

K FOR EVERY BOY AND GIRL

4

TWO LADS OF OLD KENTUCKY

By Virginia Yeaman Remnitz

HOW Toddles got out of the fort was never known. The time of his disappearance was early afternoon one spring day of the year 1781. The women of Hamilton's Station were either making their spinning-wheels sing, or were themselves singing to restless babies; the men were all out hunting; the children were playing in the fort yard. And all around this frail little settlement lay the beautiful, Indian-haunted, wolf-haunted wilderness of Kentucky.

Somewhere out in that wilderness was Toddles, but his mother did not know it yet. A little wooden "fort," made by erecting log cabins and stockade—fencing about a four-square yard, may not seem to offer adequate protection against savage enemies, brute or human; but it is far, far better for a little child than no protection at all.

Presently Mrs. Hamilton looked out from her spinning-wheel to gladden her eyes with a sight of Toddles. He was the prettiest, chubbiest bit of a boy in the settlement—a hardy little frontiersman, with a sunny smile and laughing blue eyes.

"Toddles! Toddles!" The call grew louder and louder. It rang all around the yard, until women came running; women, and children too, with here and there a tall boy who had been left at home to garrison the station. The tallest of these was Ben Hamilton; and after every cabin had been searched, and keen eyes had swept all the country within sight from the tops of the corner blockhouses, Ben laid his strong brown hand on his mother's arm and said quietly:

"I reckon I'll go and find Toddles."

"Take me too!" "And me!" "And me!" "And me!"

Every boy who was able to carry a "gun" had spoken; but they must all stay at home to take care of their mothers and the little ones. It was rarely that all the men left the fort at once; they did so only when there were no "Indian signs" about. And upon such occasions great responsibility rested upon the older boys who were left behind.

Ben's first preparation for departure was to find his father's dog, "Spot," who had been left at home as part of the garrison. Spot had been discovered, sick and half-famished, in a deserted Indian camp, and had been adopted simply because dogs of any kind were a rarity. But the animal quickly proved himself a valuable member of the settlement. He was an Indian-trained "tracking" dog, as silent as a cat and as keen on the scent as a deer. Already he had found several strayed horses and cows; now he must try to find his playfellow, Toddles.

Mrs. Hamilton herself held the little home-spun frock to the dog's nose, and made him sniff at the bed where Toddles had slept; and it was she who found the last plaything the child had handled. Spot seemed to understand. He was eager to be off, and even submitted patiently to being held in leash by a strip of buffalo tug.

When the heavy fort gate had closed upon Ben, Mrs. Hamilton hastened to the top of a blockhouse, and from this watch-tower she looked eagerly down upon the beginning of the search. And as she looked the mother's grief and fear were for the moment almost forgotten in the mother's pride.

What a man Ben looked! How tall and strong and brave he was for a lad of sixteen. How quick and keen his eye as he glanced now in this direction, now in that, in his dogged, restless, fidgety way! How grave and firm his face as he calmly watched the finding of the scent, stooped to examine the ground, and with the dog started to follow the trail that led into that limitless, terrible forest!

But scarcely had the trail been found than Ben stopped and turned about. His look rested full on his mother's face, and a bright smile broke the gravity of his own. Mrs. Hamilton leaned far over, smiling also; she waved her hand as he turned again, and she watched until the plunge into the forest was taken. Then, as the green foliage and the deep shadows closed about the gallant young figure in blue hunting-shirt and buckskin leggings, the poor mother dropped her face in her hands and wept bitterly. Thus one of the women found her, and led her down, speaking words of comfort which she could only hope might come true. It seemed only too probable that neither of the lads would ever come home again.

Ben had never been alone in the forest before, but his father had taken him on many a hunting trip and had trained the boy in that difficult art of woodcraft so necessary to every frontiersman. And almost at the outset Ben made a discovery which sent the blood to his head and a bright gleam to his eye. It was simply the faint impress of a moccasin foot in wet earth. This clue to his brother's fate Ben found on the bank of the stream which ran just at the edge of the settlement clearing.

On this bank, also, were many prints of small bare feet. Toddles had been playing there. And it was clear that the child had run a little way to escape that dreaded sight of a painted red man which had suddenly appeared before him. It was doubtless in the heat of pursuit that the Indian had been so cautious as to set his foot where any "trace" would be left.

Ben and Spot found the exact place where that pitiful uneven chase had ended. Then the lad closed his eyes for a moment. He dreaded lest his dog should make straight for—something which had been Toddles. Frontier boys saw terrible things in those days, and Ben knew the end Indians often made of the little children they captured. He did not fear anything now, save to come upon the thing his fancy pictured.

But the dog ran about uncertainly. The Indian had probably stepped with Toddles into the bed of the stream, for there was now no scent to follow.

This conclusion gave Ben a momentary sensation of relief. Perhaps the red man intended to make the child a captive rather than to slay him. But had he gone up stream or down?



IT WAS FROM BEHIND A TREE THAT JIM GOT HIS FIRST GLIMPSE OF TODDLES

He untied the strip of tug from the dog's neck, and, whispering in his ear, pointed the way home. When the poor animal, thus unbidden the reward of his labor, protested, Ben had great difficulty in persuading him to go back. But he felt a sudden sense of loneliness and desolation as he watched his friend trot disconsolately homeward.

