

The Flamingo Feather *by Kirk Munroe*

Chapter IX: A Trap Avoided and Friends

At René's cry, suppressed though it was Has-se turned quickly, and in time to see the moccasin glide away through the water. He also noted the spot of blood on his companion's finger, at which the latter was gazing with a look of horror.

Without a word the young Indian sprang to René's side, drew the little sharp-pointed dagger from its sheath, and firmly but deliberately enlarged with it the minute wound made by the fangs of the snake, until the blood flowed freely from it; then raising the hand to his own mouth, he sucked all that was possible of the poisoned blood from the wound, stopping several times during the operation to rinse his mouth with water.

When this was done he took a handful of slimy river mud and placed it over the wounded place, bidding his friend hold it there. Then, seizing his paddle, he turned the bow of the canoe up-stream in the direction from which they had come. He paddled back to a small lagoon that emptied into the stream, and in which he had noticed a peculiar species of water-lily growing as they passed it on their way down. Pulling a handful of these up by the roots, he selected one of the bulbs attached to them, pounded it until it was a mass of fibre, and washing the river mud from the wounded hand, he replaced it with this.

The hand had already swollen and become very painful, but the application of the bruised lily-root acted so like a charm that René's face showed an instant sense of relief, and he expressed his gratitude to Has-se.

"It is nothing to do," replied the other. "It is but the remedy of my people for such things." Then he added, with a sort of pride,

"The pale-faces are wise in many matters that we poor red men know nothing of; but we have at least learned that for every evil there is a remedy close at hand, and that wherever poisonous serpents are found there also grows a plant that will render

their poison harmless. In a short time thy hand will be as sound as before it laid hold of Chitta-wewa, the great water-snake.”

“Tis marvellous!” exclaimed René; “and if thou wouldst return with me to France, bringing with thee a few of these samples and thy knowledge of their application, thou wouldst become a great medicine-man and obtain much honor of my people.”

Has-se only shook his head and smiled at this suggestion; then he said,

“For a time thou must lie perfectly quiet, and keep that upon thy hand wet with cool water. Meantime I will carry out a plan of which I have just conceived the idea. Near by, from the head of this lagoon, there runs a narrow trail by which a great bend in the stream is cut off, and a point much lower down upon it is reached. If thou wilt remain here and nurse thy hand, I will cross to the lower stream by this trail; and it may be that I will thus gain more speedy information concerning those whom we follow.”

Réné at once agreed to this plan, and was soon left alone to nurse his hand and meditate upon his present strange position. From his savage surroundings his thoughts ran back to the uncle whom he had left in Fort Caroline to battle with sickness, and possibly with starvation and the upbraidings of his own men. The boy’s heart was full of tenderness for the brave old soldier who had so promptly assumed the part of a father towards him; and had he not been restrained by the consciousness of the vital importance of the mission he had undertaken, he would have been inclined to return at once and share whatever trials were besetting the chevalier. From him the boy’s thoughts sped to France and the old chateau in which he was born. He almost laughed aloud as he imagined the look of consternation with which old François would regard him if he could now see him, lying alone in a fragile craft, such as the old servant had never imagined, in the midst of a terrible wilderness of great moss-hung trees, queer-looking plants, black waters, and blacker mud.

From these reveries he was suddenly startled by the sound of a slight splash in the water and a subdued human voice. Raising his head very cautiously above the side of the canoe, René caught a glimpse, at the mouth of the little lagoon in which his own craft was concealed, of another canoe, in which were seated two Indians. It was headed up-stream, but its occupants had paused in their paddling, and from their gestures were evidently considering the exploration of the very place in which he lay hidden from



them. In one of them René recognized the unwelcome face of Chitta the Snake, but the other he had never before seen.

With a loudly beating heart and almost without breathing he watched them, thankful enough for the shelter of broad lily-leaves that raised their green barrier in front of him. He was fully conscious that upon the result of the conversation the two were holding, in such low tones that he could not distinguish a word, depended his own fate. He knew, from what Has-se had told him, that Chitta regarded him as an enemy, and he knew also that for his enemies an Indian reserves but one fate, and will kill them if he can.

Thus it was with the feeling that he had escaped a mortal peril, and with a long-drawn sigh of relief, that he saw the discussion come to an end, and the strange canoe continue on its course up-stream. It disappeared in the direction from which he and Has-se had come before encountering the moccasin. Then he became feverishly impatient to leave a place that seemed so full of danger, and he longed eagerly for Has-se's return.

