

WAKULLA, A STORY OF ADVENTURE IN FLORIDA



Chapter 11: "The Elmer Mill and Ferry Company"

Mr. Elmer made careful inquiries concerning the mill about which Mark had told him, and found that it was the only one within twenty miles of Wakulla. He was told that it used to do a very flourishing business before the bridge was carried away, and things in that part of the county went to ruin generally. Both Mr. Bevil and Mr. Carter thought that if there was any way of getting over to it, the mill could be made to pay, and were much pleased at the prospect of having it put in running order again.

Mr. March having been a mill-owner, and thoroughly understanding machinery, visited the one in question with Mr. Elmer, and together they inspected it carefully. They found that it contained old-fashioned but good machinery for grinding corn and ginning cotton, but none for sawing lumber. Only about thirty feet of the dam had been carried away, and it could be repaired at a moderate expense. Mr. March said that by raising the whole dam a few feet the water-power would be greatly increased, and would be sufficient to run a saw in addition to the machinery already on hand. He also said that he knew of an abandoned saw-mill a few miles up the river, the machinery of which was still in a fair condition and could be bought for a trifle.

The result of what he saw and heard was that Mr. Elmer decided the investment to be a good one, and at once took the necessary steps towards purchasing the property. This decision pleased Mark and Jan greatly, and they began to think that they were men of fine business ability, or, as Mark said, were "possessed of long heads."

That same evening a meeting of the "dusty millers," as Ruth called them, was held in the "Go Bang" sitting-room. Mr. Elmer addressed the meeting and proposed that they form a mill company with a capital of one thousand dollars, and that the stock be valued at one hundred dollars a share.

This proposition met with general approval, though Mark whispered to Ruth that he didn't see how father was going to make a thousand dollars' worth of capital out of five hundred unless he watered the stock.

"Now," said Mr. Elmer, after it was agreed that they should form a company, "what shall the association be called?"

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Many names were suggested, among them that of "The Great Southern Mill Company," by Mark, who also proposed "The Florida and Wakulla Milling Association." Finally Mr. March proposed "The Elmer Mill Company," and after some discussion this name was adopted.

Meantime Mr. Elmer had prepared a sheet of paper which he handed round for signatures, and when it was returned to him it read as follows:

THE ELMER MILL COMPANY.

WAKULLA, FLORIDA, January 10, 188-.

The undersigned do hereby promise to pay into the capital stock of The Elmer Mill Company, upon demand of its Treasurer, the sums placed opposite their respective names:

Mark Elmer	\$200
Ellen R. Elmer	\$200
Mark Elmer, Jun	\$100
Ruth Elmer	\$100
Harold March	\$100
Jan Jansen	\$100

After these signatures had been obtained, Mr. March said that he had a proposition to lay before the company. It was that he should superintend the setting up of the mill machinery and its running for one year, for which service he should receive a salary of one hundred dollars. He also said that if the company saw fit to accept this offer he would at once subscribe the one hundred dollars salary to its capital stock in addition to the sum already set opposite his name.

This proposition, being put to vote by the chairman, was unanimously accepted, and the amount opposite Mr. March's name on the subscription list was changed from one hundred dollars to two hundred dollars.

Then Mr. Elmer said that he wished to lay some propositions before the company. One of them was that if they would accept the ferry franchise he had recently obtained, he would present it as a free gift. He also wished to propose to Mr. March and Master Frank March that they should build the ferry-boat, for which he would furnish the material. To the company he further proposed that if Mr. Frank March would agree for the sum of one hundred dollars to run the ferry-boat for one year from the time it was launched,

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his name should at once be placed upon the subscription list, and he be credited with one share of stock.

All of these propositions having been accepted, the name of Frank March was added to the list, and the books were declared closed.

Mr. Elmer said that the next business in order was the election of officers, and he called for nominations.

Mrs. Elmer caused Mark to blush furiously by speaking of him in the most flattering terms as the originator of the scheme, and nominating him as president of the company.

The list of officers, as finally prepared and submitted to the meeting, was as follows:

President	Mark Elmer, Jun.
Vice-President and General Manager	Mark Elmer, Sen.
Treasurer	Ellen R. Elmer.
Secretary	Ruth Elmer.
Superintendent of Mills	Harold March.
Superintendent of Ferries	Frank March.

And a Board of Directors, to consist of Jan Jansen, Esq., and the officers of the company ex-officio.

This ticket being voted upon as a whole and unanimously elected, Mr. Elmer resigned his chair to the newly made President, who gravely asked if there was any further business before the meeting.

“Mr. President,” said Mr. March, “I wish to move that the name ‘Elmer Mill Company,’ which we recently adopted, be changed so as to read ‘Elmer Mill and Ferry Company.’”

“All right,” said the President; “you may move it.”

“I second the motion,” said Mr. Elmer, laughing, “and call for the question.” “Nobody’s asked any,” said Mark, looking rather bewildered.

