

In the Wilds of

Florida

by W. H. G. Kingston



Chapter 11

I had been paddling on for some time in a half dreamy state, for fatigue was beginning to tell on me more than on Tim, and I could with difficulty at times keep my eyes open. Though I managed to move my paddle mechanically, I was more asleep than awake. All sorts of strange fancies flitted across my mind, and often I saw objects before me which had no existence in reality. Now a party of Indians, in their war-paint and feathers, would appear on the bank, a bright light making them stand out in bold relief against the forest. Now in imagination I saw a huge snake wriggling across the water; or a puma would show itself among the trees, ready to spring upon us as we passed. Often I heard strange cries and the sound of human voices; then I fancied that I saw a canoe stealing out from a dark creek, about to intercept us. I tried to exert myself, but my arms refused to obey my will.

“Arrah now, Mr. Maurice dear, you’d better lie down in the bottom of the boat an’ take a quiet sleep for an hour or two,” exclaimed Tim, who discovered the condition I was in just in time to prevent me letting go my paddle, which the next instant would probably have fallen from my grasp.

His voice aroused me. “I can still paddle on,” I answered; “though my arms ache a little, to be sure.”

“No, no; just lie down, an’ I’ll keep the canoe moving,” said Tim. “I’ve been more accustomed to work than you have, Mr. Maurice, and I can stand it better. You’ll be after knockin’ yourself up altogether; an’ we have many a mile to go yet before we reach Castle Kearney.”

I felt, however, that it was food more than rest which I just then wanted. The pangs of hunger I was enduring convinced me of this. We had, however, only our live fowls remaining, with a few oranges and some grain; but the fowls could not be eaten raw, and the grain required to be pounded and made into cakes before we could swallow it. I therefore proposed that we should land on the first spot we could find clear of trees and brushwood, and cook one of the fowls and make some cakes. To this Tim agreed. Before long, projecting from below the trunk of a large tree, we discovered a bank composed of roots and driftwood, with mud washed over them. There was space enough to light a fire, so we at once landed. While I was engaged in collecting sticks for the fire, Tim wrung the neck of one of our fowls and quickly plucked it. He then cut the bird in two and stuck it up before the fire, as the quickest way of cooking it. We could not afford to be particular. Instead of making cakes, we put on some of the grain to boil in our pot, for we could not stop to bruise and bake it. We were aware that it was imprudent even to light a fire, lest it might attract the notice of any enemies prowling in the neighbourhood; but our hunger overcame all other considerations, and we hoped that as we should soon again be moving on there would be no great risk in what we were doing. I own that I ravenously ate up my share of the fowl, even before it was cooked through; but having been put on while still



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warm, it was less tough than might have been expected. The boiled grain was far from palatable.

“Sure it will do to fill up any holes which the old hen has left in our stomachs, and I have a notion there are not a few of them,” observed Tim, as he began to bolt down the hot porridge.

We were thus employed, when Tim exclaimed, “Hist, Mr. Maurice, did you hear a sound?”

I listened. “Yes; I should fancy that an alligator had popped his head above the surface, or a tortoise or wild-fowl had jumped into the river to take a bath.”

“Sure I thought it was paddles I heard. Listen again,” said Tim.

“Yes, it is paddles; no doubt about the matter,” he exclaimed directly afterwards; and stepping into the canoe he cast off the painter, while he held her fast to some roots with one hand, adding, “Get in, Mr. Maurice, get in; the sooner we are away from this the better. The Redskins—for sure it must be them—will make towards the fire, and, if they haven’t yet seen us, they’ll be puzzled to know where we have gone to.”

Seizing my gun, which lay on the ground by my side, for from force of habit I had carried it with me when I had landed, I stepped carefully back into the canoe. Immediately I had taken my seat, Tim shoved her off as far out into the stream as he could, then grasping his paddle, began to ply it with might and main.

“Stop!” I whispered, after we had got a little distance. “In what direction did you fancy you heard the sounds? It appears to me that they are coming up the river instead of down.”

