

# The Devil's Own

## A Romance of the Black Hawk War

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ILLUSTRATIONS  
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"DON'T MOVE OR CRY OUT! OBEY ORDERS!"

Synopsis.—In 1832 Lieutenant Knox of the regular army is on duty at Fort Armstrong, Rock Island, Ill., in territory threatened by disaffected Indians. The commandant sends him with dispatches to St. Louis. He takes passage on the steamer *Warrior* and makes the acquaintance of Judge Beauchaire, rich planter, and of Joe Kirby (the Devil's Own), notorious gambler. Knox learns Judge Beauchaire has a daughter, Eloise, and a granddaughter, Rene, offspring of a son whom the judge has disowned. Rene's mother is a negress, and she and her daughter, never having been freed, are slaves under the law, although the girls have been brought up as sisters. Kirby induces the judge to make his plantation and negro servants on a large scale unfairly dealt by Joe Carver, Kirby's partner. Kirby accuses the judge of cheating Beauchaire, infuriated, drops dead. Kirby tries to induce Kirby to give up his stolen winnings. Carver and Kirby throw Knox overboard. The lieutenant swims ashore and reaches a hut. Knox lies unconscious for ten days. Recovering, he finds he is in a cabin owned by Pete, a "free nigger," who had shot him, mistaking him for an enemy. His dispatches have been forwarded. Recovering from his wound, Knox sends Pete to bring Haynes, Beauchaire's lawyer, and they arrange, with Pete's help, to get the women to the cabin of an abolitionist, Amos Shrunk, before Kirby comes. At the Beauchaire place Knox overhears a conversation between the sheriff and his deputy, and learns the truth about the situation. He is witness to an interview between Kirby and a girl who says she is Rene Beauchaire. Kirby insults the girl, and Knox attacks him. Believing Kirby dead, Knox explains affairs to the girl, and she agrees to try to escape with him.

## CHAPTER VII—Continued.

—7—

"Have you ever visited the mouth of Saunders' creek? You have! How far away is that from here?"

"Not more than half a mile; it enters the river just below the Landing."

"And if I understood you rightly," I urged eagerly, "you said that these fellows left their keelboat there; that it had been rigged up to run by steam, and had no guard aboard except the engineer; you are sure of this?"

"That was what the man who talked to me first said—the deputy sheriff. He boasted that they had the only keelboat on the river equipped with an engine and had come up from St. Louis in two hours. You—think we could use that?"

"It seems to be all that is left us. I intend to make the effort, anyway. You had better show me the road."

I followed her closely, a mere shadow, as she silently led the way along the edge of the wood and back of the negro quarters. I felt confident of being able safely to approach the unsuspecting engineer and overcome any resistance before he could realize the possibility of attack. I was obliged to rely upon a guess at the time of night; yet surely it could not be long after twelve and there must remain hours of darkness amply sufficient for our purpose. With the boat once securely in our possession the engineer compelled to serve, for I had no skill in that line, we could strike out directly for the opposite shore and creep along in its shadows past the sleeping town at the Landing until we attained the deserted waters above. By then we should practically be beyond immediate pursuit. Even if Carver or the sheriff discovered Kirby, any immediate chase by river would be impossible. Nothing was available for their use except a few rowboats at the Landing; they would know nothing as to whether we had gone up or down stream, while the coming of the early daylight would surely permit us to discover some place of concealment along the desolate Illinois shore. Desperate was the attempt undoubtedly was the situation as I considered it in all its details brought me faith in our success and fresh encouragement to make the effort.

We moved forward slowly. I took the lead myself, bending low and feeling carefully for footing in the wiry grass. The darkness so shrouded everything, blinding objects into shapeless shadows, that it required several moments before I could clearly determine the exact details. The mouth of the creek, a good-sized stream, was only a few yards away, and the boat, rather a larger craft than I had anticipated, seeing, lay just off shore, with stern to the bank, as though prepared for instant departure. It was securely held in position by a rope, probably looped about a convenient stump, and my eyes were finally able to trace the outlines of the wheel by which it was propelled. Except for straggling rushes extending to the edge of the water, the space between was vacant yet sufficiently mantled in darkness to enable one to creep forward unseen.

At first glance I could distinguish no sign of the boatman left in charge, but even as I lay there, breathless and uncertain, he suddenly revealed his presence by lighting a lantern in the stern. The illumination was feeble enough yet sufficient to expose to view the small, unprotected engine aft, and also the fact that all forward of the little cockpit in which it stood the entire craft was decked over. The fellow was busily engaged in overhauling the machinery, leaning far forward, his body indistinct, the lantern swinging in one hand, with entire attention devoted to his task. Occasionally, as I lifted his head for some purpose, the dim radiance fell upon his face, revealing the unmistakable countenance of a mulatto, a fellow of medium size, broad of cheek, with unusually full lips and a fringe of whisker turning gray. Somehow this revelation that he was a negro and not a white man brought with it to me an additional confidence in success. I inclined my head and whispered in the girl's ear:

"You are not to move from here until I call. This is to be my part of

the work, handling that lad. I am going now."

