

In the Wilds of

Florida

by W. H. G. Kingston



Chapter 4

When I awoke in the morning, I sincerely hoped to find that Rochford had returned; but on inquiry I was told that he had not made his appearance, nor had any news been received of him. Lejoillie, who had taken a great liking to him, became more and more anxious, especially when he heard that Indians were in the neighbourhood.

“I have no wish to lose my scalp, even for the sake of science; and it will be a great disappointment to me if I am unable to continue my travels through the country,” he remarked.

“You need not be anxious,” said the judge; “these Indian troubles will soon be put a stop to. If Rochford doesn’t return during the morning, we must organise an expedition to search for him. I fear that I cannot undergo the fatigue myself, but I will use my influence with others; and with the assistance of Captain Norton, we may send out a strong body, who will defy the Redskins, should any be met with. In my opinion, however, the appearance of a few hunters, or a single family or so, probably gave rise to the report.”

The judge’s idea was entertained by the greater part of the inhabitants, and, I suspect, contributed not a little to the readiness with which they volunteered to form a party to go in search of our missing friend. Captain Norton, who was met by an orderly and four troopers, had to leave us and push on to carry out his instructions. Before he left, he warned the people not to venture far from the settlement. He especially counselled Carlos not to allow his sisters to return by land, but advised that, as soon as possible, they should go back by the river, as he considered that Castle Kearney was the safest place in the neighbourhood. The remainder of the day was spent in preparations; and it was agreed that the party should set off the next morning, should Rochford in the meantime not have made his appearance.

Carlos at first declared that as he had nothing to do with the stranger, he should remain to look after his sisters; but he afterwards consented to join the party, Tim and I, with Lejoillie, felt ourselves bound to go.

As Rochford did not return, the Roseville volunteers assembled in front of the judge’s house at daybreak, the time agreed on. They formed a motley group, in every variety of costume: some were whites, others brown men and blacks, with two or three half-caste Indians. The question was, who should take the command. The judge would have been the proper person; but as he could not possibly go—and had he done so, he would have greatly impeded the progress of more active men—Lejoillie, though a stranger, was requested to lead the party.

“For one object I will go,” he said. “I am not fond of fighting; but I wish to find my friend, and will endeavour to conduct you to the best of my ability.”



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We mustered between thirty and forty men and boys, with all sorts of arms and, as I have said, in every variety of costume. Each man had been directed to carry provisions for his own consumption, as we should certainly be out the whole of one day, and perhaps for a night and a second day. I don't know what Captain Norton would have said had he seen us as we marched along in a straggling fashion, many of the men with pipes in their mouths, and all either talking or laughing loudly.

Having left the settlement behind, we crossed a wide extent of prairie land, where the sun beat down on our heads, and we had to force our way among the sharp teeth of the saw-palmetto, which scratched our legs and tore our trousers, and sometimes inflicted disagreeable wounds. Then we came to what is called a "pine-barren;" the ground being flat and the soil of a sandy nature, out of which rose enormous tall pines, having beneath them a growth of rank grass, and here and there clumps of low bushes, well calculated to conceal an enemy, while our course was often impeded by fallen trunks and half-burned stumps. Several times we had to turn aside to avoid the swampy ponds, fringed with tall saw-grass; from amid which rose snipes, plovers, and wild-ducks, and occasionally flocks of the beautiful white egret and snowy heron. The water was brackish, and covered with lilies of varied colours; from amid which, every now and then, alligators popped out their heads to look at us. Other birds, among them the great sand-hill crane, stalked about, until, uttering loud whoops, they took to flight, frightened by our shouts.

When we came to spots where the forest was too thick to see far ahead, we sent out scouts; but I observed that few of the men were willing to get out of hearing of the main body. At last we found ourselves in another hummock: a dense jungle of tall cabbage-palms, oaks, hickory and cotton-trees, with an undergrowth of shrubs such as are to be found only in carefully-cultivated gardens in England—hydrangeas, azaleas, lobelias, and shrubs and creepers of varied colours and gorgeous hues; while overhead the green leaves of the wild-vine and other climbers formed a delicious roof to shelter us from the sun's rays. Out of the wood burst forth a concert of song-birds, amid which the notes of the sweet-toned mocking-bird could be especially distinguished. To Carlos it was no novelty, nor was it to most of our companions; but Lejoillie and I were delighted.

