

The Devil's Own

A Romance of the Blackhawk War

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CHAPTER XVI—Continued.

"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 yer knife an' cannon. Now, maybe ye'll tell me what the h—s 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 was possible he had never missed it before, for a look of indecision came into the man's face—the first symptom of weakness Eloise had ever detected there.

"It must have been lost—mis-laid—"

"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 vise-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.

"Yes, 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!"

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 forbore firing, in the vague hope that, not hearing from Kirby, the chiefs might become discouraged 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 there with 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.

Against the log wall a few yards away, Kirby strained at his blanket bonds, and had at last succeeded in lifting himself up far enough so as to stare about the room. There was none of the ordinary calm of the gambler about the fellow now—all the pitiless hate, and love of revenge which belonged to his wild Indian blood blazed in his eyes. He glared at me in sudden, impotent rage.

"You think you've got me, do you?" he cried, scowling across; then an ugly grin distorted his thin lips. "Not yet you haven't, you soldier dog. I've got some cards left to play in this game, you young fool. What did you butt in for anyway? This was none of your affair. D— you, Knox, do you know who she is? I mean that white-faced chit over there—do you know who she is? She's my wife; do you hear?—my wife! I've got the papers, d— you! She's mine!—mine; and I am going to have her long after you're dead—yes, and the whole d— Beaucaire property with her. By G—I you talk about fighting—why there are fifty Indians out here. Wait till they find out what has happened to me. Oh, I'll watch you die at the stake, you sneaking white cur, and spit in your face!"

"Kirby," I said sternly, but quietly, stepping directly across toward him, "You are a prisoner, and helpless, but I am going to tell you now to hold your tongue. Otherwise you will never see me at the stake, because I shall blow your brains out where you lie."

"You dare not do—"

"And why not? It will rid the girl of you, and that 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 delay 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—it cannot 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 hers, 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—I 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's

that the Sacs 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.

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



A Huge Fellow Faced Me—a Winnebago, I knew.

hinges. 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 glowing 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 flail. I saw 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 shaven head. I struck him once, laying open his cheek to the bone; then he broke through and gripped me.

The rest is what—a dream; a delirium fever? I know not; it comes to me in flashes of mad memory. I was struck again and again, stabbed, and flung to the floor. Moccasined feet trod on me, and some felled gripped my hair, bending my head back across a dead body, until I felt the neck crack. Above me were naked legs and arms, a pandemonium of dancing figures, a horrible chorus of maddened yells. I caught a glimpse of Asa Hall flung high into the air, shot dead in mid-flight, the whirling body dropping into the rack below. I saw the savage, whose fingers were twined in my hair, lift a gleaming tomahawk and circle it about his head; I stared into the hate of his eyes, and as it swept down—there was a glare of red and yellow flame between us, the thunder of an explosion; the roof above seemed to burst asunder and fall in—and darkness, death.

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 at 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 vise, and when I ventured to extend my one free arm gropingly to one side, the fingers encountered a moccasined 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 fateful second to deflect 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 this darkness, crushed and mangled in the midst of the debris?

Kennedy, Eloise Clark, the half-witted boy Asa Hall—their faces seemed to stare at me, out of the blackness. They must be dead! Why, I had seen Kennedy fall, the headless feet crunching his face, and Asa Hall tossed into the air and shot at as he fell. Eloise! Eloise! I covered my eyes with the free hand, conscious that I was crying like a child—Eloise. My God, Eloise! I wonder if I fainted; I knew so little after that; so little, except that I suffered helplessly. If I did not faint, then I must have been upon the verge of insanity, for there was a time—God knows how long—when all was blank.

Some slight, scarcely distinguishable noise aroused me. Yes, it was actually a sound, as though someone moved in the room—moved stealthily, as though upon hands and knees, seeking a passage in the darkness. I imagined I could distinguish breathing. Who, what could it be? A man; a prowling wild animal which had scented blood? But for my dry, parched lips I would have cried out—yet even with the vain endeavor, doubt silenced me. Who could be there—who? Some sneaking, cowardly thief; some despoiler of the dead? Some Indian returned through the night to take his toll of scalps, hoping to thus proclaim himself a mighty warrior? More likely enemy than friend. It was better that I lie and suffer than appeal to such a fiend for mercy.

