

The story of Kitty Gentry
and the early, perilous years at Fort Boonesborough.

OH, KENTUCKY!



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BETTY LAYMAN

OH,
KENTUCKY!
藏書章

Betty Layman Receveur

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With tears choking her, she inched out the tip of the gun barrel. Her legs stopped shaking and her hand was steady as she waited until he was a bare twenty yards away before she fired. And though the recoil of the rifle almost broke her shoulder, she stood stubbornly, determined not to fall back until she saw him fall first. And he did, headlong, like a tree that had been axed through . . . and never moved a muscle.

Also by Betty Layman Receveur
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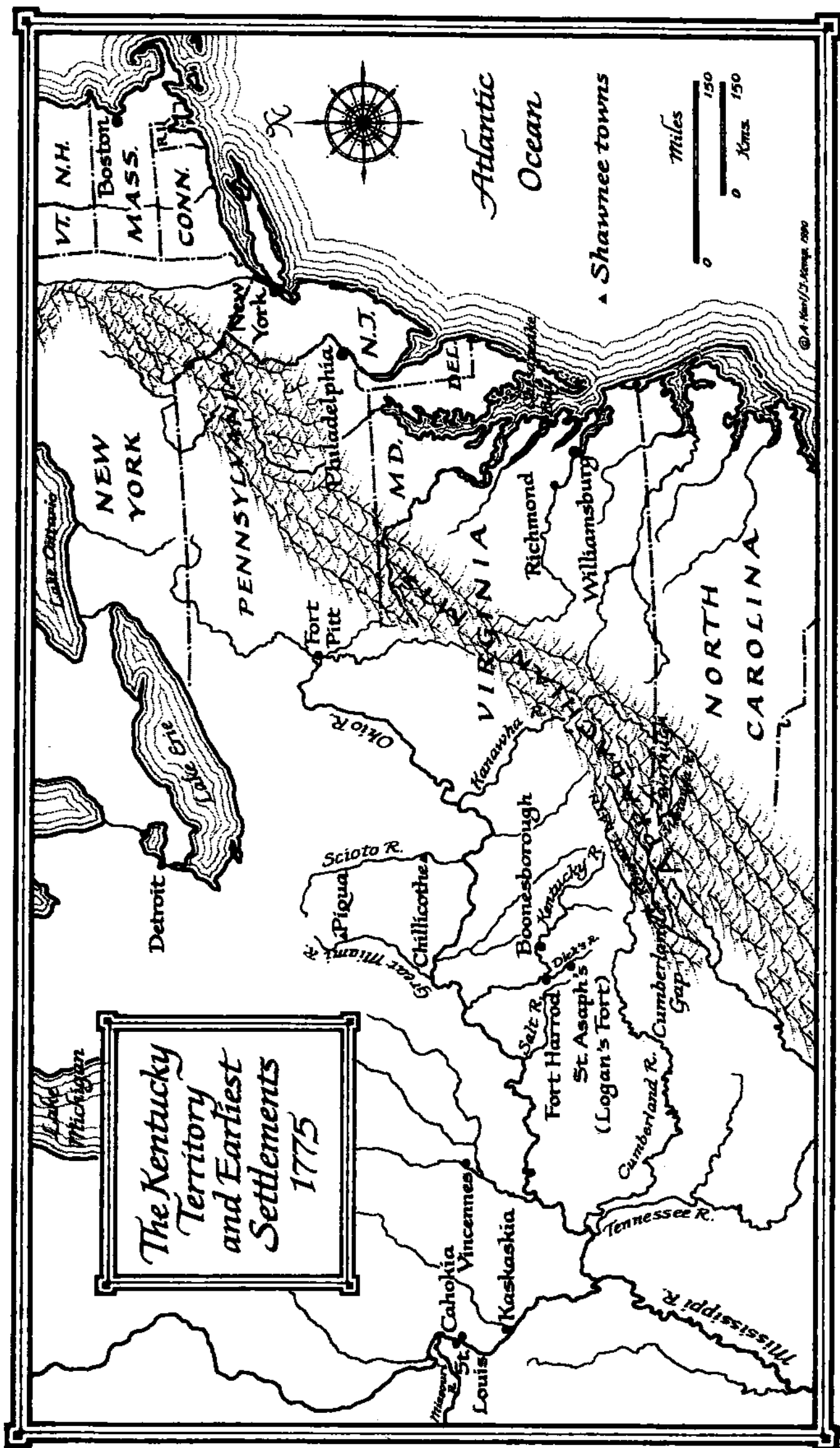
CARRIE KINGSTON
MOLLY GALLAGHER
SABLE FLANAGAN