We had as yet discovered no trace of our friend. The few woodmen we met had seen nothing of him. We had passed the spot where Lejoillie and he had separated; and we felt convinced that unless we took a much wider range, we should have little chance of finding him.

Several of the party now called out that they were getting hungry; and as we had reached a shady spot, we agreed to halt and dine.

"Before we do so, gentlemen, we must ascertain that no enemies are lurking in the neighbourhood," said Lejoillie.

Accordingly, he directed three of the men, who had proved to be the best scouts, to push forward and examine the ground around us. Many of the party had unstrapped their wallets; some had thrown themselves on the ground; and others had gone to a green and unattractive pool to obtain water.

Two of the scouts had come in, and assured us that they could discover no trace of the red men. "We may then venture to recruit our strength, my friends," said Lejoillie.

Carlos and I seated ourselves before a fire kindled by Tim, at which he was cooking some slices of bacon. Our motley party lay about in all directions: some had thrown aside their coats, as well as



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their shoes and hats; and others had even taken off their shirts, that they might the more completely enjoy the cool air. We had begun our meal, and Lejoillie was offering Carlos a petit verre from a bottle he carried at his side, when suddenly a shout was raised—"The Redskins! the Redskins are upon us!"

"Stand to your arms, men!" cried Lejoillie, leaping up.

Carlos and I, following his example, seized our rifles; Tim did the same. But the words produced a terrifying effect on the rest of our companions, who, without waiting to ascertain the number of our enemies or how far off they were, took to their heels, and scampered away, leaving their hats, coats, and shoes behind them, many even forgetting their rifles. In vain Carlos, Lejoillie, and I shouted to them to stop.

"Halt, ye villains! halt!" cried Tim, "or I'll be afther sendin' a shot among ye that'll make a hole in one of your backs."

Tim's threat produced no effect, and away went our brave party, tumbling over each other; and certainly, had the Redskins been close at hand, every one of us would have been scalped.

The scout who had given the alarm, and who was a brave fellow, now joined us, and explained that he had seen a large party of Indians in the distance, making, as he supposed, towards the hummock; and that he had shouted out, not supposing that his warning would have produced so terrifying an effect.

Lejoillie directed him to hurry on, and try to induce the men to come back for their clothes and arms; and to point out to them that should their flight be discovered by the Indians, they would certainly follow, believing they would obtain an easy victory; whereas, if we were to halt and show a bold front, they would probably not attempt to molest us.

Tim accompanied the scout, and fortunately overtaking the fugitives, gave them Lejoillie's message. Having pointed out that we had remained behind, and that the Indians were still at a distance, they induced them at length to come back and collect their scattered garments. We then retreated at a rapid rate, in somewhat better order than before, as we were anxious to get out of the hummock, where the Indians, had they discovered us, would have taken us at a great disadvantage. In the open prairie, or even in the pinewood, we should have no fear of the Indians, though more numerous than ourselves, as our rifles would tell with more deadly effect than their inferior arms or bows and arrows. I cannot say that I felt very confident that, should an enemy appear, the Roseville volunteers would not again cut and run. I must say, however, that most of the heroes looked very much ashamed of themselves. The truth was, they had been seized with a panic, such as occurs sometimes even among regular troops. Lejoillie, who was acting as their leader, was a stranger to them, and they probably also had very little confidence in each other. Having got to a sufficient distance from the hummock to prevent it affording shelter to an enemy firing at us, a halt was called, and Lejoillie advised that scouts should be sent back to ascertain the whereabouts of the Indians.

Carlos and I volunteered to undertake the duty. On hearing this, Tim stepped forward.

"Sure, Mr. Maurice dear, it'll be better for me, an old soldier, accustomed to the ways of the savages, to go out and scout than you," he said. "What could I say to the capt'n if the varmints were to shoot you down and take your scalp?"

