

The Devil's Own

A Romance of the Black Hawk War

By **Randall Parrish**

Author of *Contraband*, *Shea of the Irish Brigade*, *When Wilderness was King*, etc.

Illustrated by **Lewis Myers**

"Did you say ye was an army offer?"

"Yes, a lieutenant; my name is Knox."

"I never know'd yer."

"Probably not, but Joe Kirby does. I was on the steamer Warrior coming down when he robbed old Judge Beaucaire. That was what got me mixed up in this affair. Later I was in that skiff you fellows rammed and sunk on the Illinois. I know the whole dirty story, Kennedy, from the very beginning. And now it is up to you whether or not I tell it to Governor Clark."

"I reckon yer must be right," he admitted helplessly. "Only I quit cold the minute I caught on ter what was up. I never know'd she wa'n't no nigger till after we got yere. Sure's yer live that's true. Only then I didn't know what else ter do, so I got billin' drunk."

"You are willing to work with me, then?"

"Yer kin bet I am; I ain't no guri-stealer."

"Then listen, Kennedy. Jack Rale told me exactly what their plans were, because he needed me to help him. When you jumped the reservation, he had to find someone else, and picked me. They mean to pull off the affair tonight. Here's the story."

I told it to him, exactly in the form it had come to me, interrupted only in the recital by an occasional profane ejaculation, or some interjected question. The deputy appeared sober enough before I had finished, and fully grasped the seriousness of the situation.

"Now that is the way it stacks up," I ended. "The girl is to be taken to this fellow's shack and compelled to marry Kirby, whether she wants to or not. They either intend threatening her, or else to actually resort to force—likely both. No doubt they can rely on this renegade preacher in either case."

"Jack didn't name no name?"

"No—why?"

"Only that uster be a bum hangin' round the river front in Saint Louis who hed preacher's papers, an wore a long-tailed coat. That wa'n't no low-down game he wudn't take a hand in fer a drink. His name was Gaskins; I hed him up fer mayhem onct. I'll bet he's the duck, for he hung round Jack's place most o' the time. Whatcha want me ter do?"

"It has seemed to me, Tim," I said thoughtfully, "that the best action for us to take will be to let them place the girl in my hands, just as they have planned to do. That will throw them entirely off their guard. Once we succeeded in getting her safely away, and remain unknown ourselves, there ought to be very little trouble in straightening out the whole matter. My plan would be to either ride around the camp in the night, and then report the whole affair at headquarters, or else to strike out direct for Fort Armstrong across country. Do you know any place you can pick up a horse?"

"That's a slew o' 'em round yere," he admitted. "These fellers are most all hoss-soldiers. I reckon I cud cinch sum sort o' critter. Yer want me s'ong?"

"Perhaps not, Tim. Your disappearance might cause suspicion, and send them after us. My plan is to get away as quietly as possible, and let them believe everything is all right. I want a day or two in which to work, before Rale or Kirby discover we have not gone to Bear Creek. I'll met them alone at the spring down the trail, but shall want you somewhere near by. You see this is bound to mean a fight if I am recognized—likely three against one; and those men wudn't hesitate at murder."

"I reckon not, an' it wudn't be their first one nuther. Looks ter me like yer was takin' a big chance. I'll be thar, though; yer kin bet on that, an' ready for a fight er a foot race. This is how I size it up—if thar ain't no row, I'm just ter keep still an' low; an' if a fracas starts I'm ter jump in fer all I'm worth. Is that the program?"

"Exactly—that's my idea."

"Wal' then, I'm a prayin' it starts; I want just one crack et that Kirby, the ornary cuss."

We talked the whole matter over in detail, having nothing better to do, and endeavoring to arrange for every probability, yet did not remain together for long.

I felt nervous, anxious, eager for action. The time dragged horribly. What if something unforeseen should occur to change Rale's plan? My God! if I only knew where it was they had concealed the girl.

The two of us explored about the silent cabin, but discovered nothing. There was no light visible in the rear room, nor any sound of movement within. The two windows were closed, and the door locked. We found a convenient stump in the woods and sat down to wait where we could see all that occurred about the cabin.