This book could be only for my grandparents
Frank Fuller and Addie Shelton Layman

They were true Kentuckians
All that I am of worth or note, I owe to them

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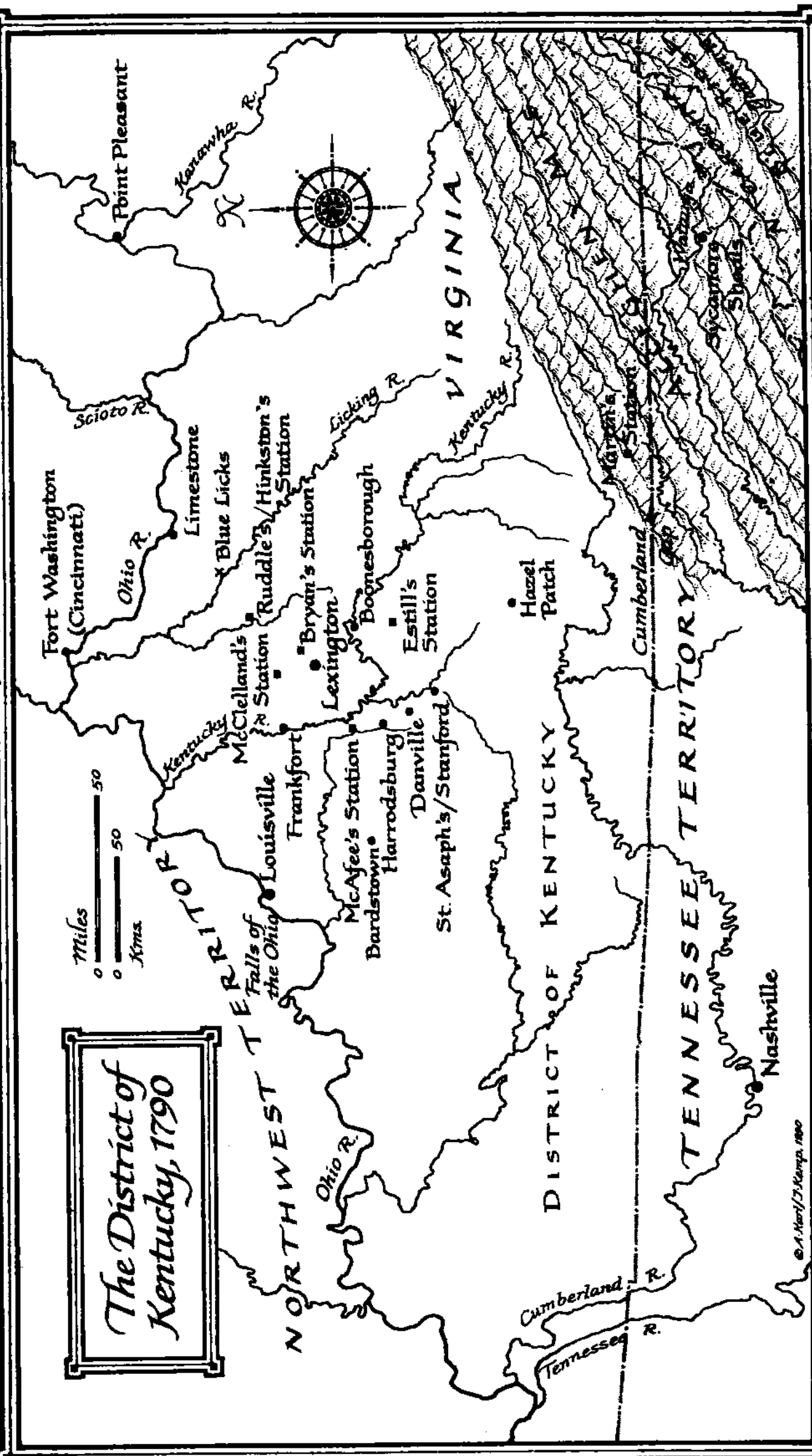
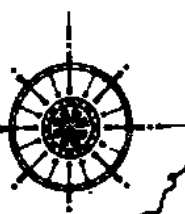
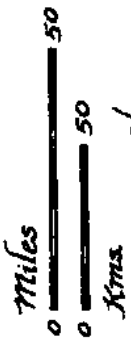


