

# The Devil's Own

A Romance of the Black Hawk War

By Randall Parrish

Author of "Contributions," "Shoes of the Irish Brigade," "When Wilderness was King," etc.

Illustrated by Edwin Meyer

CHAPTER II.

**History of the Beaucaires.**

The first two days and nights of the journey southward were devoid of any special interest or adventure. After the first day Kirby withdrew all attention from me and ceased in his endeavor to cultivate my acquaintance, confined of my displeasant to indulgences in cards. Throckmorton, being his own pilot, seldom left the wheel-house, and consequently I passed many hours on the bench beside him. At one time or another he had met the famous characters along the river banks, and through continual questioning I thus finally became possessed of the story of the house of Beaucaire.

In the main it contained no unusual features. Through the personal influence of D'Arville at Louis' court Alphonse de Beaucaire had originally received a royal grant of ten thousand acres of land bordering the west bank of the Mississippi a few miles above St. Louis. When his master returned to France leaving him unemployed, Beaucaire, possessing ample means of his own, had preferred to remain in America. In his boats, propelled by voyagers, and accompanied by a considerable retinue of slaves; he, with his family, had ascended the river and finally settled on his princely estate. Here he erected what for those early days was a stately mansion and devoted himself to cultivating the land. Twenty years later, when his death occurred, he possessed the finest property along the upper river was shipping heavily to the New Orleans market, and was probably the most influential man in all that section.

His only son, Felipe, succeeded him, but was not so successful in administration, seriously lacking in business judgment, and being decidedly indolent by nature. Felipe married into one of the oldest and more respectable families of St. Louis, and as a result of that union had one son, Lucius, who grew up reckless of restraint, and preferred to spend his time in New Orleans, rather than upon the plantation. Lucius was a young man of twenty-six, unsettled in habits, when the father died, and against his inclination, was compelled to return to Missouri and assume control of the property. He found matters in rather bad condition, and his was not at all the type of mind to remedy them. Much of the land had been already irrevocably lost through speculation, and when his father's obligations had been met, and his own gambling debts paid, the estate, once so princely and magnificent, was reduced to barely five hundred acres, together with a comparatively small amount of cash. This condition sufficed to sober Lucius for a few years, and he married a Merard of Cape Girardeau, of excellent family but not great wealth, and earnestly endeavored to rebuild his fortunes. Unfortunately his reform did not last. The evil influences of the past soon proved too strong for one of his temperament. The plantation house became in time a rendezvous for all the wild spirits of that neighborhood, and stories of fierce drinking bouts and mad gambling were current in St. Louis.

"Have you ever been at Beaucaire, captain?" I asked.

"We always stop at the landing, but I have only once been up the cliff to where the house stands. The judge was away from home—in St. Louis, I believe—the day of my visit. He had sold me some timber, and I went out with the family lawyer, a man named Haines, living at the landing, to look it over."

"The house was closed?"

"No; it is never closed. The house-keeper was there, and also the two daughters."

"Daughters?"

"Certainly; hadn't I told you about them? Both girls are accepted as his daughters; but, if all I have heard is true, one must be his granddaughter." He paused reminiscently, his eyes on the river. "Haines told me a number of strange things about that family I had never heard before," he admitted at last. "You see he has known them for years, and attended to most of Beaucaire's legal business. This is about how the story runs, as he told it. It wasn't generally known, but it seems that Lucius Beaucaire has been married twice—the first time to a Creole girl in New Orleans when he was scarcely more than a boy. Nobody now living probably knows whatever became of her, but likely she died early, or has since been heard from. The important part is that she gave birth to a son, who remained in New Orleans, probably in her care, until he was fourteen or fifteen years old. Then some occurrence, possibly his mother's death, caused the judge to send for the lad, whose name was Adelbert, and had him brought to Missouri. All this happened before Haines settled at the Landing, and previous to Beaucaire's second marriage to Mademoiselle Merard. Bert, as the boy was called, grew up wild, and father and son quarreled so continuously that finally, and before he was twenty, the latter ran away, and has never been heard of since—simply disappeared, and no one knows to this day whether he is alive or dead. At least if Judge Beaucaire ever received any word from him he never confessed as much

of the main cabin. The forward portion was wrapped in darkness, and unoccupied, but beyond, toward the rear of the long saloon, a considerable group of men were gathered closely about a small table, above which a swinging lamp burned brightly, the rays of light illuminating the various faces. Gambling was no novelty on the great river in those days, gambling for high stakes, and surely no ordinary game, involving a small sum, would ever arouse the depth of interest displayed by these men. Some instinct told me that the chief players would be Kirby and Beaucaire, and with quickening pulse I opened the cabin door and entered.