“I mean, Mr. President, that I call upon you to lay the motion just made by our distinguished superintendent of mills, and seconded by myself, before the meeting, that they may take action upon it.”

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"Oh," said Mark; and remembering how his father had done it, he put the motion very properly, announced that the yeas had it, and that the name of the company was accordingly changed.

Then the President made an address, in which he said that, after a most careful examination into the affairs of the Elmer Mill and Ferry Company, he was able to report most favorably as to its present condition. He found that they owned valuable mill buildings and machinery, and had contracted for a first-class ferry-boat, which was to be built immediately, and which had been paid for in advance. He also found that the two salaried officers of the company, the superintendent of mills and the superintendent of ferries, had been paid one year's salary in advance.

In spite of these great outlays, he was informed by the treasurer that a cash balance of three hundred dollars remained in the treasury, and he congratulated the stockholders of the company upon its healthy and flourishing condition. This address was received with loud and prolonged applause.

Before the meeting adjourned it was decided that the election of officers should be held annually, and that the Board of Directors should meet once a month.

A meeting of this Board was held immediately upon the adjournment of the meeting of stockholders, and the general manager was instructed to purchase saw-mill machinery, and to begin the rebuilding of the dam at once.

"Well, Ruth," said Mark, after all this business had been transacted, "now we ARE property owners sure enough. That newspaper was about right after all."

After the others had gone to bed, Mr. Elmer and Mr. March talked for some time together, and this conversation resulted in the latter agreeing to move to Wakulla, and build a small house for himself and Frank on Mr. Elmer's land. He told Mr. Elmer that meeting him and his family had given him new ideas of life, and aroused a desire for better things both for himself and his son.

The Sunday-school was well attended the next Sunday; and as Mr. Elmer had brought a package of song-books with him from Tallahassee, the scholars learned to sing several of the songs, and seemed to enjoy them very much.

Monday was a rainy day, but as a rough shed had been built to serve as a temporary workshop, the ferry-boat was begun. On it Mr. March laid out enough work to keep all hands busy except Frank, who was still confined to the house.

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The rain fell steadily all that week, until the Elmers no longer wondered that bridges and dams were swept away in that country, and Mark said that if it did not stop pretty soon they would have to build an ark instead of a ferry-boat.

As a result of the rainy week, the boat was finished, the seams were calked and pitched by Saturday night, and it was all ready to be launched on Monday. By that time the rain had ceased, and the weather was again warm and beautiful.

On Monday morning Frank March left the house for the first time since he had been carried into it, and was invited to take a seat in the new boat. The mules were then hitched to it, and it was dragged in triumph to the edge of the river. It was followed by the whole family, including Aunt Chloe and Bruce, who had shown great delight at meeting his old master, Mr. March, and appeared to be ready to make up and be friends again with Frank, who had treated him so cruelly.

At the water's edge the mules were unhitched, a long rope was attached to one end of the boat, stout shoulders were placed under the pry poles, and with a "Heave'o! and another! and still another!" it was finally slid into the water amid loud cheers from the assembled spectators. These cheers were answered from the other side of the river, where nearly the whole population of Wakulla had assembled to see the launch.

Mark and Frank begged so hard to be allowed to take the boat across the river on a trial trip that Mr. Elmer said they might. Armed with long poles, they pushed off, but in a moment were swept down stream by the strong current in spite of all their efforts, and much to the dismay of Mrs. Elmer, who feared they were in danger.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear," said her husband; "they are not in any danger in that boat. It will teach them a good lesson on the strength of currents, and they'll soon fetch up on one bank or the other."

They did "fetch up" on the opposite side of the river after a while, but it was half a mile down stream. When they got the boat made fast to a tree, both boys were too thoroughly exhausted to attempt to force it back to Wakulla.

Just as they had decided to leave the boat where she was and walk back through the woods, they heard a shout out on the river, and saw Jan and a colored man coming towards them in the skiff.

The men took the poles and the boys, jumping into the skiff, made it fast to the bow of the boat with a tow-line; and, by keeping close to the bank, they finally succeeded, after

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two hours' hard work, in getting back to Wakulla. They left the boat on that side of the river for the time being, and all crossed in the skiff.

The rest of that day was spent in planting two stout posts, one on each side of the river, close to the old bridge abutments, and in stretching across the river, from one post to the other, a wire cable that Mr. Elmer had bought for this purpose. A couple of iron pulley-wheels, to which were attached small but strong ropes, were placed on the cable, its ends were drawn taut by teams of mules, and anchored firmly in the ground about twenty feet behind each post.

The ropes of the pulley-wheels were made fast to the bow and stern of the boat, and the forward one was drawn up short, while the other was left long enough to allow the boat to swing at an angle to the current. Then the boat was shoved off, and, without any poling, was carried by the force of the current quickly and steadily to the other side.

A tin horn was attached by a light chain to each post, the ferry was formally delivered to Master Frank March, and it was declared open and ready for business.