Kentucky-Tennessee Frontier, 1782

- Early Settlers' Roads and Trails
- - - Boone Trace/Wilderness Road
- - - Great Buffalo Trace
- - - Warriors' Path

Kms. 0 50
Miles 0 50

The District of Kentucky, 1790



✱ PROLOGUE ✱

March 1775

ROMAN GENTRY SHIFTED HIS LEAN FRAME TO A MORE COMFORTABLE position against the smooth trunk of a sycamore. His piercing blue eyes swept the hundreds of wigwams, built of poles and skins, that dotted the foothills of Yellow Mountain and the flat, greening banks of the Watauga River. The sun was dipping toward the mountains to the west, and the acrid smell of smoke from countless campfires mingled pleasantly with the aroma of roasting venison, rabbit, and pork. Smoke curled, too, from the chimneys of the sprawling line of cabins that made up the small settlement of Sycamore Shoals. Despite the week-long presence of the strangers from across the "Ridge"—as the local people called the Blue Ridge Mountains to the east—and the hordes of Indians up from their haunts to the south, the women of the settlement went about their supper preparations as usual. But the bargaining that had been going on for days, there beneath an aged oak tree whose branches spread almost to the riverbank, continued still. Later than usual.

The great chiefs of the Cherokee sat on one side of the table, suffering with a wry amusement the chairs that the white men favored. Braves hunkered down around their leaders, their dark, heavy hair befeathered, silver bracelets gleaming here and there on muscular arms. On the opposite side of the table the negotiators for the newly formed Transylvania Company looked stiffly out of place in their woolen coats and ruffled stocks. Among them was Richard Henderson, a former Associate Justice of the Colony of North Carolina and founder of the company.

Twenty paces away, Roman Gentry had been observing it all with a patient detachment when, suddenly, his attention shifted to a lad of nine or ten who had sidled up to him, faded blue shirttail escaping the confines of stout homespun breeches. The boy squinted to look Roman up and down leisurely, taking in the fringed hunting shirt

and deerskin leggings, his gaze traveling upward to the hawklike face which was all planes and angles, then to the shock of flaming red hair. Finally his eyes came to rest on the long rifle that lay so easily in the crook of the young scout's arm.

"You ever been to Kaintuck?" The boy jerked his thumb in the direction of the western mountains and the great wilderness that everyone knew lay beyond.

At Roman's nod the boy's eyes narrowed thoughtfully.

"You aimin' to go back, are ye? Oncet they're through with all their palaverin'?"

Roman looked toward the Indian chiefs. At the aged Ocanostota and Attacullaculla, at Dragging Canoe and Savanooko, who even now was speaking earnestly, a translator relaying his words to Judge Henderson and the others.

"Aye," said Roman. "And it's not Kaintuck, boy. It's Kentucke. *Ken-tuc-kee*," he repeated.

A skinny slip of a girl ran up, hair flying in the breeze. "Ma's been a-callin' and a-callin' you, Henry. It'll be your hide for it if you don't get some wood chopped, and right quick!" The boy grimaced but allowed himself to be tugged away.

Roman watched them go, a slow, half smile coming to soften his face. Kaintuck. Kentucke. The Iroquois called it Kentake, which meant Great Meadow. In the language of the Wyandot it was Kah-ten-tah-teh, which meant Land of Tomorrow. But whatever it was called, he thought, the rich land out there beyond the mountains, so fiercely claimed by the Cherokee and Shawnee as their hunting ground, had beckoned to white men for years. Tantalizing some almost beyond endurance.

The French had tried to keep claim to it but were defeated by the British. The land would have been settled long ago were it not for the English king's edict at the end of the war that forbade any settlement west of the Alleghenies. That had not gone down well with colonists who'd been promised land there as payment for their services during the conflict. It was muttered bitterly that England had not wanted to endanger its profitable fur trade with the Indians. But even now, twelve years after the end of the French and Indian War, Kentucke had seen little of the white man, but for a few hunters and surveyors.

Roman's friend Daniel had attempted to lead a party of settlers through the Cumberland Gap the year before last, but that ill-fated effort had cost him his oldest son, James. The Indians had tortured the boy before they'd finally killed him. Roman hadn't been there, but it was a bitter thing to think of.