“Sure, you’re right, Mr. Maurice,” answered Tim, who had ceased paddling. “I see the canoe too, an’ a big one she is; she’s full of savages. We may get over to the shadow of the opposite bank, an’ they’ll not perceive us. Use the paddle gently though, so as to make as little noise as possible.”

While working away as he advised, I kept my eye down the stream, looking out for the canoe, which Tim fancied he had seen. Before long I also perceived it; indeed, it looked so high out of the water that I was convinced it was of much larger size than the ordinary Indian canoes. It was being directed towards the fire which we had left only a few minutes before; those on board being naturally anxious to see who were encamped there.

We had got over by this time to the opposite shore, and, as far as I could judge, had escaped observation; so that we could easily, by keeping under the shadow of the trees, paddle down the stream. But as I again looked towards the boat, I was convinced that she was of large size, and full of white men.

Remaining perfectly quiet, before long we heard their voices. There was no doubt that they were whites; perhaps our friends coming to look for us. Tim was at length satisfied that I was right. We forthwith paddled back. To prevent any one mistaking us for Indians, and sending a chance shot at us, I hailed, “Who are you, friends?”

“Why, that must be Maurice! Hurrah! he’s not lost, then,” I heard a voice exclaim, which I recognised as that of Carlos; and directly afterwards Lejoillie shouted out,—

“Glad to see you alive. Come here!”

We were soon alongside; and Tim making the canoe fast, he and I stepped on board the boat. We found that she was a long, large craft pulling ten oars, and holding between thirty and forty men, all well-armed. Among them were three blacks, two of whom I had seen at the judge’s; and I remembered



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the intense admiration they had shown for Rochford, when in their presence he had expressed his liberal opinions, such as they were very unlikely ever before to have heard.

The first person who grasped my hand was my father.

“Maurice, my boy, thank Heaven you have come back,” he said. “I was very anxious about you, as were all your friends; for we were afraid that you had fallen into the hands of those rascally Redskins, and that they had treated you and Tim as they have so many other white people.”

I briefly told him how I had lost my way, and was found by Tim; how we had at length reached the river, and obtaining a canoe, got down thus far homewards. I mentioned also our having seen an Indian, who had pursued us along the bank for some distance. I then, turning to Lejoillie and Carlos, inquired how they had made their escape.

Lejoillie replied that, having searched in vain for us, they had reached the stream, and fortunately discovered a canoe, as we had done. Just as they were about to push off, a band of Indians had pursued them; and this had naturally given rise to the supposition that we had been cut off by the Redskins. Having a supply of ammunition, they had been able to obtain as much food as they required; and there being three people to paddle the canoe, they had come down the river more rapidly than we had been able to do, moving on night and day, one of them only sleeping at a time.

“Then were you coming to look for Tim and me?” I asked.

“No,” answered Carlos; “we thought you must either have made your way long ago to one of the forts, or been captured and killed by the Indians. When I got back, I found those at home in a fearful state of grief and anxiety about Juanita. She has disappeared, and been carried off by some one. Suspicion strongly turns against that fellow Rochford, who came with Lejoillie to our house. She and Rita, and two black servants, had ridden out a short distance only from Castle Kearney, when Juanita suddenly exclaimed that she would canter on ahead of them. Before they could advise her not to go, she was off, and was soon hidden from sight. They rode forward, expecting her every instant to reappear; but when they reached a more open part of the forest, she was nowhere visible. Nor could they discover any traces of her horse’s hoofs—probably because they did not look for them in the right place. I think that I should have found them had I been there. In vain they shouted and galloped about in all directions. From that day to this nothing has been heard of her. There can be no doubt, however, that she must have been carried off, as Rita is confident she would not have gone of her own accord. But whether Rochford or Indians are guilty of the deed is still a matter of doubt. I decidedly believe that Rochford has had a hand in it. I never felt very cordial towards him from the first, though you seemed to fancy him a very fine fellow, with his wild notions of getting freedom for the blacks, and giving the Redskins their rights; but I believe there’s nothing he would stick at. Uncle Michael and Captain Norton blame themselves greatly. They and my father lost no time in organising a plan for recovering my poor sister, and punishing Rochford, or any one else who may be found guilty. They took Judge Shurtleff into their counsels: he stuck out, however, to the last that Rochford was innocent; and told them that he had information that a band of Indians had been in the neighbourhood, and had retreated up the left bank of the river. He advised that one party should proceed in this direction by water, and then landing, proceed west—so as to prevent the Indians making their way farther south—to reunite with another party moving west, of which my father was to take charge.



