

## The Devil's Own

### A Romance of the Blackhawk War

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"Controlled," "She of the Irish Brigade,"  
"When Wilderness Was King," etc.

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CHAPTER XVI—Continued.

—17—

"Kirby, stand up! Drop that rifle—take it, Eloise. Now raise your hands. Tim."

"What's up?"  
"Is there anything serious going on outside?"

"No; nuthin' much—just pow-wowin'. Yer want me?"

"Search that scoundrel for weapons. Don't ask questions; do what I say."

"He made short work of it, using no gentle methods."

"Wal, the gent wasn't exactly harmless," he reported, grinning cheerfully, "considerin' this yere knife an' cannon. Now, maybe y'all tell me what the h—up?"

Kirby stood erect, his dark eyes searching our faces, his lips scornful.

"And perhaps, Mr. Lieutenant Knox," he added sarcastically. "You might condescend to explain to me also the purpose of this outrage."

"With pleasure," but without lowering my rifle. "This boy here belonged to the company of soldiers massacred yesterday morning. You know where I mean. He was the only one to escape alive, and he saw you there among the savages—free, and one of them."

"He tells you that? And you accept the word of that half-wit?"

"He described your appearance to us exactly twenty-four hours ago. I never thought of you at the time, although the description was accurate enough, because it seemed so impossible for you to have been there. But that isn't all, Kirby. What has become of the emblem pin you wore in your tie? It is gone, I see."

His hand went up involuntarily. It is possible he had never missed it before, for a look of indecision came into the man's face—the first symptom of weakness I had ever detected there.

"It must have been lost—misled—"

"It was; and I chance to be able to tell you where—in this very room. Here is your pin you incarnate devil. I found it caught in those blankets yonder. This is not your first visit to this cabin; you were here with Indian murderers."

"It's a d—d lie!"  
But Kennedy had him, locked in a vice-like grip. It was well he had, for the fellow had burst into a frantic rage, yet was bound so utterly helpless as to appear almost pitiful. The knowledge of what he had planned, of his despicable treachery, left us merciless. In spite of his struggles we bore him to the floor, and pinned him there, cursing and snapping like a wild beast.

"Tear up one of those blankets," I called back over my shoulder to Hall. "Yea into strips, of course; now bring them here. Tim, you tie the fellow—yes, do a good job; I'll hold him. Lie still, Kirby, or I shall have to give you the butt of this gun in the face."

He made one last effort to break free, and, as my hand attempted to close on his throat, the clutching fingers caught the band of his shirt, and ripped it wide open. There, directly before me, a scar across his hairy, exposed chest, was a broad, black mark, a tribal totem. I stared down at it, recognizing its significance.

"By Heaven, Tim, look at this! I cried. "He is an Indian himself—a black Sac!"

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I do not know what delayed the attack of the savages, unless they were waiting for some signal which never came. I passed from loophole to loophole, thus assuring myself not only that they still remained, but that the cabin was completely surrounded, although the manner in which the warriors had been distributed left the great mass of them opposite the front. The others evidently composed a mere guard to prevent escape. No movement I could observe indicated an immediate assault; they rather appeared to be awaiting something.

Those I saw were all dismounted, and had advanced toward the cabin as closely as possible without coming within the range of guns. They had also sheltered themselves as far as possible behind clumps of brush, or ridges of rock, so that I found it difficult to estimate their number. Only occasionally would a venturesome warrior appear for a moment in the open, as he glided stealthily from the protection of one covert to another. No doubt some were brought within range of our rifles, as these efforts were usually made to more advanced positions, but I forbade firing, in the vague hope that, not hearing from Kirby, the chiefs might become disengaged and draw off without risking an open attack.

This was more a desperate hope, rather than any real faith I possessed. Beyond doubt the Indian chief knew, or thought he knew, our exact strength before he consented to use his warriors in this assault.

