

MUNROE KIRK

THE FLAMINGO

FEATHER

Kirk Munroe

The Flamingo Feather

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Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	9
CHAPTER III	13
CHAPTER IV	16
CHAPTER V	19
CHAPTER VI	22
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	24

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CHAPTER I

RÉNÉ DE VEAUX

On a dreary winter's day, early in the year 1564, young René de Veaux, who had just passed his sixteenth birthday, left the dear old chateau where he had spent his happy and careless boyhood, and started for Paris. Less than a month before both his noble father and his gentle mother had been taken from him by a terrible fever that had swept over the country, and René their only child, was left without a relative in the world except his uncle the Chevalier René de Laudonniere, after whom he was named. In those days of tedious travel it seemed a weary time to the lonely lad before the messenger who had gone to Paris with a letter telling his uncle of his sad position could return. When at length he came again, bringing a kind message that bade him come immediately to Paris and be a son to his equally lonely uncle, René lost no time in obeying.

He travelled like a young prince, riding a spirited steed, and followed by a party of servants, mounted and armed to protect him against robbers and other perils of the way. Behind him rode old François, who had been his father's valet and was now his sole friend and protector. The big tears rolled down the boy's cheeks as he turned for a last look at his home; but as it was shut from view by the trees of the park surrounding it, he brushed them away resolutely, and turning to his companion, said,

"Thou hast seen the last of my tears, François, and with them goes my boyhood; for hereafter I am to be a man, and men know not how to weep."

"Well spoken, my young master," replied the old servant, greatly pleased at the brave words of the lad. "Thou art already a man in feeling, and thine Uncle Laudonniere will presently make thee one in fact, if the tales that come to us of his valorous deeds be true, and there is naught to disprove them."

"Tell me of him, François; for though he is my only uncle, I have but little knowledge of him or his deeds. Of what nature are they?"

"Well, then, he is a mighty navigator, and 'tis but little more than a year since he returned from the New World, whither he sailed in company with his Excellency Admiral Jean Ribault. He brings strange tales of those wonderful lands beyond the sea, and rumor has it that he is shortly to set forth again for them with a noble company, who will establish there a sanctuary for our blessed Protestant faith."

The boy's interest was thoroughly aroused by this, and he plied the old servant with questions concerning his uncle and the New World. François answered these to the best of his ability, and even drew largely upon his imagination to aid his glowing descriptions of those distant lands of which the men of that day held such vague knowledge.

With such talk they beguiled much of the tedious journey, that occupied a week ere it was ended and they entered Paris. Here they were finally set down before a modest dwelling near the King's palace, in which Laudonniere was lodged.

Upon meeting his nephew, the chevalier embraced him warmly, and then holding him forth at arm's-length to gain a better view of him, exclaimed, "In good sooth, René, thou'rt a likely lad; and if thy heart be as true and bold as thy face promises, we'll soon make a man of thee such as even thy noble father would approve."

That evening uncle and nephew talked long and earnestly together concerning the latter's future; and ere they slept it was fully decided that, in spite of his youth, he should make one of the expedition that, even as François had reported, Laudonniere was fitting out for the New World.

The next three months were occupied in busy preparation for the long voyage, not unmixed with vexatious delays and grievous disappointments, in all of which young René de Veaux bore manfully his share. He became each day more useful to his uncle, who intrusted him with many important commissions, and who, stern old soldier as he was, learned in this time to love the boy as though he had been his own son.

At length all was in readiness. The stores and munitions of war had been placed on board the three ships that formed the little fleet, the last colonist had embarked, and Laudonniere had taken leave of his King and Admiral Jean Ribault, who was to follow him in a few months with a still larger company. On a bright May morning uncle and nephew reached the little seaport town before which lay their ships, and hastened to embark and take advantage of the favorable wind that promised them a fair start on their long and perilous voyage.

As Laudonniere stepped on board his flagship his broad pennant was flung to the breeze from the mainmast-head, the *fleur-de-lis* of France floated proudly from the mizzen, and amid the booming of cannon and the loud acclamations of the throngs assembled on the quay to bid them Godspeed, the ships moved slowly down the harbor towards the broad ocean and the New World that lay beyond.

For many weeks they sailed ever westward, seeing no ship save their own, and becoming every day more weary of the vast, endless expanse of sea and sky. It is no wonder, then, that when on the morning of the 22d of June the welcome cry of "Land, ho!" rang through the flag-ship every soul on board rushed on deck with joyous exclamations to catch once more a glimpse of the blessed land. The cry that had brought them such pleasure had come from the mast-head, and it was some time before those on deck could detect the dim blue cloud, low-lying in the west, that was said to be land. Even then one man, who was known as Simon the Armorer, was heard to mutter that it might be land and then again it might not; for his part, he believed the whole world had been drowned in a flood, as in the days of Noah, and that the only land they should ever see would be at the bottom of the ocean.

As the day wore on, and before a light breeze the ships were wafted towards the blue cloud, it was proved beyond a doubt to be land, for some palm-trees and tall pines became distinguishable, and above all other sounds came, faint but distinct, the heavy, regular boom of surf.

By noon the ships had approached as near to the coast as was deemed prudent, and for the first time since leaving France their anchors were dropped and their sails were furled.

They had come to anchor off the mouth of an inlet, before which extended a bar upon which the great seas were breaking and roaring so frightfully that no passage for the ships among them seemed to offer itself. Laudonniere thought he recognized the inlet as one leading into a broad river, on the opposite side of which was located an Indian village called Selay. This place he had visited two years before in company with Admiral Ribault, and he determined to reassure himself as to the locality; therefore, bidding René accompany him, he entered a small boat, and ordering another, full of soldiers, to follow them, he gave the word to pull straight for the breakers.

Just as René thought the boat was to be swallowed by the raging seas, his uncle guided her, with great skill, into a narrow passage that opened in their very midst. After a few minutes of suspense, during which René dared hardly to breathe, they shot into smooth waters, rounded a point of land, and saw before them the village of which they were in search. On the beach in front of it a crowd of savage figures, nearly naked, were dancing wildly, and brandishing bows and spears.

Meanwhile, the village that the boats were now approaching had been thrown into a state of the greatest excitement by the appearance of the ships, which had been discovered while yet so distant that their sails resembled the wings of the white sea-gull. Upon the first alarm all the warriors had been collected on the beach, and the women had left their work in the fields of maize and hurried with the children to the security of the forest depths. When, however, the fleet came to anchor and

the Indians could distinguish the meaning of their banners, their alarm was changed to joy; for they had learned to love the French—who, upon their previous visit, had treated them with kindness—as much as they hated the cruel Spaniards, whose ships had also visited that coast. Then the women and children were recalled from the forest, the warriors washed the war-paint from their faces, and preparations for feasting were begun.

