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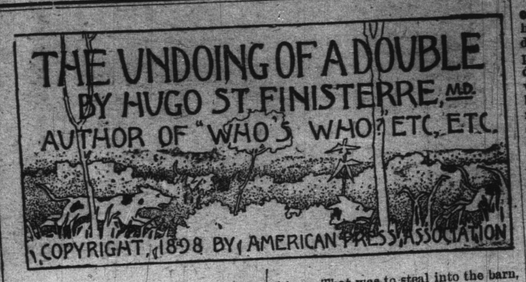

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"You're just too late, Cy," I muttered. "You ought to have awakened a minute sooner if you wished to see lively times."

But if Cy Walters had discovered the flight of his prisoner while his jailers slept he did not abandon the effort to recapture him. I saw the huge form crouch together and clamber heavily but quickly through the window. Then, being still between me and the light, the head and shoulders were seen sway ing grotesquely about as he strode through the garden, and, as if impelled by perverse fate, came in as direct a line for the spot where I stood as if the sun were shining. It was a good time for me to make a change of base, but I stood my ground.

Doubtless the army experience of Cy Walters helped him in outwitting his foes at night, but it was an extraordinary act, which must have been purely accidental, that held him to a mathematically true line until he came directly opposite me with only the paling fence separating us.

I had the advantage, inasmuch as the dim light beyond gave me a partial glimpse of his gigantic figure, but his eyes were keen, and he saw me before attempting to leap the obstruction between us. That keen vision, too, showed my revolver leveled at his head.

"Hands up!" I commanded in a voice whose earnestness could not be mistaken.

Cy Walters was unquestionably a brave man, and it is such who know when to fight and when to surrender. Up went both huge hands, one grasping the Winchester, so that it was interposed like a rude cross against the faint background.

"Drop that gun!"

Down it went with a thump to his feet.

"My man, as you see, I have the drop on you. It would serve you right if I stretched you beside your rifle, but I have never committed murder and don't intend to begin now. You take me for Hank Beyer. If I were he, there would be no sense in denying it when it would bring me no danger, but I repeat that I am another person. Everything that I said at the hotel tonight was true. I was never in this part of the country until yesterday. The real Hank Beyer was that young man whom I pointed out standing by the door of the dining room. He had made himself look different by shaving off his mustache, and he also disguised his voice. What do you think of my statement?"

"It's all a d——d lie!"

Mr. Walters was evidently a man of convictions. I had not shaken his belief in my identity with the detested horse thief.

"Very well, believe as you choose, but it won't be long before you will learn that you and your friends are the biggest fools in Mississippi."

"Me and Archie Hunter have showed that already in allowing you to climb out of the winder while we slept and after you had took Archie's pistol from his lap; that's a little the worst yet—augh!"

It was clear he had no suspicion of the part played by the young woman, and it was not my place to enlighten him.

"It was a piece of tomfoolery, Cy, and the boys will have the laugh on you both when you tell them how I gave you the slip and got out of the country."

"You hain't got out the kentry yet," was his significant comment.

"Not just yet, but I soon shall, thanks to you and your stepson. You see I have Archie's revolver, and now I shall take your Winchester. Since you persist in looking upon me as a horse-thief you may as well include the theft of weapons."

He emitted a blistering imprecation, but saw there was no help for it. He was still reaching for the stars when I commanded:

"Face about toward the hotel!"

He complied with surprising promptness.

"If you stoop or attempt to pick up your gun, I'll shoot. It won't be the first time I fired a revolver, and you are in good range."

Despite my watchfulness and readiness to use my weapon the fellow outwitted me.

"March," I added, "and don't pause or look around until you climb back through the window."

He began moving, but his feet seemed to become entangled in the vines that had partly retarded my steps. He advanced slowly, tripped, swore and struck his toe against some obstruction. Then he straightened up and stumbled onward with the same difficulty.

The cunning veteran was kicking his Winchester along in front of him, and I had no suspicion of it.

