

The Devil's Own

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"GOOD LORD O' MERCY, WHAT'S DAT?"

Synopsis.—In 1832 Lieutenant Knox of the regular army is on duty at Fort Armstrong, Rock Island, Ill., in territory threatened by Indians. The commandant sends him with dispatches to St. Paul. 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, René, and granddaughter, Rene, offspring of a son whom the judge has disowned. René's mother is a negro, and she and her daughter, René, have been freed, are slaves under the law, although the girls have been brought up as sisters. Kirby induces the judge to stake his plantation and negro servants on a poker hand unfairly dealt by Joe Carver, Kirby's partner. Kirby accuses the judge of cheating. Beauchaire, infuriated, drops dead. Knox tries to induce Kirby to give up his stolen winnings. Kirby and Carver 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, to them. They arrange, with Pete's help, to get the women to the cabin of abolitionist, Amos Strunk, before Kirby comes. At the Beaufort place, Knox overhears a conversation between the sheriff and his deputy, and learns the truth about the situation. He witnesses an interview between Kirby and a girl who says she is René Beauchaire. Kirby insults the girl, and Knox attacks him. Before Kirby dead, Knox explains affairs to the girl, and she agrees to try to come with him. They fail to find Pete where he had been posted, so Knox seizes the sheriff's keelboat, along with Sam, the slave left in charge, and they begin their voyage up the river.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Dawn of Deeper Interest.

It tested his skill as a boatman to locate the exact spot sought amid that gloom, yet he finally attained to it closely enough so I was able to get ashore, wading nearly thigh deep in water and mud, but only to learn that the boat, which I had provisioned earlier in the evening, had disappeared from its moorings. No trace of it could be found in the darkness, although I devoted several minutes to the search. To my mind this was positive evidence that Pete had returned, accompanied by the two frightened women, and that, finally despairing of my arrival, had departed with them up the river. In all probability we would overhaul the party before morning, certainly before they could attain the mouth of the Illinois. I made my way back to the keelboat with this information, and the laboring engine began to chug even while I was briefly explaining the situation to René. She listened almost wearily, asking but few questions, and both of us soon lapsed into silence. A little later she had pillowed her head on her arms and apparently had fallen asleep.

I must have dozed myself as the hours passed, although hardly aware of doing so. It was faint and dim, a promise more than a realization of approaching day, yet already sufficient to afford me view of the shore at our right and to reveal the outlines of a sharp point of land ahead jutting into the stream. The mist rising from off the water in vaporous clouds obscured all else, rendering the scene weird and unfamiliar. It was indeed a desolate view, the nearby land low, and without verdure, in many places overflowed, and the river itself sullen and angry. Only that distant point appeared clearly defined and real, with the slowly brightening sky beyond. I endeavored to arouse myself from stupor, rubbing the sleep from my eyes. René had changed her posture, but still slumbered, with face completely concealed in her arms; but Sam was wide awake and turned toward me grinning, at my first movement. Instinctively I liked the fellow—he appeared both intelligent and trustworthy.

"Daylight, is it?" I said, speaking low so as not to awaken the girl. "I must have been asleep."

"Yas, sah; yer's bin a-noddin' fer de las' hour. Ah wus bout ter stir yer lip, sah, fer Ah reckon as how we's mos' dar."

"Most where?" staring about incredulously. "Oh, yes, Rassuer creek. Have we made that distance already?"

"Wal, we's bin a-goin' et a mighty good gait, sah. She ain't done fooled none on me all dis night," his hand laid lovingly on the engine. "Nebber kicked up no row o' no kind—just chug, chug, chug right long." "Pears like she sorter know'd dis nigger hed ter git away. Enyhow, we bin movin' long now right smart fer 'bout four hours, an' Rassuer creek am just 'round dat p'int yonder—Ah's mighty sure ob dat, sah."

He was right, but it was broad day-light when we reached there, the eastern sky a glorious crimson, and the girl sitting up staring at the brilliant coloring as though it pictured to her the opening of a new world. The passage of a few hundred yards revealed the mouth of Rassuer creek, a narrow but sluggish stream, so crooked and encroached upon by the woods as to be practically invisible from the center of the river. The water was not deep, yet fortunately proved sufficiently so for our purpose, although we were obliged to both pole and paddle the boat upward against the slow current, and it required an hour of hard labor to place the craft safely beyond the first bend, where it might be roughly concealed by the intervening fringe of trees. Here we made fast to the bank.