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They were then to come down south, so as to be able to follow up the marauders should they turn back again, or try to escape westward.”

Carlos gave further explanations of the proposed plan of proceedings. I at once became as eager as any one to carry them out; though a short time before I had felt so wearied that I could scarcely use my paddle, I now declared that I was ready to begin the march as soon as it was settled we should land. I found that the point fixed upon was only a mile or two farther up the river. Had we been a little later we should probably have missed our friends altogether. The boat did not stop at the place where we had lighted our fire, which was allowed to continue burning, to assist in deceiving any Indians who might be in the neighbourhood. From the reports we had heard, we were well aware that those we were likely to meet with would prove unfriendly, if not open enemies, and that we should have to be cautious in our proceedings.

For some time I was kept awake by having to talk and listen to my friends; but at length my head began to nod.

“Just lean back, and make yourself comfortable,” said my father.

I followed his advice, and was soon fast asleep. I was awakened by feeling the boat run against the bank, and I found that we were about to land. Dawn had just broken, and I could see the dark outlines of the trees on the opposite side of the river against the brightening sky. A crew of four hands were left in the boat, and charged to navigate her back to Castle Kearney. They were provided with arms, and were directed to allow no Indian canoe to come alongside on any pretext whatever. I found that we now mustered thirty-six men, including Tim and myself. It was, after all, but a small party should we encounter any large band of Indians, who were not likely to attack us unless far superior to us in force. Still, we possessed good rifles and plenty of ammunition, so that we considered ourselves a match for three times our own number of natives, many of whom were likely to be armed only with bows and arrows, or should they have guns, with those of an inferior character. Twenty of our party were soldiers under Captain Norton’s command, the others were volunteers. We had a few of my uncle’s people, and the rest came from Roseville. As the Indians would probably not have expected so many white men to come up the river, we had hopes of taking them by surprise.

Captain Norton, my father, and Tim were the only old soldiers among us; for even the regulars had had no experience of warfare. Tim, therefore, found himself raised to the rank of third in command, the scouts being placed under his orders—an honourable though dangerous appointment.

We remained only sufficient time to enable the men to eat what may be called a breakfast, to strap on their knapsacks, and get themselves into marching trim, when the order to advance was given; and Tim and his scouts, six of the most active men, went ahead, having received instructions never to get beyond hailing distance of each other, or get too much in advance to be prevented from falling back quickly on the main body. After going some distance, we marched across a pine-barren, with a marsh on our left, over which Indians could scarcely make their way, while here and there on our right were hummocks, thick bottoms in which a whole army of natives might have concealed themselves. Our friends, I should have said, had brought half-a-dozen of the large blood-hounds I have before described, which were used for hunting ocelots and other fierce game, as well as for searching out runaway negroes. These were likely to prove of the greatest service in exploring the



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hummocks, as they would quickly give tongue on discovering any lurking enemies. We felt pretty sure, therefore, that we had no foes on our right, or that we had left any behind us. Our great object, however, was to find some Indians who could give us information either of Juanita or Rochford; whether they were together, or whether either one or the other had been seen. From what I had heard of the Indians, I had very little hope of success.

We marched on all day, frequently, however, in consequence of the nature of the ground, making but slow progress. We could carry, of course, but a small quantity of provisions, chiefly flour, coffee, pepper, and salt, so that we depended on our guns for supplying ourselves with game. It might have been better had we been able to be independent of hunting, as we ran a risk of being separated, and falling into the hands of our enemies, should any be on the watch to cut us off.

