

THE UNDOING OF A DOUBLE

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AUTHOR OF "WHO'S WHO, ETC., ETC."

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CHAPTER III.

Amid the fright of that moment the feeling was strong upon me that a grotesque mistake had been made. Why should these people wish to do me bodily harm? I had committed no crime since my entrance into the state of Maine, and men could not be stirred to such violence by any cause other than an outrageous violation of law.

But the peril was imminent, and I had scarcely time to draw my weapon and back against the wall when the mob swarmed in after the landlord. As the foremost were making for me I leveled my weapon and called out:

"Halt! the first one lays a hand on me will be a dead man!"

The bravest persons do not rush to certain death. There was a pause, although the men in the door kept pushing forward until there was danger of the leaders being forced against me. The countenances were like those of the cannibals during the commune. Anger, fierce resolve and an almost irresistible yearning to clutch my throat were stamped on the faces, some of which were bearded, some clean shaven, while among the savage group were several who were not yet out of their teens. Their attire was coarse and slovenly. Most of them were in slouch hats, without coat or vest, with trousers tucked in their boots. Two had rifles in their hands, three carried revolvers, while many more grasped short, thick clubs, and a fourth gripped a fence paling.

If a hand to hand contest opened, I might shoot down a number, but I could not hold out against a determined attack.

Three persons in the group attracted my attention. Aunt Meg had fled before the mob, but her husband and Squire Gager remained. They were powerfully excited, like the others, but less demonstrative. The landlord was struggling to keep back the rush and begging his friends not to be too hasty. As only partially succeeded in restraining them.

The third man had come through the door and moved a couple of paces aside, where he stood with his back against the wall, silent, but intently scrutinizing me. His face was smooth shaven, and he had dark hair and eyes, and a certain air of the situation was the feeling that I had seen him before, but I could not recall the time or place, and the terrifying circumstances prevented my giving the matter further thought.

I fixed my eyes on the foremost man, the leader, and when something like a hubbub had been restored, so that nothing but the hurried breathing and an occasional muttered imprecation were heard, I said, addressing him:

"From your looks and actions you mean me harm. I demand to know the cause for such treatment."

The savage faces broke into smothering grins, and one or two guffawed. The man to whom I spoke and who held a Winchester in his grasp replied:

"Hank Beyer, you've got cheek. We've all known you for a rogue ever since you was a boy, but we never got it dead to rights on you today."

"Got what dead to rights on me?" I asked, a glimmering of light beginning to break through my muddled brain.

"The horse you stole from Colonel Mansley is in Tom Bulfinch's barn. You've kept clear of the law so long that you thought you was in no danger. You rid the animal here and had Tom put him in his stable. He was stole from Colonel Mansley last night. I don't suppose you've ever heard of this before; of course not."

The truth flashed upon me. The animal which I had bought that afternoon from the stranger at the crossroads had been stolen by him. I had ridden the horse to Aldine without a suspicion of the truth and in my stupidity had helped on the fearful blunder by allowing myself to be addressed by his name without protest. As if that inane business was not enough, I had virtually admitted that my name was Hank Beyer in my conversation with Landlord Bulfinch and Squire Gager. Beyer was my double, and the resemblance between us was so perfect that our own mothers might have been puzzled.

It would be idle for me to attempt to bluff it through. I was in the gravest peril. Many an innocent man has been hanged by a mob, and unless these hoodlums could be convinced of their blunder my life was likely to pay the forfeit.

With this conviction upon me another startling truth became manifest. The real thief was in the room. He was the young man standing near the door, with his back against the wall, silently and intently watching me. He had shaved off his mustache since our meeting and his dress had been changed. He had still a respectable appearance, but unquestionably he was the criminal. No wonder he was interested in me.

"My friends," I said, speaking earnestly, and instantly the hubbub became profound, "you have made a great mistake. You take me for a man whom you call Hank Beyer, but I assure you I am not he."

At that moment it seemed as if bedlam had broken loose. The whole crowd, numbering fully 45, broke into uproarious laughter. Some slapped others on their shoulders, one man bent over the floor, stamped on it, while all thought it the best joke of the season. Landlord Bulfinch may have had a sympathy for me, as he had proved my story, but he made matters still worse by call-

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"Don't show the white feather, Hank! Try some other tack!"

