

The Devil's Own

A Romance of the Black Hawk War

By **Randall Parrish**

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Illustrated by **Levin Myers**

At first glance I could distinguish no sign of the boatman left in charge, but even as I lay there, breathless and uncertain, he suddenly revealed his presence by lighting a lantern in the stern. The illumination was feeble enough yet sufficient to expose to view the small, unprotected engine aft, and also the fact that all forward of the little cockpit in which it stood the entire craft was decked over. The fellow was busily engaged in overhauling the machinery, leaning far forward, his body indistinct, the lantern swinging in one hand, with entire attention devoted to his task. Occasionally, as he lifted his head for some purpose, the dim radiance fell upon his face, revealing the unmistakable countenance of a mulatto, a fellow of medium size, broad of cheek, with unusually full lips and a fringe of whisker turning gray. Somehow this revelation that he was a negro and not a white man brought with it to me an additional confidence in success. I inclined my head and whispered in the girl's ear:

"You are not to move from here until I call. This is to be my part of the work, handling that lad. I am going now."

"He is colored, is he not—a slave?"

"We can only guess as to that. But he does not look to me like a hard proposition. If I can only reach the boat without being seen the rest will be easy. Now is the proper time, while he is busy tinkering with the engine. You will stay here?"

"Yes, of course; I—I could be of no help."

She suddenly held out her hand, as though impelled to the action by some swift impulse, and the warm pressure of her fingers meant more than words. I could not see the expression on her face, yet knew the slender body was trembling nervously.

"Surely you are not afraid?"

"Oh, no; it is not that—I am all unstrung. You must not think of me at all."

I realized the gravity of my task, and my eyes were watchful of the shrouded figure I was silently approaching. I drew nearer inch by inch, advancing so slowly and snake-like that not even the slightest sound of movement aroused suspicion. Apparently the fellow was engaged in oiling the machinery, for he had placed the lantern on deck and held a long-spouted can in his fingers. His back remained toward me as I drew near the stern, and consequently I no longer had a glimpse of his face. The wooden wheel of the boat, a clumsy-appearing apparatus, rested almost directly against the bank, where the water was evidently deep enough to float the vessel, and the single rope holding it in position was drawn taut from the pressure of the current. Waiting until the man was compelled to bend lower over his work, utterly unconscious of my presence, I straightened up and, pistol in hand, stepped upon the wooden beam supporting the wheel. He must have heard this movement, for he lifted his head quickly, yet was even then too late; already I had gained the afterdeck, and my weapon was on a level with his eyes.

"Don't move or cry out!" I commanded sternly. "Obey orders and you will not be hurt."

He shrank away, sinking upon the bench, his face upturned so that the light fell full upon it, for the instant too greatly surprised and frightened



His Mouth Hung Open and His Eyes Stared at Me.

to give utterance to a sound. His mouth hung open, and his eyes stared at me.

"Who—who was yer? Whatin' want yer?"

"I am asking questions and you are answering them. Are you armed? All right, then; hand it over. Now put out that light."

He did exactly as I told him, moving as though paralyzed by fear, yet unable to resist.

"You are a negro—a slave?"

"Yes, sah; Ah's Massa Donaldson's boy from St. Looce."

"He is the sheriff?"

"Yes, sah—yes, sah. What is Massa

Donaldson? Yer ain't done bin sent yere by him, I reckon. 'Pears like I never see yer afore."

"No; but he is quite safe. What is your name?"

"Sam, sah—just plain Sam."

"Well, Sam, I understand you are an engineer. Now, it happens that I want to use this boat, and you are going to run it for me, do you understand? I am going to sit down here on the edge of this cockpit and hold this loaded pistol just back of your ear. It might go off at any minute, and surely will if you make a false move or attempt to foul the engine. Any trick, and there is going to be a dead nigger overboard. I know enough about engines to tell if you play fair—so don't take any chances, boy."

"Ah—Ah—reckon as how I was goin' fer ter run her all right, sah; she's sum consid'ble contrary at times, sah, but Ah'll surely run her, if that's eny run in her, sah. Ah ain't carin' 'bout bein' no corpse."