"I am not afraid of that," I said. "If my cousin and I hang back, we cannot expect the rest of the



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people to show any courage; though I shall be very glad if you will accompany us.”

“Then, Mr. Maurice dear, I’ll go with you,” said Tim; “and if I say, ‘Run,’ just promise me that you will run; and I won’t say it unless I see it is the best thing to be done.”

To this I agreed, knowing that Tim was a staunch old soldier, who would not beat a retreat unless we were likely to be overpowered.

On seeing us prepared to set out, two other men stepped forward who had before acted as scouts. We made our way as rapidly as we could towards the hummock. Advancing quickly through the forest, keeping ourselves concealed from any one in front by stooping down behind bushes, or running from one trunk to another, we reached the spot where our party had so ignominiously taken to flight, without having seen an enemy. After this, we expected every instant to discover the Indians who had caused the alarm, as, unless they had halted, they could not be far off. We had thus worked our way to the farther side of the hummock, when looking out from behind a tree I had just reached, I saw two persons advancing across the open, neither of whom had much the look of an Indian.

“Sure that’s not the band of Redskins that set our fellows running so hard!” exclaimed Tim, who had at the same time caught sight of the two men.

As they drew nearer, to my infinite satisfaction I discovered that one was Rochford. It was difficult to determine whether the other, a tall, fine-looking man in hunter’s costume, was an Indian or a white.

There being no further need for concealment, I hurried forward, followed by Tim, when Rochford and his companion rapidly advanced to meet us.

“Where have you been?” I exclaimed. “We feared that you had met with some accident, and we have been hunting for you all the morning.”

“I am sorry to have caused you and my other friends any anxiety, but I could not help myself,” he answered. “While chasing a deer which I had wounded, I was made prisoner by a band of natives, who dragged me off, and were about, I feared, to put me to death, supposing that I was a settler, when my companion here, who is a chief of importance among them, made his appearance. On my explaining who I was, and my object in coming to Florida, he at once set me at liberty, and treated me with the greatest kindness. As he appeared anxious to see the settlement, I induced him to accompany me to Roseville, having pledged myself for his safety.”

“No one would wish to interfere with him,” I observed. “I feel very sure he will meet with a friendly reception.”

To my surprise, the Indian chief, turning to me, said, in perfectly good English,—

“I know that I can rely on the honour of an Irishman. My sole object in entering the settlement is to assure the white inhabitants that my countrymen desire peace, and that they need be under no apprehension of an attack from us. All we wish is to retain our hunting-grounds, and to cultivate our lands unmolested.”

While we were speaking, Carlos and the two other men came up, when Rochford’s companion repeating what he had said to me, they invited him to accompany us back to the settlement. On our way I inquired of Rochford what could have caused our scout to suppose that a band of Indians was approaching.



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“He must have seen my new friend’s followers in the distance,” he answered. “They set out to accompany him, but returned by his directions to a wood a short distance from this. There are a couple of hundred of them, fine-looking fellows, all well-armed, and evidently devoted to him. It proves, I think, his friendly disposition; for, were he ill disposed, they might pounce down on the settlement at any moment, and destroy it before the inhabitants could have time to defend themselves.”

“Then he does not altogether rely on your safe-conduct; for he knows well that should the inhabitants of Roseville attempt to detain him he would quickly be rescued by his followers,” I remarked.

Lejoillie showed his delight at recovering Rochford by giving him a warm embrace; and then turning to the chief, he welcomed him cordially.

I observed that the latter carefully eyed the countenances of our companions, as if wishing to ascertain if any of them knew him, while, at the same time, he kept his rifle in his hand, ready for instant use. When we began our march, he came alongside Rochford, Carlos, and me, in the rear of the party, who now hurried on, eager to get back to their homes.

He addressed himself especially to Carlos, from whom, it appeared to me, he was endeavouring to obtain information which neither Lejoillie nor I was able to give him. It was late in the evening by the time we reached Roseville. The judge, on seeing Rochford, blamed him for having caused us so much anxiety.