It was nearly twelve before even the slightest sound near at hand indicated the approach of others. I was already in an agony of suspense, imagining something might have gone wrong, when the dull scuffling of horses' hoofs being led cautiously up the trail to

my right broke the intense silence. I listened to assure myself, then shook Tim into wakefulness, leaving him still blinking in the shadow of the stump, while I advanced in the direction of the spring. I saw nothing of Rale until he spoke.

"That yer, Moffett?"

"Yes; whar's yer party?"

I caught a view of his dim outlines, as he stepped slightly forward, reassured by my voice.

"They'll be yere; thar's a bit o' time ter spare yit. I aimed not ter keep 'em waitin'. Here, this is yer boss, an' yere's the leadin' strap fer the others. Better tie it ter yer pommel, I reckon, so's ter leave both yer hands free—yer might hav' need fer 'em. We'll tend ter mountin' the gurls, an' then all yer'll hav' ter do will be ter lead off. Better walk the hosses till yer git cross the creek, so the sojers wou'n't hear yer. Got that?"

"I reckon I hav', an' sense 'nough ter know it without bein' told. Did yer think I wanted ter be caught on this job?"

"All right, but thar's no harm a tellin' yer. Whar's Tim gone to?"

"I reckon he don't even know hisself; he's sure sum drunk."

Rale chuckled, patting the side of the horse's neck him.

"Whole caboodle workin' like a charm," he said, good humoredly. "Thought onct the deputy might show up ugly, but a quart o' red-eye sure fixed him—thar's our party a comin' now. Yer're ter stay right whar ye are."

They were advancing toward us up the bank which sloped down toward the creek. Rale moved forward to meet them across the little open space, and a moment later, from my hiding place among the motionless horses I became able to distinguish the slowly approaching figures. There were four in the party, apparently from the garb two men and two women. The second man might be the preacher, but if so, why should he be there? Why should his presence at this time be necessary? Unless the two main conspirators had special need for his services, I could conceive no reason for his having any part in the action that night. Had I been deceived in their plans? Even as this fear overwhelmed me with consternation, I was compelled to notice helplessly the first of the two women walked—as though her limbs refused to support her body, even though apparently upheld by the grip of the man beside her. Rale, joining them, immediately grasped her other arm, and, between the two, she was impelled forward. The saloonkeeper seemed unable to restrain his voice.

"Yer must'r give her one b— o' a dose," he growled, angrily. "Half o' thet wud a bin' nough. Why, d— it, she kin hardly walk."

"Well, what's the odds?" It was Kirby who replied sarcastically. "She got more because she wudn't drink. We had to make her take it, and it wasn't no easy job. Gaskins will tell you that. Have you got your man here?"

"O' course; he's waitin' thar with the hosses. But I'm d—d if I like this. She don't know nuthin', does she?"

"Maybe not now; but she'll come around all right, and she signed her name. So there ain't no hitch. She seemed to get worse after that. Come on, we can't stand talkin' here; let's get them off, Jack; there isn't any time to waste. I suppose we'll have to strap her into the saddle."

I held back, and permitted them to work, merely lending my own horse slightly to one side and keeping in his shadow. Gaskins brutally jerked the shrinking mulatto forward and forced her to mount one of the horses. She made some faint protest, the nature of which I failed to catch clearly, but the fellow only laughed in reply and ordered her to keep quiet. Eloise uttered no word, emitted no sound, made no struggle, as the two other men lifted her bodily into the saddle, where Kirby held her, swaying helplessly against him, while Rale strapped her securely into place.

The entire proceedings were so brutally cruel that it required all my strength of will to restrain myself from action. My fingers closed upon the pistol in my pocket, and every impulse urged me to hurl myself on the fellow, trusting everything to swift, bitter fight. I fairly trembled in eagerness to grapple with Kirby, hand to hand, and crush him helpless to the earth.

"Thar," said the saloonkeeper, at last, testing his strap. "I reckon she can't fall off nowhow, even if she don't sit up worth a d—. Go ahead now, Moffett."

