

# The Devil's Own

A Romance of the Black Hawk War

By RANDALL PARRISH

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"I CANNOT ORDER; I AM A SLAVE."

**Synopsis.**—In 1832 Lieutenant Knox of the regular army is on duty at Fort Armstrong, Rock Island, Ill., in action 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 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. Recovery, he finds he is in a cabin owned by Pete, a "free negro" who had shot him, mistaking him for an enemy. His disputes 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 Shrank, 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. 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. Next day a steamer passes and Sam recognises Kirby on board. At Shrank's place they find a dead negro, treacherously shot down from behind, lying in the woods near the cabin. It is a stunning surprise.

CHAPTER VIII—Continued.

He was slow in following, hanging back as I approached closer to the motionless form, and I could hear the muttering of his lips. Unquestionably the man was dead; of this I was assured before I even knelt beside him. He lay on his face in a litter of dead leaves, and almost the first thing I noticed was the death wound back of his ear, where a large-caliber bullet had pierced the brain. His exposed hands proved him a negro, and it was with a feeling of unusual repugnance that I touched his body, turning it over sufficiently to see the face. All at once I knew him, unable wholly to repress a cry of startled surprise as I stared down into the upturned face—the dead man evidently murdered, shot treacherously from behind, was Free Pete. I sprang to my feet, gazing about blindly into the dim woods, my mind for the instant dazed by the importance of this discovery. What could it mean? How could it have happened? By what means had he reached this spot in advance of us, and at whose hand had he fallen? He could have been there only for one purpose, surely—in an attempt to guide Eloise Beauchaire and the quadron Delta. Then what had become of the women? Where were they now?

I stumbled backward to the support of the log, unable to answer any one of these questions, remembering only in that moment that I must tell Rene the truth.

"Tell me—please," she begged. "Is the man dead? Who is he, do you know?"

"Yea," I replied desperately. "He is dead, and I recognized his face. He is the negro Pete and has been killed, shot from behind."

"Pete," she echoed, grasping at the log to keep erect, her eyes on that dimly revealed figure in the leaves. "Free Pete, Carlton's Pete? How could he have got here? Then—then the others must have been with him. What has become of them?"

"It is all mystery; the only way to solve it is for us to go on. It can do no one any good to stand here, staring at this dead body. When we reach the cabin we may learn what has occurred. Go on ahead, Sam, and we will follow—don't be afraid, boy; it is not the dead who hurt us."

She clung tightly to me, shrinking past the motionless figure. She was

sidewall, and so overhung with trees as to be invisible, except from the direction of our approach. We could see only the side wall, which contained one open window, and was a one-room affair, low and flat-roofed, built of logs. Its outward appearance was peaceful enough, and the swift beat of my pulse quieted as I took rapid survey of the surroundings.

"Sam," I commanded, "you are to remain here with Rene, while I learn the truth yonder. Yes," to her quick protest, "that will be the better way—there is no danger and I shall not be gone but for a moment."

I seated her on a low stump and left them there together, Sam's eyes rolling about in a frightened effort to perceive every covert in the woods, but the girl satisfied to watch me intently as I moved cautiously forward. A dozen steps brought me within view of the front of the cabin. The door had been smashed in and hung dangling from one hinge. Another step, now with a pistol gripped in my hand, enabled me to obtain a glimpse within. Across the puncheon threshold, his feet even protruding without, lay a man's body; beyond him, half concealed by the shadows of the interior, appeared the outlines of another, with face upturned to the roof, plainly distinguishable because of a snow-white beard.

CHAPTER IX.

The Trail of the Raiders.

Shocked and unmanned as I was at this discovery, to pause there staring at those gruesome figures would have only brought fresh alarm to the two watching my every movement from the edge of the clearing. Gripping my nerves, I advanced over the first body, watching for any sign of the presence of life within the cabin. There was none—the work of the murderer had been completed, and the perpetrators had fled. The dead man, with ghastly countenance upturned to the roof rafters, and the snowy beard, was undoubtedly the negro helper, Amos Shrank. Pete's description of the appearance of the man left this identification beyond all dispute. He had been stricken down by a savage blow, which had literally crushed in one side of his head, but his dead hands yet gripped a rifle, as though he had fallen fighting to the last.