"He is colored, is he not—a slave?"

"We can only guess as to that. But he does not look to me like a hard proposition. If I can only reach the boat without being seen the rest will be easy. Now is the proper time, while he is busy tinkering with the engine. You will stay here?"

"Yes, of course; I—I could be of no help."

She suddenly held out her hand, as though impelled to the action by some swift impulse, and the warm pressure of her fingers meant more than words. I could not see the expression on her face, yet knew the slender body was trembling nervously.

"Surely you are not afraid?"

"Oh, no; it is not that—I—I am all unstrung. You must not think of me at all."

I realized the gravity of my task, and my eyes were watchful of the shrouded figure I was silently approaching. I drew nearer inch by inch, advancing so slowly and snake-like that not even the slightest sound of movement aroused suspicion. Apparently the fellow was engaged in oiling the machinery, for he had placed the lantern on deck and held a long-spooned can in his fingers. His back remained toward me as I drew near the stern, and consequently I no longer had a glimpse of his face. The wooden wheel of the boat, a clumsy-appearing apparatus, rested almost directly against the bank, where the water was evidently deep enough to float the vessel, and the single rope holding it in position was drawn taut from the pressure of the current. Waiting until the man was compelled to bend lower over his work, utterly unconscious of my presence, I straightened up and, pistol in hand, stepped upon the wooden beam supporting the wheel. He must have heard this movement, for he lifted his head quickly, yet was even then too late; already I had gained the afterdeck, and my weapon was on a level with his eyes.

"Don't move or cry out!" I commanded sternly. "Obey orders and you will not be hurt."

He shrank away, sinking upon the bench, his face upturned so that the light fell full upon it, for the instant too greatly surprised and frightened



His Mouth Hung Open and His Eyes Stared at Me.

to give utterance to a sound. His mouth hung open, and his eyes stared at me.

"Who—who was yer? Whatcha want yer?"

"I am asking questions and you are answering them. Are you armed? All right; then; hand it over. Now put out that light."

He did exactly as I told him, moving as though paralyzed by fear, yet unable to resist.

"You are a negro—a slave!"

"Yas, sah; Ah's Massa Donaldson's boy frum St. Louee."

"He is the sheriff?"

"Yas, sah—yas, sah. Whar is Massa Donaldson? Yer ain't done bin sent yere by him, I reckon. Pears like I never see yer afore."

"No; but he is quite safe. What is your name?"

"Sam, sah—just plain Sam."

"Well, Sam, I understand you are an engineer. Now, it happens that I want to use this boat, and you are going to run it for me, do you understand? I am going to sit down here on the edge of this cockpit and hold this loaded pistol just back of your ear. It might go off at any minute, and surely will if you make a false move or attempt to foul the engine. Any trick, and there is going to be a dead nigger overboard. I know enough about engines to tell if you play fair—so don't take any chances, boy."

"Ah—Ah—reckon as how I was goin' fer ter run her all right, sah; she's sum' consider'ble contrary at times, sah, but Ah'll surely run her, if that's eny run in her, sah. Ah ain't carin' bout bein' no corpse."

"I thought not; you'd rather be a free nigger, perhaps? Well, Sam, if you will do this job all right for me tonight I'll put you where the sheriff will never see hide nor hair of you again—no, not yet; wait a moment, there is another passenger."

She came instantly in answer to my low call, and through the gloom the startled negro watched her descend the bank, a mere moving shadow, yet with the outlines of a woman. I half believe he thought her a ghost, for I could hear him muttering inarticulately to himself. I dared not remove my eyes from the fellow, afraid that his very excess of fear might impel him to some reckless act, but I extended one hand across the side of the boat to her assistance.

"Take my hand, Rene," I said pleasantly, to reassure her, "and come aboard. Yes, everything is all right. I've just promised Sam here a ticket to a certain extent—yes; but we had to decide on this action very quickly, with no chance to plan it out. I am aiming at the mouth of the Illinois."

He glanced about at me, vainly endeavoring to decipher my expression in the gloom.

"De Illinois ribber, boss; what yer hope fer ter find that?"

"A certain man I've heard about. Did you ever happen to hear a white man mentioned who lives near there? His name is Amos Shrunk."

I could scarcely distinguish his eyes, but I could feel them. I thought for a moment he would not answer.