No one noted my approach, or so much as glanced up, the attention of the crowd riveted upon the players. There were four holding cards—the judge, Kirby, Carver and McAfee; but I judged at a glance that the latter two were merely in the game as a pretense, the betting having already gone far beyond the limit of their resources. Without a thought as to the cards they held my eyes sought the faces of the two chief players, and then visioned the stakes displayed on the table before them. McAfee and Carver were clearly enough out of it; their cards still gripped in their fingers, as they leaned breathlessly forward to observe more closely the play. The judge sat upright, his attitude strained, staring down at his hand, his face white and eyes burning feverishly. That he had been drinking heavily was evident, but Kirby fronted him in apparent cold indifference, his feelings completely masked, with the cards he held bunched in his hands and entirely concealed from view. Between the two rested a stack of gold coin, a roll of crushed bills and a legal paper of some kind; the exact nature of which I could not determine. It was evident that a fortune already rested on that table, awaiting the flip of a card. The silence, the breathless attention, convinced me that the stakes had been reached—it was the judge's nerve, he must cover the last bet or throw down his hand, a loser.

Perpiration beaded his forehead, and he crunched the cards savagely in his hands. His glance swept past the crowd as though he saw nothing of their faces.

"Another drink, Sam," he called, the voice trembling. He tossed down the glass of liquor as though it were so much water, but made no other effort to speak. You could hear the strained breathing of the men.

"Well," said Kirby cheerily, his cold gaze surveying his motionless opponent. "You seem to be taking your time. Do you cover my bet?"

Someone laughed nervously, and a voice sang out over my shoulder, "You might as well go the whole hog, judge. The niggers won't be no good without the land for work 'em on. Fling 'em into the pot—they're as good as money."

Beaucaire looked up, red-eyed, into the impassive countenance opposite. His lips twitched yet managed to make words issue between them.

"How about that, Kirby?" he asked hoarsely. "Will you accept a bill of sale?"

Kirby grinned, showing his hand carelessly.

"Why not? 'Twon't be the first time I've played for niggers. They are worth so much gold down the river. What have you got?"

"I can't tell or hand," sullenly.

"About twenty field hands."

"And house servants?"

"Three or four."

The gambler's lips set more tightly, a dull gleam creeping into his eyes.

"See here, Beaucaire," he hissed sharply. "This is my game, and I play square and never squeal. I know about what you've got, for I've looked them over; thought we might get down to this sometime. I can make a pretty fair guess as to what your niggers are worth. That's why I just raised you ten thousand and put up the money. Now if you think this is bluff, call me."

"What do you mean?"

"That I will accept your niggers as covering my bet."

"The field hands?"

Kirby smiled broadly.

"The whole bunch—field hands and house servants. Most of them are old; I doubt if altogether they will bring that amount, but I'll take the risk. Throw in a blanket bill of sale, and we'll turn up our cards. If you won't do that the pile is mine as it stands."

Beaucaire again wet his lips, starting at the uncovered cards in his hands. He could not lose; with what he held no combination was possible which would beat him. Yet in spite of this knowledge the cold, sneering confidence of Kirby brought with it a strange fear. The man was a professional gambler. What gave him such recklessness? Why should he be so eager to risk such a sum on an inferior hand? McAfee, sitting next him, leaned over, managed to catch a swift glimpse at what he held, and eagerly whispered to him a word of encouragement. The judge straightened up in his chair, grasped a fluted glass someone had placed at his elbow, and gulped down the contents. The whispered words, coupled with the fiery liquor, gave him fresh courage.

"By heaven, Kirby, I'll do it!" he blurted out. "You can't bluff me on the hand I've got. Give me a sheet of paper, somebody—yes, that will do."

He scrawled a half-dozen lines, fairly digging the pen into the sheet in his fierce eagerness, and then signed the document, flinging the paper across toward Kirby.

"There, you bloodsucker," he cried insolently. "Is that all right? Will that do?"

The imperturbable gambler read it over slowly, carefully deciphering each word, his thin lips tightly compressed.

"You might add the words, 'This includes every chattel save legally belong-

ing to me," he said grimly.

"That is practically what I did say."

"Then you can certainly have no objection to putting it in the exact words I choose," calmly. "I intend to have what is coming to me if I win, and I know the law."

Beaucaire angrily wrote in the required extra line.

"Now what?" he asked.

"Let McAfee there sign it as a witness, and then toss it over into the pile." He smiled, showing a line of white teeth beneath his mustache. "Nice little pot, gentlemen—the judge must hold some cards to take a chance like that," the words uttered with a sneer. "Four, at least, or maybe he has had the luck to pick a straight flush."

Beaucaire's face reddened, and his eyes grew hard.