I assisted René ashore, and aided her to climb to a higher level, carpeted with grass. The broad river was invisible, but we could look directly down upon the boat, where Sam was already busily rummaging through the lockers in search of something to eat. He came ashore presently, bearing some corn pone and a goody portion

of jerked beef. Deciding it would be better not to attempt a fire, we divided this and made the best meal possible, meanwhile discussing the situation anew, and planning what to do next. The negro, seated at one side alone upon the grass, said little, beyond replying to my questions, yet scarcely once removed his eyes from the girl's face. He seemed unable to grasp the thought that she was actually of his race, a runaway slave, or permit his tongue to utter any words of equality. Indeed I could not prevent my own glance from being constantly attracted in her direction also. Whatever had been her mental strain and anguish, the long hours of the night had in no marked degree diminished her beauty. To me she appeared even younger and more attractive than in the dim glare of the lamplight the evening before; and this in spite of a weariness in her eyes and the lassitude of her manner. She spoke but little, compelling herself to eat, and assuming a cheerfulness I was sure she was far from feeling. It was clearly evident her thoughts were elsewhere, and finally the conviction came to me that, more than all else, she desired to be alone. My eyes sought the outlines of the boat lying in the stream below.

"What is there forward of the cockpit, Sam?" I questioned.

"A cabin, sah; 'tain't so awful big, but Massa Donaldson he uther sleep dar off an' on."

"The young lady could rest there then?"

"Sure she cud. 'Twas all fixed up fine afore we lef' St. Louee. Ah'll show yer de way, missus."

She rose to her feet rather eagerly, and stood with one hand resting against the trunk of a small tree. Her eyes met mine and endeavored a smile.

"I thank you for thinking of that," she said gratefully. "I—I really am tired, and—it will be rest just to be alone. You—you do not mind if I go?"

"Certainly not. There is nothing for any of us to do but just take things easy until night."

"And then we are to go on up the river?"

"Yes, unless, of course, something should occur during the day to change our plan. Meanwhile Sam and I will take turns on guard, while you can remain undisturbed."

I watched the two as they went down the steep bank together and Sam helped her over the rail into the



Her Eyes Met Mine, and Endeavored a Smile.

cockpit. The negro left the door open and returned slowly, clambering up the bank.

"Cuse me, sah," he said clumsily, as he paused before me, rubbing his head, his eyes wandering below. "Did Ah hear right what yer sed las' night, 'bout how dat young woman was a nigger, a runaway from Massa Kirby? Pears like Ah don't just seem fer ter git dat right in my head, sah."

"That is the truth, Sam, although it appears quite as impossible to me as to you. She has the blood of your race in her veins, and is legally a slave."

"As' now she does b'long ter dis

"Yes, he won all the Beauchaire property, including the slaves, in a poker game, on the river, the night Beauchaire died."

"Ah done heerd all 'bout dat, sah. An' yer nebbet know'd dis yere girl afore et all!"

"No, I never even saw her. I chanced to hear the story and went to the house to warn them, as no one else would. I was too late, and no other course was left but to help her escape. That is the whole of it."

He asked several other questions, but at last appeared satisfied, and after that we discussed the guard duty of the day, both agreeing it would not be safe for us to permit any possible pursuit to pass by us up the river unseen. Sam professed himself as unwearied by the night's work and willing to stand the first watch. I lay down in the tree shade, and must have fallen asleep almost immediately. I do not know what awoke me, but I immediately sat upright, started and instantly awake, the first object confronting me being Sam on the crest of the opposite ridge, eagerly beckoning me to join him. The moment he was assured of my coming, and without so much as uttering a word of explanation, he vanished into the shadow of the woods.

I crossed the ravine with reckless haste, clambering up the opposite bank, and sixty feet beyond suddenly came into view of the broad expanse of water. Scarcely had I glimpsed this rolling flood, sparkling under the sun's rays, when my gaze turned upstream, directed by an excited gesture of the negro. Less than a mile away, its rapidly revolving wheel churning the water into foam in ceaseless battle against the current, was a steamboat. A number of moving figures were perceptible on the upper deck. I stared at the apparition, scarcely comprehending the reality of what I beheld.

"Yer bettah stoop down more, sah," Sam urged. "Fer sum o' dem fellars might see yer yet. Ah nebbet heerd nuthin' ner saw no smoke till she cum a-puffin' round de end o' dat p'nt. Ah cudn't dare go fer yer then, sah, fer fear dey'd see me, so Ah just nat'ral'y lay down yere an' watched her go by."