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Southfield yesterday on the steamer New Orleans and started to walk to Aldine."

"What business brought you to Aldine?" again interrupted Dungan.

"I am bookkeeper in a bank. Our cashier ran away some weeks ago with a large amount of the bank's funds, and we heard he was hiding at Aldine."

"He never been here," said the man who had been speaking to me.

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CHAPTER IV.

Every eye turned toward the man whom I indicated. He must have expected something of the kind from my manner, for he was prepared for it, and never was there more perfect acting. He stared right and left, as if he did not quite comprehend what I said and then with a laugh called out:

"What's that, Hank?"

"You are Hank Beyer," I added, keeping my finger pointed at him and restraining my anger. "You know it as well as I. Dare you deny it?"

His merriment seemed so hearty that several joined in. Comprehending his baseness, it required my utmost self-restraint to keep from sending a bullet into his worthless brains.

"If you deny that you are Hank Beyer, who are you?"

"You ought to know, Hank," he said, with amazing coolness. "I came up on the steamer Bonito Belle yesterday with you from New Orleans and you won all I had at poker."

All who looked at the miscreant must have noted his extraordinary resemblance to me. Had he not removed his mustache the difference would have been unappreciable. His preparation for his part was admirable, for when he spoke I observed that his voice sounded different from when he talked with me at the crossroads. He had succeeded to perfection in disguising it.

Since he was a stranger to the rest (or, what was the same, they believed him to be such), I hoped to gain an advantage from that fact.

"Who are you?" I thundered.

"I'm not accustomed to introduce myself to folks in that fashion, but you haven't forgot that when you gave me your name on the steamer as Hank Beyer I told you mine was Richard Early—at your service, gentlemen."

And the unconscionable scoundrel doffed his hat and bowed to the right and left with the mawkish blandness of a Chesterfield.

"If you are a stranger like myself, what business brought you to Aldine?"

"I explained all that to you on the boat. My uncle sent me here to look up the market, but," he added, shrewd enough to perceive the tangle in which I was likely to involve him, "I decline to be questioned any further by you, though I am ready to give these gentlemen any information they desire."

Nothing could have been cleverer than his manner and words. His announcement that he was after cotton land was a passport to the good will of the countrymen, most of whom were eager to sell their unproductive property. His glib story of our traveling together on the steamer was accepted as truth.

"Then you deny selling me that horse yesterday?" I said, frowning in the words into which I had stepped.

"Oh, I don't deny anything," he answered with a bored air. "Tell your story to these gentlemen. You make me excessively weary."

It was vain to dally with him. Staggered for the moment, I was about to address words to those around me, when Squire Gager, who had not yet spoken, posed. He was a conscientious man, and though he undoubtedly sympathized with me, did not sympathize with the fraudulent action which he believed I was trying to weave.

"I wish to ask this man a few questions," he said, and the universal respect felt for the officer of the law caused a hush to fall upon the angry throng. I bowed, suspecting what was coming.

"You don't deny that you came up to this hotel this afternoon on the chestnut gelding which Mr. Bulfinch put into his stable at your request?"

"I have already admitted that. I afterward crossed to the postoffice and got a letter which was mailed from New York and addressed to me, Edward Kenmore."

And any of us might have done the same by asking for it, having arranged that little matter beforehand," said the squire, brushing aside this cobweb, when I stood mute, not knowing what to say, but ready to go down with colic.

Only the unexpected occurred. The good angel appeared in the last person to whom I looked for support. He was Jim Dungan, the leader of the vigilantes.

CHAPTER V.

Turning toward the men who had swarmed around him, Dungan spoke in a loud voice and an earnestness of manner that commanded attention:

"You all know me well enough to know I haven't a grain of pity for horse thieves. This part of the state has suffered so much from that sort of people during the last ten years and the courts have been so slow in getting hold of them that we formed ourselves into a vigilance committee of the whole to regulate things, and I flatter myself we've had tolerable success in the business."

He "paused for a reply" and received a thunderous one. There were general nodding of heads and exclamations of approval.

"And we intend that the good work shall go on," he resumed. "A rope and the limb of the nearest tree is our medicine for men that have an itching for other folks' property in the shape of horseflesh. But boys, we all believe in

fair play. Now, while you and me are satisfied that the man standing on t'other side of the table is Hank Beyer, and no one else, there's one chance in a million that he ain't. That chap over there by the door calls himself Dick Early. He's a stranger to us, and there ain't any denying that he looks like Hank. If he had a mustache, he would look more like him than Hank does himself."

