



by Kirk Munroe
Canoemates
A Story of the Florida Reef and Everglades

Chapter 17: An Entertainment on the Key

HOW Quorum managed to tumble out of the Psyche without upsetting her is a mystery, but he did it somehow. Seeing that he was easily making his way to the land, Worth continued on his course to the Transit, which he reached a minute later. The moment he stepped abroad, Sumner threw his arms about the boy with what was intended for a joyful hug. Worth returned it with interest. For a few seconds the two staggered about the deck in what looked decidedly like a wrestling match to the amused spectators of the scene, who had been attracted from below by Sumner's shout. Finally they tripped and rolled with a crash into the cockpit, where they scrambled to their feet, greeted by shouts of laughter from Lieutenant Carey and Ensign Sloe, while even the men forward were chuckling with ill-suppressed mirth.

Had Sumner and Worth been a few years older, they would probably have expressed their joy over this happy and unexpected meeting with a cordial handshake, and a few inquiries after each other's welfare during their separation. That would have been a man's way. Happily, all boys are not men, nor are their ways men's ways. Any genuine boy will understand that nothing short of a wrestling match would have served to express the joy with which these two young hearts were relieved of the load of anxiety that had weighed so heavily upon them during the past three days.

"But how did you know the canoes were out at the light, Worth?" inquired Sumner, after the first boisterous greeting was over. "Excuse me! Let me introduce you to Lieutenant Carey and Ensign Sloe. And how did you get there? And how did you know that we were here?" exclaimed Sumner, in a breath, as soon as he had regained his feet.

"The keeper told us," answered Worth, shaking hands with those to whom he had just been introduced. "And I didn't know you were here. How did you get here, and what became of the raft? Did you ever see anything so absurd as Quorum? I don't believe he has opened his eyes since we left the light, and I actually thought he was turning white, he was so scared. Oh, Sumner, I never was so happy in my life!"

"Nor I," answered Sumner; "and if I ever leave you again, you young scamp, before delivering you safe and sound to your lawful guardians, you'll know it."

"And you may be mighty sure I won't be left again," answered Worth. "No, siree! From this time on, you'll think I'm your shadow, I'll stick to you so close."



By this time Quorum had been brought aboard, and Sumner, shaking hands with him, gravely congratulated him upon having formed the habit of taking a plunge bath before breakfast. With a reproachful look at the lad, and without deigning to reply to his banter, Quorum turned away and dived into the little forward galley. Here he quickly made himself at home, and all the time he was drying by the galley stove he could be heard entertaining the colored cook of the *Transit* with a thrilling description of his recent voyage in “dat an tickly nutshell. Mo’ like er washbasin dan er ’spectible boat; an’ ef I don’t hole her down wif bofe han’s till dey done achin’, she flop ober like er flapjack. I tell yo’, chile, hit’s er ’sperience sich as I don’t want no mo’ ob in all my sailin’.”

Around the breakfast table in the tiny after saloon Sumner and Worth were comparing experiences and discussing their plans for the future.

“I tell you what it is, Sumner,” exclaimed Worth “I don’t know about cruising any farther up this reef, where we are likely at any time to be seized and carried off to sea by some Jew-fish or other marine monster. Seems to me it’s taking a big risk.”

“Then why not come with us through the ’Glades?” laughed Lieutenant Carey. “There aren’t any Jew-fish there. It will be almost the same as cruising on dry land all the way, and we’ll bring you out at Cape Florida, the very point you are aiming for.”

“I think that would be fine,” answered Worth, who had no more idea of the nature of the Everglades than he had of the moon. “What do you say, Sumner?”

“It’s the very thing I should most love to do,” replied Sumner.

“Then you will go with us?” asked the Lieutenant.

“Yes, sir, we will,” answered both the boys.

“Good! That settles it. Now do you suppose we can persuade your old darkey to go along as cook? I think you said he was a good one, Sumner?”

“Indeed he is!” exclaimed Worth; “the very best I ever knew. Oh yes, we must have Quorum along by all means.”

When the plan was laid before him, Quorum shook his head doubtfully, and said:

“I allus hear dem Ebberglades is a ter’ble place. Dey’s full ob lions an’ tigers, sayin’ nuffin’ ob wild Injuns an’ cannonballs” (probably Quorum meant cannibals). “But ef dem two chilluns boun’ ter go, I spec’ ole Quor’m hab ter go ’long ter look after um, an’ see dat dey’s kep’ outen danger. Hit’s er mighty owdacious undertaking fer de ole man; but dish yere er peart looking wessel, an’ maybe she take us troo all right.”

“But we are not going in this vessel,” laughed Sumner. “We couldn’t take her through the ’Glades.”