As the small boats approached, the men ran down to the beach to meet them, dancing and waving their weapons in their joy, and when they recognized Laudonniere standing in the stern of the leading boat, they raised a great cry of welcome that caused the forest to ring with its echoes. As the pious leader of the expedition stepped on shore, he took René by the hand, and both kneeling on the sands, gave thanks to Him who guided them thus far in safety in their perilous wanderings. Though the simple-minded Indians could not understand what Laudonniere said or was doing, they were so anxious to show their respect and love for him that all knelt when he did and maintained a deep silence while he prayed.

When Laudonniere arose to his feet the Indians crowded about him with shouts and gestures of welcome; but they readily made way for him when, still holding René's hand, he began to walk towards the lodge of their chief. He was as anxious as his followers to welcome the white men, but his dignity had not permitted him to rush with them down to the beach.

As they walked, René stared in astonishment at the waving palms with richly plumaged birds flitting among their leaves, the palmetto-thatched huts of the Indians, the shining and inflated fish-bladders that the men wore suspended from their ears, the moss-woven kirtles of the women, and above all, at the mighty antlered stag that, stuffed and mounted on a tall pole, with head proudly turned towards the rising sun, rose from the middle of the village.

He in turn was an object of astonishment and curious interest to the natives; for, although they had become familiar with the appearance of bearded white men, they had never before seen a white boy, René being the first to set foot in this land. The Indians had thought that all white men were born with beards, and that their closely cropped hair never grew any longer; so that this smooth-faced boy, whose golden hair hung in ringlets over his shoulders, was a much greater curiosity to them than they were to him. The old chief took an immediate fancy to him, and as he had given to Laudonniere the Indian name of Ta-lah (a palm) upon the occasion of his previous visit to Selay, he now called René Ta-lah-lo-ko (the palmetto, or little palm), a name ever afterwards used by all the Indians in their intercourse with him.

The chief entreated Laudonniere to tarry many days in Selay; but the latter answered that the orders of his own great chief were for him to proceed without delay to the river known as the River of May, and there erect a fort and found his colony. So, after an exchange of presents, they parted, and taking to their boats, the white men regained their ship. As they left, René gave many a backward glance at the pleasant little village of Selay, and would have loved to linger there among its simple and kindly people.

As they crossed the bar, in going again to the ships, their boats were surrounded by a number of what they called dolphins, but what are today called porpoises, sporting in the great billows; and on their account Laudonniere named the river they had just left the River of Dolphins.

Spreading their white wings, the ships sailed northward forty miles during the night, and daylight found them standing off and on at the mouth of the great River of May. By the aid of a chart, made by Admiral Ribault two years before, they crossed its dangerous bar, and sailed up its broad channel.

Short as was the time since they had been discovered off Selay, swift runners had already conveyed the great tidings of their coming to Micco, the chief of this part of the country, and he and his people were thus prepared to greet them upon their arrival. When René and his uncle, followed by a company from the ships, landed, they were received with shouts and extravagant gestures of joy by the friendly Indians, and conducted by them to the top of a hill upon which Admiral Ribault had set a

pillar of stone engraved with the French coat of arms. They found it twined with wreaths of flowers, and surrounded by baskets of maize, quivers of arrows, and many other things that the kindly Indians took this means of offering to their white friends.

Not far from this point Laudonniere selected the site of his fort, and work upon it was immediately begun. He named it Fort Caroline, in honor of King Charles IX of France, and about it he hoped to see in time a flourishing colony of French Huguenots.

After all the stores and munitions had been landed from the ships, they sailed for France, leaving the little company of white men the only ones of their race in all that vast unknown wilderness. As Laudonniere remained in command of Fort Caroline, René de Veaux of course remained with him, and thus became the hero of the surprising adventures that will be related in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER II

A WONDERFUL DELIVERANCE

The building of Fort Caroline occupied about three months; and during this time the friendly Indians willingly aided in the work of preparing the tree-trunks which, set on end, were let deep into the earth close beside one another, and in digging the wide moat that surrounded the whole. A heavy embankment of earth was thrown up on the inner side of the palisade of tree-trunks, and upon this were mounted a number of great guns.

During the time thus occupied, René de Veaux became acquainted with Micco's son, a young Indian of about his own age, named Has-se, which means a sunbeam, and a strong friendship was speedily cemented between them. They saw each other daily, and each learned the language of the other.

After the ships had sailed away René's uncle found time, even in the midst of his pressing duties, to attend to the lad's education; and every morning was devoted to lessons in fencing, shooting the cross-bow, and in military engineering. The evenings were passed with the good Jacques Le Moyne the artist, who was a very learned man, and who taught René Latin, and how to draw.

Although his mornings and evenings were thus occupied, René had his afternoons to himself, and these he spent in company with his friend Has-se, who instructed him in the mysteries of Indian woodcraft. Now it happened that while Has-se was a merry, lovable lad, he had one bitter enemy in the village. This was a young man somewhat older than himself, named Chitta, which means the snake. Their quarrel was one of long standing, and nobody seemed to know how it had begun; but everybody said that Chitta was such a cross, ugly fellow that he must needs quarrel with somebody, and had chosen Has-se for an enemy because everybody else loved him.

One afternoon Has-se asked René to go out on the river with him in his canoe, as he had that to tell him which he did not wish to run any risk of being overheard by others. René willingly agreed to go with him, and taking his cross-bow and a couple of steel-tipped bolts, he seated himself in the bow of the light craft, which Has-se paddled from the stern. Going for some distance down the river, they turned into a small stream from the banks of which huge, moss-hung oaks and rustling palm-trees cast a pleasant shade over the dark waters. Here the canoe was allowed to drift while Has-se unburdened his mind to his friend.

It seemed that the day of the Ripe Corn Dance, the great feast day of his tribe, was set for that of the next full moon. On this day there was to be a series of contests among the lads of the village to decide which of them was most worthy to become Bow-bearer to Micco, their chief and his father. This was considered a most honorable position to occupy, and he who succeeded in winning it and filling it satisfactorily for a year was, at the expiration of that time, granted all the privileges of a warrior. The contests were to be in shooting with bows and arrows, hurling the javelin, running, and wrestling. Has-se had set his heart upon obtaining this position, and had long been in training for the contests. His most dreaded rival was Chitta; and, while Has-se felt ready to meet the snake in the games of running, shooting, and hurling the javelin, he feared that with his greater weight the latter would prove more than a match for him in wrestling. Could Ta-lah-lo-ko advise and help him in this matter?

