

## 8. Three Kidnapped Daughters

**I**N spite of all the talk about Indian wars and in spite of the December murders, Boonesborough had begun to feel fairly secure again in the early summer of 1776. Farther to the north, a few settlers had been killed, but Daniel and Squire Boone had come home from their surveying at the Falls of the Ohio without hint of danger. Daniel himself lived in an unfortified cabin by the river, and it is said that a few other settlers had even built cabins on the other side.

Everything seemed so safe that on Sunday, July 7, after the usual Bible reading, a party of three young girls went for a paddle on the river. Jemima Boone was suffering from a "cane stab" in the foot. It was not an infrequent injury, since the stubble of broken cane was sharp, and young girls and even grown women rarely wore shoes in the summertime. Jemima wanted to soak the wound in the cool water of the river, and Betsey and Fanny Callaway went with her to paddle.

These three were the belles of Boonesborough. Betsey, sixteen, was engaged to marry Samuel Henderson. Jemima and Fanny, though only fourteen, already had serious suitors eager to marry them. Daniel Boone was at the moment enacting the rôle of stern parent, opposing the marriage of so young a girl to Flanders Callaway, a nephew of Colonel Callaway.

A great many youngsters clamored to go along on the boat ride; but young ladies with suitors felt much too grown up to

bother with small-fry. With the ineffable dignity of adolescence, they left the smaller girls weeping on the bank and set off. They had been willing enough to take Nathan Reid, a dashing young man lately arrived from Virginia; but at the last moment Nathan was too busy.

Daniel Boone himself is said to have seen them on their way and then to have strolled off on one of his solitary rambles. If that is so, he did not go far, for it is quite certain that he was soon back in the cabin with his moccasins off, taking a quiet Sunday afternoon nap.

The two Callaway girls paddled about safely enough, with Jemima Boone steering and dangling her bare foot in the river. The current carried them slowly downstream until they were about a quarter of a mile below the fort, and then drew them toward a steep cliff on the other side of the river. One of the Callaway girls suggested going ashore to gather flowers on the bank opposite the settlement; but when Jemima Boone remarked laughingly that she was afraid of "the Yellow Boys," they prepared to turn back.

Not being very skillful or very strong, they had trouble with the canoe and, according to some stories, got stuck on a sandbar. Struggle as they might, they could not control the canoe, and "it would go to the other shore despite of their hearts."

The cane came down so close to the water's edge here that its branches hung over into the river. It was an ideal hiding place for five warriors, who had been watching the fort and who, observing the girls' struggles, had quietly waited to see if they might not drift within reach.

The band included some Shawnees, who seem to have met the Cherokee chief, Hanging Maw, in the forest. He had come north along the Warriors' Path to stir up the northern tribes against the white men who were encroaching on the common hunting grounds. Apparently they had come down to recon-

noiter Boonesborough, more or less under Hanging Maw's leadership, before going back to Ohio to hold a council and discuss plans for attacking it. There was no war as yet and no special reason for taking prisoners. The tribes had not formally cast their lot with the British. But no Indian was going to neglect a chance like this.

As they silently waited, the boat drifted nearer and nearer. The girls' futile struggles with the paddles only brought it closer. When they had drifted into shallow water a few yards from shore, the Indians pounced on them. One ran waist-deep into the water and, seizing the canoe by the "buffalo tug" at its prow, tried to haul the craft to shore. Little Fanny Callaway, the smallest of the three, whacked him over the head with the paddle until it broke. Betsey, too, struck out with her paddle as hard as she could, until the other Indians made signs that they would upset the canoe unless they stopped.

The little white squaws were then easily overpowered, dragged through the shallow water to shore, and then, under cover of a densely wooded ravine, rushed to the hills which edge that side of the river. Their screams were instantly silenced by the threatening flourish of knives and tomahawks. One warrior seized Betsey Callaway by the hair and threatened to scalp her if she made another sound. After that, the mute threat of the tomahawks was enough to keep them quiet.