In this manner he advanced for fully a rod, when, like a flash, he stooped, snatched up his rifle, and, wheeling with the same amazing quickness, let fly at me. I felt the ball graze my temple and snip off a bit of hair. Dazed for the moment, I discharged two chambers of my revolver, but in the flurry missed, as he had just done with his Winchester. Before I could pull myself together for another shot he was beyond fair range, while he, knowing the uselessness of firing at me, refrained from the attempt.

I had safely emerged from my prison, but my full escape remained to be made. It would not do to stay at Alcidine, nor indeed anywhere in that section. It was 20 miles to the steamer landing, and I could hardly feel safe until aboard of one of the boats and steaming up or down the Mississippi.

I was tempted to try a daredevil thing. That was to steal into the barn, remount the horse I had honestly bought and ride away at headlong speed. Reflection, however, convinced me that such an act would invite my own ruin. My escape was known to Cy Walters and Archie Hunter, and they would be on the alert for anything of that nature.

Standing just outside the garden of the old inn, I decided that my best course was to push inland until I reached some town or village where I was unknown or could communicate with the authorities should it prove necessary. It would seem that the facts being as I have given it should be an easy matter for me to escape the punishment due another man, but unfortunately

Snatched up his rifle and let fly at me.

lynchings have been and are still too common in some parts of our country for the most innocent person to be absolutely safe.

It did not take me long to reach this conclusion, and simultaneous with it came the alarming discovery that I was mistaken in believing I was alone.

CHAPTER IX.

It will be remembered that the night was clear and starlit. There would be no moon until near morning, and it was so new that the additional light was not likely to be appreciable. There was scarcely a cloud in the sky, so that it was easy to distinguish objects at a distance of 15 or 20 yards.

The gentle wind was crisp and pleasant, and I breathed deep drafts after my long confinement in the stuffy room of the inn. The ozone, with the reawakening of hope, filled me with delicious joy. I was strong and brave.

Such was my mood when I was startled by the unmistakable sound of a footfall behind me. My first thought was that Archie Hunter had joined his parent in the search and was trying to steal upon me from the rear. I wheeled, revolver in hand, and faced the new danger.

I was looking over an undulating meadow which sloped away in the gloom beyond sight. Neither on the right nor left could its boundary be detected. It was at the rear of the inn, and therefore led away from the main road, which I dared not travel, since the indignant citizens, determined not to be balked of their prey, would scour the whole country for me, and it would be impossible to throw them off my track.

Though I had heard the stealthy footfall, I could not see anything to explain it. So far as I was able to judge, no man was in sight and yet it was incredible that my ears should have deceived me.

Scanning my surroundings, I observed that the field upon whose margin I was standing was uncultivated, and a little to the left was what appeared to be a natural hummock. With no special object in mind, I walked toward it, when, to my astonishment, it rose to its feet with the question:

"Hello, dat yo', Marse Hank?"

It was a short, stocky negro who thus addressed me, and without stopping to explain his blunder as to my identity I demanded:

"Who are you?"

"Huh, dean' yo' know Rastus Brown, Colonel Mansley's nigger?"

"What are you doing here?"

The question seemed to strike the African as excessively funny, for he humped his shoulders and chuckled.

"Who yo' s'pose sent me?"

"I haven't any idea."

"Hain't, eh? Yah, yah! Why, Miss Esther done sent me."

"What for?"

"Wid her complerments and de special obquest 'dat yo'll run like de debbil."

"Did she say that?"

"Doan' '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' do't."

"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 t'ought I'd better look after her 'cause she an' younger dan me, yo' know."

"And what made Miss Esther leave her home at so late an hour?"

"Yo' see, de colonel comed home last night wid de news dat de folks had yo' locked up fur hoss stealin and dat dey was gwine to hung yo' fur takin his pet animal. De colonel was awful ramparageous and swore he hoped dey would hang yo' if it was yo' dat stole de chestnut hoss, fur de colonel doan' seem to hab much love fur a hoss t'ief."