If the band had trailed us to this spot, it had been done through the

influence of Kirby, and he had, beyond question, informed them as to who we were, and the conditions under which we had fled from Yellow Banks. The only addition to our party since then was the rescued boy. They would have little fear of serious loss in an attack upon two men, and two women, unarmed, except possibly with a pistol or two, even though barricaded behind the log walls of a cabin. And, with one of their number within, any attempt at defense would be but a farce. This same gang had already sacked the cabin, taking with them, as they believed, every weapon it contained. In their haste they had overlooked the cellar below. They had no thought of its existence, nor that we awaited them rifles in hand and with an ample supply of powder and lead. Whatever might be the final result, a surprise of no pleasant nature was awaiting their advance.

Convinced, as I had become, that Black Hawk was actually with the party, although I was unable to obtain any glimpse of him, I felt there was small chance of his departure, without making at least one effort to capture the cabin. That was his nature, his reputation—that of a bulldog to hang on, a tiger to strike. More, even, this band of raiders must be far south of the main body of the Hawk's followers, and hence in danger themselves. They would never remain here long, facing the possibility of discovery, of having their retreat cut off. If they attacked the attempt would not be long delayed.

Still there was nothing left to do but wait. We were already as completely prepared as possible with our resources.

The main assault would undoubtedly be delivered from the front, directed against the door, the only point where they could hope to break in. Here Tim and myself held our positions, as ready as we could be for any emergency, and watchful of the slightest movement without. Tim had even brought up the half-keg of coarse powder from the cellar, and rolled it into one corner out of the way. His only explanation was, a grim reply to my question, that "it might be mighty handy ter hav' round afore the fracas was done." There was no fear in Eloise, no shrinking, no evidence of cowardice. Not once did I feel the need of giving her word of encouragement—even as I glanced toward her it was to perceive the gleam of a pistol gripped in her hand. She was of the old French fighting stock, which never fails.

Again they struck, and again, the jagged end of their battering ram protruded through the shattered wood. We killed, but they were too many. Once more the great butt came crashing forward, this time caving in the entire door, bursting it back upon its

frame. In through the opening the red mob hurled itself, reckless of death or wounds, mad with the thirst for victory; a jam of naked beasts, crazed by the smell of blood—a wave of slaughter, crested with brandished guns and gleam of tomahawks. There is nothing to remember—nothing but blows, curses, yells, the crunch of steel on flesh, the horror of cruel eyes glowering into yours, the clutching of fingers at your throat, the spit of fire singeing you, the strain of combat hand to hand—the knowledge that it is all over, except to die. I had no sense of fear; no thought but to kill and be killed. I felt within me strength—desperate, insane strength. The rifle butt splintered in my hands, but the bent and shapeless barrel rose and fell like a fail. I saw it crack against skulls; I jabbed it straight into red faces! I brought it down with all my force on clutching arms. For an instant Tim was beside me. He had lost his gun and was fighting with a knife. It was only a glimpse I had of him through red mist—the next instant he was gone. A huge fellow faced me, a Winnebago, I knew, from his shaved head. I struck him once, laying open his cheek to the bone; then he broke through and gripped me.

"You dare not do—" "And why not? It will rid the girl of you, and that not means something to me—and her. Just try me, and see."

He must have read the grim meaning in my face, for he fell back against the log, muttering incoherently, his dark eyes wells of hate, his face a picture of malignancy, but utterly helpless—the lurking coward in him, unable to face my threat. I left him and stooped above her.

"We shall be busy presently; the day cannot be much longer. I am afraid that fellow may succeed somehow in doing us harm. He is crazed enough to attempt anything. May I trust you to guard him?"

Her eyes, absolutely fearless and direct, looked straight up into mine.

"Yes, he will make no movement I shall not see. Tell me; do you believe there is hope?"

"God knows. We shall do our best. If the worst comes—what?"

"Do not fear for me; do not let any memory of me turn you aside from your work," she said quietly. "I know what you mean and pledge you I shall never fall into his hands. It—can not be wrong, I am sure, and—I must tell you that I—I could not, Steven, for—for I love you."

My eager hands were upon her, my eyes greedily reading the message revealed so frankly in the depths of her own. She only was in my thoughts; we were there alone—alone.

"They're a comin', Cap," yelled Kennedy and his rifle cracked. "By G—! they're here!"