When the Indians reached the hilltop, Jemima Boone, who was not Daniel Boone's daughter for nothing, announced that she would not go another step. They could kill her if they wanted to, but her bare and wounded foot was a good deal worse than death. The Indians at first threatened, but the fourteen-year-old girl was stubborn. Refractory prisoners were casually tomahawked in most cases; but the American Indian has a gentle way with children, always, and these girls were little more than children. Besides, Hanging Maw when not upon the

warpath was a kindly soul, indulgently inclined. Bowing to the inevitable, he and his braves provided moccasins for Jemima and for Fanny Callaway, both of whom were barefoot. Then they cut off the long skirts of all three at the knees, so that they could travel more easily, and let them make wrapped leggings out of the scraps as protection against the underbrush and brambles through which they would have to go.

Recognizing Hanging Maw, whom she had seen at her father's cabin, probably in the Watauga country, Jemima Boone told him who she was. The chief, who spoke excellent English, asked if the other two were her sisters.

"Yes," lied adroit little Jemima, hoping they would get better treatment if the Indians thought they were all daughters of Daniel Boone. Acquaintance with the Shawnee brave, Big Jim, had not saved her brother from death by torture three years before, but Hanging Maw was a less sinister individual. In any case, women were rarely tortured.

The Cherokee chief was mildly amused. Rare was the Cherokee who got the better of the white hunter, "Wide Mouth."

"We have done pretty well for old Boone this time," said he, laughing.

The wily savages as usual divided their party going through canebrakes, so that the trail would be hard to follow. They forced their captives to do the same thing, and even to walk down little streams to hide the trail completely. Where possible, the Indians traveled on the barren tops of ridges, where they left less "sign" than in the lush vegetation of the lowlands.

The Indians treated the girl captives well enough, vastly better than an ordinary group of white soldiers would have treated them. They shared the hard, dry, smoked buffalo-tongue which was their only ration, chatted freely, and explained that they were on their way to the Shawnee towns. They called their

captives "pretty squaws," but—true to the honorable Shawnee tradition—made no attempt to offer familiarity.

The war party camped that night not far from the present city of Winchester, Kentucky, after covering some ten or twelve miles. Each girl was then pinioned for the night with thongs at the elbows and set against a tree, since it was impossible to lie down when bound in this way. One end of the thong was tied to the tree and the other held by a sleeping Indian. The three were placed far enough apart so that they could not reach each other, while the Indians sprawled on the ground in a circle around them. Jemima Boone, who had a penknife in her pocket, tried to reach it and cut herself and the others loose while the Indians slept, but it was no use. All night long they sat there, each girl lashed to her tree, wondering what the morning would bring.

As soon as it was light, Hanging Maw started his band off northward as fast as he could, the girls still full of confidence they would be rescued—a confidence that dwindled as the day passed with no sign that rescuers had found the trail.

By leaving as much evidence of their passing as they could, the quick-witted daughters of the pioneers aided the pursuit which they knew would do its best to follow them. Betsey Callaway, the only one with shoes, managed to dig her high wooden heels into any damp earth, and especially into the mud at buffalo wallows, as plain evidence that a white woman had passed that way. They managed to lag behind the Indians whenever possible and contrived to break a good many twigs. When the warriors asked suspiciously what they were doing, the girls replied innocently that they were tired and were helping themselves along by grasping the bushes. The explanation was not a conspicuous success, but in spite of the Indians' vigilance they broke enough twigs to leave marks on their hands.

"I saw the blisters on the little fingers where the bushes

pinched them," a somewhat sentimental Boonesborough youth afterward reported.

Once the Indians detected Betsey Callaway in the act of breaking a twig. They threatened her with their tomahawks, but they never noticed that she was slyly tearing off bits of her clothing and dropping them on the trail. One fragment of her white linen handkerchief even had the name "Callaway" marked on it. Eventually, the Indians knocked the wooden heels off her shoes to keep her from leaving marks, but the dauntless little sixteen-year-old continued to leave the imprint of her shoe-sole.

Jemima Boone made her sore foot the excuse for frequent falls, accompanied by loud screams intended for any white ears that might be listening in the forest. The Indians hushed her by waving their knives and tomahawks, but it was not long before the girl prisoners found another way of disturbing their captors. Encountering a stray pony in the woods, the Indians put Jemima Boone on it, hoping to hurry up their march. Sometimes the other two also rode.