"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 wan't round dat I was to scorch hes 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 frettenin yo' up so dat yo' would be fit to kill in de mawnin 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 apparent. Miss Esther Mansley, if not engaged in marriage to the conscienceless Henry Beyer, loved him despite his worthlessness and the fact that he had stolen a valuable horse belonging to her 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, believing I was her lover. The act was womanlike, and who shall blame her therefor, even though she knew the unworthiness 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.

"Rastus, yon say Miss Esther wishes me to run and it is the best thing for me to do, but did she say in what direction?"

"I s'pose from her obserwations dat she meant fur yo' to run to de debbil, 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' doan't know much 'bout dis country."

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

"What do you advise? What direction is best for me to take?"

"My advice am to head fur Noo Orleans 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 got tired, but when yo' arrove 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 Walters and Archie Hunter would not sit down and wait for daylight before making another move against me, and unless morning found me several miles from that spot it would find me in imminent peril of being recaptured or shot down.

Another fact was not to be forgotten. Although I had possession of an excellent revolver, only three chambers were loaded, and I was without an additional cartridge, for Jim Dungan when he relieved me of my weapon took good care, as I have related, to supply himself with the accompanying ammunition. It was necessary, therefore, that I should husband 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 me eccentric that night, but probably he laid it to my flustered condition. He muttered 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 perceptible 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, Erastus?" I asked sharply.

"Gracious 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 sometimes used to hide. De swamp am so

Erastus Brown emitted an exclamation of mortal fear and dashed off.

big and sich a bully place fur hidin dat de obersees couldn't allers track and brung 'em back. Dey would steal out in de nighttime and smoke up to de nigger quarters, whar dey got somethin to eat. Yo've heerd 'bout it?"

"Certainly, and you wish me to hide in there till the hue and cry is over"—

At that instant the colored man, Erastus Brown, emitted an exclamation of mortal fear and dashed off at the top of his speed, leaving me alone.

CHAPTER X.

Although the strange cry that sounded through the night and threw the African into a panic was unfamiliar to me, I could not mistake its meaning. It was the baying of a bloodhound.

When first heard, it was so distant that it could have borne no relation to me, but the infernal fate that seemed to cling to me had brought the owner to the inn, where Cy Walters was prompt to take advantage of the frightful means thus placed at his disposal for my undoing. I knew that the scent of the animals approaches as close to the marvelous as anything in this world. It was impossible for me to shake off the brute or brutes (for there was no saying whether there was one or more on my track) except by taking to the water, and I knew not whether there was a stream within miles of me, nor could I guess which way to turn to search for one.

These descendants of the man hunters of slavery days would trail a fugitive into the wildest recesses of a swamp and compel him to escape rending by climbing a tree, where his pursuers could capture him at their leisure. I drew my revolver and with something of the panic shown by Erastus turned toward the wood which loomed in front and plunged into Black Man's swamp, intent only upon getting away from my enemy, who was to be dreaded more than a jungle tiger.

The ground was soft and spongy, the best in the world for trailing, and none could have known better than I that the brute would soon be on my heels.

"If there is but one, or possibly two," I reflected, "I will settle him with my revolver."

The baying sounded at intervals, and I fancied it came from one animal, though there could well be several whose cries were similar. The men who accompanied the hound did so in silence. There was no call for them to waste their strength in shouting.

I thrashed ahead, sometimes catching my feet in the wirelike vines, with the branches switching my face and a larger limb occasionally compelling me to change my course, but all the time I was plunging deeper into the swamp which had served more than one runaway slave in the past.

The terrifying danger, leaving out of account the dog, was from the men at his heels. It had been announced by Jim Dungan, leader of the mob, that I was to be shot down if I tried to escape from my captors, and I had not only made the attempt, but had well nigh succeeded. Consequently they would make short work of me, and Cy Walters would not hesitate to give me a variation of the "witch's parole," as he had done in the case of more than one miserable wretch in wartimes.

