

Caintuck Lies Within My Soul



The Jemima Boone Story

C.M. Huddleston

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Caintuck Lies Within My Soul: The Jemima Boone Story

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For all the brave girls and women who
dared to follow the men in their lives
west, beyond the Appalachians.

In particular,
Susannah “Sukey” Thomas Miller
my fourth great grandmother,
a Kentucky pioneer.

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Part I:
A Childhood Remembered

Chapter 1

September 30th, 1767

“No, Lil’ Duck, you can’t go with me,” James hollered. “I’m goin’ sangin’ and you’re too little. You can’t keep up. You don’t even have on shoes. Now, go back to the cabin.” With that stern command, he turned, placed the short-handled shovel over his shoulder, and scampered up the steep slope across the now almost-dry Beaver Creek, leaving the scrawny girl to splash in the few puddles lying scattered among its rock bed. Her bare feet caused what little water remained to splash only as high as her bony knees, showing white as she held up the bottom of her shift, hoping against hope of keeping it dry.

She continued to stomp, wildly, with great glee, and considerable anger until no puddles remained and her shift hung soaked mid-calf around thin, scratched, and bite-covered legs.

“I can too, go sangin’. I know how sang looks, I seen it before. Just ’cause James be older, don’t mean he knows everything. I’ll go if’in I want to. I’m big enough to help,” she muttered to herself, growing more confident with each breath, each thought, and each word.

Abruptly, she marched across the damp, rounded creek stones and began to climb the steep, tree-covered hillside, deliberately going away from where James’ towhead had disappeared. Thick, shrubby undergrowth of mountain laurel, rhododendron, blackberries, and thousands of vining plants fought each other for space and sunlight beneath the heavy autumn canopy formed by multi-colored leafy trees. She recognized oaks, chestnuts, sugar maples, sycamores, and even a few magnolias. As a child of the woods, Jemima tried to remember landmarks such as large stones, particular trees, and other such things, just as Daddy’d taught her. Then she remembered

she had set out to hunt ginseng, *sang* they called it. Sang brought good money, Daddy and Mama said. Briefly, she wondered what *bad* money was. She knew from listening to them talk, long after she'd gone to her pallet one night, 'bout how they needed cash money. Round and round her thoughts flew, coming to rest on the exact thought that started her up the hillside—James was not the only one who could sang. She'd show them.

Jemima continued to hunt ginseng among the Yadkin Valley's hills until almost dark. Finding the first olive green-leafed plant, standing high amidst the surrounding undergrowth, with its red berries shining, had been easy. Not having brought a shovel, she used her fingers to dig the plant from the root-filled soil. As she grasped the plant's roots and pulled with all her might, she fell into the surrounding briars. Despite small bloody pinpricks along her legs and arms, she pulled the root free. She stood, dusted off her behind, and turned to continue her search. Only a few steps later, she stopped, walked back, and picking up the discarded berries, buried them in the shallow hole created by her pulling up the root. "Mama always tells James to remember to bury the berries so more plants will grow," she murmured, using her dirty bare feet to stomp the soil flat around where the green leaves once stood.

Later, her now grubby hands each held tight to a bumpy-looking root. "Sang, glorious sang, I found sang," she crooned happily and off key, changing the made-up tune for another whenever she grew tired of singing the current one. She watched for her landmarks, confident in her sense of direction. She drank from streams and picked the last autumn berries, constantly moving toward home, that small cabin near the spring where Mama, and maybe even Daddy, waited with supper. Only the rising dark among the trees and shrubs, making the shadows of each trunk and branch create spooky specters across the landscape, awakened her to the understanding of being somewhat lost. She stopped and turned in a slow circle, observing every direction for familiar landmarks or smoke

from a cabin fire, for theirs was not the only cabin along the Yadkin. She listened, but heard only the tree frogs begin their songs, a few crows, and then a whippoorwill. Not close. She knew the will's loud call carried for miles. "Oh, my," she whispered, "some soul done gone to heaven. Sure hope it wasn't mine."

She tried smelling home, supper cooking, even the cows and pigs. Anything. Nothing but the heavy scent of vegetation filled her nose, which dripped, mixing with the tears now sliding down her cheeks, until she grabbed her grubby shift's bottom, wiped her eyes, blew her nose, and declared aloud to no one in particular. "No, it wasn't my soul that darn ol' whippoorwill sent on to heaven. I'm right peckish, and dead people are not hungry. Leastwise I don't believe so."