"I thought not; you'd rather be a free nigger, perhaps? Well, Sam, if you will do this job all right for me tonight I'll put you where the sheriff will never see hide nor hair of you again—no, not yet; wait a moment, there is another passenger."

She came instantly in answer to my low call, and through the gloom the startled negro watched her descend the bank, a mere moving shadow, yet with the outlines of a woman. I half believe he thought her a ghost, for I could hear him muttering inarticulately to himself. I dared not remove my eyes from the fellow, afraid that his very excess of fear might impel him to some reckless act, but I extended one hand across the side of the boat to her assistance.

"Take my hand, Rene," I said pleasantly, to reassure her, "and come aboard. Yes, everything is all right. I've just promised Sam here a ticket for Canada."

I helped her across into the cockpit and seated her on the bench, but never venturing to remove my eyes from the negro. His actions and whatever I was able to observe of the expression of his face only served to convince me of his trustworthiness, yet I could take no chances.

"She's just a real, live woman, sah?" he managed to ejaculate, half in doubt. "She sure ain't no ghost, sah?"

"By no means, Sam; she is just as real as either you or I. Now listen, boy—you know what will happen to you after this, if Donaldson ever gets hold of you?"

"I 'spects I does, sah. He'd just nat'arly skin dis nigger alive, Ah reckon."

"Very well, then; it is up to you to get away, and I take it that you understand this river. We are going to head upstream."

"Yas, sir; yer plannin' fer ter go nor? Whi, sah, dars plenty o' watah fer dis yere boat right now, wid de spring floods. Nothin' fer ter be afeerd o' 'bout dat."

"That is good news. Now, Sam, I am going to cut this line, and I want you to steer straight across into the shadows of the Illinois shore. I believe you are going to play square, but for the present I'm going to take no chances with you. I am holding this pistol within a foot of your head, and your life means nothing to me if you try any trick. What is the speed of this boat upstream?"

"'Bout ten mile an hour, sah."

"Well, don't push her too hard at first, and run that engine as noiselessly as possible. Are you ready? Yes—then I'll cut loose."

I severed the line and we began to recede from the shore, cutting diagonally across the decidedly swift current. Once beyond the protection of the point the star-gleam revealed the sturdy rush of the waters, occasionally flecked with bubbles of foam. Sam handled the unwieldy craft with the skill of a practiced boatman, and the laboring engine made far less racket than I had anticipated. Pistol in hand, and vigilant to every motion of the negro, my eyes swept along that vague shore line, catching nowhere a spark of light, nor any evidence that the steady chug of our engine had created alarm. We were alone upon the mysterious bosom of the vast stream, tossed about in the full sweep of the current, yet moving steadily forward, and already safely beyond both sight and sound.

Every moment of progress tended to increase my confidence in Sam's loyalty. The fellow plainly enough realized the situation—that safety for himself depended on keeping beyond the reach of his master. To this end he devoted every instant diligently to coaxing his engine and a skillful guidance of the boat, never once permitting his head to turn far enough to glance at me, although I could occasionally detect his eyes wandering in the direction of the girl.

She had not uttered a word nor changed her posture since first entering the boat, but remained just as I had seated her, one hand grasping the edge of the cockpit, her gaze on the rushing waters ahead. I could realize something of what must be passing

through her mind—the mingling of doubt and fear which assailed her in this strange environment. Up until now she had been accorded no opportunity to think, to consider the nature of her position; she had been compelled to act wholly upon impulse and driven blindly to accept my suggestions. And now, in this silence, the reaction had come, and she was already questioning if she had done right.

It was in my heart to speak to her, in effort to strengthen her faith, but I hesitated, scarcely knowing what to say, deeply touched by the pathetic droop of her figure, and in truth uncertain in my own mind as to whether or not we had chosen the wiser course. All I dared do was to silently reach out one hand and rest it gently on those fingers clasping the rail. She did not remove her hand from beneath mine, nor indeed give the slightest evidence that she was even aware of my action.

"Was Ah to turn nor, sah?" asked the negro suddenly.

"Yes, upstream; but keep in as close to the shore as you think safe. There is no settlement along this bank, is there?"

"No, sah; dar's jus' one cabin, 'bout a mile upstream, but dar ain't nobody livin' thar now. Whar yer all aim fer ter go?"