“Now we’ve got you, we’ll not let you run away again,” he exclaimed, shaking him by the hand.

Rochford then introduced his Indian companion.

“I have seen many of your people, but I don’t know that I have ever before met you,” observed the judge, eyeing him narrowly.

“I am fonder of the chase than of war or treaty-making with the whites,” answered the Indian. “I have visited you now for the sake of assuring you of the friendly feelings of my people, so that you may rest in quiet without any apprehensions of an attack from us.”

“I said so! I always said that the red men were well disposed!” exclaimed the judge. “I expect Captain Norton back to-morrow, and I should be happy if you could remain, and give him the same assurances that you have given me.”

“I would willingly have an interview with Captain Norton, but my stay here must be short. I will leave you to repeat to him the assurances of our pacific intentions,” answered the Indian.

The judge’s wife and my cousins now made their appearance. The Indian chief appeared to regard them with great admiration. They on their part declared that he was very agreeable and good-looking, and that he behaved like a polished gentleman, conducting himself at table with thorough propriety.

The judge offered him a bed, but he declined, saying that, accustomed as he was to sleeping in the open air, he should prefer to pass the night in the veranda,—where a hammock was accordingly slung for him, so that he might occupy it whenever he felt disposed.

I forgot to say that Rochford, being introduced to my cousins, at once entered into conversation, and appeared to be winning his way into their good graces. He seemed much pleased when Carlos invited him to Castle Kearney.



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After the ladies had retired, the gentlemen sat up some time smoking their havannahs, the Indian taking part in the conversation.

At last we all turned in to our respective quarters, the judge having, some time before, set us the example. On looking out of the door of the room I occupied, which opened on to the veranda, I saw the Indian throw himself into the hammock. In another minute he was apparently fast asleep.

On awaking early the next morning, the first sound I heard was the voice of black Rose, little Paul's nurse, uttering exclamations of surprise. Presently I heard the judge's voice; and on looking out, I saw them examining, with puzzled looks, the hammock in which the Indian guest had slept. One of the ropes had apparently been cut, and the hammock had come to the ground.

"Can anything have happened to him? Where can he have gone to?" exclaimed our host. "Hunt about, Rose, and see if you can find him anywhere."

"Me ask Toby," said Rose; "he up early, perhaps he see him."

Toby was the black boy of the establishment, and was a great admirer of Rose.

I heard the judge walking about the veranda. I dressed as rapidly as I could, and went out to meet him. He presented, it must be confessed, a somewhat curious figure habited in his morning costume, a coloured dressing-gown, with a red night-cap on his head, and spectacles on his nose, while he looked puzzled and annoyed in the extreme.

"I trust no one has knocked my guest on the head during the night," he said. "The Indian has gone—vanished—disappeared! I would not have had it happen on any account!"

"Perhaps he has only gone to stretch his legs, and will return for breakfast," I observed.

While we were talking, Rose and Toby appeared together, and reported that they could nowhere find the Indian. The judge then sent off Toby and two or three other black boys to make inquiries through the village.

In a short time they returned, declaring that no one had seen him, and that if he had gone, he must have taken himself off during the night.

"I fear the worst then," said our host. "He would not have gone away without at least paying his respects to me. These Indians are as ceremonious as the courtiers of an emperor."

We were soon joined by the rest of the party in the veranda, and Rochford seemed more astonished than any one on hearing what had happened. He told us that he had thought of offering to accompany the chief back to his home, that he might have an opportunity of seeing Indian customs and manners.

"Any romantic opinions you might have entertained on the subject would quickly have been dispelled," observed the judge. "I would advise you, my friend, to keep out of their way, and live among civilised people."

Rochford, who made no answer, probably considered the judge prejudiced against the Redskins.

Our kind host pressed us so warmly to remain another day, that we consented. He promised that he would arrange for our conveyance back by water the following morning, when Lejoillie and Rochford agreed to accompany us.

