The Devil's Own

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Saga of the Black Hawk War

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CHAPTER I

AT OLD FORT ARMSTRONG

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It was the early springtime, and my history tells me the year was 1832, although now that seems so far away I almost hesitate to write the date. It appears surprising that through the haze of all those intervening years—intensely active years with me—I should now be able to recall so clearly the scene of that far-off morning of my youth, and depict in memory each minor detail. Yet, as you read on, and realize yourself the stirring events resulting from that idle moment, you may be able to comprehend the deep impression left upon my mind, which no cycle of time could ever erase.

I was barely twenty then, a strong, almost headstrong boy, and the far wilderness was still very new to me, although for two years past I had held army commission and been assigned to duty in frontier forts. Yet never previously had I been stationed at quite so isolated an outpost of civilization as was this combination of rock and log defense erected at the southern extremity of Rock Island, fairly marooned amid the sweep of the great river, with Indian-haunted land stretching for leagues on every side. A mere handful of troops was quartered there, technically two companies of infantry, yet numbering barely enough for one; and this in spite of rumors daily drifting to us that the Sacs and Foxes, with their main village just below, were already becoming restless and warlike, inflamed by the slow

approach of white settlers into the valley of the Rock. Indeed, so short was the garrison of officers, that the harassed commander had ventured to retain me for field service, in spite of the fact that I was detailed to staff duty, had borne dispatches up the Mississippi from General Gaines, and expected to return again by the first boat.

The morning was one of deep-blue sky and bright sunshine, the soft spring air vocal with the song of birds. As soon as early drill ended I had left the fort-enclosure, and sought a lonely perch on the great rock above the mouth of the cave. It was a spot I loved. Below, extended a magnificent vista of the river, fully a mile wide from shore to shore, spreading out in a sheet of glittering silver, unbroken in its vast sweep toward the sea except for a few small, willow-studded islands a mile or two away, with here and there the black dot of an Indian canoe gliding across the surface. I had been told of a fight amid those islands in 1814, a desperate savage battle off the mouth of the Rock, and the memory of this was in my mind as my eyes searched those distant shores, silent now in their drapery of fresh green foliage, yet appearing strangely desolate and forlorn, as they merged into the gray tint of distance. Well I realized that they only served to screen savage activity beyond, a covert amid which lurked danger and death; for over there, in the near shadow of the Rock Valley, was where Black Hawk, dissatisfied, revengeful, dwelt with his British band, gathering swiftly about him the younger, fighting warriors of every tribe his influence could reach. He had been at the fort but two days before, a tall, straight, taciturn Indian; no chief by birth, yet a born leader of men,

defiant in speech, and insolent of demeanor in spite of the presence also at the council of his people's true representative, the silent, cautious Keokuk.

Even with my small knowledge of such things it was plain enough to be seen there existed deadly hatred between these two, and that Keokuk's desire for peace with the whites alone postponed an outbreak. I knew then but little of the cause. The Indian tongue was strange to me, and the interpreter failed to make clear the under-lying motive, yet I managed to gather that, in spite of treaty, Black Hawk refused to leave his oldtime hunting grounds to the east of the river, and openly threatened war. The commandant trusted Keokuk, with faith that his peaceful counsels would prevail; but when Black Hawk angrily left the chamber and my eyes followed him to his waiting canoe, my mind was convinced that this was not destined to be the end—that only force of arms would ever tame his savage spirit.

This all came back to me in memory as I sat there, searching out that distant shore line, and picturing in imagination the restless Indian camp concealed from view beyond those tree-crowned bluffs. Already tales reached us of encroaching settlers advancing along the valley, and of savage, retaliating raids which could only terminate in armed encounters. Already crops had been destroyed, and isolated cabins fired, the work as yet of prowling, irresponsible bands, yet always traced in their origin to Black Hawk's village. That Keokuk could continue to control his people no longer seemed probable to me, for the Hawk was evidently the stronger character of the two, possessed

the larger following, and made no attempt to conceal the depth of his hatred for all things American.