"Yer'll surely excuse me, sah," he said at last, humbly, his voice with a note of pleading in it. "Ah's feelin' friendly 'ough an' all dat, sah, but still yer mus' member dat Ah's talkin' to a perfect stranger. If yer wud sure tell me first just wher yer was aimin' at, then maybe Ah'd know a heap mor' Ah do now."

"I guess you are right, Sam. I'll tell you the whole of it. I am endeavoring to help this young woman to escape those men back yonder. You must know why they were there; no doubt you overheard them talk coming up?"

"Yas, sah; Massa Donaldson he was goin' up fer ter serve sum papers fer Massa Kirby, so he cud run off de Beauchaire niggers. But dis yere gal, she ain't no nigger—she's just a white pusion."

"She is a slave under the law," I said gravely, as she made an effort to move, "and the man Kirby claims her."

I could see his mouth dry open, but the surprise of this statement halted his efforts at speech.

"That explains the whole situation," I went on. "Now will you answer me?"

"Bout dis yere Massa Shrunk?"

"Yes—you have heard of him before?"

"Ah reckon as how maybe Ah has."

"Do you know where he can be found?"

"Not perzackly, sah. Ah ain't never onct bin tha, but Ah sorter seems fer ter recollec' sum'thin' 'bout whar he might be. Ah reckon maybe Ah cud go thar, if Ah just hed to. Ah reckon if yer all held dat pistol plum 'gainst msh hed, Ah'd mos' likely find dis Amos Shrunk. Good Lord, sah!"

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"You have certainly heard rumors, at least, that there are regular routes of escape from here to Canada?"

"Yes; it has been discussed at the house. I have never clearly understood, but I do know that slaves disappear and are never caught. I was told white men helped them."

"It is accomplished through organized effort by these men—Black Abolitionists, as they are called—haters of slavery. They are banded together in a secret society for this one purpose and have what they call stations scattered all along at certain distance apart—night's travel—from the Mississippi to the Canadian line, where the fugitives are hidden and fed. A station keeper, I am told, is only permitted to know a few miles of the route, those he must cover—the system is perfect, and many are engaged in it who are never even suspected."

"And this man—is he one?"

"Yes—a leader; he operates the most dangerous station of all. The escaping slaves come to him first."

She asked no further questions, and after a moment turned away, resting back against the edge of the cockpit with chin cupped in the hollow of her hand. The profile of her face was clearly defined by the starlight reflected by the river, and I found it hard to withdraw my eyes. A movement by the negro attracted my attention.

"There is a small creek about four miles above the Landing, Sam," I said shortly. "Do you think you could find it?"

"On de Missouri side, sah? Ah reckon Ah cud."

"A very present help."

"It's when a man is in trouble that he realizes the value of a wife."

"Sure! He can put all his property in her name."

"Something cheap."

The price of everything is so dear—it makes one almost weep."

But one thing still remains the same—That's talk-as-usual—cheap!"

"One better."

Manager—This magnet will draw three pounds of iron from a distance of ten feet.

Rube—That's not much. I know something that draws me every Sunday over three miles of plowed fields, and I weigh 125 pounds.

Playing to a Crowd.

"Two is company, three is a crowd."

"I like that adage," declared York Ham. "It has frequently made me feel better when estimating the size of an audience out front."

driven blindly to accept my suggestions. And now, in this silence, the reaction had come, and she was already questioning if she had done right.

It was in my heart to speak to her, in effort to strengthen her faith, but I hesitated, scarcely knowing what to say, deeply touched by the pathetic droop of her figure, and in truth uncertain in my own mind as to whether or not we had chosen the wiser course. All I dared do was to silently reach out one hand and rest it gently on those fingers clasping the rail. She did not remove her hand from beneath mine, nor indeed give the slightest evidence that she was even aware of my action.

"Wus Ah to turn nor, sah?" asked the negro suddenly.

"Yes, upstream; but keep in as close to the shore as you think safe. There is no settlement along this bank, is there?"

"No, sah; dar's jus' one cabin, 'bout a mile upstream, but dar ain't nobody livin' that now. Whar yer all aim fer go?"

I hesitated an instant before I answered, yet almost as quickly decided that the whole truth would probably serve us best. The man already had one reason to use his best endeavors; now I would bring before him a second.

"Just as far up the river before daylight as possible, Sam. Then I hope to uncover some hiding place where we can lie concealed until it is dark again. Do you know any such place?"

"On de Illinois shore, sah? Le's see: that's Rassuer creek, 'bout twenty mile up. Ah 'spectz you all knows wher yer a headin' fer?"

"To a certain extent—yes; but we had to decide on this action very quickly, with no chance to plan it out. I am aiming at the mouth of the Illinois."

He glanced about at me, vainly endeavoring to decipher my expression in the gloom.

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