

THE UNDOING OF A DOUBT

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MEDICAL WORLD OF A RECENT DECADE"

Continued from first page.

domestic searching parties were scattered over a space of many miles. Nothing roused the bloodthirstiness of a mob more than the hunt for a victim with success delayed. If the fugitive can remain beyond reach for several days, their passions are likely to cool, but for a time it is a raging volcano.

It will be noted that there was no possibility of following me even with the help of the finest bloodhounds that had ever been trained. So long as I remained on the water the tribes were powerless. I could land at any point I chose, and the dogs might grope for hours before finding me, or they might do so in much less time than that. To disembark and leave the dugout to show where I had done so would be to surrender all chances of ultimate escape.

The plan I fixed upon while paddling down stream was simple. It was to land at what seemed to be a favorable point, and then set the dugout adrift. It would float a greater or less distance without betraying the spot where it and I had parted company.

The problem, however, remained to decide upon the best place to do this, for it will be remembered that I was wholly ignorant of the ins and outs of Black Man's swamp. But, reasoning from the scant knowledge picked up the previous night, I inferred that I was near the boundary of the diurnal tract. The time had not yet come for me to leave it altogether, and since each side of the creek was overhung with undergrowth I carefully ran the dugout close to shore and under the impenetrable curtain. The branches were secured and arranged around me with a care that would have done credit to an American Indian. By parting the interstices immediately in front of the screen I could look out upon the water with no risk of being observed by any one on the opposite bank or who might be navigating another craft past my hiding place while behind me the dense vegetation was equally friendly.

For the first time I felt safe. Even if my pursuers should suspect my artifice they would have to push the search until they came directly upon the dugout itself. That they should succeed upon the first attempt was out of the question. I could rest and meditate for awhile in peace.

Great. Great, but wasn't I hungry! Although I had missed but one regular meal, I felt as if famishing. The plainest food would have been a godsend. I could devour anything edible and would have mutilated and swallowed the leaves on the branches and the bark on the trees had I not been afraid of serious consequences. I was unacquainted with the flora of those southern swamps, but knew they contained a great deal of noxious vegetation that was as likely to prove fatal as the toothfloss of our northern states. So I resolutely repressed my craving, though ready to do almost anything desperate that promised to relieve the gnawing hunger.

Some 15 minutes of profound silence passed, during which I wondered at hearing nothing of the baying of the hounds. The pursuers must have reached a conclusion by that time and probably the means of my flight had been discovered long before.

Sh! Something stirred among the bushes on the opposite bank. Perhaps it was a hopping bird, or some animal making his way stealthily among the vegetation, but it was safer to set it down as one of my enemies.

Again the gentle stir fell on my ears, and I softly parted the bushes before my face and peeped out. As I did so I saw Cy Walters, who had come to the edge of the creek and was peering first down stream and then across the spot where I kept the peephole at the smallest dimensions possible through fear that those keen eyes would detect me. He wore the same slouch hat and his grizzled beard covered his face and breast. He held his Winchester in his right hand, while with his left he kept the bushes apart to the other side of the view. One huge boot foot was thrust so far forward that the water covered the foot.

"Confound you!" was my thought. "I should be justified in serving you as I did that bloodhound in the clearing. You are seeking the life of an innocent man, and he would serve you right to take yours."

The temptation was strong to do so, but, though I had exchanged shots with him, I was still garrisoned of his blood as well as that of all others and I allowed my hand to loosen its grasp upon the revolver at my hip.

"Not yet, but something tells me the day of reckoning is near."

Seeing nothing of the dugout or myself in peering up and down stream, the man fixed his gaze on the spot where I actually was. My heart throbbled fast, for it looked as if he must penetrate the leafy curtain and force the crisis, but he did not, and, withdrawing with the same stillness as before, passed from sight. The listening ear could not detect his footfall as he moved farther down stream in the continuance of his search.

The incident suggested a change of plan on my part. My intention, as I have explained, was to set the dugout adrift after stepping ashore, in order to hide the point where my disembarkation took place, but there was risk in this, since the boat was liable to be discovered so near its starting point that it would be easy to find the latter, whereas it was now so effectually concealed that hours were likely to pass before the boat was located, if indeed it were found at all.

It was too soon, however, to act upon this conclusion. I had just received evidence that my most dreaded enemy was within a few rods and probably others were on the same side of the stream with myself. They would be passing up and down, and the bloodhounds were not to be forgotten.

That this decision was wise was demonstrated within the same five minutes that it was made. Cy Walters hardly disappeared when a second rustling warned me that others were near at hand.

Something in the faint rustling sounded different from the other, and it was on the same side of the stream with myself. What mysterious instinct possessed the black demon is beyond my power to understand, but it came about that the largest and most ferocious bloodhound on which I had ever looked came through the undergrowth at that moment, and, pausing within six feet of where I sat in the dugout, fixed his devilish eyes on my face with a purpose that could not be mistaken.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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