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THE UNDOING OF A DOUBT BY HUGO ST. FINISTERRE, M.D. AUTHOR OF "WHO'S WHO" ETC. ETC.

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It was not long after this that what may be called an adjourned meeting of the man hunters took place in the depths of the swamp, near the creek which had played an important part in the curious incident of Cy Walters' disappearance. Gabe Hornor and the owner of the second house that had departed this life. To express it mildly, a vein of dissatisfaction ran through the proceedings.

The proposition was made for several members of the party to go back and procure a horse.

"I'm opposed to that," called out Gabe, who was infuriated by the loss of



"Say your prayers," his own animal. "Hank has already killed two of the best hounds in the country, and he'll shoot every one we send after him. We don't need 'em."

"How shall we work it, then?" demanded the owner of the last house. "The swamp is so big that he can hide in it for a month."

"He hasn't got the ammunition," explained Archie Hunter, who grimly rubbed it into himself by explaining that the fugitive had stolen his pistol, but had no cartridges with him.

"He has used most of the charges and may be or soon will be without any means of defending himself."

"He'll get what he wants from the darkies scattered through the swamp."

"They'll do it with revolvers."

"They'll find some way of furnishing him with what he needs."

"And then he'll go to killing dogs again," was the disgusted comment of Gabe Hornor. "It's a waste of raw material, gentlemen."

"What do you propose?"

The last of six men was added to until all of the original party were present with the exception of the real Hank Beyer, myself, Landlord Bulfinch and Squire Gager. The last to arrive was the negro, Pete. He had gone up the creek, as directed by Cy Walters, but

was only a little way when he became satisfied it was the wrong direction. He then turned about and took the same course as the veteran; not only that, but he went farther and discovered the dug-out, which was caught fast by an overhanging limb, not far from where I had turned it adrift. He spent some time in looking for me, but, meeting with no success, made his way to the spot in the swamp where the others were assembled, being directed thither by the signals sent out for that purpose.

Pete told nothing of his discovery and remained a silent participant in the proceedings. The same was true for a time of Cy Walters, who, however, listened closely to every word that was said. He desired to interpose, but appreciated the disadvantage in which he was placed. He and his stepson were under suspicion because of their escape of their prisoners, and to spring the assertion upon his neighbors that a mistake had been made by all and that I was not what I seemed would not receive a single believer.

Jim Dungan was the most violent in his speech and more than once brandished a tomahawk. He was the part of being shot in his tracks by the fierce tempered veteran, who was never known to accept an insult from any one. Dungan's proposal was to gather more dogs and push the hunt relentlessly until I was run down or dead. That he possessed high courage was again proved by his action. Advancing to the middle of the group, he raised one hand with a commanding gesture.

"Gentlemen, I've listened to every word that has been said here. Jim Dungan threw out a slur or two that I won't do him the honor to repeat. I let 'em go 'cause I see he was excited and didn't weigh his words, but he mustn't speak 'em ag'in! If he had only said that Archie and me was the two all-fired fools in Mississippi, I'd have took off my hat and said 'Amos,' but that's all. Gentlemen, since you oughter know, it's this—the chap that you're hunting for ain't Hank Beyer!"

It proved as Cy feared. His assertion was received with scorn and anger. Not even his own stepson would accept it.

His words seemed to have added fuel to the fire and intensified the determination of the others to push the hunt for me with more merciless rigor than ever. Cy Walters, however, was not the man to yield a position when once taken, and it was because of his stand and the words he said and the declaration he made that when I looked back at Black Man's swamp it gave me no sign.

CHAPTER XXIII

Erasmus Brown, my colored companion, parted company with me after we had fairly entered upon the grounds of Colonel Mansley's residence, and I stepped upon the porch alone. I had scarcely sounded the heavy polished knocker when the door was opened by a tidy looking colored girl, whose manner showed that I was expected.

"I'll show yo' de way," she said, preceding me up the broad winding stairs to a large room on the left whose door was open. When I had passed through and closed it behind me and looked around, I was as much surprised as delighted. It was not because it was furnished in that tasteful, comfortable manner for which the old southern homes are noted, but that I saw my own traveling bag resting on the floor at one side, with my umbrella near. The thoughtful hostess had provided me with that which I should not have dispensed with just then for ten times its value.

In my new and novel situation I forgot for the time the vigilantes at my great distance who were thirsting for my life.

The following hour was devoted to making myself as presentable as possible. I need hardly remark that I neglected nothing. Erasmus knocked at the door and took possession of my shoes, which he soon brought back with a polished like that of a mirror, and I should be ashamed to tell how long I primed in front of the mirror before venturing from my room and descending the stairs. The same girl who had admitted me smilingly showed me to the parlor with the words:

"Miss Esther will be wid yo' in a few minutes."

I was in one of those broad, roomy apartments which will contain 100 people with comfort. The ceiling was low, and there was an alcove at one side, partitioned with heavy curtains. The carpet, pictures, furniture, piano at one side and the brick-a-brac told of the wealth of the owner and the taste of the one who presided over the household in place of the mother that had been dead for years.

I did not hear the fair-like step until the young lady, smiling, but slightly flushed, appeared before me. She walked straight forward, with her dainty hand extended.