Now to my view all appeared peaceful enough—the silent, deserted shores, the desolate sweep of the broad river, the green-crowned bluffs, the quiet log fort behind me, its stockaded gates wide open, with not even a sentry visible, a flag flapping idly at the summit of a high pole, and down below where I sat a little river steamboat tied to the wharf, a dingy stern-wheeler, with the word "Warrior" painted across the pilot house. My eyes and thoughts turned that way wonderingly. The boat had tied up the previous evening, having just descended from Prairie du Chien, and, it was rumored at that time, intended to depart down river for St. Louis at daybreak. Yet even now I could perceive no sign of departure. There was but the thinnest suggestion of smoke from the single stack, no loading, or unloading, and the few members of the crew visible were idling on the wharf, or grouped upon the forward deck, a nondescript bunch of river boatmen, with an occasional black face among them, their voices reaching me, every sentence punctuated by oaths. Above, either seated on deck stools, or moving restlessly about, peering over the low rail at the shore, were a few passengers, all men roughly dressed—miners from Fevre River likely, with here and there perchance an adventurer from farther above—impatient of delay. I was attracted to but two of any interest. These were standing alone together near the stern, a heavily-built man with white hair and beard, and a younger, rather slender fellow, with clipped, black moustache. Both were unusually well dressed, the latter exceedingly natty and fashionable in

attire, rather overly so I thought, while the former wore a long coat, and high white stock. Involuntarily I had placed them in my mind as river gamblers, but was still observing their movements with some curiosity, when Captain Thockmorton crossed the gangplank and began ascending the steep bluff. The path to be followed led directly past where I was sitting, and, recognizing me, he stopped to exchange greetings.

"What! have you finished your day's work already, Lieutenant?" he exclaimed pleasantly. "Mine has only just begun."

"So I observe. It was garrison talk last night that the *Warrior* was to depart at daylight."

"That was the plan. However, the *Wanderer* went north during the night," he explained, "and brought mail from below, so we are being held for the return letters. I am going up to the office now."

My eyes returned to the scene below.

"You have some passengers aboard."

"A few; picked up several at the lead mines, besides those aboard from Prairie du Chien. No soldiers this trip, though. They haven't men enough at Fort Crawford to patrol the walls."

"So I'm told; and only the merest handful here. Frankly, Captain, I do not know what they can be thinking about down below, with this Indian uprising threatened. The situation is more serious than they imagine. In my judgment Black Hawk means to fight."

"I fully agree with you," he replied soberly. "But Governor Clark is the only one who senses the situation. However, I

learned last night from the commander of the *Wanderer* that troops were being gathered at Jefferson Barracks. I'll probably get a load of them coming back. What is your regiment, Knox?"

"The Fifth Infantry."

"The Fifth! Then you do not belong here?"

"No; I came up with dispatches, but have not been permitted to return. What troops are at Jefferson—did you learn?"

"Mostly from the First, with two companies of the Sixth, Watson told me; only about four hundred altogether. How many warriors has Black Hawk?"

"No one knows. They say his emissaries are circulating among the Wyandottes and Potawatamies, and that he has received encouragement from the Prophet which makes him bold."

"The Prophet! Oh, you mean Wabokieshiek? I know that old devil, a Winnebago; and if Black Hawk is in his hands he will not listen very long even to White Beaver. General Atkinson passed through here lately; what does he think?"

I shook my head doubtfully.

"No one can tell, Captain; at least none of the officers here seem in his confidence. I have never met him, but I learn this: he trusts the promises of Keokuk, and continues to hold parley. Under his orders a council was held here three days since, which ended in a quarrel between the two chiefs. However, there is a rumor that dispatches have already been sent to Governors Clark and Reynolds suggesting a call for volunteers, yet I cannot vouch for the truth of the tale."

"White Beaver generally keeps his own counsel, yet he knows Indians, and might trust me with his decision, for we are old friends. If you can furnish me with a light, I'll start this pipe of mine going."

I watched the weather-beaten face of the old riverman, as he puffed away in evident satisfaction. I had chanced to meet him only twice before, yet he was a well-known character between St. Louis and Prairie du Chien; rough enough to be sure, from the very nature of his calling, but generous and straightforward.

"Evidently all of your passengers are not miners, Captain," I ventured, for want of something better to say. "Those two standing there at the stern, for instance."