We had now to cross an extensive tract of prairie land, which covers a large portion of the interior of the country north of the Everglades. I have already described its unpleasant character. The sun struck down on our heads with intense force, there being few trees to afford us shade. Our legs were torn by the sharp teeth of the palmetto; and the only water we could obtain was from stagnant pools fringed with tall saw-grass, through which it was difficult to penetrate to get to the water, such as it was. Sometimes, after a great deal of trouble, and at the risk of being snapped up by an alligator, we found the water brackish and utterly undrinkable. Occasionally we came upon pine-islands, slight sandy elevations above the prairie covered by tall pine-trees. We here got the benefit of shade, but no water was to be obtained near them. We had one advantage, however, in crossing the prairie: no enemies in any number could find concealment to burst out suddenly upon us, as we knew they might well do where the country was thickly wooded. While crossing the prairie we saw no four-footed game, nor even any of the wild cattle which we had expected to find there. The opinion was that they had been driven off by the Indians.

We had made but slow progress; for owing to those abominable saw-palmetto roots, we could seldom march more than two miles an hour. At length, darkness approaching, we were compelled to camp on a pine-island. It was the best spot we could select, as we could hold it, should we be attacked during the night, against any number of Indians. We had, however, to content ourselves with but a short allowance of water, which we had brought from the last pool. We had, however, killed several ducks and plovers, and three large snowy herons, which the men ate in spite of their rank taste. We, of course, placed sentries on the watch, and sent out several scouts, accompanied by blood-hounds, who, we knew, would not fail to discover any Indians lurking in the neighbourhood. The most experienced backwoodsman of our party had examined the ground as we came along in search of Indian trails, but none of recent date had been perceived. We were aware, however, that the natives might, if they were so disposed, easily pass us on their way to the south, where, among the impenetrable woods of the Everglades, they might set us at defiance. Our great object, therefore, was to find an Indian who, either from a friendly disposition towards the whites, or from being ready to receive a bribe, would act as our guide, and bring us information as to where those we were in search of were to be found.

As my father, Captain Norton, Lejoillie, Carlos, and I sat round our camp-fire eating our frugal supper, we anxiously discussed the probabilities of recovering Juanita. Carlos spoke very strongly on the subject. He regretted that he had not been at home when his sister disappeared, as he would,



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he declared, have collected every man capable of bearing arms in the neighbourhood, and at once proceeded with a strong force in pursuit. He still adhered to the belief that Rochford had carried her off, aided by a strong band of Indians.

“We shall hear of him before long acting as Powell’s lieutenant, or perhaps raised to the chief command himself!” he exclaimed.

“I do not think that,” observed Lejoillie. “He is very enthusiastic, and considers that the Indians have been ill-treated; but I do not believe that he would wish them to resort to force to enable them to obtain their rights. He spoke of going among them only for the purpose of giving them good advice, or trying to induce them to adopt the customs of civilisation.”

I corroborated what Lejoillie said, as did my father. Captain Norton expressed the hope that we were right, though he had not had sufficient intercourse with his cousin to judge of his opinions.

I need not say I was very glad to roll myself in my blanket as soon as supper was over, and to fall fast asleep. I should, I believe, have slept on far into the next day, had I not been aroused by my father, who handed me a mug of coffee, some wild duck, and corn-cake for breakfast. Directly afterwards, the march was resumed. We were unable to obtain any game during the first part of the day, and were truly glad when, in the afternoon, we came in sight of the thickly-growing trees of an extensive hummock. As it was important to obtain food, the men were halted at some distance from its border, while my father, Lejoillie, and I, with Tim and three or four of the best shots of the party, made our way as best we could amid the dense brushwood, in the hopes of getting a shot at some deer or any other game which might be taking shelter there. Pushing on through hydrangeas and azaleas, with lofty cabbage-palms, cotton, cedar, and other trees above our heads, festooned with wild-vines, convolvuli, air-plants, and numberless other creepers, Tim and I, who were ahead, at length saw before us a small pool.

“Hist, Mr. Maurice!” he whispered; “I jist caught sight of something moving. We must creep up carefully. Maybe it’s a painter, or an ocelot, or, what would be better, a deer; an’ if we can escape the creature windin’ us, we may git up near enough to have a fair shot, for it won’t be you or I that’ll be afther missin’.”