I hesitated an instant before I answered, yet almost as quickly decided that the whole truth would probably serve us best. The man already had one reason to use his best endeavors; now I would bring before him a second.

"Just as far up the river before daylight as possible, Sam. Then I hope to uncover some hiding place where we can lie concealed until it is dark again. Do you know any such place?"

"On de Illinois shore, sah? Let's see; thar's Rassauer creek, 'bout twenty mile up. Ah 'spects you all knows what yer a headin' fer?"

"To a certain extent—yes; but we had to decide on this action very quickly, with no chance to plan it out. I am aiming at the mouth of the Illinois."

He glanced about at me, vainly endeavoring to decipher my expression in the gloom.

"De Illinois ribber, boss; what yer hope fer ter find thar?"

"A certain man I've heard about. Did you ever happen to hear a white man mentioned who lives near there? His name is Amos Shrunck."

I could scarcely distinguish his eyes, but I could feel them. I thought for a moment he would not answer.

"Yer'll surely excuse me, sah," he said at last, humbly, his voice with a note of pleading in it. "Ah's feelin' friently 'nough an' all dat, sah, but still yer mus' 'member dat Ah's talkin' ter a perfect stranger. If yer wud sure ter me first just what yer was aimin' at, then maybe Ah'd know a 'heap mo' Ah do now."

"I guess you are right, Sam. I'll tell you the whole of it. I am endeavoring to help this young woman to escape those men back yonder. You must know why they were there; no doubt you overheard them talk coming up?"

"Yas, sah; Massa Donaldson he was goin' up fer ter serve sum papers fer Massa Kirby, so he end run off de Beaulieu niggers. But dis yere gal, she ain't no nigger—she's just a white pussen."

"She is a slave under the law," I said gravely, as she made an effort to move, "and the man Kirby claims her."

I could see his mouth fly open, but the surprise of this statement halted his efforts at speech.

"That explains the whole situation," I went on. "Now will you answer me?"

"'Bout dis yere Massa Shrunck?"

"Yes—you have heard of him before?"

"Ah reckon as how maybe Ah has, sah."

"Do you know where he can be found?"

"Not perzackly, sah. Ah ain't never onct bin thar, but Ah sorter seems fer ter recollect sum'thin' 'bout whar he might be. Ah reckon maybe Ah end go thar, if Ah just hed to. Ah reckon if yer all hed dat pistol plum 'gainst mah hed, Ah'd nos' likely find dis Amos Shrunck. Good Lord, sah!" and his voice sank to a whisper. "Ah just can't git hol' o' all dis—Ah sure can't, sah—'bout her bein' a nigger."

Rene turned about, lifting her face into the starlight.

"Whether I am white or colored, Sam," she said quietly, "can make little difference to you now. I am a woman and am asking your help. I can trust you, can I not?"

The negro on his knees stared at her, the whites of his eyes conspicuous. Then suddenly he jerked off his old hat.

"Ah 'spects yer kin, missus," he pledged himself in a tone of conviction which made my heart leap. "Ah's bin a slave-nigger fer forty-five years, but just de same Ah ain't never bin mean ter no woman. Yas, sah, yer don't neither one ob yer eber need ter ask Sam no mo'—he's a-goin' thro' wid yer all ter de end—he sure am, ma'am."

Silence descended upon us, and I slipped the pistol back into my pocket. Rene rested her cheek on her hand and gazed straight ahead into the night. Far off to the left a few twinkling lights appeared, barely perceptible, and I touched the negro, pointing them out to him and whispering my question so as not to disturb the motionless girl.

"Is that the Landing over there?"

"Ah certainly 'spects it must be, sah; dar ain't no other town directly 'round dese parts."

"Then those lights higher up must

be on the bluff at Beaulieu?"

"Yes, sah; looks like de whole house was lit up. I reckon things am right lively up thar 'bout now." He chuckled to himself, smothering a laugh. "It's sure goin' fer ter bother Massa Donaldson ter lose dis nigger; sah, fer Ah's de only one he's got."

The lights slowly faded away in the far distance, finally disappearing altogether as we rounded a sharp bend in the river bank. The engine increased its stroke, giving vent to louder chugging, and I could feel the strain of the planks beneath us as we battled the current. This new noise may have aroused her, for Rene lifted her head as though suddenly startled and glanced about in my direction.