Although René watched anxiously for Has-se, he also cast frequent glances towards the stream, fearful lest Chitta and his companion should again appear. Thus he was not looking when his friend emerged from the forest, and did not hear the light tread of his moccasined feet. Nor was he aware of any presence near him, until a low laugh, which so startled him that he almost upset the canoe, gave the first hint of his friend's return.

“Oh, Has-se!” he exclaimed, in a whisper rendered hoarse by his excitement, “glad am I to see thee once more. Chitta is in pursuit of us, and with him is as evil-looking an Indian as ever I saw, but large and powerful withal.”

Then he related the whole incident of the appearance of the strange canoe, to which Has-se listened with grave attention.

When René had finished he said, “Has-se also has something to tell. Far down the river, on the side opposite the end of the trail, he heard the sound of many voices, and he knows his people are there. Let us go to them.”

“But if we venture out into the stream, will not Chitta and the one with him see us?”

“If they do not until we float on the river, they must prove themselves swifter than Hu-la-lah” (the wind) “to catch us before we reach friends. How is thy hand? Is the sting of Chitta-wewa still painful?”

“Oh! my hand? Why, no; I had no thought of it until now. Thanks to thy application, the pain and the swelling seem alike to have been removed.”

“Then let us go, and if it comes to meeting Chitta, we will see if we cannot render his sting as harmless as that of his namesake Chitta-wewa.”

Very cautiously the two boys paddled their canoe out from the lagoon, and headed it down the narrow river towards the place where they hoped to find friends.

Having reached the stream in safety, they were about to congratulate each other on their good-fortune, when suddenly a wild scream, such as is made by an enraged panther, came ringing down through the dark forest glade behind them.

“It is the yell of Cat-sha the Tiger, chief of the Seminoles!” cried Has-se. “For the Snake, with the Tiger to aid him, we are no match. If those white arms of thine have strength in them, now is the time to prove it, Ta-lah-lo-ko.”

With this the two boys bent over their paddles, and plied them with such energy that their light craft fairly hissed through the water, and flew past the gray, motionless columns of the cypresses. Not far behind came their pursuers, also straining every muscle, and already exulting over the prize that was so nearly within their grasp.

Cat-sha and Chitta had become impatient of waiting in their ambush for those who failed to come, but who they knew had been following them, and they finally decided to cautiously retrace their course in order to learn, what had become of them. At the mouth of the lagoon in which René had awaited Has-se’s return they paused, undecided, for a moment. From the very trail taken by Has-se there branched another, which led to the distant Seminole fastness in the heart of the great swamp. Cat-sha at first thought they would do well to examine this trail; for if it should prove to be some



of his own band of whose canoe he had caught a glimpse, he would surely discover traces of them here. Chitta, however, said that those who had followed them might chance to pass on unnoticed while they were in the lagoon. It would be time enough to examine the trail after they had been back as far as the bayou, and made certain that nobody was between them and it. Happily for René de Veaux, this counsel had prevailed, and they had gone on up the stream.

It was while on their return from the bayou that they had caught sight of the two boys just leaving the lagoon, and that Cat-sha had uttered his war-cry with such startling effect.

Even at the distance they were, both he and Chitta had seen the Flamingo Feather braided in Has-se's hair, and had also recognized the peculiar costume worn by him whom they knew as the son of the great white chief.

Faster and faster flew the two canoes in their race of life or death down the narrow stream. That of the two boys was the lighter, but the other, impelled by the powerful strokes of the gigantic Cat-sha, kept pace with it from the outset, and at length began slowly to gain upon it. Foot by foot, closer and closer, it came, and as the labored breath of the panting boys came shorter and quicker, while the perspiration rolled in great beads from their faces, it seemed as though they were moving at a snail's pace, and they knew that the unequal struggle could not last much longer.

Suddenly Has-se paused from his labor for an instant, and placing a hand to his mouth, uttered a long, tremulous cry, so wild and shrill that it roused the forest echoes for miles around.

He had hardly resumed his paddle, after a quick backward glance that showed the other canoe to be fearfully near them, when his cry was answered by one precisely similar, uttered only a short distance ahead of them.

In another minute an arrow from behind whizzed so close to Has-se's head that it cut the red feather from his hair, and passing on, it buried itself in René's shoulder. At the same instant a canoe filled with Micco's warriors appeared around a point ahead of them, and the two hunted and exhausted boys, seeing it, knew they were saved.