In the afternoon Captain Norton returned. On hearing of the visit of the chief, whose appearance was described to him, he exclaimed,—



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“Why, he is no other than Powell, or Ocoola, as the Indians call him, their great leader, and the most dangerous person in the country. I believe that no Indian bears a more deadly hatred to the Palefaces, as he calls us, than does that man. Notwithstanding all his promises, I would not trust him. So violent was his behaviour while the other chiefs were making the treaty at Payne’s Landing, that General Thompson caused him to be seized and carried off in irons, though he managed to slip out of them, and to make his escape. He has since sent word that he would agree to the treaty; but those who know him best mistrust him most. What could have induced him to run the risk of coming to this settlement, I cannot say; probably he supposed no one here was acquainted with him, and evidently had some object in view.”

“At all events, he saved my life when his countrymen were threatening to take it,” observed Rochford, stepping forward; “and I am deeply indebted to him.”

“My dear, sir, he may have had an object in saving your life; and knowing you were a British subject, he would not hate you as he does Americans. Am I wrong in supposing that you are an Irishman, though I have not the pleasure of knowing your name?”

“Maulins Rochford,” said my friend, bowing to the captain; “may I ask yours?”

“Roger Norton, of the United States army. I am familiar with your name, having some relatives of the same in the old country. May I ask if you belong to the Rochfords of Killmallan?”

“Mr. Rochford of Killmallan is my uncle,” answered Maulins.

“Then we may hail each other as cousins,” said Captain Norton, putting out his hand. “We Americans are always glad to meet with relatives from the other side of the Atlantic. I shall be truly glad if, after you have seen something of the country, you make up your mind to remain with us.”

Rochford, who was warm-hearted in the extreme, cordially shook his cousin’s hand. Of course they each had numerous questions to ask and answer.

The remainder of the day was happily spent, in spite of the judge’s anxiety as to what had become of his Indian guest. Captain Norton, however, assured him that he was confident the chief had gone off of his own accord some time during the night, fearing that it might be discovered who he was, and that he might again be made prisoner.

The young captain would gladly have accompanied us to Castle Kearney, but his duties prevented him from doing so. He undertook, however, to come over in the course of a few days, and to bring our ponies, with a sufficient escort. He expressed himself very glad that we had arranged to return by water.

Our friend Lejoillie had not been idle, but had been constantly employed in searching for objects of natural history, of which he found no lack even in the judge’s garden. He had been watching, with great attention, the nest of a humming-bird, which he had discovered a short distance from the house, and invited me to come and see it. No parents could be more attentive to the wants of their young than were those bright little gems, the smallest of the feathered tribe. They were constantly flying hither and thither, bringing insects too minute even to be seen, which they put into the gaping beaks of their young ones, each scarcely larger than a humble-bee. As we were looking, we saw a spider, one of the largest I had ever seen, crawl up the branch to which the nest was attached. Slowly and cautiously it made its way upward, with the fell intent, I felt sure, of seizing the young birds, and perhaps the



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parents also, in its embrace.

“Stay,” whispered Lejoillie, holding my arm, “it is a question I have long desired to have settled, whether these spiders really do feed on birds.”

“But there is no doubt about it!” I exclaimed, trembling for the fate of the beautiful little creatures.

“It is not yet an accomplished fact,” answered Lejoillie; “the creature may have some other object in view. Overcome your humanity this once for the sake of science;” and he held me back.

On crawled the horrid monster. The hen-bird sat on the nest with open beak, while the cock fluttered with wings expanded just above the creature’s claws, endeavouring to attract its attention, or to seize one of the claws in its beak, which at times I thought its parental feelings would induce it to do. All its efforts were in vain. The monster, knowing its power, crawled on, and putting in its claws, seized one of the young birds, which in an instant it applied to its mouth.

I could bear it no longer. “You are satisfied of the fact,” I cried; and rushing forward with a stick, I struck the hideous creature to the ground.

“Not that it kills the older birds as well as the young,” said Lejoillie, somewhat vexed at my proceeding.

“It would have done so, depend upon it. Pray enter the fact in your note-book.”

He did so, fully satisfied, I believe, and really not sorry that I had saved the humming-birds, or, as he called them, the “fly-birds,” from destruction.