I followed his advice, eager to obtain the game, and trusting none of our party would approach incautiously. In the meantime, by creeping slowly on, we at length came close to the pool, which was almost filled up with grass and water-lilies. Lifting up our heads, to our infinite satisfaction, we saw a doe and her young one standing in the water, into which they had evidently gone to drink. At the same moment a heron, with a loud cry, rose from the sedgy banks; and the deer, as if its note had been one of warning, turned her head towards where we were.

“Fire at the mother,” I whispered to Tim; “I’ll take the fawn.”

We pulled our triggers, and almost at the same moment a third shot was heard at a distance; a bullet splashing the water close to where the deer stood, but hitting neither of the animals.

Both deer fell, however, struggling in the water. We rushed forward to secure our prey. Having put them out of suffering, I carried the fawn to a dry spot, and Tim followed with the deer, which was as much as he could well stagger under. While we were looking about for a long pole by which we might suspend the animals, so as to carry them with greater ease to the camp, we heard a rustling



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sound made by some person or animal approaching. We, of course, had both reloaded our rifles, but fully expected to see one of our party, attracted to the spot by our shots. Our surprise, therefore, was great to see instead, standing close to us, an Indian in the usual light hunting costume worn by his people, composed of skins embroidered in the ordinary fashion. His face, however, was painted in a way which gave him a far from prepossessing expression.

“Who are you, Mr. Redface?” asked Tim, instinctively handling his rifle ready for action.

“A friend!” answered the Indian. “You come kill my deer. What you want here?”

“Arrah, sure, do you call it your deer?” asked Tim. “A deer in this country belongs to the man who kills it, I’ve a notion; and it was not your bullet which brought either of the animals to the ground. Mr. Maurice here kilt one, and I the other; an’ your bit of lead tumbled into the water, a foot away at least from either of them. Sure, if ye’ll be afther lookin’ for it, you’ll find it in the mud.”

“Ugh!” ejaculated the Indian, who saw that he was not likely to get much change out of Tim, and knew from the distance he had fired that his aim was uncertain. “Where are your people?”

“Come along, and you shall see,” said Tim; “they’ll be glad to have a talk with you about some matters, and you’ll find it to your advantage to tell them what you know.”

The Indian understood probably only a part of what Tim said, but nodding, he said, “Spotted Wolf will go with you.”

“Oh, is that your name? Come along, then, Mr. Spotted Wolf; we’ll take care no harm happens to you.”

The Indian laughed scornfully, as if he considered that he could take very good care of himself; and as by this time we had hung the deer to the pole, Tim told him we were ready to move. “I’ll trouble ye, however, Mr. Spotted Wolf, to lead on ahead; you know the way out of this hummock, maybe, better than we do. An’ see that you lead us right, if ye please.”

He then turned to me, and in a lower voice said,—“It’s as well to keep this sort of gentleman in front, or maybe he’ll be afther shootin’ one of us, an’ stickin’ his scalping-knife into the other.”

The Indian, no ways displeased by the evident want of confidence placed in him, led the way, and managed to pick out a path with fewer obstructions than the one by which we had entered the hummock. As we came in sight of the camp he hesitated for a moment, perhaps surprised at seeing many more people than he might have expected. It is possible that he would have been welcomed by half-a-dozen rifle shots had we not appeared close behind him. Our friends were highly pleased at seeing the game which we brought. Just then Lejoillie arrived, bringing three fat gobblers, some smaller birds, and a racoon, which he and the men attending him had shot. My father, who had only one companion, had not yet returned. I could not help fearing that he might have fallen in with some other Indians, who might not have behaved in so pacific a manner as Spotted Wolf. I at once took the Indian up to Captain Norton, who rose to receive him, and being well accustomed to the habits of the Redskins, desired him to be seated on the ground near the camp-fire. The fact that Spotted Wolf spoke English showed that he had had frequent intercourse with the white men.

Captain Norton at once began questioning him as to whether he was alone, or had few or many companions.

He declared that he was alone; that he had separated from his countrymen, as he did not approve



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of their making war on the Palefaces, who, he knew, must conquer at last. At the same time, while making this acknowledgment, he described the army of Ocoola as very large, consisting of numerous warriors, well-armed, and with abundance of ammunition.

