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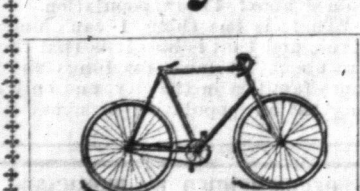
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THE UNDOING OF A DOUBT

BY HUGO ST. FINISTERRE, MD.
AUTHOR OF "WHO'S WHO" ETC., ETC.



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"Did she say that?"
"Don't member de words obzactly, but dat's what she meant. I say, Marse Hank, yo' gib 'em de slip mighty slick, didn't yo'?"

"How do you know I did?"
"Seed yo' dot."

"You saw me! Where were you at the time I came out the window?"
"Standin back and bossin de job."

"What brought you here at this late hour of the night?"
"I come wid Miss Esther. She warn't afeard, but I 'ought I'd better look after her 'cause she am younger dan me, yo' know."

"And what made Miss Esther leave her home at so late an hour?"
"Yo' see, de colonel come home last night wid de news dat de folks had yo' locked up fur hose stealin and dat dey was gwyne to hang yo' fur takin his pet animal. De colonel was awful rampagous and swore he hoped dey would hang yo' if it was yo' dat stole de chestnut horse, fur de colonel don't seem to hab much love fur a horse t'lef."

"What did Miss Esther say?"
"She didn't say nuffin, but cried kind ob quietlike after de colonel had gone out ob de parlor. Den she tole me when he warn't round dat I was to scorch her dat night from her home to a sartin place dat she didn't name. So we come down, and when she found out whar dey was fattenin yo' up so, dat yo' would be fit to kill in de mornin she made me stand back out ob de way while she slipped up and rose de winder and den slipped off ag'in jes afore yo' fell out on de ground."

The meaning of all this was appar-ent. Miss Esther Mansley, if not en-gaged in marriage to the colonel, was Henry Beyer, loved him despite his worthlessness and the fact that he had stolen a valuable horse belonging to his father. It was that feeling which caused her to make her way stealthily to the inn late at night under the escort of her faithful servant and to release me, be-lieving I was her lover. The act was womanlike, and who shall blame her therefor, even though she knew the un-worthiness of the miscreant that had won her affection?

But after all I had nothing to do with this phase of the business. So far as I was concerned the young woman had builded better than she knew. I was breathing the free air of heaven and should continue to do so or know the reason why.

"Erastus, you say Miss Esther wishe me to run and it is the best thing for me to do, but did she say in what di-rection?"

"I s'pose from her observations dat she meant fur yo' to run to de debil, which am de same as runnin like de old boy."

But, not being acquainted with the country—What the mischief are you laughing at?" I angrily demanded as the negro chuckled.

"Marse Hank, yo' jokin when yo' say yo' don't know much 'bout dis ken-try."

It was a waste of the precious min-utes to seek to convince Erastus Brown of the truth. I appealed to his good opinion of himself.

"What do you advise? What direc-tion is best for me to take?"

"My advice am to head fur Noo Or-leans and not stop runnin day or night till yo' got dere. It am only free, four t'ousand miles, and I s'pose yo'll get tired, but when yo' arrive dere yo'll be safe and yo' kin take a good, long rest. Mercy heben," suddenly exclaimed the African, "did yo' hear dat?"

It was a dismal, mournful sound that rose on the night air, coming from some point apparently miles distant. I took it for the cry of a wolf in some swamp or woods and set it down as unworthy of attention at the time.

Although I had made my escape from the house, I was still near it. Cy Wal-ters and Archie Hunter would not sit down and wait for daylight before mak-ing another move against me, and un-less morning found me several miles from that spot it would find me in im-minent peril of being recaptured or shot down.

Another fact was a not to be forgotten. Although I had possession of an excel-lent revolver, only three chambers were loaded, and I was without an additional cartridge, for Jim Dungan when he re-lieved me of my weapon took good care, as I have related, to supply himself with the necessary, therefore, that I should bus-hed those three charges until the direst necessity compelled me to appeal to them.

"You know I have been away for some time, Erastus," I said desperately. "I shall depend upon you to guide me to a secure hiding place. Lead on."

No doubt the African deemed ma-cabre that sight, but probably he laid it to my gaudied condition. He mut-tered something which I did not catch and turned straight about and started across the broad spreading meadow to which I have referred. I followed a few paces behind him.

As nearly as I remember, we walked an eighth of a mile without any per-ceptible change of direction. Then my guide turned to the left, and in a few minutes we were making our way through low, swampy ground, where the water wet my shoes. Dense stubby trees and bushes loomed up in front.

"Where are you leading me, Eras-tus?" I asked sharply.