"I am glad to welcome you, Mr. Kenmore, to our home and regret more than I can tell you that it should be made under such distressing circumstances."

"You have done much to rob it of its unpleasant features," I replied as I rose to my feet, "and I am unable to say how much I thank you."

"It is shocking," she said, resuming her seat, and without the least trace of embarrassment, though the color of her wonderfully attractive features was heightened. "Your resemblance to the guilty person is extraordinary; but does not justify any one in holding you responsible for his crimes. I wish you would tell me about it."

Thus invited, I went over the history from the time of my arrival in Mississippi until the present hour, she listening with a close attention that was embarrassing at times, though flattering in a high degree. When I gave the particulars of my purchase of her own horse from the stranger, she compressed her thin lips and a peculiar light shone in her lustrous eyes, but she did not utter a word.

"We were both struck by our mutual resemblance," I added, "though neither made any reference to it. It was striking, even after he had removed his mask."

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perhaps it was not, when your wonderful resemblance to each other is noted. Your appeal to them for time ought to have been heeded."

"Nothing is so unreasoning as a mob."

"Nor so cruel. Even now you are in danger. They expect you to come here, and will follow you. I hope father will soon return."

For the first time she showed nervousness, and, rising from her chair, walked to the window and looked down the highway. Nothing was observed, and she returned to her seat.

"He heard of it last evening, and could scarcely believe it. There has never been a lynching in this part of the state, and it would have been horrible had an innocent man been the victim. Colonel Mansley's first belief was that it was Mr. Beyer who had taken his horse and been caught at it, and he was angry enough to express the wish to take part in his punishment. He, however, changed his mind."

I was hopeful that there would be some explanation of her visit to the inn. My curiosity was to know whether that belief that the real Hank Beyer was in peril or whether from the first it had been her wish to save a guiltless man from punishment. I dared not ask the question, and she did not choose to enlighten me.

"I have been wondering," I said after a moment's silence, "whether Mr. Beyer was not conscience smitten when he saw my peril and whether he would not take some steps to save me."

"Not he!" she exclaimed, with another flash of her black eyes. "Did he not have the opportunity and yet fail to use it?"

"Because it would have involved him in danger. But he could place himself beyond reach of the mob and then send word to them of the truth."

She shook her head decisively.

"A man who commits such a wrong as he did is the one to condemn to death. But the truth would be certain to come to light ere long. His and my identity would be established."

"Still he could have escaped by placing himself at his own leisure beyond reach of the law. Do you not see also that if your mutual identity was clear it would not have removed the stain from your name—that is, on the part of the unreasoning ones who accuse you?"

"Why not?"

"The missing horse was in your possession. That is enough to condemn you with unthinking people. Mr. Beyer had only to deny the purchase as you explained it, and he would have been generally believed. It was a grave error on your part to humor the fancy that you were another person."

"I saw it when too late. I believe but for that I should have been able to clear myself. It was the testimony of the landlady and the squire that clinched matters against me. My explanation was too absurd to satisfy them."

"Yet you were not blameable. It is they who rushed headlong to violence. Why should they forget that Mississippi is a state where law and right prevail?"

Our conversation ran on delightfully for more than an hour, when it was broken by a gentle tap on the door, and, in response to Miss Mansley's call, it was opened, and the colored girl stood before us. She looked at me queerly, as if she did not quite understand things, and said:

"Mr. Beyer is at the door and would like to see yo' if it's greable."

"Ask him to wait a few minutes," was the instant response of the young woman.

CHAPTER XXIII

While I sat absorbed in delightful conversation with the daughter of Colonel Finney Mansley the servant announced that Hank Beyer, my double and one of the most unrecognizable miscreants that ever breathed, was awaiting outside for permission to pay his respects to the young woman.

I rose with the intention of withdrawing, but she raised her hand in protest.

"I wish you to remain," she said, "until this interview is over."

"But—but," I replied in some embarrassment, "it will not be pleasant for any one of us."

"I do not mean for you to take part in it. Come with me."

She led the way to the alcove and parted the curtains.

"Sit there until he leaves."

"I have no wish to overhear your conversation."

"But I have reasons for wishing you to do so."

"I shall be so, then."

"Our interview will not be an extended one," was her significant comment as she drew the curtains together so as to shut me from sight.

My situation was peculiar. But for her command I could never have consented to play the coward that man named Finney Mansley. The thought that possibly she might need my assistance helped to justify the breach of decorum on my part.

A minute later I heard a footfall on the carpet and the voice of my double:

"Ah, Esther, I'm delighted to meet you! You must have been worried over my absence, but really it couldn't be helped."

I judged that he advanced to take her hand, but if so she rejected it, and the two sat down near the window on the opposite side of the room beyond my As yet she had not spoken, but he gave her no rest.

"How do you like my looks without my mustache?"

"As well as with it," she coolly replied. "But why did you remove it?"

"Oh, just a fancy! I like a change now and then."

"You are sure there was no special reason?"

"Of course. What are you hinting at?"

"Do you know a gentleman named Mr. Edward Kenmore of New York city?"

To be Continued.

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