



The Devil's Own A Romance of the Black Hawk War

Author of 'Contraband', 'Shea of the Irish Brigade', 'When Wilderness was King, etc.'

CHAPTER VII—Continued.

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.

"Wus 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. What 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.

"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 Russner 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.

"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 comin' up."

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

"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?'"

"'Yas—you have heard of him be fore?'"

"'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 cud go thar, if Ah jus' hed to. Ah reckon if yer all hed dat pistol plum 'gainst mah hed, Ah'd mos' likely find dis Amos Shrunck. Good Lord, sah!'"

His voice sank to a whisper, "Ah just can't git 'ol' 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 for 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 mor'—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 Beaucare?"

"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 departed 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 procured 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—laters 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."

CHAPTER VIII.

The Dawn of Deeper Interest.

It tested his skill as a boatman to locate the exact spot sought amid that gloom, yet he finally attained to it closely enough so I was able to get ashore, wading nearly thigh deep in water and mud, but only to learn that the boat, which I had provisioned earlier in the evening, had disappeared from its moorings. No trace of it could be found in the darkness, although I devoted several minutes to the search. To my mind this was positive evidence that Pete had returned, accompanied by the two frightened women, and that, finally despairing of my arrival, had departed with them up the river. In all probability we would overhaul the party before morning, certainly before they could attain the mouth of the Illinois. I made my way back to the keelboat with this information, and the laboring engine began to chug even while I was briefly explaining the situation to Rene. She listened almost wearily, asking but few questions, and both of us soon lapsed into silence. A little later she had piloted her head on her arms and apparently had fallen asleep.

I must have dozed myself as the hours passed, although hardly aware of doing so. It was faint and dim, a promise more than a realization of approaching day, yet already sufficient to afford me view of the shore, at our right and to reveal the outlines of a sharp point of land ahead jutting into the stream. The mist rising from off the water in vaporous clouds obscured all else, rendering the scene weird and unfamiliar. It was indeed a desolate view, the nearby land low and without verdure, in many places overgrown, and the river itself sul' en and angry. Only that distant point appeared clearly defined and real, with the slowly brightening sky beyond. I endeavored to arouse myself from stupor, rubbing the sleep from my eyes. Rene had changed her posture, but still slumbered, with face completely concealed in her arms; but Sam was wide awake and turned toward me grinning, at my first movement. Instinctively I liked the fellow—he appeared both intelligent and trustworthy.

"Daylight, is it?" I said, speaking low so as not to awaken the girl. "I must have been asleep."

"Yas, sah; yer's bin a-noddin' fer de las' hour. Ah wus 'bout ter stir yer up, sah, fer Ah reckon as how we's mos' dar."

"Most where?" staring about incredulously. "Oh, yes, Rassuer creek. Have we made that distance already?"

"Wal, we's bin a-goin' at a mighty good gait, sah. She ain't done fooled none on me all dis night," his hand laid lovingly on the engine. "Nebber kicked up no row o' no kind—jus' chug, chug, chug right 'long. Pears like she sorter know'd dis nigger he'd ter git away. Enyhow, we bin movin' long now right smart fer 'bout four hours, an' Rassuer creek am just 'round dat pint yonder—Ah's mighty sure ob dat, sah."

He was right, but it was broad daylight when we reached there, the eastern sky a glorious crimson, and the girl sitting up staring at the brilliant coloring as though it pictured to her the opening of a new world. The passage of a few hundred yards revealed the mouth of Rassuer creek, a narrow but sluggish stream, so crooked and encroached upon by the woods as to be practically invisible from the center of the river. The water was not deep, yet fortunately proved sufficiently so for our purpose, although we were obliged to both pole and paddle the boat upward against the slow current, and it required an hour of hard labor to place the craft safely beyond the first bend, where it might be roughly concealed by the intervening fringe of trees. Here we made fast to the bank.