"Gleasons heben, doan' yo' know

Marse Hank?"

It would not do to throw away time with this fellow. I spoke with sternness and laid my hand on the butt of the pistol at my hip.

"Erastus, after this when I ask you a question answer me if you don't want me to shoot you. What place is this to which you are leading me?"

"It am Black Man's swamp."

"What gave it that name?"

"Dat's whar de runaway slaves some-times used to hide. De swamp am so

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I had run barely 200 yards when I heard the bloodhound thrashing behind me. He was on my trail and emitted a bay which I fancied contained a note of exultation in its horrible discord. Cer-tainly it was inevitable there could be no better place than the logs in the middle of the clearing.

"The men must be some distance be-hind him—ah!"

Matters went with a rush. I had not stood more than three minutes, panting, at bay when the bloodhound burst into sight on the edge of the clearing and charged straight for me like a meteor.

The true bloodhound is not of large size, but sates himself could not possess a more hideous front, while his strength is prodigious. A dusky Hercules cornered by one of those black demons has but one chance of escape, and that is to make his leap or he has slitted his throat with a knife at close quarters, but the chances are always the other way. None knew better than I that in a hand to hand struggle I would be as helpless as against the assault of a panther. But my revolver contained no cartridges. I had no clear straight line to the dog caught sight of me at the same instant that I saw him. He emitted a peculiar cry and rushed across the open space as if shot from a catapult.

I stood as rigid as iron. My panic had vanished, and I never was cooler in my life. Before the bloodhound had half way to me I leveled my weapon and held my finger on the trigger until he was hardly five yards distant. Then I let fly.

I made the statement at the opening of this story that I was an expert with the revolver, as my numerous friends of the Seventh regiment will testify, but I never made a prettier bulleseye than on that October night in a Missis-sippi swamp, when I sent a bullet into the brain of the bloodhound that was charging for my throat. It entered his skull between the eyes, and, ranging downward, must have plowed through the brain matter, being based upon the consequences of the shot.

The dog uttered a rasping howl, and leaping straight up in the air for six or eight feet dropped on his side, rolled over, furiously clawing the ground and air, and then lay motionless, as dead as Julius Cesar.

My fear was that he had companions of his own species. If so, there could be no better place than the present to have it out with them. If I could maintain my marksmanship, I was good for two more.

But intense listening for two or three minutes failed to bring another sound of the nature dreaded. It was evi-dent that only a single hound had been used at this stage of the business. A few hours would doubtless bring a change.

But I heard something else that was to be dreaded with an equal dread. It was the sound made by at least two men as they hurried through the swamp toward the spot whence sounded the shot of the revolver and the death cry of the dog. One at least had a Win-ches-ter, against which my smaller weapon was useless. I had no wish to meet Cy Walters, and, leaping down from the log on which I had been standing, I darted for the opposite side of the clear-ing, with the knowledge that not a mo-mest was to be lost.

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Great as was my haste it was with a second of being too late, for the men who were pursuing me had footed were slower than I suspected. Being from under the protecting shadow of the trees, I was in plain sight as I reached the other side of the clearing at the moment the leading pursuer emerged from the wood. An unexpected complication saved me from being winged before I could plunge into shelter.

There were three men after me, Cy Walters, Archie Hunter and the owner of the bloodhound that had just finished his last hunt for a flying fugitive. It so happened that the bereaved dog owner was in the lead, he probably being better acquainted with the peculiarities of his animal, but the others were only a short distance behind.

The sight of the motionless form on the ground filled the man with irre-sistible rage. With an imprecation, he bounded forward and passed over the carcass, as if to make sure of the animal, but the others were only a short distance behind.

He was in time to catch sight of my vanishing form, as he brought his gun to his shoulder, while Walters and Hunter had just dashed into the clear-ing. Casting one glance over my shoul-der, I leaped among the trees and dodged to one side with my head bent low, as the bullet whistled over me.

But I had not yet shaken off my pur-suers, and the chase was on once more with redoubled vigor.

CHAPTER XI.

My pursuers were so close to me that there was danger of betraying myself by the noise I made in hurrying through the wood. The clearing gave them op-portunity to run across it much faster than I could pick my way through the undergrowth.

Bearing this in mind, my object was to reach a point where I could not be discovered in the obscurity unless the men came directly upon me. It was al-ready established that there had been but one bloodhound on my trail, and he being disposed of nothing more was to be dreaded from his species.

Naturally I made an abrupt change in my course as soon as I was fairly in the wood. I moved to the left, consid-erably slowing my gait, with a view of suppressing every sound of my move-ments. It was impossible to do more than partly to succeed, for the bushes

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