The Devil's Own

A Romance of the Black Hawk War

By RANDALL PARRISH

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CHAPTER XII—Continued.

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"H——, thar ain't really no manner o' risk at all. Yer don't even hav' ter break the law, fer as I know. It's just got fer ter be done on the dead quiet, an' no question asked. I'll tell yer all yer need ter know. 'Tain't such a long story. This yere Joe Kirby he's a frien' o' mine; I've know'd him a long time, an' he's in a h—— of a fix. Here's how it all happened: Ther wus an ol' planter livin' down in Missoury at a place called Beaucaire's Landin'. His name wus Beaucaire, an' he hed a son named Bert, a good-fer-nothing cuss, I reckon. Wal, this Bert runned away a long while ago, an' never cum back; but he left a baby behind him—a gurl baby—which a quadroon slave give birth to. The quadroon's name wus Delia, an' the kid wus called Rene. Git them names in yer head. Ol' Beaucaire he knew the gurl wus his son's baby, so he brought her up 'long with his own daughter, who wus named Eloise. They wus both 'bout ther same age, an' nobody seemed ter know thet Rene wus a nigger. Fer sum reason ol' Beaucaire never set her free, ner the quadroon neither. Wal, Kirby he heard tell o' all this sumwhar down the river. Yer see he an' Bert Beaucaire run tergether fer a while, till Bert got killed in a row in New Orleans. I reckon he tol' him part o' the story, an' the rest he picked up in Saint Louee. Enyhow, it looked like a d—— good thing ter Kirby, who ain't passin' up many bets. Ol' Beaucaire wus rich, an' considerable ov a sport; people who hed seed the gurls sed they wus both ov 'em beauties an' Eloise—the white one—hed an independent fortune left her through her mother. So Kirby, he an' a feller named Carver—a tin-horn—planned it out betwixt 'em ter copper ol' Beaucaire's coin, an' pick up them gurls along with it."

"But how cud they do thet?"

"Luck mostly, I reckon, an' Kirby's brains. The plan wus ter git Beaucaire inter a poker game, ease him 'long a bit, an' then break him, land, niggers, an' all. They didn't figure this wud be hard, fer he wus a dead game gambler, an' played for his ...

"Wal', I sed she cudn't do nuthin' 'gainst him onct he wus married to her. I thought o' thet right away. Yer see this wus how it happened: Kirby sed he'd like fer ter marry her, an' I sez, 'Why not, then? Thar's an ol' bum ov a preacher yere at Yellow Banks, a sorter hanger-on ter one o' them militia companies, what'll do eny d——n thing I tell him to. I got the goods on him, an' he knows it.'

"'But she wouldn't marry me,' he says; 'yer don't know thet gurl.'

"'Don't I?' I asked sarcastic. 'Wal', thar ain't no gurl ever I see yet thet won't marry a man if the right means are used. How kin she help herself? Yer leave it ter me.'"

"And he consented?"

"He wus d——n glad to, after I told him how it cud be done. But Tim he wudn't go in with us, an' thet's why we got ter have another man. Come on over ter the bar an' have a drink, Moffett; them other fellers are goin' ter eat now."

The diversion gave me opportunity for a moment's thought. The plan was a diabolical one, cold-blooded and desperate, yet I saw no certain way of serving Eloise, except by accepting Rale's offer. I did not even know where she was concealed, or how I could lay hands on Kirby. The genial Rale pushed out a black bottle and we drank together.

"Wal," he said, picking up the conversation where it had ended, quite satisfied with his diplomacy, and wiping his lips on his sleeve. "What ye say, Moffett? Thar's a hundred dollars in this job."

"What is the gurl?"

"Oh, I reckon she ain't fur away; we kin find her all right. I got ter know 'bout yer furst. Are yer game?"

"I'm game 'nough, Jack," assuming a familiarity I thought he would appreciate. "Only I don't want'r jump inter this yere thing without knowin' nuthin' 'bout it. What is it yer got lined up fer me ter do?"

He helped himself to yet another liberal drink, and I was glad to note that the fiery liquor was already beginning to have its effect, increasing his recklessness of speech.

... The horses will be thar et midnight waitin' fer yer. All ye got ter do is just put them two gurls on an' ride away. Yer don't never need ter speak ter 'em. Yer understand? All right, then; have another drink."

I shook my head.

"But how'm I goin' ter git ter this place—whatever it's called?"

"Thar ain't no trouble 'bout thet; all yer got ter do is ride straight south till yer cum ter the crick, an' yer thar. It's Jenkins' crossing yer after."

"I reckon thar ain't eny Indians, er nuthin'?"

"H——, no; they're all t'other direction; nuthin' worse'n wolves. Say, though, yer might have trouble with them gurls—got a gun?"

"No."

He reached back into a small drawer under the shelf and brought out an ugly looking weapon, tried the hammer movement with his thumb, and handed it over to me with a grin.

"Some cannon, an' I want it back. Don't fail at midnight."

"An' thar ain't nuthin' fer me ter do till then?"

"Not a thing; take a nap, if yer want'r. Sal kin wake ye up. I reckon I won't be back till after yer off."

I sat down in a chair and leaned back against the wall, tilting my hat down over my eyes and pretending to fall asleep. Through half-closed lids I managed to see all that transpired in the room, and my mind was busy with the approaching crisis.

Rale busied himself for some minutes before putting on his hat, counting over some money and filling his bottles from a reserve stock underneath the shelf. Tim slept peacefully on, but had slightly changed his posture, so that his face was now upturned to the light. The sight of his familiar features gave me an inspiration. He was, undoubtedly, an honest fellow, and had quarreled with Kirby over this very matter, refusing to have any hand in it. He had supposed up to that time that he was doing no more than his duty under the law. If I could arouse him from drunken stupor he might even be willing to work with me in the attempt to rescue Eloise ...

"What the Devil—?"

"That's a Hundred Dollars in This Job."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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