The slight sound shifted to the right of where I lay, no longer reminding me of the slow progress of a moving body, but rather as though someone were attempting blindly to scrape together ashes in the fireplace. I pressed my one free hand beneath my neck, and thus, by an effort, lifted myself so as to see more clearly beyond the shoulder of the dead Indian. The first tiny, flickering spark of fire had caught the dry wood, and was swiftly bursting into flame. In another moment this had illumined that stooping figure, and rested in a blaze of light upon the lowered face, bringing out the features as though they were framed against the black wall beyond—a woman's face, the face of Eloise!

I gave vent to one startled, inarticulate cry, and she sprang to her feet, the mantling flames grilling her as though she were a statue. In that first frightened glance she failed to see me; her whole posture told of fear, of indecision.

"Who was it spoke? Who called? Is someone alive here?"

The trembling words sounded strange, unnatural. I could barely whisper, yet I did my best.

"It is Steven, Eloise—come to me."

"Steven! Steven Knox—alive! Oh, my God; you have answered my prayer!"

She found me, heedless of all the horror in between, as though guided by some instinct, and dropped on her knees beside me. I felt a tear fall on my cheek, and then the warm, eager pressure of her lips to mine. I could

not speak; I could only hold her close with my one hand.

"You are suffering," she cried. "What can I do? Is it this Indian's body?"

"Yes," I breathed, the effort of speaking an agony. "He lies directly across my chest, a dead weight."

It taxed her strength to the utmost, but, oh, the immediate relief! With the drawing of a full breath I felt a return of manhood, a revival of life. Another body pinned my limbs to the floor, but this was more easily disposed of. Then I managed to lift myself, but with the first attempt her arm was about my shoulders.

"No; not alone—let me help you. Do you really think you can stand? Why, you are hurt, dear; this is a knife wound in your side. It looks ugly, but is not deep and bleeds no longer. Are there other injuries?"

"My head rings, and this left arm appears paralyzed, from blows, no doubt; there are spots on my body which feel like burns. No, I am not in bad shape. Now let me stand alone; that's better. Good God, what a scene!"

The fire, by this time blazing brightly, gave us a full view of the entire dismantled interior. The cabin was a complete wreck, the roof practically all gone and the upper logs of the side walls either fallen within or dangling in threat. Clearly enough it had been the sudden plunge of heavy timbers and the dislodgment of those upper logs, which accounted for this havoc of death. There were dead there pierced by bullets and brained by rifle stocks, but the many had met their fate under the avalanche of logs, and amid the burning glare of exploding powder.

Only between arched timbers and sections of fallen roof could we move at all, and beneath the network of this entanglement the majority of the bodies lay, crushed and mangled. I saw Kirby, free from his bonds, but dead beneath a heavy beam. His face was toward us and the flicker of flame revealed a dark spot on his forehead—his life had never been crushed out by that plunging timber which pinned him there; it had been ended by a bullet. My eyes sought hers, in swift memory of my last order, and she must have read my thought.

"No," she said, "not that, Steven. It was the boy who shot him. Oh, please, can we not go? There is light already in the sky overhead—see. Take me away from here—anywhere, outside."

"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."

"Not alone; I must be where I can touch you. Try to understand. Oh, you do not know those hours I have spent in agony—I have died a thousand deaths since that sun went down."

"You were conscious—all night long?"

"Conscious? Yes, and unhurt, yet prisoned helpless beneath those two logs yonder, saved only by that overturned bench. Eloise, poor thing, never knew how death came, it was so swift, but I lay there, within a foot of her body unscratched. I could think only of you, Steven, but with never a dream that you lived. There were groans at first and cries. Some Indians crept in through the door and dragged out a few who lived. But with the coming of darkness all sound ceased and such silence was even more dreadful than the calls for help. Oh, I cannot tell you," and she clung to me, her voice breaking. "I—I dared not move for hours, and then, when I did try, found I could not; that I was held fast. Only for a knife in the hands of a dead savage, which I managed to secure, I could never have freed myself. And oh, the unspeakable horror of creeping in the darkness among those bodies. I knew where the fireplace must be; that there might be live coals there still. I had to have light; I had to know if you were dead."