I assisted Rene ashore, and aided her to climb to a higher level, carpeted with grass. The broad river was invisible, but we could look directly down upon the boat, where Sam was already busily rummaging through the lockers in search of something to eat. He came ashore presently, bearing some corn pone and a goodly portion of jerked beef. Deciding it would be better not to attempt a fire, we divided this and made the best meal possible, meanwhile discussing the situation anew, and planning what to do next. The negro, seated at one side alone upon the grass, said little, beyond replying to my questions, yet scarcely once removed his eyes from the girl's face. He seemed unable to grasp the thought that she was actually of his race, a runaway slave, or permit his tongue to utter any words of equality. Indeed I could not prevent my own glance from being constantly attracted in her direction also. Whatever had been her mental strain and anguish, the long hours of the night had in no marked degree dimpled her beauty. To me she appeared even younger and more attractive than in the dim glare of the lamplight the evening before; and this in spite of a weariness in her eyes and the lassitude of her manner. She spoke but little, compelling herself to eat, and assuming a cheerfulness I was sure she was far from feeling. It was clearly evident her thoughts were elsewhere, and finally the conviction came to me that, more than all else, she desired to be alone. My eyes sought the outlines of the boat lying in the stream below.

"What is there forward of the cockpit, Sam?" I questioned.

"A cabin, sah; 'tain't so awful big, but Massa Donaldson he uster steep dar off an' on."

"The young lady could rest there then?"

"Sure she cud. 'Twas all fixed up



Her Eyes Met Mine, and Endeavored a Smile.

fine afore we left St. Louis. Ah show yer de way, missus."

She rose to her feet rather eagerly, and stood with one hand resting against the trunk of a small tree. Her eyes met mine and endeavored a smile.

"I thank you for thinking of that," she said gratefully. "I—I really am tired, and—and it will be rest just to be alone. You—you do not mind if I go?"

"Certainly not. There is nothing for any of us to do but just take things easy until night."

"And then we are to go on up the river?"

"Yes, unless, of course, something should occur during the day to change our plan. Meanwhile Sam and I will take turns on guard, while you can remain undisturbed."

I watched the two as they went down the steep bank together and Sam helped her over the rail into the cockpit. The negro left the door open and returned slowly, clambering up the bank.

"Cuse me, sah," he said clumsily, as he paused before me, rubbing his head, his eyes wandering below. "Did Ah hear right what yer sed las' night, 'bout how dat young woman was a nigger, a runaway from Massa Kirby? Pears like Ah don't just seem fer ter git dat right in my head, sah."

"That is the truth, Sam, although it appears quite as impossible to me as to you. She has the blood of your race in her veins, and is legally a slave."

"An' now she done b'long ter dis yere Massa Kirby?"

"Yes, he won all the Beaucare property, including the slaves, in a poker game, on the river, the night Beaucare died."

"Ah done heard all 'bout dat, sah. An' yer nebbes know'd dis yere girl afore at all?"

"No, I never even saw her. I chanced to hear the story and went to the house to warn them, as no one else would. I was too late, and no other course was left but to help her escape. That is the whole of it."

(To be Continued.)

—For the first time in five years Servia is said to be free of small pox.

Discovery of a human "junk heap" was announced by officers of the House of Corrections at Deer Island near Boston, Mass., last week. Charles W. Buzzell, of Montreal, serving a sentence of one year for forgery, complained of miscellaneous articles from his stomach. The collection, Dr. L. C. Rockwell said, included parts of a dog chain, two feet long; a safety razor blade nearly whole; a suspender buckle and 179 fragments or pieces of glass, hay wire, staples, nails and screws. Relieved of these substances, Buzzell has almost entirely recovered. The prisoner had been accumulating the collection with suicidal intent, according to Dr. Rockwell, since last December. He had previously made a similar cumulative attempt to end his life, but it was frustrated by an operation performed in New York, he said. Buzzell told the surgeons that he was a former clergyman, having held several pastorates in Canada, and had been convicted of worthless check operations in Michigan, New York and New Jersey.

Vice President Thomas R. Marshall has accepted an invitation to speak in Columbia on November 18 as the guest of the Columbia Lodge, Loyal Order of the Moose.

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