He laughed at his own facetiousness, and the forbidding countenances were lit up with approving grins.

"Once or twice when he stood there talking," added Dungan, alluding to me, "I've noticed something that was a little odd—that is, that didn't seem to be quite like Hank. I can't tell what it is, but maybe some of you have observed the same."

He looked around again for signs of assent, but unfortunately there was none. No one shared his doubt, and Squire Gager spoiled the possible effect of his appeal by a sad swaying of his head and the remark:

"Hank has been away long 'nough to pick up some differences of speech, if that is what you mean, Jim, but you're 'way off."

In another respect this remark served me well. It roused the resentment of Jim. Evidently he was the leading spirit of the neighborhood and was not accustomed to be opposed like this, even by Squire Gager. I noticed the flash of his gray eye and the compression of his thin lips as he said:

"Wal, we'll take till tomorrow mornin' to drive out what doubts we have in mind."

"But we hain't got no doubts, Jim," remarked a man standing at the leader's elbow.

"That don't make no difference. I hain't."

"How are we going to have them aforesaid doubts removed?" asked the squire.

"I have a plan that will do it," was the reply of Dungan.

I was satisfied that he had no definite scheme at that moment, but that he expected to hit upon something decisive.

"Begging your pardon, gentlemen, I think Mr. Dungan is right. No matter how black it looks against Hank, give the poor devil a show."

It was Hank himself who made this remark, and nothing could have been more politic. At that moment there was not a person in the room besides us two who was not morally convinced that I was the real criminal. Jim Dungan believed it, but the rude chivalry of his nature answered my appeal. He intended to spite me until morning, when none would be more eager than he to pull the rope over the limb with me dangling from the end of it.

The man's personality impressed itself upon the rough group. They accepted his decision and looked expectantly at him for further orders.

"We'll hold this fellow till tomorrow mornin'. Then, if matters stand as they seem to be now—that is, if we hain't found out that he's what he says he is—why that ends it."

"Will you bind him?" asked one of the mob.

"If you're afraid he might bite you, we'll put a muzzle on to him," replied Jim with the sarcasm, and a general guffaw followed.

"No, gents," he added, "we won't tie him up, 'cause there ain't any use of it. We'll take his gun away from him, set him in the very chair from which he has run, and put two men to watch him through the night. How will that do?"

A general nodding of the heads showed how quickly the leader had molded the turbulent spirits into his way of thinking.

"Fill 'em up," he continued, looking round the room into the different faces. "Cy Walters and Archie Hunter the guards. They'll stay here with the prisoner all night, ready to shoot him on the first move. Hank, I'll trouble you for your shooting iron and cartridges," said Dungan, turning abruptly toward me.

I promptly handed them over with the remark:

"I surrender with pleasure to you and place myself at your disposal."

He shoved the weapon without speaking into his capacious hip pocket, the rest of the crowd looking on.

Night had fully come and an oil lamp was lighted by Landlord Bulfinch and placed on the table. Dungan talked for a few minutes in a low tone with the host, and then, turning to me, spoke loud enough for all to hear:

To be Continued.

It was His Deal.

A mining engineer who has returned from Alaska brings, among other interesting things, evidence that the higher the latitude the greater the latitude.

Watching a poker game in which the stakes were heavy he saw a player give himself four aces from the bottom of the pack.

Burning with indignation at such shameless cheating, he turned to a bystander and whispered, "Did you see that?"

"See what?"

"Why, that fellow dealt himself four aces!"

"Well, wasn't it his deal?"

Why We Bathe.

Professor Vivian Leves, at the London Institution, recently furnished the following answer to the question, "Why do we bathe?"

"Twenty-eight miles of sweat glands in our skin are discharging 30 ounces of water per day and leaving upon the outer surface of the skin a full ounce of solid matter. These are aided by the oil glands of the hair, which facilitate the adherence of external dirt. Hence the refreshing character of the morning bath and the necessity for grease absorbing alkalies in soap."

George—I have just invested in one of those "pepper and salt" suits.

Robert—Ah! That ought to be good for two seasons.

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