The next morning a large boat, having a gay-coloured awning, with six rowers, provided by the judge, was in readiness to carry us up the river. Captain Norton escorted the ladies on board. It took us very much less time to proceed by water, even though the current was against us, than to have come by land.

We found my uncle greatly recovered. He expressed his pleasure at seeing our friends Rochford and Lejoillie, and begged that they would remain at Castle Kearney as long as they felt disposed to honour him with their society. They expressed their admiration of the house and everything about it, including my fair cousins, who certainly did their best to entertain them.

In consequence of the rumours which had reached my uncle regarding the threatened hostility of the Indians, he would not allow us to engage in any shooting excursions. We contrived, however, to amuse ourselves by making occasional trips in a boat up the river, when Lejoillie succeeded in obtaining a number of specimens of birds.

In a few days Captain Norton arrived with the ponies, and set my uncle’s mind at rest by reporting that the Indians had retired westward, and that it was supposed they would before long finally take their departure, according to the treaty they had entered into, and cross the Mississippi. As soon as Carlos heard this, he proposed that we should set off on a shooting expedition.

Lejoillie at once agreed, hoping thus to find opportunities of adding to his specimens of natural history; but Rochford showed no desire to accompany us. It was very evident that he preferred the society of the ladies, and especially of my cousin Juanita, to whom it appeared to me, he was paying devoted attention. Whether or not the elders of the family observed this I could not make out. The girls were also both so lively and animated, that it was difficult to be certain that my young cousin



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had discovered our guest's feelings towards her, or, at all events, that she returned them. Her manner was in no way altered; she treated him, as she did Lejoillie and Captain Norton, in a frank and easy manner.

Carlos showed some annoyance when Rochford made excuses for not going with us.

"We are not a large party, and we fully relied on having your company," said my cousin. "You came out here to see the country, and you will know nothing about it if you stop in the house and only take a short ride occasionally with the girls or paddle them about on the river. You can return with us, and stop here afterwards as long as you like."

Still Rochford would not promise to go.

Captain Norton also excused himself. He had, he said, traversed the country and camped out often enough in the course of duty. He was not particularly fond of sport; at all events, it would not recompense him for the life he should have to lead. He could spend but a few days at Castle Kearney, and must then return to Saint Augustine, where his regiment was quartered. At this I was not surprised, though I liked him so much that I should have been glad of his society. He, however, I suspected, was paying attention to Rita, and, as far as I was able to judge, was making progress in her good graces. My uncle and aunt were, of course, grateful to him for having preserved her from the puma; and though he claimed no merit for the service he had rendered, it was very natural that it should be in his favour.

We had all gone out in the evening to enjoy the cool air in the orangery, in which were seats on raised terraces, where views could be obtained up and down the river. I had separated from the rest of the party, when, after wandering about by myself for a short time, I passed one of the bowers I have mentioned. On looking in I saw Juanita and Rochford. I overheard my cousin say, in answer to something her companion had said,—

"It is impossible—I cannot quit my home; and I tell you frankly that you have not won my heart."

As my cousin did not call, though I was sure she must have seen me, I felt that it would not be right to interfere, and therefore hurried on until I was out of sight.

Some time afterwards, when the ladies had returned to the house, Rochford came up to me.

"Maurice, I have made up my mind to accompany you on your expedition," he said. "I shall be obliged if you will let Carlos know. I see that I cannot with propriety stay here any longer."

He did not tell me, but of course I guessed, the cause of his sudden change of plan. I could not help thinking Juanita had done right, for he was in reality a comparative stranger; and except that he was a warm-hearted, impulsive young man, we knew little of his principles or character. Carlos, on hearing of his intention to go with us, exclaimed, "I am very glad of it; he'll make a capital companion: he sings a good song, and I dare say will prove a good shot."

At daybreak on the following morning we started, our party consisting of Lejoillie, Rochford, Carlos, Tim, and myself, with two ponies for carrying game, and four blacks to beat the bushes and make themselves generally useful. We had six dogs, well-trained animals, two being retrievers, the others, powerful brutes, taught to rush into thickets and turn out the game, or to pull down the larger animals. The blacks carried guns, axes, and machetes; while we had our rifles, a brace of pistols, and a



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long knife a-piece.

