

# *The Flamingo Feather* by Kirk Munroe

## Chapter VII: Chitta Becomes a Seminole

In order to account for the presence of the canoe of which René and Has-se had caught a glimpse, as it darted in among the black shadows of the cypress forest in the great swamp, we must go back to the night that followed the Feast of Ripe Corn.

After Chitta struck Has-se the blow that stretched him stunned and bleeding on the ground, he sprang into the forest, and gliding swiftly among the stately trunks of the solemn pines, made his way to the river. On its bank were drawn up many canoes, over which Chitta glanced hastily, but with a practised eye. In a moment he selected one that promised to combine lightness with speed, noiselessly launched it, and stepped into it. Grasping a paddle, he headed the stolen craft down the river, and was quickly buried in the mist that rose from its surface.

As the unhappy lad pursued his solitary way down the river, neither knowing nor caring where he was going, so long as he placed distance between himself and those whom he knew would shortly search for him, his mind was filled with bitter reflections. He felt as though he hated all men, but especially Has-se and the white lad, who, he felt certain, had taught the former the trick of wrestling, by means of which the games had been won.

In destroying the great storehouse, with its winter's supply of provisions of his tribe, his desire had not been so much to injure his own people as the white men, whom he knew were also dependent upon it for food, and of whom Has-se's friend was one who would thus suffer. He had thought to escape detection after committing this wicked act, and that the fire would be supposed to be the result of an accident. This hope had been dashed by the unexpected appearance of Has-se, who had overheard his muttered threats; and now he knew that he must be an outlaw from his tribe forever, and that he would meet with a terrible punishment if he ever fell into their hands.

Of all his bitter thoughts the one uppermost in his mind was the desire for revenge upon the gentle but high-spirited Has-se, who had not only won from him his coveted position, but against whom he had just struck such a cruel and cowardly blow.

This is the way of the world, with white as well as with red men, and with boys and girls as well as with grown people. The more we injure a person, the more bitter do we



feel against him; and the more we help and do good to him, the more kindly do we feel towards him.

The deep scowl of hate had not left Chitta's face when he ran his canoe ashore at the foot of the high bluff upon which Admiral Ribault had erected the stone pillar engraved with the French coat of arms. Securing his canoe, and carefully concealing it from those who might pass on the river, Chitta made his way, by means of a narrow path through the tangled underbrush, to the summit. From here, by daylight, he would command a view of the river for miles in either direction, and would be able to detect the approach of any who should come in search of him while yet they were a long way off.

As it was still night, and nothing was now to be seen except what was disclosed by the moon, the young Indian gathered together a small heap of moss and leaves, and drawing his robe over his head, flung himself down for a few hours' sleep.

Tired as he was, Chitta fell asleep almost instantly; but it was fully an hour after he had done so that a tall Indian rose, without a sound, from the clump of bushes, concealed by which he had all this time been watching the motionless figure, and cautiously approached it. In his hands the tall Indian held a slender cord of twisted deer-hide, in one end of which was a noose.

Without a movement that could arouse the lightest sleeper, he knelt by Chitta's side, and with great dexterity managed to pass the noose over both his moccasined feet without disturbing his slumber. Drawing it as tightly as he dared, the tall Indian made the other end fast to a sapling, and sat down beside the sleeper to patiently await his awakening.

At length, just as the sun was appearing in the far east, Chitta stirred uneasily, yawned, threw the blanket off from his head, and sat up. As his gaze fell upon the motionless figure beside him he uttered a sort of a gasping cry and sprang to his feet. He had hardly gained them before the noose did its work, and, tripped by it, he fell heavily to the ground. The tall Indian had also sprung to his feet, and now stood over the prostrate form of his victim, with a cruel smile lighting his dark features.

Although wicked, Chitta was no coward, and finding himself thus trapped by an unknown enemy, he coolly asked, as he lay there,

“Who art thou, and what have I done to thee that thou shouldst thus snare me like Pet-che?” (the pigeon).

For answer the tall Indian said, “I will first tell thee who thou art. Thy name is Chitta. Thou wast overthrown but yesterday at the Feast of Ripe Corn by the lad who wears in his hair the To-fa chat-te” (red feather). “Thou art he who set fire to the



storehouse of corn. Above all, thou art now, like myself, an outlaw forever from thy people; for know that I am that Seminole called Cat-sha” (the tiger).

At this name Chitta gave a start of surprise, for though he had never before seen this Indian, the name of Cat-sha had been familiar to him from his childhood. It was one used by Indian mothers to frighten their unruly children, and quiet them into obedience, for it belonged to the crudest, boldest, and most dreaded of all the outlawed Seminoles.

When still a youth, Cat-sha had, in a fit of ungovernable anger, struck one of his young companions a blow, from the effects of which he died. For this he was driven from his tribe, and from that day he had been an outcast, whose hand was raised against all men, and who had become famed and dreaded for his deeds of savage cruelty. He had gathered together and become chief of that band of Seminoles of whom Has-se had told René, and under his leadership it was rapidly becoming a scourge to all the more peaceful inhabitants of that country. Knowing all this, it is no wonder that Chitta gave a start of surprise not unmixed with alarm when he learned into whose hands he had fallen.

Evidently gratified at the impression the mere mention of his name produced upon his prisoner, Cat-sha continued:

“For many days have I watched the place of the pale-faces from beyond the great waters. I hate them, and would gladly drive them back into the sea whence they came. It was to learn their strength and discover in what manner they might be most successfully attacked that I came to this place. Thy people, at their feasting and dancing, have I also seen, and I had thought to do with my own hand the deed accomplished by thee last night. Since thou hast relieved me of that labor, I am inclined favorably towards thee, and will spare thy life upon condition that thou renounce forever thy own people and become one of my band.”

“Become a Seminole!” exclaimed Chitta, in a tone expressive of dislike and contempt. He had never thought, even amid his wildest schemes for obtaining revenge upon those whom he considered his enemies, to make one of this band of outcasts.

“Un-cah” (yes), answered Cat-sha, fiercely, angered by the tone of the other; “and why not? Art thou not already an outlaw and a runaway from thy people? Having thus left them forever, to whom else canst thou turn save to the brave and warlike Seminoles? Besides, if thou dost not join us, I will kill thee where thou liest, and none shall ever know thy fate. We Seminoles know but two kinds of men, those who are of us and those who are against us.”



Thus Chitta had no choice left him between making one of the band of outlaws whose name was a term of reproach among all good Indians, and meeting with a cruel death, from which he shrank. After a moment's silence he made up his mind, and said, "So be it then, Cat-sha. From this hour call me Chitta the Seminole. From this hour the wisdom of the serpent shall be for them with whom he thus joins his fortunes, and henceforth his fangs shall be held ready for all who are their enemies."

Cat-sha's dark face was again lighted by a cruel smile of triumph as he listened to these words, for he knew that one of China's nature would be a valuable addition to his band. He released his new recruit, helped him to his feet, embraced him, and said,

"Chitta the Seminole, I welcome thee gladly to our number. The time will come when we shall have increased to a great and powerful tribe, and when the name given us by our enemies shall be honored of all men. Let us go."

