THE UNDOING OF A DOUBLE

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AUTHOR OF "WHO'S WHOSE ETC. ETC."
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Continued from first page.

to serve you as I did the other dog a few minutes ago."

Wormwood and gall must have been his reflections at that moment, but there was no help for it.

My dread was that Cy Walters and Archie Hunter, being so near, would have their suspicions roused and hurry back to the spot, in which event my own situation would be anything but enviable. I had formed my plan and now carried it out.

Nothing was heard of the couple who were threading their way up the bank

"If you speak or move, I shall bore you through."

and must have already attained considerable distance. Every second was of value, and my scheme was to hold my captive silent and motionless until the danger of interference on the part of his friends was at the minimum.

I expected my man to say something, but he remained mute. Probably he was in the situation of the one who kept his lips sealed because of his inability to do justice to his feelings. He had straightened up, and his pose must have been irksome with the weight of the gun in one of his hands.

"Drop that Winchester," was my next command, "and do it quick!"

It would have been unjust to accuse him of sluggishness, for my words were scarcely uttered when the rifle splashed into the water and sank from sight. Beyond question that particular individual had met with adversity that night, for his choice bloodhound and most valuable weapon were irrecoverably gone.

"I have a great mind to shoot you as it is," I added, careful to modulate my voice to its most impressive base. "Don't move hand or limb until I give permission."

"Who the —— is doing so?"

My man had found his voice at last.

"And don't speak another word if you want to save your worthless life."

"Who the"—

He checked himself abruptly, aware that he was violating orders.

Having transfixed him, so to speak, I now proceeded to carry out the rest of the scheme I had formulated. That was to withdraw from the dangerous spot without his knowledge. He was so effectually cowed that he was likely to remain passive for a considerable time, provided I succeeded in my effort.

Before making the attempt I spoke:

"Your right hand is drooping. Up with it!"

He obeyed so promptly that I smiled. Shoving my revolver into my hip pocket, I noiselessly faced the other way, and, gently parting the bushes in front, began a stealthy withdrawal. So carefully did I work that when I had accomplished a dozen steps I was confident a listening fawn would not have been alarmed.

It would be interesting to know how long that individual held his place on the trunk of the tree. It may have been 10 or 15 minutes or a good deal longer. Possibly despite my care he discovered what I was doing and hurriedly withdrew to join his companions. At any rate, I acted upon the theory that such was the fact.

Amid this flurry and contest of wits one reflection brought me more comfort than would be suspected. I had got the best of three men who had devoted their energies to my undoing. The grim Cy Walters and his stepson would have to admit to their companions that I slipped out of the window while they were on guard, and, as they believed, without outside help, while the man who had put his best bloodhound on my trail had lost the brute and his Winchester, and the three had not yet laid hands on me.

But it was no time to felicitate myself, for in more than one sense I was not yet out of the woods.

Sooner or later the most unfortunate of the trio would find he was holding up his hands to the command of a nonentity and would make haste to retrieve his blunder. Each and all had the most compelling reasons to run me down without an hour's unnecessary delay and would neglect no means to do it.

Mingled with my partial exultation, which it will be admitted was justified, was the knowledge that, though I had crossed the interposing creek, I had not succeeded in obliterating my trail. Disregarding the fact that one of my pursuers knew the precise spot where I had passed over the stream, it would be the easiest matter in the world for a bloodhound to trail me along the trunk to and from the point where I had landed. At daylight the vigilantes would be after me again, and by summoning the dogs to their aid must speedily run me down unless I adopted more drastic measures. It was because of this certainty that I decided to keep near the creek, in order to take to it the moment the necessity appeared.

My overwhelming disadvantage lay in knowing nothing about Black Man's swamp. The negro Erastus had said that its area was extensive and during and before wartimes many runaway slaves had found refuge within its recesses. It followed that it was a good hiding place, though a persistent hunt was certain to unearth me in a comparatively brief while.

When I had advanced a few rods, I stopped to listen. So far as I could ascertain none, of my enemies was moving near me.

"What an unprecedented situation!" I reflected. "I, a freeborn citizen of the United States, a man never before charged with crime, am a fugitive in a Mississippi swamp from a mob of men, all clamoring for my life and certain to give me short shrift if they once lay hands on me. I am charged with doing that which it is impossible for me to do and am strenuously believed to be guilty, for no other reason than that the real criminal and I resemble each other. Will this tragedy go on until in some way the truth becomes manifest or will not the truth be known until I have paid the penalty for another's misdoing?"

The thought thrilled me with burning anger, and I felt as if it would be a pleasure to wing every one of the mob that had closed their ears to reason and refused to give me half a show for my life. Still it would only complicate matters to begin shooting, though every law would justify me, and I resolved again to reserve the three charges in my revolver for the last extremity.

At this moment, when I had forecasted, as I believed, the events of the next few hours, a wholly unlooked for incident gave a new and extraordinary turn to the whole business.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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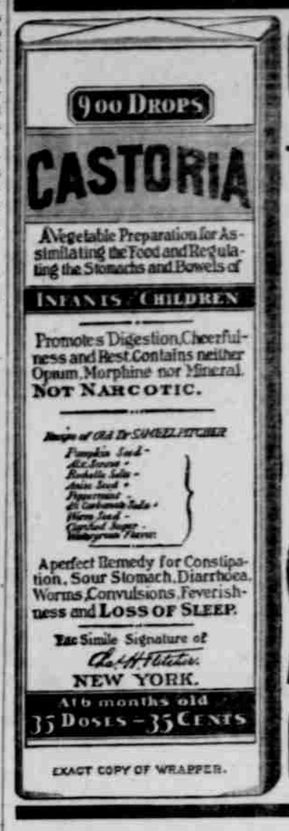

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