

# In the Wilds of

# Florida

by W. H. G. Kingston



## Chapter 12

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The night passed quietly away, notwithstanding the very natural apprehension we had entertained that the Indians my father had seen would attack us. One circumstance, however, caused us considerable astonishment and anxiety. In spite of the vigilant watch supposed to have been kept, two of our black companions had disappeared; and we could find no trail to indicate in what direction they had gone, nor how they could have managed to get out of the camp without being observed. No one, however, recollected exactly when they were last seen; and it was generally believed they had gone off in the evening, when the party had set out to search for my father. Could they have had any communication with the Redskins hovering about our camp? This was not considered probable. It occurred to me, however, that they might have known of the blacks who had treated us so hospitably, and that they had gone off under the idea that they could reach them, or some other party of negro runaways, several of whom had long been living among the impenetrable jungles of the south. It was generally supposed, however, that the Indians, knowing the strength of our party, would not dare to interfere with us, and that we might be able to recover the body of the poor fellow who had been murdered. Captain Norton, however, would not allow search to be made for it, as the risk, he considered, would be far greater than any advantage to be gained. We therefore marched forward, as on the previous day.

“There’s one of our number gone,” observed Carlos gloomily; “how many more will be lost before we return home?”

We had grave suspicions of Spotted Wolf. When asked whether he knew anything of the Indians who had been seen by my father in the hummock, he declared that they must have been some who had followed him when he was making his escape, but that he was not aware that they had reached the hummock.

“That may or may not be the case,” observed Carlos; “but I would advise Captain Norton to keep a look-out on the fellow’s movements. I suspect his object is rather to betray us than to render us assistance.”

The Indian, however, seemed perfectly at ease, and as far as his knowledge of English would allow, conversed freely with every one. He was asked if he knew whereabouts Ocoola was to be found. He replied that he was ignorant of that chief’s movements, but he acknowledged that he might possibly not be far off. Though our scouts ranged on every side, as well as ahead, and sometimes dropped behind, they failed to catch sight of the Indians, who, however, we knew, would, in all probability, keep near us, waiting for an opportunity to attack us, should they find us off our guard. It was not altogether a pleasant feeling to know that at any moment we might be assailed by a band



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of savages eager to take our scalps; but by degrees we got accustomed to the feeling, and there was nothing we so much desired as to catch sight of our supposed enemies, being certain that we should beat them off, however numerous they might be.

I have already so fully described the country, that I need not draw any further pictures of it. Our course led us sometimes over the prairie, covered with low saw-palmetto and grass; sometimes over the pine-lands, by the side of ponds; occasionally along the edges of the belts of forest, chiefly composed of pines and cabbage-palms; and then near hummocks, which, as they were mostly impenetrable jungles, we carefully avoided, except when it became necessary to halt to obtain food for our party. We then sent in the dogs, to ascertain if an enemy were concealed in the jungle. Spotted Wolf, who invariably marched ahead with the captain, kept his eyes ranging over the ground in search of any trail which might serve to point out in what direction parties of his countrymen had gone. But though he did this, I saw how easily he might deceive us; for though he might see trails, he might not communicate his discovery.

We again halted for the night among a clump of pine-trees, with a stream near us, a pond on one side, and a hummock at a little distance. The hummock might conceal a foe; but as the Indians could not possibly know that we should halt in this neighbourhood, it was not likely that they would have laid an ambush there.