Children of the frontier, these young girls knew all about horses. They did what they could to make the pony troublesome and then tumbled off at every possible excuse. Laughing heartily, the warriors would pick them up and put them back. When they continued to fall off, the joke rather wore out. An Indian mounted and gravely tried to teach them to ride. It was no use. They fell off almost as frequently as before.

They were, of course, taking desperate chances when they annoyed the Indians in this way. If the good-natured Hanging Maw had not been the most tolerant Cherokee ever heard of, the three of them would have been tomahawked a dozen times over. Except for bruises, however, no one was hurt except Betsey Callaway, who was justifiably bitten by the outraged pony. Finally the harassed Indians decided that since the pretty squaws

were still falling off the pony nearly as fast as they could be put back, the party would make better time without a mount. They turned their horse loose again and went ahead with their captives on foot.

The Indian kidnappers had been so quick and clever that, according to one story, the girls were not even missed until milking time. Then a hunter, probably one of their suitors, who had gone out to meet them, gave the alarm. According to other stories, their screams were heard at once, but they were too far down the river for help to reach them, as they had taken the only boat.

There was intense excitement in Boonesborough. Daniel Boone leaped from the bed in his cabin, seized his rifle, and raced for the river bank, without even waiting for his moccasins. No one had ever seen him betray so much agitation. It was hours before he even missed his footgear, and even then only when a friend reminded him. Samuel Henderson, Betsey Callaway's betrothed, who was shaving at the moment, doubtless with an eye to his fiancée's return, had rushed out rifle in hand with one half of his face shaven and the other still bristling. He never had a chance to even up his countenance until the girls were safely back, three days later.

Efforts at rescue were delayed at the very start, because the Indians had been careful to set Boonesborough's only canoe adrift, and the riflemen had no way of getting across the Kentucky River without wetting their powder. The intrepid John Gass had to swim over for the canoe, expecting invisible Indians to begin sniping at him from the bushes at any moment. No one had any idea how strong the raiding band were nor where they were. While Gass swam, the rest of the Kentuckians lined the bank and covered the other shore with their rifles. But there was no need of precaution. The Indians had long since gone.

When Gass towed the canoe back, Boone took five men over

the river and examined the other shore. A mounted party had already ridden downstream, crossed by the ford, and were working upstream from there. Boone divided his men so as to find the trail as soon as possible. With John Gass and Samuel Henderson, he himself started downstream toward the horsemen. John Floyd led another party upstream. As Boone, finding no tracks, was turning back, Colonel Callaway rode up with his mounted party. It was John Floyd and his men who actually picked up the Indians' trail.

Callaway wanted to ride straight after them, feeling sure that his mounted men could ride them down easily enough. He was probably right. But Daniel Boone pointed out that the Indians would certainly keep one warrior traveling well in their rear to give the alarm if the pursuit got close. He would hear the approach of horsemen and the Indians would instantly tomahawk their prisoners to prevent recapture. This actually did happen to another woman prisoner in that very year. They agreed that Callaway should disregard the trail entirely and ride off at full speed for the ford across Licking River, where he would lie in ambush. Meantime, Boone's party would follow the Indians' trail, or its general direction, with the utmost caution.

It was now so late that there was little hope of following more than a few miles. Floyd's men went as far as they could, and Boone soon overtook them. As they consulted, a dog began barking in the woods. Slipping silently toward the sound, they came upon nine strange white men building a cabin. The Indians had passed without molesting them and apparently without even noticing their presence. Boone and his party halted here for the night, ready to start early Monday morning.

They had rushed after the Indians so hastily that they were still wearing their long, Sunday-go-to-meeting pantaloons, precious garments reserved strictly for the Sabbath and exceedingly



awkward for wilderness travel. Worse still, they had no food, and it began to look as if there would be a long chase. John Gass, the man who swam the river for the canoe, made his way back to Boonesborough in the black night of the forest and returned before morning with breech-clouts, leggings, hunting shirts, and more ammunition, as well as a supply of jerked venison, which was the only provender the housewives of Boonesborough could supply. He also brought moccasins for Daniel Boone, who had been dashing about the woods in his bare feet for hours and by this time needed them badly.