"We have passed the village?" she asked, rather listlessly.

"Yes; it is already out of sight. From the number of lights burning I imagine our escape has been discovered."

"And what will they do?"—an echo of dismay in her voice.

All fear of any treachery on the part of the negro had completely deserted me, and I slipped down from my perch on the edge of the cockpit to a place on the bench at her side. She made no motion to draw away, but her eyes were upon my face, as



But Her Eyes Were Upon My Face, as Though Seeking to Read the Meaning of My Sudden Action.

though seeking to read the meaning of my sudden action.

"We can talk better here," I explained. "The engine makes so much noise."

"You have not yet explained to me what we were to do. Your plans for tomorrow?"

"Because I scarcely have any," I replied. "This has all occurred so suddenly I have only acted upon impulse. No doubt those back at the Landing will endeavor to pursue us; they may have discovered already our means of escape and proccred boats. My principal hope is that they may take it for granted that we have chosen the easier way and gone downstream. If so we shall gain so much more time to get beyond their reach."

"But why have you chosen the northern route? Surely you had a reason?"

"Certainly; it was to deceive them and get out of slave territory as quickly as possible. There are friends in this direction and none in the other. If we should endeavor to flee by way of the Ohio we would be compelled to run a thousand-mile gantlet. There are slaves in Illinois—it has never been declared a free state—but these are held almost exclusively in the more southern counties. North of the river the settlers are largely from New England, and the majority of them hate slavery and are ready to assist any runaway to freedom."

"But you have spoken of a man—Amos Shrunck—who is he?"

"You have certainly heard rumors, at least, that there are regular routes of escape from here to Canada?"

"Yes; it has been discussed at the house. I have never clearly understood, but I do know that slaves disappear and are never caught. I was told white men helped them."

"It is accomplished through organized effort by these men—Black Abolitionists, as they are called—haters of slavery. They are banded together in a secret society for this one purpose and have what they call stations scattered all along at a certain distance apart—a night's travel—from the Mississippi to the Canadian line, where the fugitives are hidden and fed. A station keeper, I am told, is only permitted to know a few miles of the route, those he must cover—the system is perfect, and many are engaged in it who are never even suspected."

"And this man—is he one?"

"Yes—a leader; he operates the most dangerous station of all. The escaping slaves come to him first."

She asked no further questions, and after a moment turned away, resting back against the edge of the cockpit with chin cupped in the hollow of her hand. The profile of her face was clearly defined by the starlight reflected by the river, and I found it hard to withdraw my eyes. A movement by the negro attracted my attention.

"There is a small creek about four miles above the Landing, Sam," I said shortly. "Do you think you could find it?"

"On de Missouri side, sah? Ah reckon Ah cud."

(To Be Continued.)

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BUY FULL GROWN PULLETS.

It is advisable, if well-matured pullets can be purchased at a reasonable price, to kill and eat the hens as they begin to molt, replacing the flock with newly purchased pullets. The hens should not be killed, however, until they begin to molt and their comb begins to lose its size, color, and flexibility, for if these changes have not taken place the hens will probably still be laying and at a time of year when eggs are especially valuable.

BENCH BED.

A litter of straw or the leaves raked up in the fall about 3 or 4 inches deep should be used on the floor of the hen house. This material helps to absorb the droppings and also provides a means of feeding the grain in such a way that the hens are obliged to exercise by scratching for it.

LET 'EM SCRATCH.

Chickens need a lot of litter to scratch in. Dry leaves make a cheap litter. A good supply should be gathered and stored for future use.

DISPOSE OF USELESS HENS.

If efforts were made to dispose of all hens when their best laying days were over a large quantity of poultry meat would be placed on the market. All poorly developed chickens should be culled out and sold for meat, also. This would allow the poultry keeper to make the best use of his grain by feeding it to younger and more productive fowls.

GIVE EACH PIG SHARE.

Young pigs should be given their feed in such a manner that each individual pig gets its share. The simplest way to accomplish this is to allow the pigs to eat from a properly constructed feed trough, one that will keep the pigs out of the feed and will lessen the possibility of crowding.

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