"Ay, that can I, Has-se, my lad," cried René; "thou couldst not have hit upon a happier expedient than that of asking advice of me. 'Tis but a week since I removed a cinder from the eye of Simon the Armorer, and in return for the favor he taught me a trick of wrestling that surpasses aught of the kind that ever I saw. I have practised it daily since, and would now confidently take issue with

any who know it not without regard to their superior size or weight. I will show it thee if thou wilt promise to keep it secret. Ha!"

As they talked the canoe had drifted close in to the shore, until it lay directly beneath the gigantic limb of a tree that extended far out over the water, and from which hung a mesh of stout vines. As he uttered the exclamation that finished his last sentence. René seized hold of a stout vine, and with a quick jerk drew the light craft in which they were seated a few feet forward. At the same instant a tawny body was launched like a shot from the overhanging limb and dashed into the water exactly at the spot over which, but an instant before, Has-se had sat.

The animal that made this fierce plunge was a panther of the largest size; and if René had not chanced to catch sight of its nervously twitching tail as it drew itself together for the spring, it would have alighted squarely upon the naked shoulders of the unsuspecting Indian lad. René's prompt action had, however, caused the animal to plunge into the water, though it only missed the canoe by a few feet; and when it rose to the surface it was close beside them.

Has-se seized his paddle, and with a powerful stroke forced the canoe ahead, but directly into the mesh of trailing vines, in which it became so entangled that they could not extricate it before the beast had recovered from his surprise, and had begun to swim towards them.

A bolt was hurriedly fitted to René's cross-bow and hastily fired at the approaching animal. It struck him near the fore-shoulder, and served to check his progress for a moment, as with a snarl of rage he bit savagely at the wound, from which the blood flowed freely, crimsoning the water around him. Then he again turned towards the canoe, and seemed to leap rather than swim, in his eagerness to reach it. A second bolt, fired with even greater haste than the first, missed the panther entirely, and the boys were about to plunge from the opposite side of the canoe into the water, in their despair, when an almost unheard-of thing occurred to effect their deliverance.

Just as one more leap would have brought the panther within reach of the canoe, a huge, dark form rose from the red waters behind him, and a pair of horrid jaws opened, and then closed like a vice upon one of his hind-quarters. The panther uttered a wild yell, made a convulsive spring forward, his claws rattled against the side of the canoe, and then the waters closed above his head, and he was dragged down into the dark depths of the stream, to the slimy home of the great alligator, who had thus delivered the boys from their peril. A few bubbles coming up through the crimson waters told of the terrible struggle going on beneath them, and then all was still, and the stream flowed on as undisturbed as before. For a few moments the boys sat gazing in silent amazement at the place of the sudden disappearance of their enemy, hardly believing that he would not again return to the attack.

When they had regained the fort, Laudonniere heard with horror René's story of their adventure with the tiger and the crocodile, as he named panthers and alligators, and bade him be very careful in the future how he wandered in the wilderness. He did not forbid his nephew to associate with Has-se, for he was most anxious to preserve a friendship with the Indians, upon whom his little colony was largely dependent for provisions, and he considered René's influence with the Indian lad who was the son of the chief very important.

On the afternoon following that of their adventure, Has-se came into the fort in search of René, and anxious to acquire the promised trick of wrestling. After securing his promise never to impart the trick to another, René led him into a room where they would not be observed, and taught it to him. It was a very simple trick, being merely a feint of giving way, followed quickly by a peculiar inside twist of the leg; but it was irresistible, and the opponent who knew it not was certain to be overcome by it. Has-se quickly acquired it, and though he found few words to express his feelings, there was a look in his face when he left René that showed plainly his gratitude.

When next the silver sickle of the new moon shone in the western sky, active preparations were begun among the Indians for their great Dance of Ripe Corn. The race-course was laid out, and carefully cleared; clay was mixed with its sand, and it was trampled hard and smooth by many moccasined feet. A large booth, or shelter from the hot sun, under which the chiefs and distinguished

visitors might sit and witness the games, was constructed of boughs and palm leaves. Bows were carefully tested and fitted with new strings of twisted deer-sinew. Those who had been fortunate enough to obtain from the white men bits of steel and iron, ground them to sharp points, and with them replaced their arrow-heads of flint. Has-se, with great pride, displayed to René his javelin or light spear, the tough bamboo shaft of which was tipped with a keen-edged splinter of milk-white quartz, obtained from some far northern tribe. Guests began to arrive, coming from Seloy and other coast villages from the north, and from the broad savannas of the fertile Alachua land, until many hundred of them were encamped within a few miles of Fort Caroline.

At length the day of feasting broke bright and beautiful, and soon after breakfast Laudonniere, accompanied by René de Veaux and half the garrison of Fort Caroline, marched out to the scene of the games. Here they were warmly welcomed by Micco and his people, and invited to occupy seats of honor in the great booth. Upon their arrival the signal was given for the games to begin.

First of all came the races for wives, for at this feast only of all the year could the young men of the tribe get married. Even now they were obliged to run after their sweethearts, who were allowed so great a start in the race that if they chose they could reach the goal first and thus escape all further attentions from their pursuers. They generally allowed themselves to be caught, however, and thus became blushing brides. Thus, on this occasion, and in this manner, Yah-chi-la-ne (the Eagle), a young Alachua chief, gained the hand of Has-se's beautiful sister Nethla, which means the Day-star.

The contests among the boys to decide who of them should be Bow-bearer to their chief for the ensuing year followed, and as the great drum, Kas-a-lal-ki, rolled forth its hollow, booming notes, twenty slender youths stepped forward, of whom the handsomest was Has-se the Sunbeam, and the tallest was dark-faced Chitta the Snake. All were stripped to the skin, and wore only girdles about their loins and moccasins on their feet; but Has-se, as the son of the chief, had the scarlet feather of a flamingo braided into his dark hair.

From the very first Has-se and Chitta easily excelled all their competitors in the contests; but they two were most evenly matched. Has-se scored the most points in hurling the javelin, and Chitta won in the foot-race. In shooting with the bow both were so perfect that the judges could not decide between them, and the final result of the trial became dependent upon their skill at wrestling. When they stood up together for this contest, Has-se's slight form seemed no match for that of the taller and heavier Chitta; and when in the first bout the former was thrown heavily to the ground, a murmur of disapprobation arose from the white spectators, though the Indians made no sign to express their feelings.

In the second bout, after a sharp struggle, Has-se seemed suddenly to give way, and almost immediately afterwards Chitta was hurled to earth, but how, no one could tell, except René, who with the keenest interest watched the effect of his lesson. As Chitta rose to his feet he seemed dazed, and regarded his opponent with a bewildered air, as though there were something about him he could not understand.