The other man, the one lying across the threshold, had been shot, although I did not ascertain this fact until after I turned the body over sufficiently to reveal the face. This was disfigured by the wound and covered with blood, so that the features could scarcely be seen, yet I instantly recognized the fellow—Carver. Surprised out of all control by this unexpected discovery, I steadied myself against the log wall, fully aroused to the sinister meaning of his presence. To a degree the complete significance of this tragedy instantly gripped my mind. If this fellow Carver had been one of the assailants then it was absolutely certain that Kirby must also have been present—the leader of the attack. This inevitably meant that both men had been aboard the steamer, and later were put ashore at the mouth of the Illinois. And, now that I thought about it, why not? It was no accident, and I wondered that the possibility had never occurred to me before. The gambler naturally knew all the gossip of the river, and beyond question he would be aware of the reported existence of this underground station for runaway slaves. It was common talk as far down as St. Louis, and his mind would instantly revert to the possibility that the fleeing Rene might seek escape through the assistance of Shrank. The mysterious vanishing of the boat would serve to increase that suspicion. Even if this had not occurred to him at first, the steamer would have brought news that no keelboat had been seen on the lower river, while the captain of the John B. Glover, or someone else on board, would have been sure to have mentioned the negro helper and suggest that he might have had a hand in the affair. To follow that trail was, indeed, the most natural thing for Kir-

by to do. He had not overtaken Rene because she was not yet there, but he had unexpectedly come upon the other fugitives, and, even though the encounter had cost the life of his henchman, Carver, it also resulted in the death of two men who had come between him and his prey—the negro and the abolitionist. The scene cleared in my brain and became vivid and real. I could almost picture in detail each act of the grim tragedy. The two revengeful trackers—if there were only two engaged, for others might have been recruited on the steamer—must have crept up to the hut in the night or early morning. Possibly Kirby had learned of some other means of approach from the big river. Anyway the fact that Shrank had been trapped within the cabin would indicate the final attack was a surprise. The negro might have been asleep outside and met his death in an attempt at escape, but the old white man, finding flight impossible, had fought desperately to the last and had killed one antagonist before receiving his death blow. This was all plain enough, but what had become of Kirby, of the two women—Eloise and the quadron mother?

Uncertain what to do or how to act, I could only turn to the waiting girl and the negro to tell them what I had found.

They listened as though scarcely comprehending. Sam uttering little moans of horror, and appearing helpless from fright, but Rene quiet, merely exhibiting her emotion in the whiteness of her face and quickened breathing. Her eyes, wide open, questioning, seemed to sense my uncertainty. As I ended the tale and concluded with my theory as to what had occurred following the deed of blood, her quick mind asserted itself.

"But this must have happened very lately; the fire still smoldered, you said. When do you think that steamer could have landed here?"

"Why, perhaps early last evening."

"And it has not occurred to you that the boat might have waited here while the man Kirby went ashore?"

"No; that could scarcely be true, if the steamer was transporting troops; what was it you were thinking about?"

"It is all dark, of course," she said slowly, "we can only guess at what happened. But to me it seems impossible that the man Kirby could have accomplished this alone—without assistance. The boat we saw at the landing was not his; it must have been Pete's, and there is no evidence of any other trail leading here from the river. If, as you imagine, he knew the captain of that steamer, and some of the other men aboard were Missourians and defenders of slavery, he would have no trouble in enlisting their help to recover his runaway slaves. They would be only too glad to break up an abolitionist's nest."

"But why not? It would not be a cowardly act at all. I could not blame you, for I have no claim on your service—never have had. You have done a thousand times too much already; you have risked honor, reputation, and neglected duty to aid my escape; and—I am nothing to you—can be nothing."

"Nothing to me?"

"Certainly not. Why speak like that? Have you forgotten again that I am a slave—a negress?"

"But," she questioned, unsatisfied, "he would have only one reason for being here—hunting me, his slave. That was his one purpose, was it not? If he saw us then he must have known of my presence, that I was here with you. Why should he make no attempt to take me with him? Why should he steal our boat and run away?"

"One theory is as good as another," I said, "and mine so far have all been wrong. What do you make of it, Sam?"

"Who, sah? Me, sah?"

"Yes, take a guess at this."

"Pears like," he said, deliberately, rubbing his ear with one hand, "as how it mought have happened dis yere way, sah. Ah ain't a-sayin' it wus mought be. Maybe Mass Kirby neber got no sight ob us 'tall, an' wus afeerd fer ter stay. He just knowned a party wus yere—likely 'nough sum Black Abolitionists, who'd be huntin' him if he didn't el' out, just so soon as dey foun' dat Amos Shrank wus dead. Here wus his chance, an' he done took it."

He bent suddenly forward, his glance at the edge of the log. "Dey ain't took but just de one boat, sah, fer de odder am shoved under dar o'er sight."

