



The Devil's Own

A Romance of the Black Hawk War

By
Randall
Parrish

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"When Wilderness was King", etc.

Illustrated by Edwin M. Mays

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CHAPTER XV—Continued.

"Indians, you say! Here?" her eyes widening in horror. "When do you suppose this happened? how long ago?"

"Within twelve hours certainly; probably soon after dawn."

I caught the rein of her horse, and Elsie, who was now wide awake, and trembling with fear, pressed forward, close to my side, moaning and casting her frightened glances backward. Kennedy was already started in advance of me on foot, leading his animal, and seeking to discover the quickest passage to shelter. On a narrow terrace the deputy halted us.

"I reckon maybe this yere is as good as any place fer ter stop," he said rather doubtfully. "It'll be mighty dark in an hour, an' then we kin go on; only my boss is about did up. What ye say, Cap?"

"We are probably as safe here as anywhere in the neighborhood. Is that all you have to report, Tim?"

He lifted his hat, and scratched gently his thin hair.

"Only that them Injuns went south. I done run onto their trail after yer left—it was plain as the nose on yer face. Thar must be a sly o' em, an' sum a hossback; they was a strikin' straight across yonder, an' I reckon they fetched a prisoner long, somebody wearin' boots anyhow, fer I saw the tracks in the mud." He hesitated, as though something was on his mind, glancing toward the girls, and lowering his voice. "I ain't so very dern tired, an' reckon I'll scout 'round a bit. Them red devils might've overlooked a rifle or two back thar in the timber, an' I'd sure like ter git my fingers on one."

I nodded indifferently, too completely exhausted myself to care what he did, and then dull-eyed watched him disappear through the trees. No one spoke, even Eloise failing to question me, as I approached where she and Elsie had flung themselves on the short grass, although her heavy eyes followed my movement, and she made an effort to smile.

"One can easily see by your face how tired you are," I said, compassionately, looking down at her. "I am going to sleep for an hour or two, and you had both better do the same. Tim is going to keep guard."

She smiled weakly at me, her head sinking back. I did not move or speak again; indeed I had lost consciousness almost before I touched the ground.

I could not have slept long, for there was a glow of light still visible in the western sky, when a strong grip on my arm aroused me, causing me instantly to sit up. Tim stood there, a battered, old, long rifle in his hand, and beside him a boy of eighteen, without a hat, tousled hair, with an ugly red wound showing on one cheek.

"Mighty sorry fer ter wake ye, Cap," the deputy grinned. "This yere young chap is one o' them sojers; an' it strikes me, he's got a d— queer tale ter tell."

I glanced backward across my shoulder toward the others. Both girls were sleeping soundly, while beyond them,



"Indians, You Say! Here?" Her Eyes Widening in Horror.

down the slope, the three horses were quietly cropping away at the herbage. I managed to rise.

"Let's move back to the spring, where we will not wake them up," I suggested. "Now we can talk."

My eyes sought the face of the lad questioningly. He was a loose-lipped, awkward lout, trembling still from a fright he could not conceal.

"You belonged to that squad killed out yonder?"

"Yes, seh; I reckon I'se the only one what ain't died," he stammered, so tongue-tied I could scarcely make out his words. "I was gone after wahter, an' when them Injuns begun fer ter yell, I never dun nuttin' but just run, an' hid in the bush."

"I understand. What is your name?"

"Asa Hall."

"Well, Asa, I suppose those were militiamen; you belonged to the company?"

He nodded, his eyes dull, his lips moving, as though it was an effort to talk. Quite evidently whatever little

dawned suddenly upon us—there to our right lay a dead mule, harnessed for work, but with throat cut; while directly in front of the cabin door was a dog, an ugly, massive brute, his mouth open, prone on his back, with stiffened legs pointing to the sky. I dropped my rein and strode forward.

"Wait where you are," I called back.

"There have been savages here; let me see first what has happened inside."

The dog had been shot, stricken by two bullets, and I was obliged to drag his huge body to one side before I could press my way in through the door. The open doorway and window afforded ample light, and a single glance was sufficient to reveal most of the story. The table had been smashed as by the blow of an ax, and pewter dishes were everywhere. The bed in one corner had been stripped of its coverlets, many of them slashed by a knife, and the straw tick had been ripped open in a dozen places. Coals from the fireplace lay widespread, some of them having eaten deeply into the hard wood before they ceased smoldering.