We at once struck away to the south-west, in the direction in which Carlos considered we were most likely to find sport. Rochford was unusually silent; a change had evidently come over him, and he seemed almost morose and sullen. When Carlos bantered him with not being as merry as usual, he turned away, and soon afterwards dropped behind the rest of the party. Lejoillie was too much occupied in observing the various birds and animals to remark our friend's behaviour.

I should have said that one of the dogs was a large handsome spaniel—"Caesar"—of which my uncle had kindly made me a present some days before. The animal seemed to understand the change of masters, and having taken a great fancy to me, obeyed my orders as readily as if I had trained him from his puppyhood. Three other animals, if not perfectly well-bred, were closely allied to the Cuban blood-hound, too frequently employed in hunting runaway slaves, although equally useful for driving game out of thick coverts or protecting the camp when committed to their charge. They were possessed of great keenness of scent, were fierce, courageous, and very powerful animals, and could endure the intense heat of a tropical sun. They could follow the wily ocelot, making their way noiselessly through the dense palmetto-scrub, and could fearlessly tackle panthers or bears.

We passed, on our course, alternate narrow strips of grass and jungle, with cabbage-palms and numerous live-oaks scattered about in picturesque groups. Sometimes we came to ponds fringed with saw-grass eight or ten feet in height, from amid which rose large flocks of the beautiful roseate spoonbill ibis, while the white ibis and ducks of varied colours stalked and swam around the edges, and snipes rose frequently almost from under our feet. From among a flock of turkeys, which flew up from a thick palmetto jungle, we knocked over four fat gobblers, sufficient for two substantial meals to our whole party.

I must not stop to describe the adventures of each day. For the first three or four, we met with less large game than we had expected, Carlos always telling us that farther south we should find much more.

We were not altogether unmindful of the reported bad temper of the Indians, and had we not taken precautions against surprise, we might possibly have been attacked; but at night two of the party were always on watch, accompanied by a blood-hound, to give notice of the approach of a foe. We put up rough tents, which afforded us sufficient protection against the weather, though not against the mosquitoes, which frequently troubled us severely. It was only towards morning that we felt any sensation of cold. We were then glad to draw our blankets tightly around us, though a small amount of exercise soon warmed our blood. Our plan was to breakfast before daylight, so as to get some of the cool hours of the morning for hunting.

We had not been long on foot—the fourth day after leaving Castle Kearney—when we saw the hounds running backwards and forwards from one large clump of scrub-palmetto to another.

"They are after a cat," exclaimed Carlos; "but it will be some time before they catch it."

"A cat?" I asked.

"We call it 'cat' for shortness' sake. Its common name is a 'catamount,' or, more properly, an 'ocelot.'"

The hounds, who well knew where the ocelot had gone to, were chasing it from tree to tree;



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but still it continued to elude them. All we could do was to stand by with our rifles ready to shoot the creature, should it burst forth into the open. Nearly two hours must have passed since the dogs first got scent of it, and yet the animal managed to evade them. I was standing in a palmetto-scrub almost up to my shoulders, when about a dozen paces off I saw a movement among the leaves, which I suspected was caused by a wild beast of some sort. I stood ready to receive it. In a few seconds, catching a glimpse of a yellow skin, I fired, but my bullet failed to take effect; and the next instant an animal, with glaring eyes and outstretched claws, sprang towards me, as if about to fly at my throat. I was endeavouring to reload, when I heard a shot, and the creature fell dead almost at my feet. Turning round, I saw that it was Rochford who had fired.

“Thank you,” I said, as he came forward to examine the animal.

It was, as had been supposed, an ocelot, the most beautiful creature of that region. It measured about three feet in length from the nose to the root of the tail. It had a reddish fur, marked with black spots, oblong on the back, and round or streaked on the under part and paws. The strongly-formed shoulder showed the power which it could exert when seizing its prey. Its handsome fur was soon taken off, and placed on the back of one of the ponies.

