

Chapter XI: Rene's Return

When René de Veaux sank down in the bottom of the canoe, completely exhausted by his labors at the paddle, and by the pain of Chitta's arrow that quivered in his shoulder, he became almost unconscious, and only dimly realized that they had escaped from their cruel pursuers. Then he had a vague knowledge of being lifted from the canoe and borne away, very gently, he knew nor cared not whither, and then he seemed to fall asleep. When he again awoke to an interest in his surroundings, he felt that a soft hand was smoothing his brow, and the air was cooled by a delicious sweet-scented breeze. Opening his eyes, he saw bending over him, and fanning him with a fan woven of fragrant grasses, Has-se's beautiful sister Nethla.

As he attempted to rise she gently restrained him, and bidding him lie still for a moment, she left the lodge. Directly afterwards she returned, accompanied by Has-se, whose face was radiant with joy at seeing his friend once more, and finding him so much better than he had dared hope.

The Indian lad told René that those who came so promptly to their rescue upon hearing his call had stopped for a minute upon reaching them to learn who their pursuers were, and how many there were of them. Cat-sha and Chitta had taken instant advantage of this delay to paddle swiftly up-stream and disappear in the depths of the great swamp, where it was impossible to track them, and so had escaped.

The fortunate meeting between the boys and their friends was owing to a scarcity of provisions among Micco's followers, which had obliged them to remain in camp for two days, while the hunters went in pursuit of game to replenish the larder.

The next evening, thanks to the wonderful healing properties of the herbs applied by Nethla to his wound, René was able to recline on a soft couch of furs in front of the chief's lodge, near a great fire, and enjoy with the rest the feast of venison, wild turkey, and bear's meat that had been prepared to celebrate the successful return of the hunters.

As he lay there, thoroughly enjoying the feast and the novelty of the scene, Has-se came to him and placed in his hand the Flamingo Feather that had been cut from his hair on the day before by Chitta's arrow. As he did so he said, "This I give to thee, Talah-lo-ko, as a token of friendship forever between us, and for thee to keep in memory of this day. It is a token such as may only be exchanged between chiefs or the sons



of chiefs; and if at any time it shall be sent to me or any of my people in thy name, whatever request comes with it from thee must be granted even at the cost of life. Keep the emblem hidden, and wear it not, for that may only be done by the chiefs of my tribe, or those who are sons of chiefs.”

As he took the precious feather, and thanked Has-se warmly for the gift and its assurance of friendship, René noted with surprise that attached to it was a slender gold chain fastening a golden pin of strange and exquisite make. It was by these that the feather had been confined in Has-se’s hair, and it was the cutting of this chain by Chitta’s arrow that had loosened it.

In answer to René’s inquiries Has-se explained that these ornaments came from a distant country in the direction of the setting sun, where gold was like the sands on the shores of the great salt waters, and whence they had reached his tribe through the hands of many traders.[1]

At sunrise on the following morning the journey towards the land of the Alachuas was resumed, and René occupied with Nethla a canoe that was paddled by Has-se and Yah-chi-la-ne (the Eagle), Nethla’s young warrior husband. The stream down which they floated soon left the great swamp and widened into a broad river, the high banks of which were covered with the most luxuriant vegetation and beautiful flowers. The Indians called it Withlacoochee, but the Spaniards afterwards changed its name to San Juanita (pronounced San Wawneeta), or Little St. John, from which in these days it has come to be known as the Suwanee.

The river contained great numbers of alligators, of which, when they went into camp, the Indians killed many, for the sake of the valuable oil that was to be extracted from the fat embedded in the joints of their tails.

On the second day after René and Has-se joined them the tribe reached the land of the Alachuas, a people speaking the same language with themselves, and bound to them by closest ties of friendship. It was a land of broad savannas, studded with groves of magnolia and oak trees, and abounding in springs of the purest water. The clear streams running from these great springs teemed with the finest fish, and the country watered by them was overrun with game of every variety. It was indeed a land of plenty, and from its peace-loving and hospitable dwellers the visitors from the far East received a warm welcome.

On the very day of their arrival they selected the site for the camp, which they expected to occupy for some months. It was in the midst of a grand oak grove, surrounding a crystal spring; and before sunset the slightly built lodges had sprung



up as though by magic among its trees, the sparks from the camp-fires gleamed like myriads of fire-flies among the moss-hung branches, and the tribe was at home.

Réné de Veaux, as became his rank, was invited to occupy the lodge of Micco the chief, in which he shared the bear-skin couch of his friend the chief's son and Bow-bearer. Here, that his wound completely, he though the world or anxieties. He time in adding to of the Indian which, with Has-se Nethla as teachers, familiar. Thanks descriptions of glory of the white friends, Réné found with distinguished the Alachuas, who the greatest interest was always spoken young white chief, wishes were as he made them

At the end felt sufficiently to set about mission that had pleasant country. he sought an

Alachua chief, and displayed before him the trinkets contained in the package that he had so carefully brought with him from Fort Caroline. As the chief gazed with delight and amazement at what he regarded as a most wonderful treasure, but what in reality was only a lot of knives, hatchets, mirrors, and fish-hooks, Réné explained to him the distress of the white men in Fort Caroline, caused by the destruction of their winter's supply of provisions. He then said that if the chief would, out of the abundance of the



during the week took to heal rested as happily as contained no cares spent most of this his knowledge language, with and the beautiful he quickly became to the glowing the power and men given by his himself treated consideration by regarded him with and curiosity. He of by them as the and his slightest gratified as soon known.

of a week Réné strong and well accomplishing the brought him to this Accordingly interview with the



Alachuas, give him twelve canoe-loads of corn, and send warriors enough to conduct them in safety to the white man's fort on the great river of the East, he would give him the package of trinkets there displayed, and would promise, in the name of his uncle the great white chief, a package of equal size and value for each canoe-load of provisions delivered at the fort. He also pledged his word that the Alachua warriors who should escort the provisions should be kindly treated by the white men in Fort Caroline, and should be allowed to return at once to their own country.

