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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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The temptation was strong to do so, but, though I had exchanged shots with him, I was still guiltless of his blood as well as that of all others and I allowed my hand to loosen its grasp upon the revolver at my hip.

"Not yet, but something tells me the day of reckoning is near."

Seeing nothing of the dugout or myself in peering up and down stream, the man fixed his gaze on the spot where I actually was. My heart throbbed fast, for it looked as if he must penetrate the leafy curtain and force the crisis, but he did not, and, withdrawing with the same stillness as before, passed from sight. The listening ear could not detect his footfall as he moved farther down stream in the continuance of his search.

The incident suggested a change of plan on my part. My intention, as I have explained, was to set the dugout adrift after stepping ashore, in order to hide the point where my disembarkation took place, but there was risk in this, since the boat was liable to be discovered so near its starting point that it would be easy to find the latter, whereas it was now so effectually concealed that hours were likely to pass before the boat was located, if indeed it were found at all.

It was too soon, however, to act upon this conclusion. I had just received evidence that my most dreaded enemy was within a few rods and probably others were on the same side of the stream with myself. They would be passing up and down, and the bloodhounds were not to be forgotten.

That this decision was wise was demonstrated within the same five minutes that it was made. Cy Walters had hardly disappeared when a second rustling warned me that others were near at hand.

Something in the faint rustling sounded different from the other, and it was on the same side of the stream with myself. What mysterious instinct possessed the black demon is beyond my power to understand, but it came about that the largest and most ferocious bloodhound on which I had ever looked came through the undergrowth at that moment, and, passing within six feet of where I sat in the dugout, fixed his devilish eyes on my face with a purpose that could not be mistaken.

CHAPTER XVII.

If you should ever be approached while hiding in a swamp by a ferocious bloodhound who is looking for you, and you haven't time to climb a tree, the best thing to do is to shoot, taking care to make your aim accurate and not losing any time in carrying out the proceeding.

The terrible brute that had come upon my hiding place probably did so by accident, for his sudden stoppage and stare showed his momentary surprise. He was of unusual size and as black as midnight. There was not a



He leaped.

white hair on his body, and his big ears hung like flaps of ink colored silk. The massive jaws, with their prodigious strength, were parted sufficiently to show the blood red mouth and tongue and the white fangs, which perhaps had been sunk into the throat of more than one panting fugitive. The glitter of his eyes was like that of a rattlesnake. He emitted a cavernous mutter instead of baying, and the twitching of the iron muscles over the broad chest and legs showed that he was gathering his mighty power for a leap at me. If the other brute was mistaken as to my identity, there was no hesitation on this one's part.

He leaped, but instead of striking the banded against the side of the dugout, almost upsetting it, and floundered.

My interest centered upon the basket at his feet.

"Dat? I like to forgot 'bout it. Dat's full ob wittles dat Miss Esther told me to gib to yo'." She put 'em up fur yo' 'hese' and told me to keep huntin' fur yo' till I found 'em, as she reckoned yo' must be powerful hungry. Hab yo' got any appetite left, Marne Hank?"

"Have I any appetite left?" I repeated, almost dazed by the glorious tidings. "Ah, but let me test the question!"

Erastus handed me the basket, and, restraining my eagerness, I gently removed the mowmy napkin inclosing the pone, the corn cake and the game and gazed enraptured upon the contents.

There are some scenes too sacred to be dwelt upon and to which the pen cannot do justice. Let it suffice to say that when I passed the basket back to the servant he remarked with a grin:

To be Continued.

THE BELL TELEPHONE CO., of Canada.

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and spongy, but the rising slope proved that dry soil would soon be reached.

These reflections occupied much less time than has been taken in the telling. Turning my back on the swamp that had been the scene of so many stirring experiences, I strode in the direction of the plantation, little dreaming of the still more extraordinary adventures that awaited me.

The most puzzling features of the situation just then were the silence and apparent inactivity of the vigilantes that had pursued me into Black Man's swamp. There must have been a large number of men there, all armed and accompanied by a pack of hounds seemingly with the ability to trail an eagle through the air, but when I looked around not a living moved or animal was visible, nor did any sound issue from the dismal recesses to show they were within the swamp.

The curious situation was inexplicable, yet it had the best of causes, of whose nature I never dreamed. With the slightest glance on my left I had not walked far when something in the appearance of the rails in advance that were serving me as a guide arrested my attention. It was as if one of the crosspieces that supported the horizontal rails had suddenly become jammed with life. It moved and wobbled unaccountably and suggested that a person or animal had something to do with it.

Stopping short and studying it for a minute or two, the explanation appeared—a man was leaning with one arm on the top of the fence and waving his hat with the other. Moreover, he was a negro, and since his face was turned toward me it was evident he was making some kind of a signal for my benefit.

So far as I could ascertain, he had no companion, and nothing, therefore, was to be apprehended in approaching him. I walked forward at a rapid pace, while, donning his old hat, he came forward to meet me. His black countenance glowed with pleasure, mixed, as it seemed to me, with some misgiving. He had no weapon, but carried a basket in one hand, and I recognized him as Erastus Brown, Colonel Mansley's servant.

"Hello, Marne Hank!" he said when within speaking distance. "I've been lookin' fur yo'."

"What do you want of me?"

"I've got a letter fur yo'. Hols on a minute."

Setting down his basket, he began hurriedly searching his clothing for the missive, while I looked on more perplexed than ever. A letter for me! Who was the writer, and what could it mean?

As the search progressed it became almost furious. He jammed a big hand first under one shoulder, then under the



A man was leaning with one arm on the top of the fence.

other, then hurriedly through the side pockets and into his trousers, repeating the action again and again with greater earnestness and vigor, while his expression grew anxious and scared. He crooked his finger in the sides of his huge shoes, took off his hat, peeped in, and then shook it out, as if the missive might have been hiding somewhere inside, but in vain, for the letter could not be found on or about him.

"Boats de debil, Marne Hank, but I hab lost dat letter sartin snah!"

"Are you sure it was meant for me?"

"No mistake 'bout it."

"Who wrote it?"

"Miss Esther, and she'll broke my head when she finds I hab lost it. Deah! see how I could hab been so disarrumless."

CHAPTER XVIII.

The strange thrill that passed through me upon hearing the declaration that Miss Esther Mansley had sent a letter to me by the hand of her servant quickly vanished when I came to consider the announcement.

The negro believed me to be Hank Beyer, for he addressed me as such and showed it in everything he did and said. His mistress held the same belief when she left her home and raised the window of my prison and helped me to escape. Even if Erastus had the missive with him I could not open it, for it was intended for another person.

My interest centered upon the basket at his feet.

"What have you in that?" I asked.

"Dat? I like to forgot 'bout it. Dat's full ob wittles dat Miss Esther told me to gib to yo'." She put 'em up fur yo' 'hese' and told me to keep huntin' fur yo' till I found 'em, as she reckoned yo' must be powerful hungry. Hab yo' got any appetite left, Marne Hank?"

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