We had run short of provisions, and were anxious to shoot some deer; indeed, it was absolutely necessary to obtain food at all risks. We waited therefore until dark, when, the main body being encamped, with sentries on the watch, my father, Tim, and I, with four of our best shots, proceeded to the edge of the hummock. We were, each of us, supplied with pine-torches secured to sticks which could be run into the ground. We advanced cautiously to the spots we had selected, some hundred feet apart, when, having stuck our torches in the ground, and lit them, we lay down just in front, concealed either by a low bush or by some grass. Thus we remained perfectly invisible, while the light passed over our heads. Tim and I were near enough to see each other's torches. While I lay crouched down, the thought occurred to me that should by chance any Indians be hidden in the hummock, they would know exactly where to find each of us, and creeping cautiously up, would try to kill and scalp us separately. I therefore kept my ears well open and my senses fully awake, to be ready for any emergency. I had not long, however, to endure these unpleasant apprehensions, when I heard a slight rustling, and presently caught sight of two faint lights just before me. They were large and round, and I knew that they were the eyes of a deer, in which the blaze from the pine-torch was reflected. The animal stood quite still, and I had time to raise my rifle, and to aim between the lights. I fired, and a large deer bounded into the air, and fell close to me with scarcely a struggle. Almost at the same time I heard Tim fire. I at once reloaded, and jumping up extinguished the torch, and began dragging my prize into the open. While thus employed, two other shots from the farther extremities of the hummock reached my ears, and I hoped that our party had bagged three more deer at least. The animal I had shot was too heavy to carry, but I managed, notwithstanding, to drag it over the rough ground. I had not gone far when I was joined by Tim, who exclaimed,—

“Arrah! sure, I thought I had kilt a deer, but it's only a beast of a grey wolf. However, it will serve to feed the dogs; and I hope your father and the rest will each have knocked over a deer.”



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I asked Tim to leave the wolf and assist me in carrying the deer into camp. This he did, and we got on very well. He was so vexed, however, that he declared he must have another trial, as in a short time the deer, which had been startled by our shots, would recover from their alarm, and very likely return to the spot. Telling one of the men whereabouts the wolf lay, he set off with a fresh pine-torch. In the meantime my father and his companions returned with a couple of deer. So hungry had the party become that no time was lost in kindling fires, which had not before been done, and putting on the venison to roast. The deer we had killed were not more than sufficient for a couple of meals to each man, and Tim was hailed with considerable satisfaction, when later in the night he returned with a fourth one. We had no longer any fears as to the hummock concealing Indians, as they would certainly have shown themselves long before this. A careful watch, however, was kept during the night. Some of the party proposed scouring the hummock, to obtain a larger supply of venison, or any other game we could shoot; but Captain Norton would not consent to this.

Next morning, having breakfasted on venison, with some wild duck which the keenest of our sportsmen had killed at sunrise, we recommenced our march. Spotted Wolf shortly afterwards intimated that if we would proceed farther west, he might probably obtain information regarding those of whom we were in search. There were a few lodges of his people, connected to him by ties of blood, who, being peaceably disposed, had declined to join Ocoola and the other rebel chiefs. "They, of necessity," he said, "keep themselves well informed of what is going forward in other parts of the country, that they may make their escape should the rebels attempt to compel them to join their party."

Carlos doubted the truth of this statement; but Captain Norton appeared to believe it, or, at all events, allowed Spotted Wolf to think so. If Ocoola had really carried off Juanita, his object, no doubt, would be to place her somewhere in safety, under the charge of the female members of his family, so that she would be unable to escape herself, or obtain the assistance of her friends. He could scarcely have expected that a force like ours would so soon have been despatched in pursuit. Carlos, however, persisted in declaring that the Indian chief had had nothing to do with the matter, and that Rochford alone had, somehow or other, obtained the means of carrying her off.

We had been marching on for some hours across a pine-barren, with the sun beating down on our heads, and were anxiously looking out for a stream or pool at which we could quench our thirst, Carlos and I being together, when an object was seen moving across the plain towards us. It was soon made out to be a horse.

"It is riderless," observed Carlos.

"Can it be a wild one?" I asked.

"Not from its movements, I am nearly sure. And see! it has a saddle on its back," he replied.

