



# The Devil's Own

## A Romance of the Black Hawk War

By Randall Parrish

Author of 'Contraband, Shea of the Irish Brigade, When Wilderness was King, etc.' Illustrated by Lewin Myers

### CHAPTER XV—Continued.

My eyes sought the face of the lad questioning. He was a loose-lipped, awkward lout, trembling still from a fright he could not conceal.

"You belonged to that squad killed out yonder?"

"Yes, seh; I reckon Ise the only one whut ain't dead," he stammered, so tongue-tied I could scarcely make out his words. "I was gone after walter, an' when them Injuns begun fer ter yell, I never dun nuthin' but just run, an' hid in the bush."

"I understand. What is your name?" "Asn Hell."

"Well, Asa, I suppose those were militiamen; you belonged to the company?"

He nodded, his eyes dull, his lips moving, as though it was an effort to talk. Quite evidently whatever little intellect he had ever possessed, now refused to respond. Kennedy broke in impatiently.

"It takes that boy 'bout an hour fer ter tell anything, Cap," he explained gruffly. "I reckon he's skeered half ter death in the first place, an' then thar's smuthin' wrong with him enyhow. Howsumever, it's whut he seed an' heard, Cap, that sounds mighty queer ter me. He sez thar was more'n fifty bucks in that party, an' that ol' Black Hawk was thar hisself, a leadin' 'em—he done saw him."

I turned, surprised at this statement, to stare into the boy's face. He half grinned back at me, vacantly.

"Black Hawk! He could scarcely be down here; what did he look like?"

"'Bout six feet high, I reckon, with a big hooked nose, an' the blackest pair o' mean eyes ever yew saw. I reckon he didn't hav' no eyebrows, an' he wore a bunch o' eagle feathers, an' a red blanket. Gosh, mister, but the devil cuden't look no worse'n he did."

"Was thar him, Cap?" burst in Tim, anxiously.

"It's not a bad description," I admitted, yet not convinced. "I can't believe he would be here with a raiding party. If he was, there must be some important object in view. Is that all?"

"No, 'tain't; the boy swears thar was a white man 'long with 'em, a feller with a short mustache, an' dressed in store clothes. He wan't no prisoner nuther, but hed a gun, an' talked ter Black Hawk, most like he was a chief hisself. After the killin' was all over, he was the one whut got 'em ter go off thar to the south, the whole kit an' kaboodle."

"I don't doubt that. There have always been white renegades among the Sacs and plenty of half-breeds. If Black Hawk, and this other fellow are leading this band, they are after big game somewhere, and we had better keep out of their way. I favor saddling up immediately, and traveling all night."

"So do I," and Tim flung a half-filled bag from his shoulder to the ground. "But I vote we eat furst. 'Tain't much, only a few scraps I found out thar; but it's a way better then nuthin'. Here you, Hall, give me a hand, an' then we'll go out, an' round up them hosses."

If the party of raiding Indians, whose foul deed we had discovered, had departed in a southerly direction, as their trail would plainly seem to indicate, then our safest course would seemingly be directed eastward up the valley. This would give us the protection of the bluffs, and take us more and more out of the territory they would be likely to cover. Within twenty minutes we were in saddle, descending the steep hillside through the darkness, Tim walking ahead with the lad, his horse trailing behind, and the long rifle across his shoulder.

I do not recall feeling any special fear. In the first place I was convinced that we must already be at the extreme limit of Black Hawk's radius, and that, traveling as we were eastward, must before morning be well beyond any possible danger of falling into the hands of his warriors. The other pursuers I had practically dismissed from thought. Shortly after midnight my horse strained a tendon, and could no longer uphold my weight. On foot, with the poor beast limping painfully behind me, I pressed on beside Eloise, both of us silent, too utterly wearied with the strain for any attempt at speech.

The rising sun topped the summit of the bluff, its red rays seeming to bridge with spans of gossamer the little valley up which we toiled. I had lost my interest, and was walking doggedly on, with eyes bent upon the ground, when the girl beside me cried out suddenly, a new excitement in her voice.

"Oh, there is a cabin! See! Over yonder; just beyond that big oak, where the bluff turns."

Her eager face was aglow, her outstretched hand pointing eagerly.

The logs of which the little building had been constructed, still in their native bark, blended so perfectly with the drab hillside beyond, that for the moment none of us caught the distant outlines. Tim possessed the keenest sight, and his voice was first to speak.

"Sure, miss, thar's a cabin, all right," he said grimly. "One room, an' new built; likely 'nough sum settler just com' in yere. I don't see no movement, ner smoke."