Three of the cabin-builders now joined the pursuit, and they pushed on as soon as there was daylight enough to see the trail. For a time it was easy to follow, and they even noted the exact spot where the Indians had camped. Beyond their camp, however, the warriors had slipped by separate paths through the thickest canebrake they could find. The trail had simply vanished.

Boone soon gave up the attempt to find it again. He knew that every minute counted and he felt sure that the Indians were making for the Shawnee camps on the Scioto. Remarking that it was no use to follow the trail very closely, anyway, until the Indians had gone farther and become less cautious, he led his men swiftly and silently for thirty miles northward along the general route the kidnappers were taking, and then turned at right angles until he crossed the trail itself. Boone and his men knew they were going in the right direction. Even though they were not trying to follow the Indian trail, they frequently crossed it and recognized the "sign" the girls had left. Betsey Callaway's lover could look down in the mud and see her footprints. The suitors of the other two girls could catch similar "sign" that their intended wives had passed that way, en route to become slaves and concubines in some smoky wigwam in a squalid village forever.

After resting for the night when there was no more hope of following the trail, the pursuers were up and away at dawn. Knowing the country of old, Daniel Boone remarked that he was sure the Indians would cross a stream which they were then approaching, only a short distance ahead. They found the crossing within two hundred yards. The moccasin prints were still fresh, the water still muddy. Boone had been right again!

Since the Indians had now covered thirty-five miles without any sign of white pursuers, Boone believed they would be less cautious. It was time now to stick doggedly to their trail. The band still made some effort to evade pursuit, for though they followed the Warriors' Path most of the time, they broke off every now and then for a little while into one of the numerous buffalo traces running parallel with it.

Their precaution was useless. Boone was by this time too close to be shaken off. In a little while his party passed the freshly slaughtered carcass of a buffalo from which only the hump had been cut. It was so fresh that blood was still oozing. Again Daniel ventured a prophecy: The Indians, he said, would halt and cook at the next water. Again Daniel was right. The Indians did exactly what he had expected.

Moving silently ahead, Boone's men came on a small snake the Indians had paused to kill. It was still wriggling. Ten miles farther on the white men came to a small stream. The trail did not cross. Instead, it disappeared entirely. There was no "sign" of any kind on the other bank. This meant that the Indians had taken the precaution of wading down the stream for a while to break the trail before halting. Their trail did not go on. They must be very near. They were probably within earshot.

It was about noon. Boone was sure the raiders were concealed somewhere near at hand cooking a meal. For the third time he was right.

Now came the ticklish part of the rescue. As they went along,

Boone and his men had discussed the danger that he had already pointed out to Callaway. The prisoners might be tomahawked the moment the Indians saw the rescuers. The Boonesborough men made ready for quick action at the finish. In the lightest whisper, Daniel Boone gave his orders. They must exercise the utmost caution. They must approach in dead silence. When they came up with the Indians, no one was to fire until he got Boone's signal. The surest way to save the captives was to pour in a sudden volley and then charge into the camp.

The party divided. Samuel Henderson and one group went downstream. Daniel Boone and another group went upstream. Within two or three hundred yards, they found the Indians, "up a little creek that puts into Licking [River] just above Parker's Ferry," not far from the Blue Licks.

The raiders believed that they had by this time distanced any possible pursuit. Even the prisoners had begun to agree with them and had nearly given up hope of rescue. Actually, however, the pursuit had been much swifter than the Indians dreamed. While Boone's men were closing in from the south, Colonel Callaway's band were already lying in wait, some miles ahead to the north. The Indians could not escape unpunished. Saving the girls was the real problem.

As Boone's men crept up to the outskirts of the camp, the warriors had just kindled a fire and were getting ready to cook. Betsey Callaway sat leaning against a tree. The two younger girls lay with their heads in her lap. Only one Indian—the guard lounging near the girls—had his rifle with him.

