

THE UNDOING OF A DOUBT

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AUTHOR OF "WHO'S WHO IN LITERATURE"
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Continued from first page.

With the same regular, noiseless movement of his muscular arms Pete continued to waver the paddle and to propel the dugout until we must have passed fully a half mile from where I had joined him. It was clear that all this time he was penetrating deeper into Black Man's swamp. I gained some idea of the fastnesses of that marshy timber and could well understand how it became a favorite refuge for runaways in the olden slavery days. With the help of the abundant water the bloodhounds could be thrown off the trail, while the slaves of the adjoining plantations would be eager to contribute stealthily to the fugitives when they stole out at night in quest of food.

Having paddled the distance named, during which Pete slowly puffed his pipe, he reached a spot where the creek broadened to three or four times its former width. The banks were overhanging with bushes and undergrowth, but when he ran the prow of the dugout against the shore I perceived a well marked path leading deeper into the wood. I stepped out, and he followed, pulling the end of the rope fast to the bank to prevent its being washed away by the sluggish current. He had knuckled the ash from his pipe, and he now slung the bag over his shoulder preparatory to moving away. As he did so there was a vigorous clucking and struggling inside, but it caused him no embarrassment. He knew I understood matters, and there was no need of affecting ignorance or discussing the subject.

"We're party near home," he remarked as he strode off with me on his heels. He had but a short distance to go when he debouched into a clearing similar to that where I turned at bay and shot the bloodhound. It was of about the same extent, and the foliage ground gave evidence of being well tilled. He continued straight forward over the path to the little cabin of logs which stood in the center. Just in front of the door he swung the bag off his shoulder, untied the top, and, lifting it by the closed end, shook out about a dozen roosters and hens. At first they were dazed, but soon ran behind the cabin to join a number of others that were roosting among the bushes. Then Pete led the way into his home.

"Do you live alone?" I asked, waiting on the threshold until he struck a light.

"Yass, eber since my daddy died, eight years ago," he replied as he disappeared in the place. A minute later he struck a match, and he applied it to a tallow candle called me to enter.

The structure was similar to many that may be found today in the south and southwest, consisting of two small rooms below and a sort of loft above, which was reached by means of a sloping ladder at one corner. Furniture was crude and scarce, consisting of a few stools, a stand, some pictures cut from newspapers and the simplest articles for cooking. In that latitude a fire is rarely needed except for cooking, which was done in the rough fireplace. The candle that was thrust into the neck of a bottle rested on the stand at the side of the room. The door had been opened by means of the old fashioned latchfastening, which was now drawn in, thus "locking" the building against intruders. The door and two small windows, the latter without sash or pane, were all that furnished light and ventilation to this primitive home.

Pete had taken but a few minutes to light the candle, but in that brief interval his grizzled wig and his bending form had vanished, and he stood before me the young, magnificent hunter that he was. He grinned, and, looking down from his splendid height upon me as I seated myself, he asked:

"I s'pose yo' am s'prised, ain't yo'?"

"Not at all. When you lit your pipe, I saw you were not what you pretended. You are wise in disguising yourself when making those little excursions through the country."

He grinned more broadly than before and said:

"I s'pose yo' am hungry?"

"Not so much as I am tired. I ate a meal last evening and I don't feel like wait the regular time for my breakfast. What I want more than anything is sleep."

He sat down on one of the stools, which he had evidently made for himself, with the candle between us. Despite his superb physical appearance, there was something in his broad black face which I did not like. I more than suspected he was a bad man.

"What time am I?"

Looking at my watch, I replied that it was between 3 and 4 in the morning.

"Can't gib yo' a kind ob bed dat yo'll brag ob, bow, but I'll do de bestest dat I kin. If yo'll climb dem ladder dere, yo'll find a blanket dat yo' kin lay down on."

"What are you going to do?"

Victim that something was wrong was strengthened when I descended the ladder and found Pete was absent from the cabin.

"He's up to some deviltry," I muttered, preparing myself for mischief.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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