As Ben hastened on, the angry outcry ahead grew louder and louder, and he wondered that the small captive's behavior did not bring fatal wrath upon him. The fear that it might at any moment have this result impelled Ben, even at some risk from noise, to quicken his pace to a run.

It was from behind a tree that Ben got his first glimpse of Toddles. That undaunted child was engaged in thumping with both tiny fists at the chest and head of the powerful brute who carried him, and was also kicking furiously. Ben looked sharply about, and when he discovered that he had but one redskin to deal with, his courage rose out of all proportion to the situation. He had feared to come upon a whole party of Indians.

The vigor of Toddles's attack upon his captor fairly made Ben's blood run cold at the thought of such rash behavior. Surely the Indian would not tolerate it another instant. He would—oh, what might he not do? At the very idea Ben's rifle was slowly raised and aimed. There was a flash, a sharp report, and then the Indian wheeled about, quite unbroken.

Ben crouched down behind a tree to reload.

There was a brief agonized cry as the savage violently dashed Toddles to the ground, and Ben, scarcely knowing what he did, cocked his reloaded gun and sprang out of hiding. In a moment the Indian was nowhere to be seen, but Toddles lay quite still on the ground beneath a tree. There he hid, waiting for a chance to take aim at his enemy.

It was a terrible game of hide-and-seek. The red man darted from behind his cover, but vanished again before Ben could even aim. The boy believed himself exposed to the enemy's fire, and quick as thought, he rolled over. The next instant

a ball dug up the ground where he had been lying. Then he made a dash for a sheltering boulder, firing as he ran, in the direction from which the shot had just come. A few minutes of silence followed, during which every twig and leaf seemed to quiver. Ben seemed suspiciously queer. He felt that his hidden enemy was creeping upon him; he keenly realized his own inferiority in woodcraft and cunning, and felt there could be but one end to the game he was playing. But he intended to keep it up as long as he could. He felt no fear, only a strange tenseness of nerve and a quickening of every sense. His hearing had never been so keen, his sight so quick, his brain so cool and clear; and the hand at the trigger of his rifle was as steady as though he were merely hunting a squirrel.

If the red man would expose himself for but one instant, Ben believed he could be the first to fire; but if the faintest motion or sound would give warning, he felt he might avoid the enemy's aim. But this prolonged silence seemed to be a part of the game.

It may have been intuition rather than actual perception—but surely a snail was gliding somewhere near. Ben turned like a cat, and his quick blue eye seemed to pierce the underbrush ahead. No, there was nothing but the tremulous shadow of a wind-swayed bough must have deceived him. But there, over by a great rock, was a deeper shadow—and a flash. The two rifles blazed out almost instantaneously, and the reports were followed by a savage yell.

Ben dropped on his knees, a hand to his left shoulder. But he did not know it was there. He was watching the Indian. Was the fellow wounded, or was he only shamming? Was he going away, or was he coming nearer? And surely it was getting dark—dark and cold. Toddles was out alone in the dark and cold. And everywhere, behind trees and rocks, amid the underbrush, were Indians—creeping, creeping. Or were they snakes? At all events, it would not do to leave Toddles alone. He might be frightened, or hurt.



It was a Discontented Boy

Who lay upon the lawn,
And grieved because vacation days,
With all their pleasant sports and plays,
Too soon, alas! were gone.

Some sparrows near him hopped around
And, as he watched, the boy became
Filled with an envy most profound
Because the birds were free from rules,
And never even heard of schools;

And, sitting by, I overheard
This boy wish he was "just a bird."

Scarce had the words been said—alas!—
When, swift as lightning, from the grass
Puss bounded, and one cruel blow
Laid one poor chirping sparrow low.

Then said the Discontented Boy:
"I really never thought of that—
Ah, well! I wish I was a cat."
Just then a dog of monstrous size
Comes up the street—the cat he spies;

Springs for her, and half dead with fright
Puss drops her prey and takes to flight.
Then said the Discontented Boy:
"Instead of either bird or cat,
I'd like to be a dog, like that."
But even as he spoke, a man
Seized on the dog, and in a van
Thrust the unhappy hound.
"Where will you take him?" said the boy.
The man said: "To the pound;
And if nobody comes for him,
To-morrow he'll be drowned."
"Ouch!" said the boy, "I'm very sure
I should n't fancy that;
Nor being pounced on like the bird,
Nor worried like the cat.
It seems, somehow, that everything
Has sorrow mixed with joy;
So after all I guess that I
Would rather be a boy."



The King of Unsergarten

Went forth to fight the foe;
He took with him his trumpet,
His shield and sword and bow,
Along the gravel pathway
And round the lawn he passed;
He stopped at every corner
And blew a fearful blast.

His quiver and his buckler
He brandished in the breeze;
He shot a score of arrows
Into the ambush trees.
The King of Unsergarten,
When once the war was done,
His wooden sword beside him,
Lay sleeping in the sun.