The other Indians were all busy. One was gathering wood. One was forcing a spit through the buffalo hump to get it ready for cooking. Hanging Maw had gone to the stream to fill the kettle. They had posted a sentry on a small mound in the rear, exactly as Daniel Boone had predicted; but the brave had just strolled down to the fire to light his pipe and get materials for

mending his moccasins. He had left his rifle behind him. The unhappy warrior had chosen the worst possible moment to do it, for within a few seconds John Floyd's rifle was drawing a bead on him from the underbrush.

The leading white man was within thirty yards of the Indians before he saw them. He turned silently to wave the others on. As he did so, the Indians caught sight of him. The two sides had seen each other at almost the same moment, but only Boone's men were armed and ready. Seeing that Boone's plan for surprising the Indians with a sudden volley was now impossible, the leading rifleman fired instantly, hoping to drive the Indians away from the girls. Boone and Floyd fired also, and one other man got a shot in before the Indians vanished. Floyd's shot knocked the sentry sprawling into the fire; but Indians build small fires and he was not too badly hurt to reach the canebrake.

Fanny Callaway was idly watching the warrior who was putting the buffalo meat on the broiling stick. There was not a sound in the woods around her. Suddenly, she saw blood burst from a shot wound in the Indian's breast, and then heard a sudden sputter of shots.

"That's Daddy," cried Jemima Boone, as the rifles crackled.

"Run, gals, run!" yelled the rescuers.

The three girls jumped up, screaming with joy. One Indian paused in his sprint for the canebrake to throw a tomahawk which just missed Betsey Callaway's head, and it is said that the others threw knives. Seeing what might happen, Daniel Boone roared an order to the girls:

"Fall down!"

They threw themselves on the ground obediently, but were too agitated to stay there, and bounced up as the white men rushed yelling into the camp.

It was an exciting few minutes. Betsey Callaway was nearly brained by one of the rescue party who took her for an Indian.

He saw a very dark brunette, wearing a red bandanna, short skirts, and leggings, rise from the ground as he charged. He was just bringing the butt of his rifle down on the girl's head when Boone caught his arm.

"For God's sake, don't kill her," he panted, "when we have traveled so far to save her from death."

Boone and Floyd felt sure their shots had gone home, but the canebrake was too thick around them for certainty. There was a hasty crashing and rustling in it as the Indians fled. Then silence. All of the kidnapping warriors were gone. Some were without moccasins, knives, or tomahawks. The only firearm they had saved was one small shotgun. It was practically impossible to find an Indian in a canebrake, and the white men let them go. In any case, says Floyd, "being so much elated on recovering the three poor little heart-broken girls, we were prevented from making further search."

Boone and Floyd were almost certainly right about the Indians they shot. There was blood on the ground where each target had been, and two of the band did die of wounds. One of them, says legend, was the son of Chief Blackfish of the Shawnees. But at least one of the others certainly got back to Shawnee country alive, and Hanging Maw returned to the Cherokee villages, where he lived to a ripe old age. After his death, a startled Congress received a petition asking for a pension for his squaw! Ironically enough, Hanging Maw had in the meantime achieved a reputation as the white man's friend.

At the American post of Fort Randolph, far to the northeast, Captain Matthew Arbuckle heard that three girls had been kidnapped. He sent a stern message to the Shawnees demanding their return. Since the tribe was still formally at peace with the Big Knives, a Shawnee chief, brother of Cornstalk, the head chief himself, returned with the American messenger. He gave

assurance that the girls had already been retaken, and made false promises of peace for the future.

Years afterward an old pioneer wrote out an account of the fight which is a fair sample of many contemporary versions: "the seckond day just before night, Boon arrived in sight of the smoke ascending from the fire where the Indians had taken up camp. he vary cautiously creeped up within gun shot of the camp without being seen by the Indians. they were busy cooking, the girls were laying down. Boon and his men fired on the Indians at the same time and rushed on to the camp hooping and hallowing, the Indians were so much frightened that they immediately fled."