He turned and looked, shading his eyes, the smoking pipe in one hand.

"No," he said, "that big man is Judge Beaucaire, from Missouri. He has a plantation just above St. Louis, an old French grant. He went up with me about a month ago—my first trip this season—to look after some investment on the Fevre, which I judge hasn't turned out very well, and has been waiting to go back with me. Of course you know the younger one."

"Never saw him before."

"Then you have never traveled much on the lower river. That's Joe Kirby."

"Joe Kirby?"

"Certainly; you must have heard of him. First time I ever knew of his drifting so far north, as there are not many pickings up here. Have rather suspected he might be laying

for Beaucaire, but the two haven't touched a card coming down."

"He is a gambler, then?"

"A thoroughbred; works between St. Louis and New Orleans. I can't just figure out yet what he is doing up here. I asked him flat out, but he only laughed, and he isn't the sort of man you get very friendly with, some say he has Indian blood in him, so I dropped it. He and the Judge seem pretty thick, and they may be playing in their rooms."

"Have you ever told the planter who the other man is?"

"What, me, told him? Well, hardly; I've got troubles enough of my own. Beaucaire is of age, I reckon, and they tell me he is some poker player himself. The chances are he knows Kirby better than I do; besides I've run this river too long to interfere with my passengers. See you again before we leave; am going up now to have a talk with the Major."

My eyes followed as he disappeared within the open gates, a squatty, strongly-built figure, the blue smoke from his pipe circling in a cloud above his head. Then I turned idly to gaze once again down the river, and observe the groups loitering below. I felt but slight interest in the conversation just exchanged, nor did the memory of it abide for long in my mind. I had not been close enough to observe Beaucaire, or glimpse his character, while the presence of a gambler on the boat was no such novelty in those days as to chain my attention. Indeed, these individuals were everywhere, a recognized institution, and, as Thockmorton had intimated, the planter himself was fully conversant with the game, and quite able to protect himself. Assuredly it was none of my affair, and yet a certain curiosity caused me to

observe the movements of the two so long as they remained on deck. However, it was but a short while before both retired to the cabin, and then my gaze returned once more to the sullen sweep of water, while my thoughts drifted far away.

A soldier was within a few feet of me, and had spoken, before I was even aware of his approach.

"Lieutenant Knox."

I looked about quickly, recognizing the major's orderly.

"Yes, Sanders, what is it?"

"Major Bliss requests, sir, that you report at his office at once."

"Very well. Is he with Captain Thockmorton?"

"Not at present, sir; the captain has gone to the post-sutler's."

Wondering what might be desired of me, yet with no conception of the reality, I followed after the orderly through the stockade gate, and across the small parade ground toward the more pretentious structure occupied by the officers of the garrison.

CHAPTER II

ON FURLOUGH

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A number of soldiers off duty were loitering in front of the barracks, while a small group of officers occupied chairs on the log porch of their quarters, enjoying the warmth of the sun. I greeted these as I passed, conscious that their eyes followed me curiously as I approached the closed door of the commandant's office. The sentry without brought his rifle to a salute, but permitted my passage without challenge. A voice within answered my knock, and I entered, closing the door behind me. The room was familiar—plain, almost shabbily furnished, the walls decorated only by the skins of wild beasts, and holding merely a few rudely constructed chairs and a long pine table. Major Bliss glanced up at my entrance, with deep-set eyes hidden beneath bushy-gray eyebrows, his smooth-shaven face appearing almost youthful in contrast to a wealth of gray hair. A veteran of the old war, and a strict disciplinarian, inclined to be austere, his smile of welcome gave me instantly a distinct feeling of relief.

"How long have you been here at Armstrong, Lieutenant?" he questioned, toying with an official-looking paper in his hands.

"Only about three weeks, sir. I came north on the *Enterprise*, with dispatches from General Gaines."

"I remember; you belong to the Fifth, and, without orders, I promptly dragooned you into garrison service." His eyes laughed. "Only sorry I cannot hold you any longer."

"I do not understand, sir."

"Yet I presume you have learned that the *Wanderer* stopped here for an hour last night on its way north to Prairie du Chien?"