After taking a day to consider this proposal, and to consult with his wise men concerning it, the Alachua chief agreed to accept it, and greatly to René's delight the gathering together of the twelve canoe-loads of corn was at once begun. No difficulty was experienced in procuring an escort for them, for all the young Alachua warriors who had not attended the Feast of Ripe Corn were anxious to visit Fort Caroline, and see for themselves the white men, and the great "thunder-bows," as the Indians named the cannon that stood in its embrasures.

Thus, within two weeks of the time of his arrival in the land of the Alachuas, René was ready to set forth on his return to Fort Caroline. With him were to go his friend Has-se, who had obtained a reluctant consent from Micco his father to take the journey, and fifty young Alachua warriors, under command of Yah-chi-la-ne, Has-se's brother-in-law.

The white lad had made many pleasant friendships among these simple people, and it was with feelings of sadness that he bade farewell to the beautiful Nethla, the grave and stately Micco, the good chief of the Alachuas, and many others who had been kind to him, and whom he feared he might never see again.

The little fleet of twenty canoes, twelve of which were heavily laden with corn, started on their long journey at daybreak of a still, cool morning, in the presence of the entire population of Micco's camp, and a great number of the Alachuas who had collected to see them off. In the leading canoe were René, Has-se, Yah-chi-la-ne, and a young warrior named Oli-catara (the Bear's Paw). As it shot from the bank, the entire assembly of Indians on shore shouted,

"Farewell, Ta-lah-lo-ko!

Farewell, Ta-lah-lo-ko!

Farewell to the young white chief!

Do not forget us, Ta-lah-lo-ko."

These shouts sounded very pleasantly to René, for they showed that he had succeeded in gaining not only the respect but the affection of these kindly people, and



he stood up and waved his cap to them until they were hidden from his sight by a bend in the river.

On this journey nothing worthy of note happened until the party had nearly passed through the great swamp, when some of the warriors detected signs that led them to suspect that another party, eastward bound, had passed that way shortly before. The greatest vigilance was now exercised, and every effort made to discover the nature of this party. For some time no further trace of them was found; but among the vast salt-marshes of the coast these efforts were crowned with success. Here two warriors who had been sent to the main-land to examine the vicinity of a fine spring of fresh water returned, and reported that they had found a recently abandoned camp. From unmistakable signs they knew that it had been occupied by a war-party of those Indian outlaws whom they called Seminoles.

This gave René great uneasiness, for he feared that since they had received Chitta into their ranks, he had told them of the distress of the garrison of Fort Caroline, and induced them to attempt an attack upon it.

Even as René had supposed, and only a day before he and the Alachuas reached that point, Chitta, together with the gigantic Cat-sha, and the band of outlaws whom they had joined in the great swamp, had passed that way. Their object was to surround Fort Caroline, and harass its weakened garrison by cutting off any stragglers who might venture beyond its walls, until they should have so reduced the number of its defenders that it would fall an easy prey into their hands.

Upon arriving in the vicinity of the fort, the Seminoles found there a strong war-party of angry savages from the South, who were also watching for an opportunity to make a successful attack upon it, and thus obtain satisfaction for the destruction of one of their villages by the white gold-hunters. With these savages the Seminoles joined forces, and Cat-sha, whose fame as a bold warrior had spread over the entire land, was given command of the little army thus formed.

When they made their attack and were driven back from the walls of the fort by the terrifying roar of its great guns, it was Cat-sha who planned the ambush that so nearly proved fatal to Simon, the armorer, and his men. So well had he contrived the movements of his savage forces that but for a sudden and unexpected attack from behind he would certainly have captured the fort.

René's anxiety for the safety of his countrymen, when he discovered that the Seminoles were moving towards the fort, caused him to urge upon Yah-chi-la-ne the need of all possible haste in the hope of overtaking them. The Alachuas were as anxious as he to come into contact with their Seminole enemies, and so rapidly did they



travel that they finally entered the River of May in time to hear the thunder of guns from the fort when the first attack of the savages was repulsed.

Landing some distance below the fort, and leaving only a few warriors in charge of the canoes, the rest of the little band proceeded with the utmost caution up the river bank until they came in sight of the tall shell mound. Here they remained concealed, while scouts were sent out to discover the exact condition of affairs. Gliding with wonderful ease and silence amid the dense underbrush, these went, and, at the end of two hours returned. They had discovered Cat-sha's plan of an ambush, and reported that the white men were even then leaving the fort to attack the shell mound.

Then Yah-chi-la-ne ordered an advance, and dashed forward, with René and Has-se close beside him, and followed by his eager warriors. They reached the scene of the conflict just as the white soldiers were about to be overwhelmed by the swarming savages, and in time to pounce upon the rear of the astonished Seminoles; and scatter them like the forest leaves before a whirlwind.

It was while charging by Has-se's side in this, his first battle, that René de Veaux gave utterance to the cry of "France to the Rescue!" that had so amazed Simon, the armorer, and those with him who heard it.

[1]Has-se doubtless referred to Mexico, which was known by the Indians as "The Land of Gold."--K. M.