"Is it a government boat?"

"Ah reckon maybe; leastwise that's a heap o' sojers aboard her—reg'lar's, Ah reckons, fer dey's all in uniform. But everybody aboard wasn't sojers."

"You know the steamer?"

"Yas, sah. Ah's seed her face afore dis down at St. Louee. She uther run down de ribber—she's de John B. Glover. She ain't no great shaker ob a boat, sah."

"His eyes, which had been eagerly following the movements of the craft, turned and glanced at me. "Massa Kirby he wus aboard dat steamer, sah."

"Kirby! Are you sure about that, Sam?"

"Course Ah's sure. Didn't Ah see him just as plain as Ah see you right now? He was forrad by de rail, near de pilot house, a-watchin' dis whole shore like a hawk. Dat sure wus Massa Kirby all right, but dar wan't nobody else 'long wid him."

"But what could he be doing there on a troop boat?"

The negro scratched his head, momentarily puzzled by my question.

"Ah sure don't know, sah," he admitted. "Only dat's perzactly who it was. Ah figure it out 'bout dis way, sah: dat nobody kin tell yit which way we went—up de ribber or down de ribber. Long cum de John B. Glover, an' Massa Kirby he just take a chance an' goes aboard. De sheriff he goes der odder way, downstream in a rowboat; an' dat's how dey aims ter sure head us off."

I sat down at the edge of the bluff, convinced that the conclusions of the negro were probably correct. That was undoubtedly about how it had happened. To attempt pursuit upstream with only oars as propelling power would be senseless, and the passage upward of this troop boat afforded Kirby an opportunity he would not be slow to accept. Getting aboard would present no great difficulty, and his probable acquaintance with the captain would make the rest easy.

The steamer by this time was moving diagonally across the river, head toward the other shore, and was already so far away the men on deck were invisible. It was scarcely probable that Kirby would go far northward, but just what course the man would take when once more ashore was problematical. Where he might choose to seek for us could not be guessed. Yet the mere fact that he was already above us on the river was in itself a matter for grave consideration. Still thus far we remained unlocated, and there was less danger in that direction than downstream. Once we attained the Illinois and made arrangements with Shrunken the immediate danger would be over. Then I need go no farther—the end of the adventure might be left to others. I looked up—the steamer was a mere smudge on the distant bosom of the river. "Tain't so awful fur from yere, sah," Sam called to me.

"What— the place where we are land below?"

"Yas, sah. It's de mouth ob a little creek wher yer nebbet see till yer right plum at it. Bettah keep yer eyes open 'long dat shore, sah."

The girl, alertly bent forward, was first among us to detect the concealed opening, which was almost completely screened by the overarchig trees, her voice ringing excitedly as she pointed it out. Sam was quick to respond, and almost before I had definitely established the spot, the bow of the boat swerved and we shot in through the leafy screen, the low-hung branches sweeping against our faces and scraping along the sides. It looked a veritable cave, and indeed all I remember noting in my first hasty glance through the shadows was the outline of a small boat moored to a fallen tree. I scrambled over, found precarious footing, and made fast.

"So this is the place?" I questioned incredulously, staring about at the dark, silent forest, which still remained in the deep night shade. "Why, there's nothing here."

It was late afternoon before René finally emerged from the cabin to

learn the news, and I spent most of the time on watch, seated at the edge of the bluff, my eyes searching the surface of the river. While Kirby's presence upstream unquestionably increased our peril of capture, this did not cause me as much anxious thought as did the strange disappearance of Free Pete and the two women. What had become of them during the night? Surely they could never have outstripped us with only a pair of oars by which to combat the current, and yet we had obtained no glimpse of them anywhere along that stretch of river.

The knowledge that the steamer which had passed us was heavily laden with troops was most encouraging. In itself alone this was abundant proof of the safe delivery of my dispatches, and I was thus relieved to realize that the duty had been performed. There might be wonder and later the necessity of explanation, yet no one would suffer from my absence, and I was within the limits of my lough—the re-enforcements for Forts Armstrong and Crawford were already on their way. So, altogether, I faced the task of eluding Kirby with a lighter heart and renewed confidence. Alone, as I believed him to be, and in that new country on the very verge of civilization, he was hardly an antagonist I needed greatly to fear. Indeed, as man to man, I rather welcomed an encounter.