"Captain Thockmorton just informed me."

"But you received no mail?"

"No, sir; or, rather, I have not been at the office to inquire. Was there mail for me?"

"That I do not know; only I have received a communication relating to you. It seems you have an application pending for a furlough."

"Yes, sir."

"It is my pleasure to inform you that it has been granted —sixty days, with permission to proceed east. There has been considerable delay evidently in locating you."

A sudden vision arose before me of my mother's face and of the old home among the hills as I took the paper from his extended hands and glanced at the printed and written lines.

"The date is a month ago."

"That need not trouble you, Knox. The furlough begins with this delivery. However, as I shall require your services as far as St. Louis, I shall date its acceptance from the time of your arrival there."

"Which is very kind, sir."

"Not at all. You have proven of considerable assistance here, and I shall part from you with regret. I have letters for

Governor Clark of Missouri, and Governor Reynolds of Illinois; also one to General Atkinson at Jefferson Barracks, detailing my views on the present Indian situation. These are confidential, and I hesitate to entrust them to the regular mail service. I had intended sending them down river in charge of a non-commissioned officer, but shall now utilize your services instead—that is, if you are willing to assume their care?"

"Very gladly, of course."

"I thought as much. Each of these is to be delivered in person. Captain Thockmorton informs me that he will be prepared to depart within an hour. You can be ready in that time?"

I smiled.

"In much less. I have little with me but a field kit, sir. It will not require long to pack that."

"Then return here at the first whistle, and the letters will be ready for you. That will be all now."

I turned toward the door, but paused irresolutely. The major was already bent over his task, and writing rapidly.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but as I am still to remain on duty, I presume I must travel in uniform?"

He glanced up, his eyes quizzical, the pen still grasped in his fingers.

"I could never quite understand the eagerness of young officers to get into civilian clothing," he confessed reflectively. "Why, I haven't even had a suit for ten years. However, I can see no necessity for your proclaiming your identity on the trip down. Indeed, it may prove the safer course, and technically I presume you may be considered as

on furlough. Travel as you please, Lieutenant, but I suggest it will be well to wear the uniform of your rank when you deliver the letters. Is that all?"

"I think of nothing more."

Fifteen minutes sufficed to gather together all my belongings, and change from blue into gray, and, as I emerged from quarters, the officers of the garrison flocked about me with words of congratulation and innumerable questions. Universal envy of my good fortune was evident, but this assumed no unpleasant form, although much was said to express their belief in my early return.

"Anyway, you are bound to wish you were back," exclaimed Hartley, the senior captain, earnestly. "For we are going to be in the thick of it here in less than a month, unless all signs fail. I was at that last council, and I tell you that Sac devil means to fight."

"You may be certain I shall be back if he does," I answered. "But the Major seems to believe that peace is still possible."

"No one really knows what he believes," insisted Hartley soberly. "Those letters you carry south may contain the truth, but if I was in command here we would never take the chances we do now. Look at those stockade gates standing wide open, and only one sentry posted. Ye gods! who would ever suppose we were just a handful of men in hostile Indian territory." His voice increased in earnestness, his eyes sweeping the group of faces. "I've been on this frontier for fourteen years, and visited in Black Hawk's camp a dozen times. He's a British Indian, and hates everything American. Ask Forsyth."

"The Indian agent?"

"Yes, he knows. He's already written Governor Reynolds, and I saw the letter. His word is that Keokuk is powerless to hold back an explosion; he and the Hawk are open enemies, and with the first advance of settlers along the Rock River Valley this whole border is going to be bathed in blood. And look what we've got to fight it with."

"Thockmorton told me," I explained, "that Atkinson is preparing to send in more troops; he expects to bring a load north with him on his next trip."

"From Jefferson?"

"Yes; they are concentrating there."

"How many regulars are there?"

"About four hundred from the First and Sixth regiments."

He laughed scornfully.

"I thought so. That means that Atkinson may send two or three hundred men, half of them recruits, to be scattered between Madison, Armstrong and Crawford. Say we are lucky enough to get a hundred or a hundred and fifty of them stationed here. Why, man, there are five hundred warriors in Black Hawk's camp at this minute, and that is only fifteen miles away. Within ten days he could rally to him Kickapoos, Potawatamies and Winnebagoes in sufficient force to crush us like an eggshell. Why, Gaines ought to be here himself, with a thousand regulars behind him."