Jemima walked until she could no longer see, always downhill till she found a gurgling stream running with clear water. Sure it wasn't Beaver Creek, which lay near the cabin, she remembered Daddy saying, *always go downstream if you're a might confused in the woods. When you find a bigger stream, follow it downstream until you find a river, then go downstream some more. If there's a river, there's most likely people livin' along it somewhere.* So, she walked, at times stumbling. Stopping often to drink. Trying not to think about the grumbling in her stomach. . . or home. At last, true dark slid in amongst the trees, obscuring her sight, and she could walk no longer. She heard wolves howling in the distance and other smaller woodland creatures creeping nearby. Looking about, she located a large, old, multi-branched oak tree, one with low-hanging branches she could climb, and she worked her way up, about six feet off the ground, still holding tight to her sang. As she sat back against the trunk, one scrawny, dirt-covered leg hanging down each side of the branch, Jemima relaxed. She whispered her prayers, praying for her Mama, James, Israel, Suzy, and the baby, Levina, all back at their cabin, for cousins Jesse and Jonathan off helping family with the fall harvest, and Daddy and Uncle Squire, off hunting west in the mountains. She prayed she

wouldn't fall, she prayed no bears would climb the tree, and last and most fervently, she prayed Daddy would not get killed by Indians, would not get lost in the mountains, and would come home in time to find her.



“Suzy, grab up Levina and quiet her down. I need to hear James,” demanded Rebecca. “Now, son, where did you say you last seen Jemima?”

“Down to Beaver Creek, Mama, just where she prefers to go wadin’ and catchin’ frogs. I told her to *go on home* when I went past earlier today,” ten-year-old James replied over Levina’s wails of hunger, Israel’s dumping of split hickory logs on the hearth, and Suzy trying her best to sing the baby quiet. With Daddy gone hunting, James believed he was the man of the house. Eight-year-old Israel, being the only other male family member until Daddy, Jesse, or Jonathan returned, often resented James giving him chores and such. But tonight, he stood listening, sure glad he wasn’t responsible for Jemima not being home at dark. Suzy, not yet seven, remained too busy with Levina to do much more than turn the hoe cakes cooking over the hearth fire, and try to keep the baby from spilling the milk cup she’d placed on the rough-hewn table.

“She’s not home,” Rebecca said. “Best we go look for her. James, grab the rifle and a jacket. Suzy, you and Israel go ahead with supper, feed the baby, and then put her to bed. I’ll help look for Jemima. She’s probably still down to the creek.” Rebecca grabbed her shawl and shoes as she left the cabin. Once outside, she collapsed wearily on the bench sitting beside the door, pulled on her shoes, and wrapped and tied her knitted shawl against the evening cool. “James, best we take two torches along for light. We’ll need to split up.”

At first, Rebecca and James stayed together as they walked down to the place on Beaver Creek Jemima haunted during any free time she had from her chores. Rebecca thought back to the day, earlier in the summer,

when Daniel found her wet from head to toe, splashing after the small creek minnows. That child loved to play in the water more than anything else. Their fourth child, only a few days from her fifth birthday, Mima possessed a willful nature, often trying to do more than she was physically able. Rebecca knew the child's mind was sharp, since she understood and remembered most anything she heard. James, the only one of her children to ever have any schooling, tried to teach Mima her numbers and letters. She learned to recite each by heart, but rarely remained still enough to recognize them when James scribbled them out on his broken tablet.

Not finding Jemima at the stream, Rebecca and James repeatedly shouted out her name, facing north, east, south, and west in turn. Except for the usual forest night noises, nothing returned their plaintive calls. "James, exactly what was Mima doin' when you passed by?"

"Wadin', splashin'. She wanted to go sangin' with me, but I told her no. I told her she was too little. Besides, she didn't even have her shoes!" James exclaimed.

"You don't think she went off sangin' alone, do you? Oh, Lord in Heaven, where is Daniel when I need him?"

"Most likely she's done climbed a tree by now. I'll keep lookin', Mama. Guess you better send Israel off to fetch Uncle George or Uncle Ned."

"I'll send him at dawn, I don't want two lost children. You and I will search till then. How 'bout you go south along the creek, and I'll head north. Don't go so far we can't hear each other," Rebecca decided, knowing that two lost children would be more than she could deal with.

