tremulously. Her eyes were blinded with tears. Her fingers had been plucking nervously at a purple ribbon which hung from her bodice.

"Wait, I want to give you—a remembrance." She lifted the great shears from the counter and clipped the silken cord from its fastenings. A tear ran down and stained it with a darker color. Her fingers twisted the sorry token quickly twisted it into a wistful emblem such as happy lovers laughingly give each other—a lover's knot. She raised her face and her blue eyes smiled wanly through the mist that clouded them.

"Here, David, take this—just to be foolish just to be foolish for once."

He took it. His hand was trembling. But his face was steel, unforgiving. All his yearning for her burned in his breast, a white caldron of passion; but around it closed the unyielding walls of his cold passion for his honor. He could never forget that she had doubted him once. Until that stain had been washed away, he could not forgive. He remembered the young Sir Philip Sidney of whom her father, old Patrice, had so often told him—of his proud guardianship of the white shield of many honor; he himself had been only a wearer, but here, in this new country, he was a man; and his honor must be first!

"Toinette," he said in a low voice, "who told you that I had acted as a spy?"

The blood rushed to her cheeks. This, too, she would give him.

"Doctor Elliott," she whispered, with bent head.

"Who is he?" cried David in a fury. "That young doctor who comes here from Louisville? In God's name, what has he against me? I've never seen the man! But do you believe him still?"

"You have never—never denied—never—" she stopped miserably. She could not raise her eyes to face him.

"Then nothing else matters, Toinette."

"Oh, David, that doesn't matter either!" she cried. "Nothing matters! I want you in spite of that!"

But he shook his head.

She became very pale again.

"I have offered all I have," she said proudly, "I have nothing more to give."

"I can take nothing from you while you believe me guilty. My name is all I have to give you."

Her answer scarcely reached his ear:

"Oh, David, let our love be enough."

The light had faded from the sky. David looked down at her bent head and trembled.

"Where is this man Elliott now?" he demanded suddenly.

"I do not know," faltered Toinette, "but, oh, David—"

"Good-by!" he said.

She did not answer, but held out her hand. He paid no heed. With a sob she turned and ran falteringly toward her father's house.

David set about the work he had to do.

He went directly to Blackford's room at the tavern. Ike was not there. In a corner, beneath the wooden table where a dozen law books lay scattered, was a narrow box. Ike had often exhibited its contents to him. He lifted it upon the table and threw open the lid. Within lay two of those deadly weapons which none but gentlemen cherished—two dueling pistols, brown-barreled, glistening, long and lean as lightning. He drew forth one of them, tried its hammer; it moved swiftly, noiselessly. He loaded it, fitted the flint into the lock, placed it in the bosom of his coat, and went out, silent, his face white as linen.

Night had fallen. Far to the east a sheet of flame flickered palely. Long after, a faint roll of thunder followed.

A drop of icy rain struck his face.

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