Again they clinched and strained and tugged, until the perspiration rolled in great beads from their shining bodies, and their breath came in short gasps. It seemed as though René's friend must give in, when, presto! down went Chitta again; while Has-se stood erect, a proud smile on his face, winner of the games, and Bow-bearer to his father for a year.

Has-se had still to undergo one more test of endurance before he could call himself a warrior, which he must be able to do ere he could assume the duties of Bow-bearer. He must pass through the ordeal of the Cassine, or black drink. This was a concoction prepared by the medicine-men, of roots and leaves, from a recipe the secret of which was most jealously guarded by them; and to drink of it was to subject one's self to the most agonizing pains, which, however, were but of short duration. In spite of his sufferings, the youth who drank from the horrid bowl was expected to preserve a smiling face, nor admit by word or sign that he was undergoing aught but the most pleasing sensations. If he failed in this one thing, no matter what record he had previously gained for courage or daring, he

was ever afterwards condemned to share the work of women, nor might he ever again bear arms or take part in the chase or in war.

Immediately after his overthrow of Chitta, and while the shouts of joy over his victory were still ringing in his ears, Has-se was led to an elevated seat, where he could be seen of all the people, and a bowl of the awful mixture was handed him. Without hesitation, and with a proud glance around him, the brave youth swallowed the nauseous draught, and then folding his arms, gazed with a smiling face upon the assembled multitude. For fifteen minutes he sat there amid a death-like silence, calm and unmoved, though the great beads of perspiration rolling from his forehead showed what he was enduring. At the end of that time a great shout from the people told him that his ordeal was over; and, weak and faint, he was led away to a place where he might recover in quiet from the effects of his terrible sufferings, and enjoy in peace the first glorious thoughts that now he was indeed a Bow-bearer and a warrior.

Réné sprang forward from his seat to seize and shake his friend's hand, while from all, Indians as well as whites, arose shouts of joy at the victory of the brave and much-loved lad who wore the Flamingo Feather.

As the angry Chitta turned away from the scene of his defeat, his heart was filled with rage at these shouts, and he muttered a deep threat of vengeance upon all who uttered them, those of his own race as well as the pale-faces.

CHAPTER III

CHITTA'S REVENGE

So Has-se the Sunbeam became Bow-bearer to his father, the great chief Micco, and Chitta the Snake was disappointed of his ambition. By some means he became convinced that René de Veaux had instructed Has-se in his newly acquired trick of wrestling; and though he had no proof of this, he conceived a bitter hatred against the white lad. He had especially included him in his muttered threat of vengeance against all those who greeted his final overthrow with shouts of joy; but, like the wily reptile whose name he bore, he was content to bide his time and await his opportunity to strike a deadly blow. After the games were ended he disappeared, and was seen no more that day.

His absence was hardly noted, for immediately after Has-se's victory the entire assembly repaired to the great mound which had gradually been raised by the accumulation of shells, bones, broken pottery, and charred wood that many generations of Indian feasters had left behind them, and here was spread the feast of the day. Then followed dancing and singing, which were continued far into the night.

At length the dancers became exhausted; the men who beat the drums and rattled the terrapin shells filled with dried palmetto berries grew so drowsy that their music sounded fainter and fainter, until it finally ceased altogether, and by two hours after midnight the whole encampment was buried in profound slumber. Even those whose duty it was to stand guard dozed at their posts, and the silence of the night was only broken by the occasional hootings of Hup-pe (the great owl).

Had the guards been awake instead of dreaming, it is possible that they might have noticed the dark figure of a man who noiselessly and stealthily crept amid the heavy shadows on the edge of the forest towards the great granary, or storehouse, in which was kept all the ripe maize of the tribe, together with much starch-root (koonti katki) and a large quantity of yams. The granary was built of pitch-pine posts and poles, heavily thatched with palm-leaves, that the summer suns had dried to a tinder.

Occasionally the dark figure skulking among the shadows came to little patches of bright moonlight, and to cross these he lay flat on the ground and writhed his way through the grass like a snake. A close observer would have noticed a dull, steady glow which came from a round object that the skulker carried with great care. If he had been near enough he would have seen that this was a large gourd, in which, on a bed of sand, were a quantity of live coals taken from one of the fires that still smouldered about the epola, or place of dancing. In his other hand the man carried a few fat-pine splinters that would burn almost like gun-powder.

At length, without having attracted attention from any one of the encamped Indians, or the drowsy guards upon whom they depended for safety, the figure reached the granary, and disappeared amid the dark shadows of its walls. Crouching to the ground, and screening his gourd of coals with his robe, he thrust into it one end of the bundle of fat-pine splinters and blew gently upon them. They smoked for a minute, and then burst into a quick blaze.

Beginning at one end of the granary, this torch was applied to the dry thatch that covered it, and it instantly sprang into flame. As the figure ran along the end of the structure, around the corner, and down the entire length of its side, always keeping in the shadow, he applied the torch in a dozen places, and then flinging it on top of the low roof, where it speedily ignited the covering, he bounded away into the darkness, uttering, as he did so, a long-drawn, ear-piercing yell of triumph.

By the time the nodding guards had discovered the flames and given the alarm, the whole granary was in a blaze, and the startled Indians, who rushed out from the lodges and palmetto booths,

could do nothing but stand helpless and gaze at the destruction of their property. All asked how it had happened, and who had done this thing, but not even the guards could offer the slightest explanation.

Meantime the author of all this mischief stopped when he had gained what he considered a safe distance from the fire, and, concealed by the friendly shadows of the forest, stood with folded arms and scowling features gazing at the result of his efforts. At length the light from the burning building grew so bright that even the shadow in which he stood began to be illuminated, and he turned to go away. As he did so he shook his clenched hand towards the burning granary, and muttered, "The white man and the red man shall both learn to dread the fangs of the Snake, for thus do I declare war against them both."

As he spoke, a voice beside him, that he instantly recognized as that of Has-se, exclaimed, "What! is this thy work, Chitta?"

For answer Has-se received a terrible blow, full in the face, that stretched him, stunned and bleeding, on the ground; and Chitta, saying, "Lie there, miserable Bow-bearer, I will meet thee again," sprang out into the forest and disappeared.

When Has-se, aroused by the shouts of the guards and the glare of light, had rushed from the lodge in which he slept, he had seen a figure standing between him and the light, and had approached it to learn the cause of all the excitement. He was just about to speak, when he recognized Chitta, and heard him utter the words that at once declared him to be the author of the conflagration and the enemy of his people and their friends.

Not being able to appreciate the petty spirit of revenge that influenced the Snake, Has-se gave utterance to his exclamation of surprise, and in return received the cruel blow for which he was so little prepared.

When he recovered consciousness he found himself in his father's lodge, lying on a bed of deer-skins, while his sister, the beautiful Nethla, was bathing his temples with cold water.