The girls described the Indian marauders as Shawnees and Cherokees. All spoke good English and said they were taking their prisoners "to the Shawnee towns" in Ohio. Floyd thought a captured war club was of Shawnee make, and the girls remembered a few native words which some amateur philologist identified as Shawnee.

The victors paused to examine the battleground.

"At yonder bush," said Daniel Boone, pointing, "I fired at an Indian."

Some of the men went over to look and found a rifle and some blood. There was more blood by the camp fire, where Floyd had also hit his man. The Kentuckians found two small shotguns which they smashed as worthless, but they were well on their homeward way before the girls remembered that the Indian sentry had left his rifle on his knoll. Nobody wanted to go back for it, and it was left to rust.

Since the kidnappers had told their prisoners that there was an Indian band at the Blue Licks and another on the Kentucky River, it was desirable to get back to Boonesborough as soon as possible. But everyone was exhausted, the girls by the discomfort of two nights tied up to trees and the speed with which

the Indians had forced them along; the rescuers by the even greater speed with which they had followed. Boone therefore made camp for the night after covering a relatively short distance.

Next day, entirely unmolested, they set out for home. Encountering the stray pony again, they stopped to catch it, and the girls who had pretended to so much trouble in staying on its back rode home to Boonesborough with no difficulty at all. There was a good deal of jesting at Samuel Henderson's expense. With several days' growth of beard on one side of his face and three days' growth on the other, he was by no means a romantic object. But Betsey Callaway didn't mind—she married him within a month.

Just as they reached the hill along the river opposite the fort, not far from the place where the three girls had originally been kidnapped, Colonel Callaway's mounted band rode up. After watching the Licking River ford and finding nothing but the tracks of one retreating Indian, they had correctly decided that the girls must have been rescued by Boone's men, and had ridden home.

It all ended happily. The cane stab in Jemima Boone's foot, the original cause of the fatal canoe ride, had miraculously healed during her captivity. The Indian band at the Blue Licks which Hanging Maw had mentioned never appeared. The other band along the Kentucky River did little damage. Boonesborough gave itself up to rejoicing.

The anxious fiancés of the rescuing party made sure of their brides by getting married as soon as they could. Betsey Callaway had been kidnapped on July 7. She was married to Samuel Henderson on August 6. The bride's wedding finery was nothing but a dress of Irish linen. The bridegroom, having ruined his hunting shirt saving his bride from the Indians, had to borrow one to be married in. There was no magistrate, and

Squire Boone, as a lay preacher, officiated at the first wedding in Kentucky.

Old Colonel Callaway had his doubts about it all. There was no way to get a marriage license, the courthouse being several hundred miles distant. But he could not quite bring himself to divide lovers who could always argue that the Indians might catch the bride again. He had Henderson to thank in part for the fact that Betsey was not already the compulsory bride of some redskin in Chillicothe. He gave his consent, but only after young Henderson gave bond to have another ceremony performed by less doubtful authority as soon as possible. The dutiful couple complied with his wishes.

The other two girls, being only fourteen, were married to their admirers the following year, Jemima Boone to Flanders Callaway; Fanny Callaway to John Holder. Both bridegrooms had assisted in the rescue. Daniel Boone had had his own doubts about Jemima's suitor, but he withdrew them all after the share Flanders Callaway had taken in the pursuit of Hanging Maw. That worthy chief, quite unintentionally, had helped the course of true love on its way.

The kidnapping of the girls made a tremendous sensation on the frontier and even in the eastern settlements. "Shortly after the affair happened it was noised about on the frontier settlement and all the settlers were extolling Boon to the vary skies for the prowess and bravery he displayed." Contemporary letters frequently mention the episode, and James Fenimore Cooper based an episode in *The Last of the Mohicans* upon it. Indeed, his famous character Leatherstocking bears a suspicious resemblance to Daniel Boone at all times.

Hardly had Boonesborough settled down to the routine of everyday frontier life once more, when startling news arrived



from the East. The Colonies had declared their independence. America was a nation and Kentucky was part of it. A traveler brought with him a copy of the *Virginia Gazette*. The Declaration of Independence was read aloud from its pages, cheered, and celebrated with a bonfire. Soon there was a new flag fluttering in the forest.