"That's my business," he said tartly. "Sign it, McAfee, and I'll call this crowing cockerel. You young fool, I played poker before you were born. There now, Kirby, I've covered your bet."

"Perhaps you would prefer to raise it?"

"You hell-hound—no! That is my limit, and you know it. Don't crawl now, or do any more bluffing. Show your hand—I've called you."

Kirby sat absolutely motionless, his cards lying face down upon the table, the white fingers of one hand resting lightly upon them, the other arm concealed. He never once removed his gaze from Beaucaire's face, and his expression did not change, except for the almost insulting sneer on his lips. The silence was profound, the deeply interested men leaning forward, even holding their breath in intense eagerness. Each realized that a fortune lay on the table; knew that the old judge had made nearly his all on the value of those five unseen cards gripped in his fingers. Again, as though to bolster up his shaken courage, he stared at the face of each, then lifted his bloodshot eyes to the impassive face opposite.

Beaucaire drew two kayards, whispered an excited voice near me.

"Hell! He did Kirby," replied another. "They're both of 'em old hands."

The sharp exhaust of a distant steam pipe below punctuated the silence, and several glanced about apprehensively. As this noise ceased Beaucaire lost all control over his nerves.

"Come on, play your hand," he demanded, "or I'll throw my cards in your face."

The instantaneous sneer on Kirby's lips changed into the semblance of a smile. Slowly, deliberately, never once glancing down at the face of his cards, he turned them up one by one with his white fingers, his challenging eyes on the judge, but the others saw what was revealed—a ten-spot, a knave, a queen, a king and an ace.

"A straight flush!" someone yelled excitedly. "D—d if I ever saw one before!"

For an instant Beaucaire never moved, never uttered a sound. He seemed to doubt the evidence of his own eyes, and to have lost the power of speech. Then from nerveless hands his own cards fell face downward, still unrevealed, upon the table. The next moment he was on his feet, the chair in which he had been seated flung crashing behind him on the deck.

"You thief!" he roared. "You dirty, low-down thief; I held four aces—where did you get the fifth one?"

Kirby did not so much as move, nor betray even by a change of expression his sense of the situation. Perhaps he anticipated just such an explosion and was fully prepared to meet it. One hand still rested easily on the table, the other remaining hidden.

"So you claim to have held four aces," he said coldly. "Where are they?"

McAfee swept the discarded hand face upward and the crowd bent forward to look at four aces and a king.

"That was the judge's hand," he declared soberly. "I saw it myself before he called you, and told him to stay."

Kirby laughed—an ugly laugh showing his white teeth.

"The h—! you did? Thought you knew a good poker hand, I reckon. Well, you see I knew a better one, and it strikes me I am the one to ask questions," he sneered. "Look here, you men; I held one ace from the shuffle. Now what I want to know is where Beaucaire ever got his four? Pleasant little trick of you two—only this time it failed to work."

Beaucaire uttered one mad oath, and I endeavored to grasp him but missed my clutch. The force of his inrushing body as he sprang forward upturned the table, the stakes jingling to the deck, but Kirby reached his feet in time to avoid the shock. His hand, which had been hidden, shot out suddenly, the fingers grasping a revolver, but he did not fire. Before the judge had gone half the distance he stopped, reeled suddenly, clutching at his throat, and plunged sideways. His body struck the upturned table, but McAfee and I grasped him, lowering the stricken man gently to the floor.

(To be Continued.)

—Mayors of several southern cities are so apprehensive of local conditions that the war department should aid state officials in re-organizing the national guard largely with a view of police duty only. Representative Anthony of Kansas told Secretary Baker during a hearing on the guard re-organization held last Thursday by the house military committee.

—Senator Dial has arranged for a committee from the Chester chamber of commerce to confer with Director General Hines of the United States railroad administration September 29, in regard to improved passenger station facilities for the Seaboard Air Line railway at Chester.

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CHAPTER III.

**The End of the Game.**

It must have been nearly midnight before I finally decided to seek a few hours' rest below, descending the short ladder and walking forward along the open deck for one last glance ahead. Some time the next day we were to be in St. Louis, and this expectation served to brighten my thoughts. I turned back along the deserted deck, only pausing a moment to glance carelessly in through the front windows

of the main cabin. The forward portion was wrapped in darkness, and unoccupied, but beyond, toward the rear of the long saloon, a considerable group of men were gathered closely about a small table, above which a swinging lamp burned brightly, the rays of light illuminating the various faces. Gambling was no novelty on the great river in those days, gambling for high stakes, and surely no ordinary game, involving a small sum, would ever arouse the depth of interest displayed by these men. Some instinct told me that the chief players would be Kirby and Beaucaire, and with quickening pulse I opened the cabin door and entered.

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