It was now broad daylight, and the great granary, with all its contents, had been reduced to a heap of smouldering ruins. About the lodge in which Has-se lay were gathered a great crowd of Indians, awaiting his return to consciousness, to learn what he knew of the occurrences of the past few hours, and in what way he had been connected with them. By the earliest light of day a band of experienced warriors had tracked his assailant from the spot in which the young Bow-bearer had been discovered, through the tall grass and underbrush from which the fugitive had brushed the dew in his flight to the river's edge. Here one of the canoes that had been drawn up on the beach was found to be missing, and search parties had been sent both up and down the river, but as yet they had not returned.

As Has-se slowly recovered consciousness, and opened his eyes, his sister bent over him and whispered, "Who dealt thee the cruel blow, oh, my brother?"

Receiving his faint answer, she sprang to her feet, and turning to her father, who stood near, exclaimed, "'Tis Chitta the Snake who has done this thing in revenge for our Has-se's success in the games of yesterday."

From the entrance of the lodge the old chief proclaimed the news, and all through the great assembly were heard cries of anger against Chitta the Snake.

The destruction of this winter's supply of food was not only a serious blow to the Indians, but to the little garrison of Fort Caroline as well, for Laudonniere had just completed arrangements with Micco for the purchase of the greater part of it. Only a small quantity of provisions remained in the fort, and though the forest contained an abundance of game, and the river teemed with fish, the French soldiers were not skilled in either hunting or fishing, and had become dependent upon their Indian neighbors for what they needed of such food. It was therefore with feelings of surprised alarm that, on the second day after the burning of the granary, they noticed the absence of all Indians from the vicinity of the fort. Scouts were sent to the Indian encampment to discover the cause of this unusual state of affairs, and they soon returned with the report that the place was wholly deserted, and that not an Indian was to be found.

Not only had all the visiting Indians disappeared, but also every soul of Micco's tribe; and, what was more significant, they had taken with them their lodges and all portable property.

Laudonniere at once realized the full force of the situation. His soldiers were worn out with the labor of building the fort, and many of them were prostrated by a peculiar fever that racked their joints with severe pains and unfitted them for duty. The store of provisions upon which he had depended to feed his men through the approaching winter had been destroyed. The Indians who might have provided him with game had abandoned him and gone he knew not whither. His men knew nothing of the art of winning for themselves a livelihood from the wilderness that surrounded them. Although the soldiers had been allowed to think differently, he knew that some months must still elapse before the arrival of reinforcements and supplies from France. He himself, worn out by anxiety and overwork, was beginning to feel symptoms of the approach of the dreaded fever, and he feared that ere long he would be unfitted to perform the duties of his important position.

In this emergency, he decided to hold a council with the officers of the garrison, and ask their aid in deciding what was to be done. He therefore sent word to Soisson, his lieutenant, old Hillaire, the captain of artillery, Martinez, the quartermaster, Chastelleux, the chief of engineers, Le Moyne, the artist, and to René, his nephew, bidding them meet him in council. He added René to the number, for his uncle wished him to fully comprehend the difficulties of their position.

The council met in the commandant's private room, and Laudonniere, stating the situation clearly to them, asked what was to be done. Some suggested one thing and some another, and the discussion was long and earnest. Le Moyne, the artist, added to the perplexities of the commandant by stating that he had heard rumors of dissatisfaction among the garrison, and threats that unless provisions were speedily obtained they would build a vessel, abandon the fort and country, and attempt to make their way back to France.

While the discussion was at its height, two soldiers appeared at the door, leading between them a slender young Indian, whom René, with a joyful cry, at once recognized as his friend Has-se the Sunbeam.

CHAPTER IV

HAS-SE IS HELD PRISONER

Saluting his commandant, the sergeant of the guard, who held the prisoner on the right, reported that this young savage had been seen skulking in the forest near the fort, and that, deeming his presence and movements very suspicious, he had sent a party of men to capture him. They had gone out by a rear gate, and, making a long detour, had surprised him just as he was making off through the underbrush, and after a sharp tussle had secured and brought him into the fort.

At the first appearance of his friend, René had started up with an exclamation of joy to go to him, but his uncle sternly bade him keep his seat. He obeyed, but scowled angrily at the soldiers, who still retained their hold of Has-se, as though fearful that if they let go he might in some mysterious way vanish from their sight.

Laudonniere commanded them to release their hold of the prisoner and to retire from the room, but to remain within call. They did so, and the young Indian, left to face the council, drew himself up proudly, and folding his arms, stood motionless. René tried in vain to catch his eye, that he might, by a sympathetic glance, assure him of his friendship; but the other betrayed no recognition of his presence, nor once looked in his direction. He was dressed in the full costume of a young warrior who occupied the honorable position of Bow-bearer to a great chief, and in his hair gleamed the Flamingo Feather that proclaimed the station in life to which he was born. His handsome figure, proud face, and fearless bearing caused the members of the council to regard him with approving glances, and it was with less of sternness in his tone than usual that, after the door was closed, Laudonniere said,

"Now, sir, explain to us the meaning of this sudden departure of thy people, and the reason of thine own action in thus acting the part of a spy upon us."

With flashing eyes the young Indian answered in the French that he had learned of René:

"My name is Has-se. I am the son of a chief. My father and my people have been friendly to you and your people. This country is ours, and in it we go where we please when we are ready to go, and stay where we please when we are ready to rest from going. I have done nothing that I should be brought here against my will, and until I am set free I will answer no questions. Has-se has spoken."

René's face flushed with pleasure at this brave speech of his friend, and even Laudonniere admired the young Indian's coolness and courage, but he nevertheless felt it his duty to maintain his dignity, and questioned him sternly. To all his questions however, Has-se remained dumb, absolutely refusing to open his lips. The expression, "Has-se has spoken," with which he had ended his defiant speech, signified that he had said all that he had to say, and nothing should induce him to speak further unless his condition of being set at liberty were complied with.

At last Laudonniere called in the soldiers and ordered them to take the prisoner to the guard-house, and there treat him kindly, but to watch him closely and on no account allow him to escape. When Has-se had thus been removed, Laudonniere turned to the members of the council, and asked what, in their opinion, should be done with him.

Le Moyne, the artist, declared that the young Indian should be set free at once, and treated with such kindness that he might thereby be induced to give them the information they sought to gain. Then René de Veaux, blushing at his own boldness, jumped to his feet and made a vehement little speech, in which he said that Has-se was his dear friend, and that, as he himself had said, they had no right to make a prisoner of him, besides much more to the same effect. He became so excited in his defence of the Indian lad that finally his uncle interrupted him, saying,

"Softly, softly, René! Thou art right to defend thy friend if indeed he be not our enemy, but thou hast no authority for finding fault with those who are much older and wiser than thyself."

