

# *The Flamingo Feather* by Kirk Munroe

## 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.”

Réné'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 Nutchka 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.”

René 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."