As I stooped further over I saw that this was true, the small rowboat, with the oars undisturbed in its bottom, had been pressed in beneath the concealment of the log wharf, almost completely hidden from above, yet to all appearances uninjured. The very fact that it should have been thus left only added to the mystery of the affair. It had been Kirby's deliberate purpose to leave us there stranded ashore why had he failed to crush in the boat's planking with a rock? Could the leaving of the craft in fit condition for our use be part of some carefully conceived plan; a bait to draw us into some set trap? Or did it occur merely as an incident of their hurried flight? These were unanswerable questions, yet the mere knowledge that the boat was actually there and in navigable condition promised us an opportunity to escape. While hope remained, however vague, it was not my nature to despair. Whether accident or design had been the cause made no odds—I was willing to match my wits against Kirby and endeavor to win. And I must deal with facts just as they were.

The last few rods of our journey lay through thick underbrush, and beneath the spreading branches of interlacing trees. Suddenly I emerged upon the bank of the creek, with the rude log wharf directly before me. I stopped transfixed, staring at the water—nothing else greeted my eyes; both the boats were gone.

This unexpected discovery came to me like a blow; the very breath seemed to desert my lungs, as I stared down at the vacant stream. We had been outgeneraled, tricked, and all our theories as to what had occurred were wrong. The duty we had performed to the dead had cost us our own chance to escape. Instead of being alone, as we had supposed, we were in the midst of enemies; we had been seen, watched, and while we loitered ashore the murderers had stolen our boat and vanished, leaving us

there helplessly marooned. All this was plain enough now, when it was already too late to remedy the evil. The struggling girl emerged through the tangle of shrubs and paused suddenly at my side, her lips giving utterance to a cry of surprise.

"The boat! It is not here!"

"No; there is not a sign of it. Those fellows must be still in the neighborhood; must have seen us when we first came."

"But what are we to do?"

I had no ready answer, yet the echo of utter despair in her voice stirred me to my own duty as swiftly as though she had thrust a knife into my side. Do? We must do something! We could not sit down idly there in the swamp. And to decide what was to be attempted was my part. If Kirby and whoever was with him had stolen the missing boat, as undoubtedly they had, they could have possessed but one purpose—escape. They were inspired to the act by a desire to get away, to flee from the scene of their crime. They must believe that we were left helpless, unable to pursue them or create alarm. Yet if it was Kirby why had he fled so swiftly, making no effort to take Rene captive also? It was she he was seeking.



"Certainly Not. Why Speak Like That? Have You Forgotten Again That I am a Slave—a Negress?"

ing; for the purpose of gaining possession of her these murders had been committed. Why, then, should he run away when he must have known the girl was already in his grasp? The same thought apparently occurred to her.

"You—you believe that Kirby did this?"

"What other conclusion is possible? We know that he passed us on the steamer—Sam saw him plainly. It was his man, Carver, whom we found dead in the hut. It could have been no one else."

"But," she questioned, unsatisfied, "he would have only one reason for being here—hunting me, his slave. That was his one purpose, was it not? If he saw us then he must have known of my presence, that I was here with you. Why should he make no attempt to take me with him? Why should he steal our boat and run away?"

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Uncertain.

"Well, Mr. Pedagogue, does my boy show any special aptitude for work?"

"I think so, Mr. Bronson," answered the schoolmaster. "I am not certain as yet whether John will make a sculptor or a baseball player. He is unerring in his aim with paper wads, but the condition of his desk top convinces me that he can carve with considerable facility."

Still Hopeful.

"My boy," said Mr. Grabcoin, "I'm going to pay your poker debts, but this is positively the last time."

"Thank you, dad. Something tells me I won't have to trouble you that way any more."

"Good! Then you are going to quit gambling?"

"Well, not exactly, dad. I have a hunch that my luck is going to change."

Plainly a Personage.

"I don't know who that solemny guy over there is, but I'll betcha he's somebody important," whispered Heloise of the rapid-fire restaurant.

"What makes you think so?" returned Claudine of the same establishment. "He never says anything about it, does he?"

"No; but, my gosh, he can actually look dignified while eating spaghetti!"

Competent at Last.

"How long has this reporter been on the staff?"

"Oh, long enough to become really useful as a news gatherer."

"What do you mean?"

"He has passed through the period of aspiring to write the 'Great American Novel,' or the 'Great American Play' and is now able to concentrate his mind on a police court item."



GIVE IT TIME.

"Boil my egg three minutes."

"'Scuse me. Dat aig is jes' out o' cold storage an' three minutes won't much more dan jes' thaw it."

Friendly Bill.

The man I like  
Is, Bill McGuire;  
He stops and helps  
Me change a tire.