"Fled to the nearest fort probably," I replied, able myself by this time to decipher the spot. "Be too risky to

stay out here alone. We'll look it over; there might be food left behind, even if the people have gone."

We must have been half an hour in covering the distance. The cabin stood well up above the stream, within the shade of the great oak, and we were confirmed, long before we reached it, in our former judgment that it was uninhabited. No sign of life was visible about the place; it had the appearance of desertion, no smoke even curling from out the chimney. A faint trail, evidently little used, led down toward the creek, and we followed this as it wound around the base of the big tree. Then it was that the truth dawned suddenly upon us—there to our right lay a dead mule, harnessed for work, but with throat cut; while directly in front of the cabin door was a dog, an ugly, massive brute, his mouth open, prone on his back, with stiffened legs pointing to the sky. I dropped my rein, and strode forward.

"Wait where you are," I called back. "There have been savages here; let me see fust what has happened inside."

The dog had been shot, stricken by two bullets, and I was obliged to drag his huge body to one side before I could press my way in through the door. The open doorway and window afforded ample light, and a single glance was sufficient to reveal most of the story. The table had been smashed as by the blow of an ax, and pewter dishes were everywhere. The bed in one corner had been stripped of its coverlets, many of them slashed by a knife, and the straw tick had been ripped open in a dozen places. Coals from the fireplace lay widespread, some of them having eaten deeply into the hard wood before they ceased smoldering.

I saw all this, yet my eyes rested upon something else. A man lay, bent double across an overturned bench, in a posture which hid his face from view. His body was there alone, although a child's shoe lay on the floor, and a woman's linsey dress dangled from a hook against the wall. I crept forward, my heart pounding madly, until I could gain sight of his face. He was a big fellow, not more than thirty, with sandy hair and beard, and a pugnacious jaw, his coarse hickory shirt slashed into ribbons, a bullet wound in the center of his forehead, and one arm broken by a vicious blow. His calloused hands yet gripped the haft of an ax, just as he had died—fighting.

Tim's voice spoke from the doorway.

"Injuns, I reckon?"

"Yes, they have been here; the man is dead. But there must have been others, a woman and child also—see that shoe on the floor, and the dress hanging over there. The poor devil fought hard."

"Do you think it best to stop here?"

"Why not? 'Tain't likely them devils will be back agin. Thar sure must be smuthin' fer us ter eat in the place, an' the Lord kno's we can't go on as we are. Them gurls be mighty nigh ready ter drop, an' two o' the hosses has plum giv' out. I'm fer settlin' down fer a few hours enyhow—say till it gits middling dark."

Undoubtedly this was the sensible view. We would be in far less danger remaining there under cover than in any attempt to continue our journey by daylight. Together we carried the body out, and deposited it in a thicket behind the cabin, awaiting burial; and then dragged the dead dog also out of sight. The disorder within was easily remedied, and, after this had been attended to, the girls were permitted to enter. Eloise sank back on the bench, her head supported against the wall, the lashes of her half-closed eyes showing dark against the whiteness of her cheeks. She looked so pitifully tired, the very heart choked in my throat.

The rest of us found a small stock of provisions, and Eloise, with Tim to aid her, built a fire and prepared breakfast. A half-filled bottle of whisky discovered in the cupboard, helped to revive all of us slightly, and gave Asa sufficient courage to seek outside for a spring. Tim, comparatively unwearied himself, and restless, located a trapdoor in the floor, rather ingeniously concealed, which disclosed the existence of a small cellar below. Candle in hand he explored this, returning with two guns, together with a quantity of powder and ball, and information that there remained a half keg of the explosive hidden below.

"Must a bin aimin' ter blow up stumps, I reckon," he commented, exhibiting a sample. "Coarsest I ever saw; cuden't hardly use thet in no gun, but it's powder alright."

To remove the debris out of our way, I was gathering up the straw tick and slit blankets, and piled them all together back on the bed. Clinging to one of the blankets, caught and held by its pin, was a peculiar emblem, and I stood for a moment with it in my hand, curiously examining the odd design. Eloise unclosed her eyes, and started to her feet.

"What is that you have?" she asked. "A pin of some kind—a rather strange design; I just found it here, entangled in this blanket."

"Why," she exclaimed in surprise. "I have seen one exactly like it before—Kirby wore it in his tie."

(To Be Continued.)

—William Pete Howard, white, a Federal prisoner who escaped from the Cherokee county jail at Gaffney about two weeks ago with George J. Emory and Tom Rollins voluntarily returned to the jail Tuesday night. Howard said that it was necessary for him to visit his home over in the Dark Corner of Greenville county for a few days and that he broke jail to do so. He fully intended coming back he said.

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