I had run barely 200 yards when I heard the bloodhound thrashing behind me. He was on my trail and smitted a bay which I fancied contained a note of exultation in its horrible discord. Certainly it was warranted.

To my surprise, the ground suddenly sloped upward, and before I suspected anything of the kind I debouched into a small clearing less than half an acre in extent, in the middle of which was a pile of logs, evidently the ruins of some cabin that had tumbled to pieces through the lapse of time and the wear of weather.

With that instinctive longing to defer the final calamity I ran swiftly across the open space to the pile of logs, where I paused, revolver in hand, and looked back. Since a meeting with the dog was inevitable there could be no better place than the logs in the middle of the clearing.

"The man must be some distance behind him—ah!"

Matters went with a rush. I had not stood more than three minutes, panting, at bay when the hound 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 satan himself could not possess a more hideous front, while his strength is prodigious. A dusky Hercules cornered by one of those black demons has brained him with a club when he made 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 three charges.

In the clear starlight 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 hound was 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 bullseye than on that October night in a Mississippi 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 his heart, my theory 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 Cæsar.

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 evident 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 Winchester, 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 clearing, with the knowledge that not a moment was to be lost.

Great as was my haste it was within a second of being too late, for the men who were pursuing me hot footed were closer 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 irrestrainable rage. With an imprecation, he bounded forward and paused over the carcass, as if to make sure of the truth. A glance was sufficient. Then, Winchester in hand, he glared around for sight of the one who had done the deed.

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 clearing. Casting one glance over my shoulder, 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 pursuers, 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 opportunity 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 already 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, considerably slowing my gait, with a view of suppressing every sound of my movements. It was impossible to do more than partly to succeed, for the bushes

I paused and listened.

and vines were so intricate that no one other than an American Indian could have advanced without noise, and the sound of the eager footsteps almost on my heels kept me going when I ought to have been still.

I had traversed less than 50 yards in this manner when I paused and listened for evidence of my pursuers, but the stillness of the swamp was profound. Probably they had stopped with the same object. At any rate they did not know exactly where I was, and I determined not to give up the advantage. The uneasy feeling, however, which came with the certainty that they were close at hand led me to edge farther off, doing so with such stealthy care that I was sure of not betraying myself. My progress of necessity was slow, but still it was progress, and that was a consolation.

Suddenly I felt a cold sensation in the foot which I thrust forward, as with bowed head I parted the bushes in front so as to admit of my noiseless advance. The cause of the chill was apparent. I had placed my foot in water that came over the shoe top. Since, however, the thing could not be helped and the foot seemed to rest on firm support I did not withdraw it. Still leaning over I advanced the other foot and was startled to find the water reach half way to my knee.

"This won't do," I reflected as I withdrew. "By and by I shall be swimming."

That such was the fact became apparent the next moment, when I perceived with the aid of the star gleam that I was standing on the edge of a stream of water whose depth, I had already found, rapidly increased from the shore. It was easy to distinguish the other bank, which was hardly 20 feet away. I had come to the side of a creek that wound through Black Man's swamp and could reach the farther shore only by swimming.

All will understand my feeling that safety could not be attained except by placing myself on the other bank. The belief was chimerical, but it was none the less urgent for that. My aversion to swimming the stream, however, was intense. The water was chilly, and I should be excessively uncomfortable in my saturated and draggled clothing. Some other means of ferrying the creek must be found.

Meanwhile I did not forget my pursuers, who were undoubtedly picking their way through the wood much nearer me than was pleasant. Because of this fear I began stealing along the bank of the dark stream in the weak hope of finding a favorable place for crossing, though sensible at the same time of the absurdity of the expectation.

"By gracious, but that's lucky!" I exclaimed within the following ten minutes as I halted at the base of a thick cypress, as I judged it to be, which, starting on the edge of the creek just before me, grew straight toward the other bank, as if nature had set out with the purpose of forming a foot-

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RHEUMATISM

bridge, but changed her mind, just before reaching the farther shore, and, curving upward gradually, attained the perpendicular. Thus the first twenty odd feet of the trunk took the form of a bow, after which the course was as vertical as that of a mountain pine.