"Surely we can defend Armstrong," broke in a confident voice. "The savages would have to attack in canoes."

Hartley turned, and confronted the speaker.

"In canoes!" he exclaimed. "Why, may I ask? With three hundred men here in garrison, how many could we spare to

patrol the island? Not a corporal's guard, if we retained enough to prevent an open assault on the fort. On any dark night they could land every warrior unknown to us. The Hawk knows that."

His voice had scarcely ceased when the boat whistle sounded hoarse from the landing below. Grasping my kit I shook hands all around, and left them, hastening across the parade to the office. Ten minutes later I crossed the gangplank, and put foot for the first time on the deck of the *Warrior*. Evidently the crew had been awaiting my arrival to push off, for instantly the whistle shrieked again, and immediately after the boat began to churn its way out into the river current, with bow pointing down stream. Little groups of officers and enlisted men gathered high up on the rocky headland to watch us getting under way, and I lingered beside the rail, waving to them, as the struggling boat swept down, constantly increasing its speed. Even when the last of those black spots had vanished in the far distance, the flag on the high staff remained clearly outlined against the sky, a symbol of civilization in the midst of that vast savage wilderness. Thockmorton leaned out from the open window of the pilot house and hailed me.

"Put your dunnage in the third cabin, Knox—here, you, Sam, lay hold and help."

It was nothing to boast of, that third cabin, being a mere hole, measuring possibly about four feet by seven, but sufficient for sleeping quarters, and was reasonably clean. It failed, however, in attractiveness sufficient to keep me below, and as soon as I had deposited my bag and indulged in a somewhat captious scrutiny of the bedding, I very

willingly returned to the outside and clambered up a steep ladder to the upper deck.

The view from this point was a most attractive one. The little steamer struggled forward through the swift, swirling water, keeping nearly in the center of the broad stream, the white spray flung high by her churning wheel and sparkling like diamonds in the sunshine. Lightly loaded, a mere chip on the mighty current, she seemed to fly like a bird, impelled not only by the force of her engines, but swept irresistibly on by the grasp of the waters. We were already skirting the willow-clad islands, green and dense with foliage to the river's edge; and beyond these could gain tantalizing glimpses of the mouth of the Rock, its waters gleaming like silver between grassy banks. The opposite shore appeared dark and gloomy in comparison, with great rock-crowned bluffs outlined against the sky, occasionally assuming grotesque forms, which the boatmen pointed out as familiar landmarks.

Once we narrowly escaped collision with a speeding Indian canoe, containing two frightened occupants, so intent upon saving themselves they never even glanced up until we had swept by. Thockmorton laughed heartily at their desperate struggle in the swell, and several of the crew ran to the stern to watch the little cockle-shell toss about in the waves. It was when I turned also, the better to assure myself of their safety, that I discovered Judge Beaucaire standing close beside me at the low rail. Our eyes met inquiringly, and he bowed with all the ceremony of the old school.

"A new passenger on board, I think, sir," and his deep, resonant voice left a pleasant impression. "You must have joined our company at Fort Armstrong?"

"Your supposition is correct," I answered, some peculiar constraint preventing me from referring to my military rank. "My name is Knox, and I have been about the island for a few weeks. I believe you are Judge Beaucaire of Missouri?"

He was a splendidly proportioned man, with deep chest, great breadth of shoulders, and strong individual face, yet bearing unmistakable signs of dissipation, together with numerous marks of both care and age.

"I feel the honor of your recognition, sir," he said with dignity. "Knox, I believe you said? Of the Knox family at Cape Girardeau, may I inquire?"

"No connection to my knowledge; my home was at Wheeling."

"Ah! I have never been so far east; indeed the extent of my travels along the beautiful Ohio has only been to the Falls. The Beaucaires were originally from Louisiana."

"You must have been among the earlier settlers of Missouri?"

"Before the Americans came, sir," proudly. "My grandfather arrived at Beaucaire Landing during the old French regime; but doubtless you know all this?"