“How yo go, den?” asked the Negro, looking up quickly. “Not in them tickly li’l’ cooners?”

“Yes, some of us will go in the canoes, but you will have a much larger boat; one that you can’t possibly upset.”

“When I see him, den I tell yo’ ef I er gwine.” And this was the only promise that Quorum could be induced to give.

“Very well,” said Lieutenant Carey, when this was reported to him; “we will rig up the cruisers, and let Quorum sail one of them in to *Lignum Vitae*. One of the men shall take the other, you two will



sail your own canoes, and I will sail mine, while Mr. Sloe shall follow with the Transit. When Mr. Haines sees us coming he'll think he is looking at a regatta of the Reef Yacht Club."

This plan suited the boys perfectly, and the next two hours were spent in getting all the boats into the water, overhauling sails, spars, etc. When Quorum saw the Barnegat cruiser that was assigned to him, he declared, "Hit done look like er punkin seed, an' I don't beliebe hit fit fer sailin' nohow." It was only with the greatest difficulty that he could be persuaded to try the strange looking craft. When he finally did so, his eyes opened wide with astonishment at her speed and stiffness, and the ease with which she was handled.

Each of the cruisers carried a large sprit sail, and was fitted with a pair of oars. They were provided with centerboards, were fair sailers, easy to row, practically non-capsizable, and capable of carrying heavy loads without materially increasing their draught.

Quorum was a good sailor, and as soon as he became somewhat accustomed to his craft he began to handle her in a way that showed an appreciation of her qualities. When he shot ahead, after a little brush with the other cruiser, the Melon Seed -- as he termed her -- his black face fairly beamed with delight.

"Your man is as tickled with that boat as a child with a new toy," remarked Lieutenant Carey to Sumner, "and I guess there is no doubt now but what he will go with us."

The Lieutenant's open paddling canoe was fitted with a leg-of-mutton sail, but no centerboard. Thus the sail was only available for running before the wind, which on this occasion happened to be fair. The three canoes and the two cruisers, starting on their race to Lignum Vitae, formed a very pretty sight. As they were followed by the Transit, and by the schooner that had carried Worth and Quorum to Indian Key, which came along on her return trip just then, it is no wonder that Mr. Haines regarded the approaching fleet with astonishment.

The race was won by Sumner in the Psyche, with Quorum in his Punkin Seed, and wildly excited, close behind. The other three were well bunched, and the two schooners were worked under foresails only, to keep from running them down.

All hands were made heartily welcome by the proprietor of Lignum Vitae, who was made happy by the information that they proposed to stay there that night. On hearing this he immediately began to plan a grand dinner to which everybody was invited, and an entertainment for the evening. He and Lieutenant Carey spent the afternoon in arranging for the entertainment, the four cooks, with Quorum at their head, spent it in preparing a most elaborate dinner, and the others spent it fishing and sailing match races between the various small boats. As the hours flew busily and happily by, Sumner and Worth wondered how they could ever have felt wretched and forlorn in such a pleasant place.

The dinner, which was served shortly before sunset, was a veritable feast. On its bill of fare appeared oysters, green turtle soup, fish chowder, turtle steaks, baked kingfish, stewed ducks, roasted 'possum, a variety of canned vegetables, an immense plum duff, canned fruits, crackers, cheese, and coffee; while the whole was seasoned with the sauce of hearty appetites and capital digestions. It was a substantial meal, as well as a merry one, and it gave Worth Manton a new insight into the possibilities of life on the Florida Keys.

By hard work Mr. Haines had succeeded in raising the frame of the little one-story house that he intended to occupy, and in getting the floor laid. This was to be the scene of the entertainment, and an



hour or so after dinner all hands were collected here. Several large bonfires shed a cheerful light on the circle of expectant faces, and cast wavering shadows over the platform.

The first number on the program was an overture by the Lignum Vitae Band, which consisted of Mr. Haines's banjo, Lieutenant Carey's guitar, Ensign Sloe's violin, and a flute played by one of the Transit's men. Then Worth danced a clog, and was received with immense applause. He was followed by Sumner, who performed a number of sleight-of-hand tricks that drew forth exclamations of astonishment from the Negroes. A mouth-organ quartet by four of the Negro hands, was followed by Mr. Haines's banjo solo. This was of such an inspiring character that all the Negroes patted time to it, and finally Quorum sprang upon the platform and, with his beloved pipe still held tightly between his teeth, began to shuffle a breakdown in such a comical manner that it was received with tumultuous applause and roars of laughter. Solo and chorus singing followed, and the entertainment wound up with the singing of "Annie Laurie" by a quartet of sailors.

Both Sumner and Worth were certain that they had never passed a more enjoyable evening, and were almost sorry that they had promised to leave there and start for the Everglades on the following morning.