The dogs in a short time hunted out two other ocelots, which were speedily shot; and we killed also several racoons, polecats, opossums, two deer, besides turkeys, ducks, snipes, and quails,—which I mention to show the abundance of game to be found in that part of the country.

We encountered several rattlesnakes; but as they gave us notice of their whereabouts, we easily despatched them, and carried off their rattles as trophies. The one I killed, by blowing off its head, was upwards of seven feet in length, and would have proved a disagreeable customer to meet with in a narrow pathway. We fell in also with several herds of wild hogs; but as we had brought no salt for pickling them, we shot only one each day, that we might have fresh pork for dinner, for in that climate meat becomes unfit to eat in the course of a very few hours. As may be supposed, we lived very well, as far as meat was concerned; and we also occasionally added a cabbage-palm, and some wild roots and fruits, to our bill of fare.

At length Carlos and I agreed that we ought to turn our faces homewards, as we had almost come to an end of our ammunition, as well as of our flour and other stores. On our return journey we shot merely what we required for food.

On the evening of the first day, when we were on our homeward march, Rochford did not make his appearance in camp. “He’ll soon be up to us,” observed Carlos in an unconcerned tone; “though it may be as well to fire a shot or two to show him where we are encamped, should he fail to catch sight of our fire.”

We soon had two fires blazing up, round which we gathered to cook our provisions, and to shield ourselves from the attacks of mosquitoes, which were kept at a distance by the smoke. Supper was over, and we were preparing to lie down. Still Rochford did not appear. I began to grow anxious about him. As it was not likely that he would be discovered should we set off to search for him in the dark, we settled to wait till the following morning, hoping that in the meantime he might come into camp.

The night passed away, and he did not appear. At daybreak, leaving two of the blacks to look after the animals, we divided into three parties: Tim going with me; and Lejoillie and Carlos, each



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Chapter 4

having a black with him. We traversed the country in the direction from which we had come, but no trace could we discover of our missing friend. I wished that we had had Indians with us, or more experienced woodmen, who might have perceived traces which we failed to observe.

Tim and I returned late in the evening to the camp, where Lejoillie and Carlos had shortly before arrived, as unsuccessful as we had been. If Rochford had met with any accident, we should, we thought, have discovered some traces of him. On inquiring, however, of the blacks what had happened at the camp during our absence, one of them presented me with a small piece of paper, saying that an Indian had left it to be delivered to the young white stranger. I eagerly held it to the light of the fire, and I read the words:—

“Farewell! I have too long neglected my duty. I must endeavour to carry out the object for which I came to this country. I trust that justice will be done to the children of the soil, and peace be maintained. Hoping to meet you again,—yours sincerely,—

“M.R.”

Though this paper showed that our friend had not met with any accident, I regretted that he had not returned, as I feared that he contemplated engaging in some hopeless enterprise, which could not benefit the Indians, while he himself would be exposed to considerable danger.

Carlos was very indignant at the way he had left us. “Why couldn’t he have told us where he was going?” he exclaimed. “If he puts the Indians up to mischief with any of his wild notions, he will be hunted down, and to a certainty will get hung on the nearest tree.”

The appearance of the Indian showed that some of his people were in the neighbourhood, and Carlos thought it prudent to keep a strict watch during the night. Not waiting for daybreak, as the country before us was tolerably level, we struck camp and pushed homewards. Although we occasionally saw Indians in the distance, none came near us. It was, however, pretty evident that our movements were closely watched, but for what object we could not surmise, as we were allowed to proceed without being molested.

I missed Rochford greatly; and though I was interested by Lejoillie’s remarks on the natural history of the country, I was very glad when we at length reached Castle Kearney.

I watched my cousin Juanita when Carlos was giving her an account of Rochford’s disappearance, “I am very sorry,” she answered in quite an indifferent tone. “I thought he would have come back again; but as he has chosen to go away, I only hope that the Indians will treat him well. Perhaps he’ll return with a red squaw, as a proof of his affection for the Indian race.” She laughed, but perhaps not quite so heartily as she tried to do.