In spite of what happened, Daniel had wanted to press on, but

the rest of the party, fearful for their lives, had hurried back to safety. Big Jim Harrod, a seasoned woodsman and surveyor, had gone in with a handful of men and built a few cabins not far from Salt River last year, but Indians had driven them out soon after—Roman had gone with Daniel to warn them that Cornstalk and his Shawnee braves had taken to the warpath.

Still, none of that, Roman mused, would change things in the end. There were those who were bound and be damned to go to that beautiful, fertile land across the mountains, and the time had come when nothing, neither an English king nor savage Indians, could stop them. The word was that Harrod was already rebuilding his small settlement.

The peaks of the western mountains were bathed in red and purple now, and the Cherokee chiefs and the company men had left the bargaining table and were going their separate ways until the morning, taking their leave of one another as courteously as the diplomats of two great nations might. A yellow dog ran about, barking and wagging its tail as the white men gathered in small clusters to recount the day's progress and the Indians walked with solemn dignity toward their campfires, where stewpots and roasting spits heavy with dripping meat awaited them.

Judge Henderson—a man of about forty—came toward Roman, the flawlessly curled and powdered wig more in keeping with his duties on the bench a few years past than his activities here on the banks of the Watauga. There was a spring to his step and a look of excitement about his eyes.

“By God, but I believe it is nearly done, Mr. Gentry! I believe they are near to signing a treaty. If not tomorrow, surely the next day. We have raised our offer to £10,000 in goods. Will you be ready to carry the news to Captain Boone at once if they accept?”

“I’ll be ready,” Roman said.

Daniel waited a few miles away on Long Island in the Holston River. With him were the men he had handpicked to lead the way over the mountains and on to the spot on the banks of the Kentucke River that had been chosen for the site of the proposed settlement. Among the group, about thirty in all, were Daniel’s brother, Squire, and the stalwart old colonel Richard Callaway. Once Roman brought the news that the bargain had been struck, they would set out at once to blaze a trail in for others to follow.

“Splendid!” Henderson beamed. “As soon as your group is well started, I shall come along directly with additional men and supplies.” He took a small silver snuff box from his pocket and, opening the lid, offered it to Roman.

Roman shook his head.

Henderson moaned. "Damned lucky if you never picked up the habit." He took a pinch of the powdery tobacco between his thumb and forefinger and delicately sniffed a bit of it up each nostril. Then he sneezed violently, retrieving a lace handkerchief from an inside pocket to dab at a reddening nose. "I received word today that Lord Dunmore, His Majesty's Royal Governor of the Colony of Virginia, has joined our own Governor Martin here in North Carolina in denouncing our endeavor. I believe it was said he used the word 'out-laws.' " Henderson chuckled. "It seemed ever so much more grandiose when Martin threatened us with the 'pain of His Majesty's displeasure and the most rigorous penalties of the law!' " He snorted, dabbing again at his nose. "Let them issue their proclamations against us. 'Tis like trying to stop the tide now that it has begun."

Roman was silent. The company Henderson headed stood to make a good deal of money if the venture were successful. The Transylvania Company intended to set up a proprietary government, not only charging for the land initially, but requiring quitrents annually thereafter. Still, perhaps they shouldn't be begrudged that. Henderson and the other shareholders were risking a lot themselves.

"I understand," Henderson went on, "that you are a young man of education and background, Mr. Gentry. That in addition to being an excellent scout—that from Daniel Boone himself—you were educated at William and Mary and read law under Thomas Jefferson of Albemarle County in your native Virginia."

Roman nodded.

"I would venture a hope that you intend to take up land and settle in Kentucke once we are there."

"I expect to stay awhile, sir," Roman said.

"Good. Good. We shall need men like you." A chilly wind gusted off the river and Henderson shivered. "Well then, I shall bid you a good evening. 'Twill soon be dark, and a warm hearth and hearty meal will be most welcome, eh?" He went his way, dabbing at his nose still and stifling another sneeze.

Roman stood, watching the retreating figure. He did not himself have any direct connection to the company. He was there only because of Daniel, who'd been taken on as chief scout and agent, undoubtedly because he knew as much about the land out there as any white man alive.