Captain Norton inquired if he knew where they were. He replied that they were now some distance away to the west, waiting for reinforcements from the Cherokees and Creeks. Whether Spotted Wolf was giving a true account or not, it was impossible to ascertain. He was consistent in all he said, and maintained a calm and unembarrassed manner. I was little accustomed to the countenances of Indians, who looked to me very nearly all alike, but I certainly did not admire the expression of that of Spotted Wolf; and I found that Carlos had formed a bad opinion of him. He sat on in the ordinary inelegant position which Indians maintain round a council fire, deliberately smoking a pipe of tobacco which the captain had presented to him.

Captain Norton had hitherto said nothing about Juanita or Rochford. He hoped apparently that, should the Indian know anything of them, he would himself introduce the subject. At last he was obliged to ask Spotted Wolf whether he had seen a Paleface girl and a young man in company with the Indians, either together, or separately, or had heard of them.

“I have not seen any Palefaces such as you describe, nor have I heard of them,” answered Spotted Wolf positively; or, at all events, he gave us to understand as much, for I cannot exactly describe the language in which he spoke.

“Can you, however, serve us by learning whether such persons as I mention are in this part of the country?” asked Captain Norton. “Though you may not have heard of them, your friends may, and you can bring us the information we require.”

The Indian, resting his chin on his hand, appeared to consider what had been said. He then replied that he would, if it were the wish of his Paleface brother, endeavour to gain tidings of the girl, although, as there were many of his people who looked upon him as an enemy, he might have great difficulty in accomplishing his object.

“Spotted Wolf will do his best, and look for his reward,” answered Captain Norton; “we can expect no more.”

The Indian gave the usual “Ugh,” signifying that he fully understood what was required of him.

I had been all the time on the look-out for the return of my father. The sun had just set, and darkness was rapidly coming on. I went outside the camp in the direction whence I thought he would appear. Nowhere was he to be seen. I resolved, therefore, to go in search of him. Carlos and Lejoillie agreed to go also, and several others volunteered to accompany us. Captain Norton said that he would be glad to go, but he could not venture to leave the camp. He told me that although Spotted Wolf might be a very honest fellow, he would have a strict watch kept upon him; and, in case any other Indians should appear, he would not allow them to enter the camp.

On this occasion we took two of the dogs, which had been kept tied up until now, lest they should disturb the game in the hummock. They ran on before us with their noses to the ground, clearly understanding what was required of them. They were well acquainted with my father, and the man who had accompanied him, so that we had no fear of their attacking them. On they went towards the western end of the hummock. Instead of rushing into it, as we expected, they kept along the edge.



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Presently we heard them give tongue, and hurrying forward, we saw a person issuing from the thick brushwood, accompanied by the two dogs. On getting nearer to him, I discovered, to my joy, that he was my father. He seemed more than usually agitated, and when I inquired the cause, he told me that he had been separated from his companion, whom, after some time, he had found dead on the ground, stabbed apparently, but not scalped, so that he was in doubt whether an Indian had done the deed. Anxious, however, about his own safety, he was endeavouring to make his way out of the hummock, when he caught sight, in the distance, of several figures moving among the trees, which, though indistinctly seen, he was convinced were those of Indians. He concealed himself at once, and had reason to believe that he was not detected, but had been unable to make his way out, until the hounds had found him, not being aware how close he was to the edge of the hummock. How he had escaped from the Redskins it was difficult to say. Some of the party proposed at once to go in search of the body of the murdered man; but though we might possibly have found it, with the assistance of the dogs, in daylight, it would have been almost impossible to do so in the dark. We therefore agreed to return to the camp, and made the best of our way back, where the news we brought created no little sensation. Some suspected that Spotted Wolf was not altogether unacquainted with the circumstance. Carlos declared that he should not be surprised had the Indian himself killed the man; but on comparing the time we had met him with that when my father believed the murder to have been committed, we decided that Spotted Wolf must be acquitted of the charge.

In consequence of what had occurred, a double watch was set, and all sentinels were charged to keep wide awake, so that during the night we might not be taken by surprise.