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I know not whether the frantic horse checked itself, or if the rider drew rein, but the beast stopped, half rearing, and I gazed with amazement into the revealed face of the man—he was Joe Kirby. Before I could speak, or move, he burst into words.

"You! Knox! My God, man, who ever you are, don't refuse me shelter!"

"Shelter? From what?" my hand closing on a pistol butt.

"Indians! Be merciful, for God's sake. They are there in the valley,

open door, eating as though he had not tasted food for a week. From the time of sitting down he had scarcely raised his eyes from off the pewter plate before him; but at last this was emptied, and he lifted his head, to start out through the open door. Into his face came a look of dumb, articulate fright, as his lips gave utterance to one cry of warning.

"Look! Look!"

With swift turn of the head I saw what he meant—a man on horseback, riding at a savage gait up the trail, directly for the cabin, bent so low in the saddle his features could not be discerned, but, from his clothing, unquestionably white. I was without the door, Tim beside me rifle in hand, when the fellow swept around the base of the oak, still staring behind him, as though in fright of pursuers, and flogging his straining horse with the end of a rein. He appeared fairly crazed with fear, unaware in his blind terror of the close proximity of the cabin.

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they are after me. I just escaped them—they were going to burn me at the stake!"

I glanced aside at Tim; his rifle was flung forward. Then I looked quickly back at the man, who had already dropped from his horse, and seemed scarcely able to stand. Was this true, had he ridden here unknowing whom he would meet, with no other thought but to save his life? Heaven knows he looked the part—his swarthy face dirtied, with a stain of blood on one cheek, his shirt ripped into rags, bare-headed, and with a look of terror in his eyes not to be mistaken. Villain and savage as I knew him to be, I still felt a strange wave of pity sweep me—pity and tenderness, mingled with hatred and distrust.

"Kirby," I said, and strode in between him and Tim's leveled weapon. "There is no friendship between us—now, or at any time. I believe you to be a miserable, snarling dog; but I would save even a cur from Indian torture. Did you know we were here?"

"No, so help me God. I saw the cabin, and hoped to find help."

"The savages are following you?"

"Yes—yes; see! Look down there—there are half a hundred of the devils, and—Black Hawk."

"By the holy smoke, Cap, he's right—there they are!" sung out Kennedy, pointing excitedly. "The cuss ain't a lyin'. What'll we do?"

"Must a bin amin' ter blow up stumps, I reckon," he commented, exhibiting a sample. "Coarsest I ever saw; cudn't hardly use that in no gun, but it's powder alright."

To remove the debris out of our way, I was gathering up the straw tick and slit blankets, and piled them all together back on the bed. Clinging to one of the blankets, caught and held by its pin, was a peculiar emblem, and I stood for a moment with it in my hand, curiously examining the odd design. Eloise unclosed her eyes, and started to her feet.

"What is that you have?" she asked.

"A pin of some kind—a rather strange design; I just found it here, entangled in this blanket."

"Why?" she exclaimed in surprise, "I have seen one exactly like it before Kirby wore it in his tie."

CHAPTER XVI.

We Accept a Refugee.

I looked again at the thing with a fresh curiosity, yet with no direct thought of any connection. The undisguised terror manifest in her face, however, caused me to realize the sudden suspicion which this discovery had aroused.

"That means nothing," I insisted, taking the pin back into my own possession. "It is probably the emblem of some secret order, and there may be thousands of them scattered about. Anyhow this one never belonged to Joe Kirby. He could never have been here.

My guess is the fellow is back at Yellow Banks before now. Forget it, Eloise, while we eat. Then a few hours sleep will restore your nerves; you are all worn out."

We had nearly completed the meal, seated around what remained of the shattered table. The boy Asa sat at the very end of the table, facing the

open door, eating as though he had not tasted food for a week. From the time of sitting down he had scarcely raised his eyes from off the pewter plate before him; but at last this was emptied, and he lifted his head, to start out through the open door. Into his face came a look of dumb, articulate fright, as his lips gave utterance to one cry of warning.

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