"No, Judge," I answered, recognizing the egotism of the man, but believing frankness to be the best policy. "This happens to be my first trip on the upper river, and I merely chanced to know your name because you had been pointed out to me by Captain Thockmorton. I understood from him

that you represented one of the oldest families in that section."

"There were but very few here before us," he answered, with undisguised pride. "Mostly wilderness outcasts, *voyageurs*, *coureurs de bois*; but my grandfather's grant of land was from the King. Alphonse de Beaucaire, sir, was the trusted lieutenant of D'Iberville—a soldier, and a gentleman."

I bowed in acknowledgment the family arrogance of the man interesting me deeply. So evident was this pride of ancestry that a sudden suspicion flared into my mind that this might be all the man had left—this memory of the past.

"The history of those early days is not altogether familiar to me," I admitted regretfully. "But surely D'Iberville must have ruled in Louisiana more than one hundred years ago?"

The Judge smiled.

"Quite true. This grant of ours was practically his last official act. Alphonse de Beaucaire took possession in 1712, one hundred and twenty years ago, sir. I was myself born at Beaucaire, sixty-eight years ago."

"I should have guessed you as ten years younger. And the estate still remains in its original grant?"

The smile of condescension deserted his eyes, and his thin lips pressed tightly together.

"I—I regret not; many of the later years have proven disastrous in the extreme," he admitted, hesitatingly. "You will pardon me, sir, if I decline to discuss misfortune. Ah, Monsieur Kirby! I have been awaiting you. Have you met with this young man who came aboard at Fort Armstrong? I—I am unable to recall the name."

"Steven Knox."

I felt the firm, strong grip of the other's hand, and looked straight into his dark eyes. They were like a mask. While, indeed, they seemed to smile in friendly greeting, they yet remained expressionless, and I was glad when the gripping fingers released mine. The face into which I looked was long, firm-jawed, slightly swarthy, a tightly-clipped black moustache shadowing the upper lip. It was a reckless face, yet appeared carved from marble.

"Exceedingly pleased to meet you," he said carelessly. "Rather a dull lot on board—miners, and such cattle. Bound for St. Louis?"

"Yes—and beyond."

"Shall see more of you then. Well, Judge, how do you feel? Carver and McAfee are waiting for us down below."

The two disappeared together down the ladder, and I was again left alone in my occupancy of the upper deck.

CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF THE BEAUCAIRES

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The first two days and nights of the journey southward were devoid of any special interest or adventure. The lonely river, wrapped in the silence of the wilderness, brought to me many a picture of loveliness, yet finally the monotony of it all left the mind drowsy with repetition. Around each tree-crowned bend we swept, skirting shores so similar as to scarcely enable us to realize our progress. In spite of the fact that the staunch little *Warrior* was proceeding down stream, progress was slow because of the unmarked channel, and the ever-present danger of encountering snags. The intense darkness and fog of the first night compelled tying up for several hours. The banks were low, densely covered with shrubbery, and nothing broke the sameness of the river scene, except the occasional sight of an Indian canoe skimming across its surface. Towns there were none, and seldom even a sign of a settlement greeted the eye on either shore. The only landings were made at Yellow Banks, where there was a squalid group of log huts, and Fort Madison, where I spent a pleasant hour with the officers of the garrison. Occasionally the boat warped in against the bank to replenish its exhausted supply of wood, the crew attacking the surrounding trees with axes, while the wearied passengers exercised their cramped limbs ashore. Once, with some hours at our disposal, we

organized a hunt, returning with a variety of wild game. But most of the time I idled the hours away alone.

No one aboard really attracted my companionship. The lead miners were a rough set, boasting and quarrelsome, spending the greater part of their time at the bar. They had several fights, in one of which a man was seriously stabbed, so that he had to be left in care of the post-surgeon at Madison. After the first day Kirby withdrew all attention from me, and ceased in his endeavor to cultivate my acquaintance, convinced of my disinclination to indulge in cards. This I did not regret, although Beaucaire rather interested me, but, as the gambler seldom permitted the Judge out of his sight, our intimacy grew very slowly. Thockmorton, being his own pilot, seldom left the wheelhouse, and consequently I passed many hours on the bench beside him, gazing out on the wide expanse of river, and listening to his reminiscences of early steam-boating days. He was an intelligent man, with a fund of anecdote, acquainted with every landmark, every whispered tale of the great stream from New Orleans to Prairie du Chien. At one time or another he had met the famous characters along the river banks, and through continual questioning I thus finally became possessed of the story of the house of Beaucaire.