With one swift spring I was back at my deserted post and firing. Never before had I been in an Indian battle, but they had told me at Armstrong

that the Savages were fighting men, I knew it now. This was to be no play at war but a grim, relentless struggle. They came en masse, rushing recklessly forward across the open space, pressing upon each other in headlong desire to be first, yelling like fiends, guns brandished in air, or spitting fire, animated by but one purpose—the battering of a way into that cabin. I know not who led them—all I saw was a mass of half-naked bodies bounding toward me, long hair streaming, copper faces aglow, weapons glittering in the light. Yes, I saw more—the meaning of that fierce rush; the instrument of destruction they brought with them. It was there in the center of the maelstrom of leaping figures, protected by the grouped bodies, half hidden by gesticulating red arms—a huge log, borne irresistibly forward on the shoulders of twenty warriors, gripped by other hands, and hurled toward us as though swept on by a human sea. Again and again I fired blindly into the yelping mob; I heard the crack of Tim's rifle echoing mine, and the chug of lead from without striking the solid logs. Bullets ploughed crashing through the door panels and Eloise's shrill screams of fright rang out above the unearthly din. A slug tore through my loophole, drawing blood from my shoulder in its passage, and imbedded itself in the opposite wall. In front of me savages fell, staggering, screams of anger and agony mingling as the astonished assailants realized the fight before them. An instant we held them, startled, and demoralized. The warriors bearing the log stumbled over a dead body and went down, the great timber crushing out another life as it fell. Again we fired, this time straight into their faces—but there was no stopping them. A red blanket flashed back beyond the big tree; a guttural voice shouted, its hoarse note rising above the hellish uproar, and those demons were on their feet again, filled with new frenzy. It was a minute—no more. With a blow that shook the cabin, propelled by twenty strong arms, the great tree butt struck, splintering the oak wood as though it were so much pine, and driving a jagged hole clear through one panel. Kennedy was there, blazing away directly into the assailants' eyes, and I joined him.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### The Trail to Ottawa.

When my eyes again opened it was to darkness and silence as profound as that of my former unconsciousness. For the moment I felt no certainty even that I was actually alive, yet slowly, little by little, reality conquered, and I became keenly conscious of physical pain while memory also began to blindly reassert itself.

I could see nothing, hear nothing. All about was impenetrable blackness and the silence of the grave. I found myself unable to move my body and when I desperately attempted to do so, even the slightest motion brought pain. I became conscious also of a weight crushing down upon me, and stifling my breath. One of my arms was free; I could move it about within narrow limits, although it ached as from a serious burn. By use of it I endeavored through the black darkness to learn the nature of that heavy object lying across my chest, feeling it cautiously. My fingers touched cold, dead flesh, from contact with which they shrank in horror, only to encounter a strand of coarse hair. The first terror of this discovery was overwhelming, yet I persevered, satisfying myself that it was the half-naked body of an Indian—a very giant of a fellow—which lay stretched across me, an immovable weight. Something else, perhaps another dead man, held my feet as though in a vice, and when I ventured to extend my one free arm gropingly to one side, the fingers encountered a moccasin foot. Scarcely daring to breathe, I lay staring upward and, far above, looking out through what might be a jagged, overhanging mass of timbers, although scarcely discernible, my eyes caught the silver glimmer of a star.

I was alive—alive! Whatever had occurred in that fatal second to defeat that murderous tomahawk, its keen edge had failed to reach me. And what had occurred? Then it was that the probable truth came to me—that flash and roar; that last impression imprinted on my brain before utter darkness descended upon me, must have meant an explosion, an upheaval shattering the cabin, bringing the roof down upon the struggling mob within, the heavy timbers crushing out their lives. And the cause? But one was possible—the half-keg of blasting powder Kennedy had placed in the corner as a last resort. Had Tim reached it in a final, mad effort to destroy, or had some accidental flame wrought the terrible destruction? Perhaps no one could ever answer that—but was I there alone, the sole survivor? Had those others of our little party died amid their Indian enemies, and were they lying now somewhere in the darkness, crushed and mangled in the midst of the debris?

"In a moment; all these surely are dead, beyond our aid, and yet we must not depart footless. We know not how far it still may be to Ottawa. Wait, while I search for the things we need."

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