Both men stepped aside, and I led my horse forward. The movement brought me more into the open, and face to face with Kirby. By some trick of fate, at that very instant a star-gleam, piercing through the screen of leaves overhead, struck full into my eyes. With an oath he thrust my hat back and stared straight at me.

I could not see the mingled hate and horror glaring in the man's eyes, but there could be no doubt of his recognition. The acknowledgment found expression in a startled exclamation.

"By God!—you, here!"

That was all the time I gave him. With every pound of strength, with every ounce of dislike, I drove a clenched fist into that surprised face, and the fellow went down as though smitten by an ax. Even as he reeled, Rale leaped on me, cursing, falling to understand the cause, yet instinctively realizing the presence of an enemy. His grip was at my throat, and, even as his fingers closed savagely, he struck me with one knee in the stomach, and drove an elbow straight into my face. The next instant we were locked together so closely any blow became impossible, youth and agility waging fierce battle against brutal strength. I think I was his match, yet this I never knew—for all my thought centered in an effort to keep his hands from reaching any weapon. Whatever happened to me, there must be no alarm, no noise sufficiently loud so as to attract the attention of sentries on guard. This affair must be fought out with bare knuckles and straining sinews—fought in silence to the end. I held him to me in a bear grip, but his overmastering strength bore me backward, my body bending beneath the strain until every muscle ached.

"D— you—you sneakin' spy!" he hissed savagely, and his jaws snapped



"D— You, You Sneakin' Spy!" He Hissed Savagely.

at me like a mad beast. "Let go! d— you—let go!"

Crazed by the pain, I swerved to one side, and half fell, my grip torn loose from about his arms, but as instantly closing again around his lower body. He strained, but failed to break my grasp, and I should have hurled him over the hip, but at that second Gaskins struck me, and I went tumbling down, with the saloonkeeper falling flat on top of me, his pudgy fingers still clawing fiercely at my throat. It seemed as though consciousness left my brain, crushed into death by those gripping hands, and yet the spark of life remained, for I heard the ex-preacher utter a yelp, which ended in a moan, as a blow struck him; then Rale was jerked off me, and I sobbingly caught my breath, my throat free. Into my dazed mind there echoed the sound of a voice.

"Is that 'nough, Jack?—then holier. D— yer, yer try thet again, an' I'll spill whut brains yer got all over this kintry. Yes, it's Tim Kennedy talkin', an' he's talkin' ter ye. Now yer lie whar yer are. Yer ain't killed, be ye, Knox?"

I managed to lift myself out of the dirt, still clutching for breath but with my mind clearing.

"No; I guess I'm all right, Tim," I said, panting out the words with an effort. "Whar's become of Kirby? Don't let him get away."

"I ain't likely to. He's a lyn' right whar yer dropped him. Holy smoke!

(To Be Continued.)

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Wife of Absent-Minded Veteran Will See That the Course He is Taking is Thorough.

"Johnny" did not come marching home, at least not to the wife-awaiting his return in an Iowa town, after a certain fighting division returned from France. The wife waited and wondered. Comrades of the man returned. To the waiting wife they had little information to offer, except to say that "Johnny" had been wounded in battle, that he had recovered and had come home on a transport.

"If disabled soldiers are given training at the hands of the federal board for vocational training," mused the wife, "and Johnny was wounded, he may ask for training, and—well, I will just write to the board asking them to notify me if 'Johnny' does ask for training."

A letter to the board brought back information that "Johnny" slightly disabled, was about to take a course in training. The wife gathered a few clothes, boarded a train and within a few hours walked in on "Johnny."

Here is the place to insert a few stars, exclamation marks, interrogation points, quotations galore.

There was a reunion. District vocational officers will not talk. They smile, but refuse to answer even the most innocent questions. Their reports do not indicate a sudden withdrawal from training of any veteran admitted. It is understood that the

wife is now on the job to see that "Johnny" gets the training he applied for and another sort of training taught only by the affectionate wives of absent-minded husbands.—Exchange.

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