It was Daniel who'd been able to persuade the Cherokee to come here for this meeting. And Roman had decided that if Daniel wanted to throw in his lot with the company, then he would go along, too. For a while. Though he was struck with a wry amusement when he

pondered the fact that the Cherokee appeared on the verge of selling millions of acres of land to which they had no more right than the Iroquois, the Miami, the Wyandot, or the Shawnee—and to a purchaser who had no lawful right to buy it. And to complicate matters further, both Virginia and North Carolina, by virtue of their charters, could lay valid claims to large areas out there. And further still, none of that touched on the issue of the soldiers' claims, promised them during the war.

The Colonies grew ever more restive under British rule. There were more and more citizens who not only chafed under the laws and edicts of an English king who sat on his throne so far across the sea, but were increasingly ready to defy them. The pot was boiling, and Roman wondered how long it would take for it to bubble over.

Wasn't this meeting proof of it? The Transylvania Company had been formed with the objective of taking settlers into Kentucke in direct defiance of the royal edict. But in order to achieve its ends, the company had to consider the Indian peril.

The warlike Shawnee, to the north of the Ohio, had been defeated only last fall at the Battle of Point Pleasant, and had signed a treaty that they would stay north of the river and no longer hunt down into Kentucke. If the Cherokee now agreed to sell their claim on the land to the company, that would seem to take care of the Indian menace . . . though Roman wondered wryly if the Indians had any real concept of selling or buying land. And he knew the Shawnee too well to think that they would abide by their treaty. Henderson was a pleasant enough fellow, clearly determined to found a new colony out in the wilderness, but it was doubtful that he had any idea of what he was getting into.

Roman's stomach tightened, as if to remind him that it was time he, too, thought about supper. He had been offered the hospitality of more than one of the cabins in Sycamore Shoals but had declined with thanks. He had some beef jerk and a bag of parched corn, and each night, after he filled his stomach, he would roll up in his blankets and sleep under a sky filled with stars. Now, however, with the smell of roasting meat heavy in the air, it occurred to him that a rabbit cooked to a turn might taste good this chilly night. It would not take long to flush one out, especially if he rode down away from the settlement a piece.

He had turned to get his horse when suddenly the old chief Attacullaculla was beside him, coming with the barest whisper of sound, as faint as the rustling of a leaf. The withered, mahogany-colored face was scored with two ceremonial scars that ran down each cheek. Pierced ears held heavy silver ornaments that hung nearly to his shoulders.

Roman inclined his head respectfully to the "Little Carpenter," as the white men called him. One of the most powerful of the Cherokee chiefs, he had in his younger days been taken to England and received by the king. He spoke English well, the voice still vigorous from that ancient body.

"How do you this day, Firehair?" he said, using part of the name the Cherokee had given to Roman Gentry. In their language, the entire name was almost unpronounceable and meant "Man with Firehair Who Does Not Let His Tongue Run Like a Woman's." The old chief had long ago shortened it.

"Well, Attacullaculla," Roman replied gravely. "And you?"

"Well." The old man nodded his head, the silver earrings swaying. The ridges across his forehead deepened. "I have thought on why you do not sit at the table. I would have you there."

The half smile came to Roman's face. "It is not my place to be there. I do not speak for Henderson or the others. I am not with the company."

"You are with Boone."

"Yes."

"And Boone speaks for the company."

"In a way. Yes."

Attacullaculla shrugged, looking out toward the campfires that winked in the dusk. "Is it a good thing that this Henderson wishes, Firehair?"

It took a long moment for Roman to reply. "Attacullaculla must decide for himself. But," he added slowly, "no matter what happens here, the white man will go into Kentucke." He turned toward the west, suddenly filled with the memory of Rebecca Boone's face whenever she spoke of her firstborn, his mutilated body lying in a grave out there not far from the gap. "It is my hope," he went on after a moment, "that when they go, it can be in peace."

"I will think on it." Attacullaculla turned away, but after a few paces he stopped and looked back. "Dragging Canoe says he sees a dark cloud over the land beyond the mountains. I fear he is right. We can give the word of the Cherokee, but there are others to the north . . ." He left the rest unsaid, and out among the winking fires a slow and measured tribal chant began, echoing through the foothills and along the river.

"Will you share my campfire this night, Firehair?" Attacullaculla asked. "My women will have much food prepared."

"I would be honored, Attacullaculla," Roman answered.

And slowly, the tall lean scout and the aged chief of the Cherokee walked side by side into the deepening twilight.

PART ONE



Summer 1775