Long before dawn, both James and Rebecca returned exhausted to the little cabin. After a bowl of stew apiece, Rebecca sent James up for a couple hours sleep, stirred the fire, fixed herself a cup of milk, and ate another bowl of the leftover stew, which hung just barely warm over the smoldering fire. Sitting, she watched over her sleeping daughters, bedded down on a bearskin pallet beside her and Daniel's bed. It was nothing more than a platform built

in against the cabin's back wall. She could hear Israel's quiet snores from the loft, and James sliding in beside his brother. She would let them both sleep until dawn and then send one each for Daniel's brothers. Brother Neddie and his wife Martha, her own sister, lived closer. Brother George and Ann lived a mite farther away. Both brothers would come to help search. Until then, all she could do was sit, pray, and worry.



Too tired to stay awake and too worried to sleep, Rebecca's thoughts turned to all the times Daniel had been away from home. "Tis a wonder we have five children," she thought. Why, he'd been a wandering man even before she met him. One of eleven children from a Quaker family, Daniel learned to hunt and tend the family's cattle long before he was full grown. Then, in 1755 at age twenty, he'd joined the North Carolina militia as a wagon driver and blacksmith. Under Major Edward Dobbs, the North Carolina militia formed part of Braddock's Expedition to Fort Duquesne during the French and Indian War. Daniel rarely spoke of going north toward Pittsburgh, driving a wagon loaded with military supplies, and later fleeing for his life. She'd learned more about what had happened from others who told of the horrors. British General Braddock had led a 2,100-man army out from Fort Cumberland toward Fort Duquesne. Young Colonel George Washington served as his guide and aide. By early July, the Braddock force had split into two columns and worked strenuously each day to build a road through the forest and to advance toward their objective, the French-held Fort Duquesne. That same evening, Indians, fighting alongside the French, sent a delegation to the British, requesting a conference. General Braddock sent Washington and Lieutenant John Fraser to listen, speak for him, and report back. The Indians wanted the British to halt their advance so an attempt could be made to talk the French into a peaceful withdrawal from Fort Duquesne. After hearing this request, knowing the French were stalling for time, Braddock refused.

The very next day, after crossing the Monongahela River about ten miles south of Fort Duquesne, Braddock's advance guard of three hundred grenadiers and colonials with two cannons under Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Gage encountered the French and Indian forces. This became the first skirmish in what everyone now called *Braddock's Defeat*. Under heavy fire from the French and their Indian allies, Gage's men retreated along the narrow road, only to collide with the main body of Braddock's forces. Daniel had once told his brother George about how Braddock's entire force fell into disorder as they recognized their predicament, surrounded on three sides by the enemy—Canadian militiamen, Indians, and the French regulars. General Braddock fell to enemy fire. Although Colonel Washington tried to rally the forces and restore order, Braddock's army continued to retreat, running for their lives. Soon, they encountered their own supply wagons positioned to the army's rear. Wagoners, such as Daniel, many unarmed, recognized the coming disaster if they stayed with their wagons. Daniel unhitched his team and fled on horseback. Many wagoners—those who had followed orders and stayed behind—died or were captured, tortured, and burned at the stake. Daniel's was a timely escape.

Since their marriage, Daniel had been away more than he was home. Sometimes only overnight or at the most for a couple of weeks. She remembered his impromptu trip to Florida just two years earlier. Along with friends from Virginia, Daniel, his brother Squire, and his brother-in-law John Stewart had left home in late summer. Traveling south to South Carolina and then on to Savannah and St. Augustine, Daniel had returned on Christmas Day to announce their upcoming move to Pensacola, all the way down in Florida. It was the first time she had refused to move. She'd been expecting a new baby in the spring and wanted so much to have her own family close by when her time came. Daniel gave in fairly easily. He reckoned the hunting had not been good in Florida.

"Oh, why could he not stay home?" she wondered aloud as, very late into the night, her tears began to flow.

Just weeks ago, Daniel, Squire, and neighbor William Hill had traipsed off west into the Blue Ridge and Smoky Mountains for an extended hunt. Still, she knew the meat they would dry and bring home would help carry them through the winter, and the hides could be sold to pay their debts and taxes. With one last thought before sleep overtook her, she thought back on how Daniel'd once tried to stay home and farm his land, yet the pull of places he'd never seen and the land he'd never walked constantly drew him away from her and their children.

Just before dawn, as her tears subsided and exhaustion overtook her, Rebecca fell asleep still sitting at the table, her head on her arms.