There is little to record, either of the day or night. The latter shut down dark but rainless, although the sky was heavily overcast by clouds. Sam made no endeavor to speed his engine, keeping most of the way close to the deeper shadow of the shore, and the machinery ran smoothly, its noise indistinguishable at any distance. Day had not broken when we came to the mouth of the Illinois and turned our bow cautiously up that stream, becoming immediately aware that we had entered new waters. The negro, ignorant of what was before us, soon beached the boat on a sand bar, and we decided it would be better for us to remain there until dawn. This was not long in coming, the gray sky of the east slowly lighting up the scene and bringing into view, little by little, our immediate surroundings. Nowhere appeared the slightest evidence of life, either on water or land; all was forlorn and dead, a vista of utter desolation. Sam was standing up, his whole attention concentrated on the view upstream.

"Do steamers ever go up this river?" I asked, surprised at the volume of water.

He glanced around at me as though started at my voice.

"Yas, sah; putty near eny sorter boat kin. Trouble is, sah, we's got started in de wrong place—dar's plenty watah t'other side of dis yere bar."

"Who told you the best way to find Shrunken?"

His eyes widened and searched my face, evidently still somewhat suspicious of any white man.

"A nigger down St. Louee way, sah. Dey done catched him an' brought him back afore he even got ter Beardstown."

"And you believe you can guide us there?"

"Ah sure can, if what dat nigger sed was correct, sah. Ah done questioned him mighty partic'lar, an' Ah members every sign wher he giv me." He grinned broadly. "Ah sorter suspicioned Ah mought need dat information."

"All right, then; it is certainly light enough now—let's push off."

We had taken the sand lightly and were able to pole the boat into deep water with no great difficulty. The broader river behind us remained veiled in mist, but the gray light was sufficient for our purpose, enabling us to proceed slowly until our craft had rounded the protruding headland, out of sight from below.

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A Romance of the Black Hawk War

By RANDALL PARRISH
Author of
"Contraband," "Sons of the Irish Brigade,"
"When Wilderness Was King," etc.

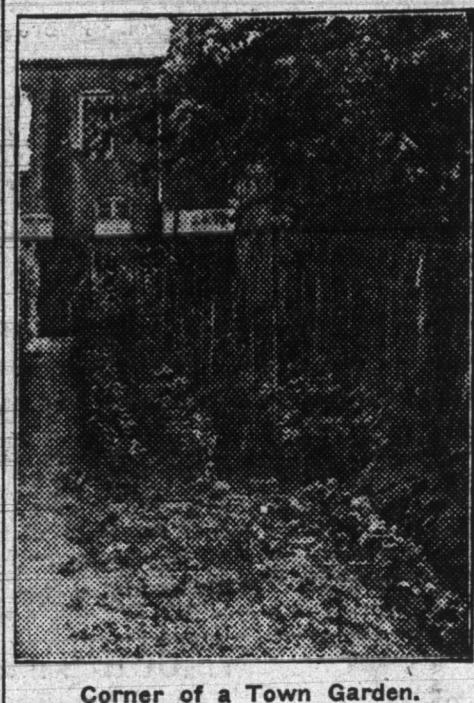
ILLUSTRATIONS BY IRWIN MYERS

HOME TOWN HELPS

START YOUR GARDEN EARLY
Department of Agriculture Puts Forth
Plea for the Raising of More
Food Products.

Gardens are going to be just as important the coming year as during the war period, United States department of agriculture specialists declare. High food costs, they say, are likely to remain until more to eat is grown and distributed. Farm gardens, village gardens and city backyard gardens all will help. Food produced in the garden not only helps balance the family budget but releases that grown on farms for the use of people who are entirely dependent upon others.

With the lengthening of the days it will not be long until land can be worked, and such hardy crops as peas, onions, lettuce, radishes and beets planted, especially throughout the lower Gulf coast region. The average date of the last killing frost of the winter in this section is not later than



Corner of a Town Garden.

March 15. This zone includes the southern portion of South Carolina, the southern half of Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi, almost the whole of Louisiana and all southeastern Texas. Several of the more hardy garden crops, including those mentioned above, will withstand considerable frost and may be planted at least a month before the average date for the last frost.

Irish potatoes are easily injured by freezing, but they require about a month to come up and may be planted at about the same time as lettuce and radishes. It pays to take a chance on the early planting of certain of the more hardy garden vegetables. If they are killed or severely injured they may be replanted. A good method is to make about three plantings at intervals of three weeks, and if the first planting is killed the later ones take its place.

Pansies seed started in the conservatory or greenhouse now will make good plants for bedding out in the spring.

Sow the seeds in seed pans or boxes and grow the plants in the shallow boxes