In the main it contained no unusual features. Through the personal influence of D'Iberville at Louis' court, Alphonse de Beaucaire had originally received a royal grant of ten thousand acres of land bordering the west bank of the Mississippi a few miles above St. Louis. When his master returned to France leaving him unemployed, Beaucaire,

possessing ample means of his own, had preferred to remain in America. In flatboats, propelled by *voyageurs*, and accompanied by a considerable retinue of slaves, he, with his family, had ascended the river, and finally settled on his princely estate. Here he erected what, for those early days, was a stately mansion, and devoted himself to cultivating the land. Twenty years later, when his death occurred, he possessed the finest property along the upper river, was shipping heavily to the New Orleans market, and was probably the most influential man in all that section. His home was considered a palace, always open to frontier hospitality, the number of his slaves had increased, a large proportion of his land was utilized, and his name was a familiar one the length of the river.

His only son, Felipe, succeeded him, but was not so successful in administration, seriously lacking in business judgment, and being decidedly indolent by nature. Felipe married into one of the oldest and most respectable families of St. Louis, and, as a result of that union, had one son, Lucius, who grew up reckless of restraint, and preferred to spend his time in New Orleans, rather than upon the plantation. Lucius was a young man of twenty-six, unsettled in habits when the father died, and, against his inclination, was compelled to return to Missouri and assume control of the property. He found matters in rather bad condition, and his was not at all the type of mind to remedy them. Much of the land had been already irretrievably lost through speculation, and, when his father's obligations had been met, and his own gambling debts paid, the estate, once so princely and magnificent, was reduced to barely five

hundred acres, together with a comparatively small amount of cash. This condition sufficed to sober Lucius for a few years, and he married a Menard, of Cape Girardeau, of excellent family but not great wealth, and earnestly endeavored to rebuild his fortunes. Unfortunately his reform did not last. The evil influences of the past soon proved too strong for one of his temperament. A small town, redolent of all the vices of the river, grew up about the Landing, while friends of other days sought his hospitality. The plantation house became in time a rendezvous for all the wild spirits of that neighborhood, and stories of fierce drinking bouts and mad gambling were current in St. Louis.

Common as such tales as these were in those early days of the West, I still remained boy enough in heart to feel a fascination in Thockmorton's narrative. Besides, there was at the time so little else to occupy my mind that it inevitably drifted back to the same topic.

"Have you ever been at Beaucaire, Captain?" I asked, eager for more intimate details.

"We always stop at the Landing, but I have only once been up the bluff to where the house stands. It must have been a beautiful place in its day; it is imposing even now, but showing signs of neglect and abuse. The Judge was away from home—in St. Louis, I believe—the day of my visit. He had sold me some timber, and I went out with the family lawyer, a man named Haines living at the Landing, to look it over."

"The house was closed?"

"No; it is never closed. The housekeeper was there, and also the two daughters."

"Daughters?"

"Certainly; hadn't I told you about them? Both girls are accepted as his daughters; but, if all I have heard is true, one must be a granddaughter." He paused reminiscently, his eyes on the river. "To all appearances they are about of the same age, but differing rather widely in looks and character. Both are attractive girls I judge, although I only had a glimpse of them, and at the time knew nothing of the difference in relationship. I naturally supposed them to be sisters, until Haines and I got to talking about the matter on the way back. Pshaw, Knox, you've got me gossiping like an old woman."

I glanced aside at his face.

"This, then, is not common river talk? the truth is not generally known?"