"I couldn't ask for a better bridge," was my conclusion after a brief study of the course of the vegetable crank in front of me.

Being without any luggage, my limbs were free, and, hesitating only long enough to make sure of my bearings, I carefully climbed upon the trunk, which was almost horizontal, with a diameter of nearly two feet. No limbs appeared until at the point farthest from the bank which I was leaving—that is, where the trunk began curving upward toward the perpendicular. There a bifurcation took place, the tree dividing as near as may be into halves, each of which again subdivided until the smaller limbs and branches were numberless.

I regarded this conformation as fortunate, since it offered a good support from which to leap to the shore that was not distant.

With so broad a base and the firm, shaggy bark upon which to rest my feet, it ought to have been easy to traverse the brief distance upright. I should have done so had the sun been shining; but, as it was, I began creeping forward on my hands and knees, ready for any treachery in my bridge.

I had not gone half the distance when a shiver of fright passed through me at the reflection that I was repeating in a small way the experience of a few minutes before. In other words, I had advanced into the open, where I was in view of my pursuers if they should happen to reach the stream anywhere near where I did. Had this thought occurred to me before setting out I should have delayed my action until there was more assurance on that point, but it was too late to turn back, and with more nervousness than I had felt since starting on my night's journey, resembling the trunk, not pausing until I reached its first forking.

The vast relief of this situation will be understood when it is stated that it gave me the benefit of the shadow cast by the branches above as well as by those on the shore. There was little starlight, but it was mighty comfortable to know that at that moment none of it reached me. Clasping one arm about the large limb for steadiness, I rose to the upright posture, so close now to the farther bank that it was an easy leap to reach it. Standing thus, secure for the moment from detection, I turned my head and peered into the darkness which had just been placed behind me.

"I've been mighty lucky so far," I muttered. "I shouldn't be surprised if those three fellows were near the base of that tree"—

By heavens, I was right! The thought had hardly time to frame itself when the crackling of a twig told that my pursuers had reached the very spot. Had there been any doubt of the fact it was removed by a voice which I recognized as that of the grim and terrible Cy Walters:—

"He was heading this way when we last heerd him."

His gruff tones were in so low a key that but for the profound stillness I should not have caught the words. Although aware of the exact point whence the sound issued, I could not see him nor either of his companions.

"I wonder if he crossed on that tree," remarked another, though I was not sufficiently familiar with the voice to identify the speaker.

"It would be just like him. Hank knows every turning of the swamp."

"And that's just why he wouldn't climb over here," added Cy.

"Why not?"

"'Cause he knows he wouldn't gain nothing by it."

"He'd gain as much as by going anywhere else."

"A couple of us oughter foller and find out," observed a man who, I suspected, was the owner of the defunct bloodhound, a suspicion that was confirmed by his addendum:

"I'd rather he'd stole all the horses in Mississippi than to shoot Victor. Hank Beyer has got to settle with me for that."

"If you wanter, you kin foller him over that tree," said Cy. "It may be Hank was fool enough to try it, but Archie and me will push things on this side of the creek."

"It's a good idea anyway, for us to divide. Some one will be sure to run ag'in the scamp and have it out with him."

And with this reasonable remark the owner of the lamented dog stepped upon the horizontal trunk and began moving toward me, crouching among the limbs a few paces away, with the immovable conviction that matters were growing more interesting with each passing minute.

[To be continued.]

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Swiss maidens have wide and deep courtship license, but in many of the cantons they are allowed but a narrow choice of bridegrooms, it being a rigorously enforced, if unwritten, law that they must marry a youth of their own neighborhood. In many villages every marriageable youth belongs to a society whose sole object is to prevent any and every youth from outside from coming a-courting the maidens of the society's village.

In Hungary there are thousands of villages and hundreds of small towns without a doctor within ten miles.