"Don't think about it any more, dear heart," I urged. "Yes, we can go now—nothing else holds us here."

We crept out through the door, underneath a mass of debris, into the gray of the dawn. Beyond a little grove we found some horses browsing in the deep grass; they were those that had brought us from Yellow Banks, and whinnied a greeting as we drew near. Two of them were fit to ride and the others followed, limping along behind.

A half mile up the valley we came to a beaten trail, running straight across from bluff to bluff, and disappearing into the prairie beyond, heading directly toward the sunrise. We stopped and looked back for the first time. There on the side of the slope, under the shade of the big tree, stood the cabin. Only for the wreck of the roof it spoke no message of the tragedy within. The sun's rays glided it, and the smoke from its chimney seemed a beckoning welcome. I reached out and took her hand, and our eyes met in understanding. What I whispered need not be told, and when we again rode forward, it was upon the trail to Ottawa.

[THE END]

Apostle Spoons.

Apostle spoons, also called "gossipy spoons," were gilt spoons given by the sponsors or "gossips" to a child at its christening. They were so called because each spoon had a figure of an apostle on the handle. Wealthy people gave the whole twelve apostles; those of less means and generosity gave the four Evangelists; while poor persons had to be contented with one, being generally the figure of the donor or of the child's patron saint.

CURRENT WIT and HUMOR



HAD DONE HIS SHARE.

An old gentleman in the South station waiting room, annoyed by some youngsters playing tag around his feet, exclaimed: "Stop that racket, children!"

"Well, I like that!" said the mother in a loud, angry tone.

"Now look here, madam," said the old gentleman, "I've raised three families of children and not a single child was ever allowed to annoy people."

"Well," replied the irate lady, "if you've raised three families you've certainly done your duty and I'll thank you to allow me to raise mine."—Boston Transcript.



BAD BREAK.

"So Miss Freeze is angry with her doctor. Why is that?"

"He tactlessly remarked that he would have her looking her old self again."

A Big Order.

"Man wants but little here below." "Is that so?" asked one miss. "When it's below the mistletoe He wants a great big kiss."

No Song and Dance for Jags.

His Wife—Mr. Jags, it is now three o'clock in the morning and you needn't try to give me a "song and dance" about where you've been.

Her Husband—I won't, m'dear. If there's anything I dislike it's musical comedy in the home.—London Answers.

Holding His Own.

"Hello, old chap! What do you know today?"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing."

"Well, cheer up. You're holding your own."—Judge.

A Knock From Miss Knox.

Miss Muggly—Isn't it wonderful, when you think of it, how a mirror can reflect one's face?

Miss Knox—Yes, dear; I sometimes wonder how it can stand the strain.

What He Wanted.

Nervous Young Man—Have you any toys?

Saleswoman—Yes, sir. What kind?

Nervous Young Man—Oh—er—for a child.—London Punch.

Appropriate Trimming.

"The wit of the Irish lady who made the address matched her dress."

"In what way?"

"Both were full of Irish point."



HUBBY KICKS.

"See here, wifey."

"Well?"

"If you must carry that ridiculous poodle, get a shawl strap."

A Creed.

For God and country! There's a creed Which covers all That mortals need.

Words of Comfort.

He (after the proposal)—Now, I've got to speak to your father, and I know he dislikes me.

She—Don't worry, dearest; he has a far greater aversion to my bills.—London Answers.

On the Job.

Mrs. Knagg—I told you to watch little Jane Marie while I was out and you've let her cut her new dress all to rags.

Her Husband—I know. I was watching her while she did it. Did you wish me to interfere?

Pat Illustration.

"Pa, what's it mean about it's being better to give than to receive?"

"It means, my son, that your mother finds more pleasure in lecturing me than I do in listening to her."