"No; I have never heard it mentioned elsewhere, nor have I previously repeated the story. However, now that the suggestion has slipped out, perhaps I had better go ahead and explain." He puffed at his pipe, and I waited, seemingly intent on the scene without. The captain was a minute or two in deciding how far he would venture. "Haines told me a number of strange things about that family I had never heard before," he admitted at last. "You see he has known them for years, and attended to most of Beaucaire's legal business. I don't know why he chanced to take me into his confidence, only he had been drinking some, and, I reckon, was a bit lonely for companionship; then those two girls interested me, and I asked quite a few questions about them. At first Haines was close as a clam, but finally loosened up, and this is about how the story runs, as he told

it. It wasn't generally known, but it seems that Lucius Beaucaire has been married twice—the first time to a Creole girl in New Orleans when he was scarcely more than a boy. Nobody now living probably knows what ever became of her, but likely she died early; anyway she never came north, or has since been heard from. The important part is that she gave birth to a son, who remained in New Orleans, probably in her care, until he was fourteen or fifteen years old. Then some occurrence, possibly his mother's death, caused the Judge to send for the lad, whose name was Adelbert, and had him brought to Missouri. All this happened before Haines settled at the Landing, and previous to Beaucaire's second marriage to Mademoiselle Menard. Bert, as the boy was called, grew up wild, and father and son quarreled so continuously that finally, and before he was twenty, the latter ran away, and has never been heard of since. All they ever learned was that he drifted down the river on a flatboat."

"And he never came back?"

"Not even a letter. He simply disappeared, and no one knows to this day whether he is alive or dead. At least if Judge Beaucaire ever received any word from him he never confessed as much to Haines. However, the boy left behind tangible evidence of his existence."

"You mean—"

"In the form of a child, born to a quadroon slave girl named Delia. The mother, it seems, was able in some way to convince the Judge of the child's parentage. All this happened shortly before Beaucaire's second marriage, and previous to the time when Haines came to the Landing.

Exactly what occurred is not clear, or what explanation was made to the bride. The affair must have cut Beaucaire's pride deeply, but he had to face the conditions. It ended in his making the girl Delia his housekeeper, while her child—the offspring of Adelbert Beaucaire—was brought up as a daughter. A year or so later, the second wife gave birth to a female child, and those two girls have grown up together exactly as though they were sisters. Haines insists that neither of them knows to this day otherwise."

"But that would be simply impossible," I insisted. "The mother would never permit."

"The mother! which mother? The slave mother could gain nothing by confession; and the Judge's wife died when her baby was less than two years old. Delia practically mothered the both of them, and is still in complete charge of the house."

"You met her?"

"She was pointed out to me—a gray-haired, dignified woman, so nearly white as scarcely to be suspected of negro blood."

"Yet still a slave?"

"I cannot answer that. Haines himself did not know. If manumission papers had ever been executed it was done early, before he took charge of Beaucaire's legal affairs. The matter never came to his attention."

"But surely he must at some time have discussed this with the Judge?"

"No; at least not directly. Beaucaire is not a man to approach easily. He is excessively proud, and possesses a fiery temper. Once, Haines told me, he ventured a hint, but

was rebuffed so fiercely as never to make a second attempt. It was his opinion the Judge actually hated the sight of his son's child, and only harbored her in the house because he was compelled to do so. All Haines really knew about these conditions had been told him secretly by an old negro slave, probably the only one left on the estate knowing the facts."

"But, Captain," I exclaimed, "do you realize what this might mean? If Judge Beaucaire has not issued papers of freedom, this woman Delia is still a slave."

"Certainly."

"And under the law her child was born into slavery?"

"No doubt of that."

"But the unspeakable horror of it—this young woman brought up as free, educated and refined, suddenly to discover herself to be a negro under the law, and a slave. Why, suppose Beaucaire should die, or lose his property suddenly, she could be sold to the cotton fields, into bondage to anyone who would pay the price for her."

Thockmorton knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"Of course," he admitted slowly. "There is no question as to the law, but I have little doubt but what Beaucaire has attended to this matter long ago. If he dies, the papers will be found hidden away somewhere. It is beyond conception that he could ever leave the girl to such a fate."

I shook my head, obsessed with a shadow of doubt.

"A mistake men often make—the putting off to the last moment doing the disagreeable task. How many, expecting to live, delay the making of a will until too late. In this case I am unable to conceive why, if Beaucaire has ever signed papers of freedom, for these two, the fact remains unknown