Blushing furiously at this rebuke, René sat down, while his uncle continued: "I am also of the opinion that this young savage should be courteously entreated and set at liberty. Thus shall we win favor with his tribe, with whom it behooves us to remain on friendly terms."

The others of the council did not, however, agree with this, but thought the better plan would be to retain the Indian lad as a hostage, and demand of his tribe a great quantity of provisions as his ransom.

As they were in the majority, Laudonniere hesitated to act contrary to their counsel, and finally said that they would hold him for at least one day, and that in the mean time René should visit him, and endeavor to extract from him the desired information regarding the movements of his people.

When René, armed with his uncle's authority for so doing, passed the sentinel and entered the guard-house, he found the Indian lad seated on a rude bench in one corner, with his face buried in his hands. He sprang to his feet at René's approach, and stood silently regarding him, not knowing but what he too had become an enemy. Carefully closing the door behind him, the impulsive French boy stepped quickly over to where the other stood, and embraced him, saying, as he did so, "Surely, Has-se, my brother, thou canst not think that I am aught but thy friend?"

Thus reassured, Has-se returned the embrace, and said, "I know thou art my friend, Ta-lah-lo-ko, and I did wrong to doubt thee for a moment; but it maddens me to be thus caged, and I am become like Nutchá the hawk when restrained of his liberty, suspicious of all men."

Then both boys sat down on the bench, and René questioned Has-se regarding the sudden departure of the Indians, and why he was there alone.

Has-se replied that while he had no secrets that all men might not know, he would have died rather than answer the questions of those who held him a prisoner, and as such commanded him to speak. To his friend Ta-lah-lo-ko he would, however, talk freely and with a straight tongue. He said that after the destruction of the storehouse containing their supply of provisions for many months, Micco, their chief, had decided that it would be best for his people to remove to the land of the Alachus, their friends, who had provisions in plenty, and remain there until the next season of corn planting. He caused their departure to be made secretly, for fear that the white men would seek to detain them as hunters for the fort, if they learned of the intended movement, and he wished to avoid any shadow of trouble between his people and their white brothers.

"He had undoubtedly the right to act as seemed to him best," said René; "but why didst not thou accompany thy people, and what brings thee here to the fort?"

"To see thee, Ta-lah-lo-ko, and thee only, did I come," answered Has-se. "I learned, after we had been some hours on the journey, that which affects thee so nearly that I could not leave thee in ignorance of it and without a warning. What I learned is, that Chitta the Snake regards thee with a deadly hatred, and has sworn to have thy life."

"Mine!" exclaimed René, in great surprise. "Why does the Snake bear malice towards me? I have no quarrel with him."

"That I know not, unless he suspects that it was thou who taught me the trick of wrestling that overthrew him, and thus lost him the position of Bow-bearer that he so greatly desired to obtain."

"It may be so," said René, musingly, "though how he could learn it I cannot think, nor why, even if he had knowledge of it, it should be cause for his wishing my death."

"Ah, Ta-lah-lo-ko, thou dost not know Chitta. His nature is that of the serpent whose name he bears, and for real or fancied wrongs to himself his revenge is cruel. Having once conceived a bitter hate against thee he will have thy life, or risk his own in attempting to take it."

"In that case," said René, "I am deeply grateful for thy warning, and will take care that master Chitta does not find me unprepared for him, in case he seeks me out."

"Now," said Has-se, "I would speak of another matter. I know that you white men have but little food within the fort, and must soon suffer for want of it if more is not obtained. There is none left in this country, but the Alachuas, to whom my people have gone, have an abundance. If one of thy people would go with me to them, and offer them things such as thou hast and they have not, in exchange for food, he could thus obtain a supply for the fort. If many went, the red men would be afraid; but with one they would talk, and if he were my friend then would his safety be assured. Wilt thou go with me to this distant land, Ta-lah-lo-ko?"

"Why," answered René, hardly knowing what to say to this sudden and unexpected proposal, "thou art a prisoner, Has-se, and dost not even know if my uncle will release thee. How then dost thou speak with such confidence of journeying to the land of these Alachuas?"

With a meaning smile Has-se answered:

"Walls and bars may answer to cage men, but they cannot confine a sunbeam. If thou wilt go with me, then meet me when the light of the second moon from now touches the waters where Allapatta the great alligator delivered us from Catsha the tiger. With my life will I answer for thy safety, and at the next full moon, or soon after it, thou shalt return to thy people."

Réné would have talked more of this plan, but just then the door of the guard-house was opened and the sergeant appeared, saluting, and saying, "'Tis the hour of sunset, Master De Veaux; the guard is about to be relieved, and I must request you to retire and leave the prisoner for the night. Surely you must be tired of talking with such a pig-headed young savage."

Not caring to exhibit his real feelings towards Has-se before the sergeant, René bade him good-night very formally, and added, "Mayhap I will see thee on the morrow; but count not on my coming, for I may not deem it worth my while to visit thee."

"I should think not," said the sergeant, as he closed the door behind them and barred it. "A young gentleman such as Master De Veaux can find but little pleasure in intercourse with such ignorant creatures. For my part, were I commandant of this fort, I would make slaves of them all, and kindly persuade them to my will with a lash. They—"

"Hold there!" cried René, as he turned towards the sergeant with flashing eyes. "An thou speakest another word in such strain of those who have favored us with naught save kindness, I will report thee to that same lash of which thou pratest so glibly."

The astonished sergeant muttered something by way of apology, but René, not waiting to hear it, hurried away to report to his uncle the result of his mission to the prisoner, and then to his own quarters to think over the startling proposal made to him by his friend.

The next morning Has-se had disappeared, and was nowhere to be found. With a troubled countenance the sergeant of the guard reported to Laudonniere that he had looked in on the prisoner at midnight, and found him quietly sleeping. He had visited the room again at sunrise, and it was empty. The sentinels at the gates, and those who paced the walls, had been closely questioned, but declared they had seen nobody, nor had they heard any unusual sound. For his part he believed there was magic in it, and that some of the old Indian witches had spirited the prisoner up the chimney, and flown away with him on a broomstick.

Although troubled to find that his prisoners could thus easily escape from the fort, Laudonniere was relieved that the disposal of Has-se's fate had thus been taken from his hands. He said to René, "I am glad that thy friend has escaped, though I like not the manner of his going, and I trust he may come to no harm. I would, however, that we had been able to send a company, or even one man, with him to this land of the Alachuas of which he told thee, for mayhap we might thus have obtained provision; but without a guide, I know not how it could be discovered."

"Could I have gone, uncle?" inquired René, eagerly.

"Thou, lad? No, thou art too young and tender to be sent on such a perilous mission. It should be one of double thy years and experience. Let no such foolish thoughts fill thy head yet a while."

CHAPTER V

THE ESCAPE OF HAS-SE AND RENE

This speech from his uncle both pleased and troubled René. He was glad to learn that it was deemed advisable for some one from the fort to visit the land of the Alachuas, and troubled to find that if he went with Has-se, he must do so without permission from his uncle. Nevertheless he felt certain that he, being Has-se's friend, and also regarded by the Indians as the son of the great chief of the white men, could undertake the mission with a greater chance of safety and success than any one else. He would have urged this view of the case upon his uncle's attention, but feared that speaking of the subject a second time would only result in his being absolutely forbidden to leave the fort on any pretence. The lad felt himself to be truly a man, now that he was nearly seventeen years old, and like all manly, high-spirited boys of his age, he was most anxious to enter upon any adventure that promised novelty and excitement.

René's appearance at this time was very different from that of the boy who, less than a year before, had left the old chateau of his fathers with tear-stained cheeks. His long curls had fallen under the shears, and his closely cropped hair showed to advantage his well-formed head. He was tall for his age, his muscles had hardened with constant exercise, and his face, neck, and hands were tanned to a ruddy brown by the hot suns beneath which he had spent so many months. His brown eyes held a merry twinkle, but at the same time there was an expression of pride and fixed purpose in his face that well became it.

At this time he wore a small plumed cap, a leathern jacket, knee-breeches, stockings of stout yarn, and short boots, the legs of which fitted closely to his ankles. Simon, the armorer, had made for him a light steel corselet, that he wore over his leathern jacket whenever he went beyond the walls of the fort. Upon all such excursions he was armed with his well-tried cross-bow (for which he carried a score of steel-tipped bolts) and a small, but keen-edged, dagger that hung at his belt.

After considering Has-se's proposal all the morning, René finally decided to accept it, and, without notifying any person in the fort of his intention, to accompany the young Indian to the land of the Alachuas.

In accordance with this plan he gathered together a number of trinkets, such as he knew would be acceptable to the Indians, and during the afternoon he conveyed these to the forest beyond the fort, where he bound them into a compact package and carefully hid them.

René could not account, any more than the others, for Has-se's disappearance, nor imagine how his escape had been effected; but he felt certain that the young Indian would be true to his word, and await his coming at the appointed place of meeting when the moon rose above the pine-tree tops.

As it would not rise until nearly ten o'clock that evening, and as his uncle retired early on account of his indisposition, René was able to bid him an affectionate good-night and receive his customary blessing without arousing any suspicion of his intended departure in the breast of the old soldier.

Leaving his own quarters about nine o'clock, with his cross-bow over his shoulder, René walked with an unconcerned air, but with a beating heart, directly to the main gate of the fort, at which he was challenged by the sentinel on duty there. René gave the countersign, and was recognized by the soldier, who, however, firmly refused to allow him to pass.

He said, "I am sorry to be obliged to interrupt thy walk, Master De Veaux; but since the escape of the Indian prisoner last night, we have received strictest orders not to allow a living soul to pass the gates between sunset and sunrise."

Thus turned back at the very outset of his adventure, René knew not what to do. Should he attempt to scale the walls, he might be shot while so doing, and at any rate there was the moat beyond, which he could not possibly cross without detection. Seeking the deep shadow of an angle, the boy seated himself on a gun-carriage and pondered over the situation. The more he thought of it the more impossible did it seem for him to escape beyond the grim walls and meet Has-se at the appointed time.

While he was thus overcome by the difficulties of his position, and as he had about concluded that he had undertaken an impossibility, he was startled by the deep tones of the great bell that hung in the archway of the gate, striking the hour of ten o'clock. Directly afterwards came the measured tramp of the guard and the clank of their weapons as they made their round for the purpose of relieving the sentinels on duty, and replacing them with fresh men. René sat so near the gate-way that he could overhear what was said when that post was relieved, and distinguishing above the rest the voice of his old friend Simon, the armorer, he became convinced that he had been placed on duty at this most important point.

After relieving this post the guard resumed their march, and passed so close to where René sat in the shadow of the great gun that, had the night been a shade lighter, they must have seen him. As it was, he escaped detection, and once more breathed freely as their footsteps sounded fainter and fainter in the distance. After a while he heard them return along the opposite side of the fort, and finally halt in front of the guard-house, when silence again reigned throughout the entire enclosure.

As René still sat on the gun-carriage, thinking how he might turn to account the fact of his friend Simon being on duty at the main gateway, the sound of a groan came from that direction. As it was repeated, the lad sprang to his feet and walked quietly but rapidly towards the place whence it came. When near the gateway he laid down his cross-bow and advanced without it, until brought to a halt by a sharp challenge in the gruff voice of old Simon.

René gave the countersign, and added, "It is I, René de Veaux, good Simon. Hearing thy groans, I came to learn their cause. What distresses thee so grievously?"

"Ah! Master De Veaux," answered the old soldier, "I fear me greatly that the fever of the bones with which so many of our men are suffering has at length laid hold on me, I have been warned for some days of its approach, and only a few hours since obtained from good Master Le Moyne physic which, if taken at the outset, prevents much pain. I left it in the smithy near the forge, not deeming the attack so near; but the chill of the night air hath hastened it, and already am I suffering the torments of the rack. Tell me, lad, wilt thou fetch me the phial from the smithy, that I may test the virtue of its contents?"

"Not so, good Simon," answered René, whose thoughts had been busy while the old soldier told of his troubles. "I will gladly aid thee, but am convinced that it can better be done in another way. Go thou for the physic, for thou canst more readily place hands upon it than I, and at the same time apparel thyself in garments thicker and more suited to the chill of the night than those thou wearest. I will stand watch until thy return, and pledge thee my word that none shall pass, or be the wiser for thy absence."

All his soldier's training forbade Simon to accept this offer. To desert his post, even though he left it guarded by another, would, he knew, be considered one of the gravest military crimes. Therefore the struggle in his mind between duty on the one side and his sufferings on the other was long and pitiful.

Finally pain conquered. "Well, well, Master René," he said, gruffly, "I must e'en take thy advice, and obtain speedy release from this pain, or else be found here dead ere the post be relieved. Keep thou open keen eyes and ears, and I pray that no harm may come of this my first neglect of duty in all the years that I have served the King."

With these words the old soldier thrust his pike into René's hands, and hurried away as quickly as his pain would permit towards his own quarters in the smithy.

As soon as Simon was out of hearing, René went and recovered his cross-bow. Then he carefully and noiselessly undid the fastenings of the great gate, and swung it open a few inches. This accomplished, he shouldered Simon's heavy pike, and patiently paced, like a sentry, up and down beneath the dark archway, until he heard approaching footsteps.

He called softly, "Is that thou, Simon?"

"Ay, lad," came the answer.

Then laying down the pike, and seizing his own cross-bow, René slipped quickly through the gate (which swung to behind him), and with noiseless footsteps fled swiftly across the bridge that spanned the moat, and disappeared in the black shadows of the forest beyond.

Although the moon had risen, and was now well up in the eastern sky, so that the bridge was brightly illumined by it, René crossed unnoticed. As the gate was still firmly fastened when he returned, Simon failed to detect that it had been opened, but the old man spent some minutes looking for the lad in the archway before he became convinced that he was gone. Even then he considered that René was only endeavoring to tease him by thus slipping away, and muttering something about a boy being as full of mischief as a monkey, the soldier shouldered his pike and once more resumed his measured paces up and down the archway.

At the edge of the forest René stopped, drew from his bosom a note that he had written before leaving his room, and thrust it into the end of a cleft branch that he stuck into the ground near the end of the bridge. It was addressed to his Excellency the Chevalier Laudonniere, Commandant of Fort Caroline, and its contents were as follows:

"MY DEARLY BELOVED UNCLE,—Doubtless I am doing very wrong in thus leaving the fort and undertaking an important mission without thy sanction. It would seem, however, that circumstances are peculiarly favorable to my success in this matter, and I feared lest thou wouldst forbid the undertaking, out of a tender regard for my youth and inexperience. I go with the Indian lad Has-se, my friend, to the land of the Alachuas, on a quest for provisions for the fort. In case of my success I will return again at the end of a month, or shortly thereafter. If I fail, and return no more, I still crave thy blessing, and to be remembered without abatement of the love thou hast ever extended to me. No person within the fort has aided me in this matter, nor has any one of thy garrison knowledge of my departure.

"I remain, dear uncle, with sincerest respect and deepest love, thy nephew,

"RÉNÉ DE VEAUX."

Having thus taken measures to inform his uncle of his departure and the mission on which he had set forth, René tightened his belt, shouldered his cross-bow, and turned into the dark pine forest. He made his way swiftly down the river-bank towards the appointed place of meeting, where he hoped to find Has-se still waiting for him, though it was already past the hour that the latter had mentioned. On the way he stopped and recovered the package of trinkets that he had hidden in the forest that afternoon.

As he neared the little stream on the bank of which the Indian lad had promised to await his coming, he uttered the cry of Hup-pe the great owl, which was the signal Has-se had taught him. To his joy it was immediately answered from a short distance in advance. In another moment he stood beside his friend, who without a word led him to where a canoe was hidden beneath some overhanging branches. They stepped in, a few strong strokes of the paddles shot them clear of the creek, the bow of their craft was turned down-stream, and ere a word had been spoken between them, they were gliding swiftly down the glassy moonlit surface of the great river towards its mouth.

CHAPTER VI

THE JOURNEY IN SEARCH OF FOOD

As the paddles flashed brightly in the moonshine, and the light craft in which René and Has-se were seated moved swiftly and silently down the broad river, the former related to his companion all the particulars of his leaving the fort, and the delays that had detained him past their appointed time of meeting. As he concluded his story, Has-se, who until then had remained silent, said,

"Thou hast done well, Ta-lah-lo-ko, and thy success at the outset is proof to me that the Great Spirit favors our undertaking."

René was not so convinced of this as his companion, for he was not at all certain that he was acting rightly; but he did not seek to disturb the other's confidence, and only said,

"Now tell me of thy escape, Has-se; for I must confess that I would have deemed it impossible, and am not a little concerned to find Fort Caroline such a sieve as thy easy leave-taking would seem to prove it."

Has-se was silent for some minutes, and then he said,

"I would have no secrets from thee, my brother, and would gladly tell thee that thou askest; but I may not now, though at another time my tongue may be loosed. For the present I am bound not to reveal that which must needs be known were the manner of my escape described to thee."

René felt somewhat hurt at this answer, which seemed to imply a want of confidence in him; but he knew his friend's character too well to press the subject further, and so, smothering his curiosity, he turned the conversation to other things.

After they had travelled for several miles down the river, Has-se turned the bow of the canoe into a sluggish bayou, that wound, with innumerable turnings, amid vast limitless expanses of salt-marsh. This stream led into others that formed such a maze that it seemed to René impossible that they should ever discover a way out of it.

As Has-se kept the canoe to its course, never for an instant hesitating as to which way he should turn, they startled from their resting-places myriads of water-fowl and strange birds, that flew away with harsh notes of alarm. These were answered from the distant forest by the melancholy howlings of wolves and the cries of other night-prowling wild beasts, that sounded very fearful to René's unaccustomed ears.

At length their craft was run ashore at the foot of a small shell mound that formed quite an elevation amid the wide levels of the marshes, and Has-se said they would rest there until sunrise. After hauling the canoe well up out of the water, he led the way to a small hut, thatched with palmetto-leaves, that stood half-way up the side of the mound. In it was piled a quantity of long gray moss, that formed a most acceptable bed to the tired boys; and throwing themselves down on it, they were in a few minutes fast asleep.

It seemed to René that he had but just fallen asleep when he was awakened by a light touch upon his forehead. Springing to his feet, he found Has-se standing smiling beside him, and saw that the sun had already risen. Running down to the beach, he bathed his face in the cool salt-water, used a handful of moss as a towel, and turned to the breakfast that Has-se had spent an hour in preparing.

When René saw what a luxurious repast the ingenuity of the young Indian had provided, he opened his eyes wide in astonishment. He knew that a bag of parched corn and several gourds of fresh water had been brought along, and upon this simple fare he had expected to break his fast. Now, in addition to the parched corn, he saw fish, oysters, eggs, and a vegetable, all smoking hot, cooked to a nicety, and temptingly spread on some freshly cut palm-leaves.

The fish were mullet, that Has-se had speared from the canoe as they swam in the clear water. He had cleaned them, wrapped them in fresh, damp leaves, raked aside a portion of the fire that he had kindled when he first arose, buried them in the hot sand beneath it, and covered the spot with live coals.

The oysters had also come from the water, in a great bunch that Has-se had just been able to lift and carry to the fire. To cook them he had simply placed the entire bunch on the coals, where they had roasted in their shells, which now gaped wide open, offering their contents to be eaten.

The eggs were plover's eggs, of which Has-se had discovered several nests among the tall marsh grass. They also had been roasted in the hot sand, from which the fire had been raked one side.

The vegetable puzzled René considerably, for he had never seen its like, and knew not what to make of it. When he asked Has-se what it was, the latter laughed, with the soft, musical laugh, peculiar to his people, and answered,

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