Presently another and another appeared, coming from the same direction. Carlos and I, with several of the men, rushed forward to catch the animals. Two of those which brought up the rear came on at a slower pace than the rest. They were wounded, and as we got nearer we perceived an arrow sticking in the side of one of them; a bullet had gone through the neck of another, which had also had a spear thrust into its shoulder; while three of the others had blood on their saddles, and two had their bridles cut. What had become of their riders?

Captain Norton at once recognised the animals as belonging to the United States cavalry. "Some



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disaster has overtaken our people, I fear,” he observed, “for these horses have been in battle, and managed to escape when their riders were overthrown. We must now be doubly on the watch. At the same time, we must hope that, although some have been killed, the rest have put the enemy to flight, or cut their way out, supposing that our troops were surprised. It is not, however, very likely!”

The arrow was extracted from the side of the horse, and the wounds of the others having been looked to, it was hoped that they would do well. Anxious to ascertain what had happened, we pushed on, while the horses were led in the rear. Every moment we expected to meet with the Indians making their escape, or with a body of American troops, who would, it was fully believed, have been victorious. Not a human being appeared in sight. We had marched a couple of miles farther, however, when we saw hovering in the air a number of birds, while others were flitting about the trees or perched on the boughs. As we drew nearer, we recognised among them numberless turkey buzzards, vultures, and other carrion fowl, while a pack of wolves were roaming about, disputing with the feathered tribe for their prey.

“It is a battle-field!” I heard my father exclaim.

A sickening sensation came over me when I saw the remains of my fellow-creatures covering the ground, and the horrible condition to which the birds of prey and the wolves had reduced them. I hung back; though several of the party went forward, that they might ascertain who they were and what number had fallen. It must have been difficult, however, to count them. Already the limbs of many had been torn off, and the countenances of all had been so disfigured that their nearest friends could not have identified them; but their uniforms told too plainly that they were soldiers of the United States. Including officers and men, there must have been nearly a hundred, mostly infantry, with a few cavalry. The latter lay scattered about outside the rest. Too probably not one of the whole force had escaped. Most of them had been scalped, showing that the Redskins had been victorious; but they had, for some reason or other, moved off before they had finished their horrible work. It was clear that the troops had been surprised and destroyed by a vastly superior force before they had had time to stand on the defensive. On either side of the space were thick woods, in which probably the Indians had lain in ambush, when some of the party, emerging from one end of the glade, and some from the other, the troops had been completely surrounded.

Captain Norton appeared deeply affected when we gathered together, after he had surveyed the battle-field. He was of opinion that the troops had come from the west coast—probably from the Bay of Tampa—and were marching to one of the forts to the northward. He acknowledged, too, that we were in a fearfully dangerous predicament, and that the fate which had overtaken the soldiers might be ours. What could our small force avail against many hundreds of fierce warriors flushed with victory? To turn back was as dangerous as to proceed. Should we be pursued, we might quickly be overwhelmed. He therefore determined on attempting to gain one of the forts, where we might hold out against Ocoola’s forces.

To stop and bury the dead was impossible. The wolves and birds of prey would soon dispose of them. We had our own safety to look after. Even now the woods on either side might be full of our enemies, waiting only for a favourable opportunity to set upon us. To ascertain whether there were any foes lurking near us, the dogs, one at a time, were turned into the woods. Before long, the loud



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baying of the first which was let loose gave notice that he had discovered some one; and the scouts, led by Tim, were at once sent forward to ascertain what was there. We waited with our weapons ready to defend ourselves, should they be driven back by the enemy. They soon, however, reappeared, carrying a wounded man. Though severely hurt, he was able to speak, and informed Captain Norton that to his belief he was the sole survivor of a force of upwards of a hundred men, who had marched from the Bay of Tampa, intending to proceed to Fort King, which was, it had been understood, threatened by Ocoola and his braves. Suddenly, when they did not believe an enemy was near, having halted and piled their arms, they were set upon by upwards of five hundred well-armed Indians, who were in their midst before they could recover their weapons. He was one of the very first wounded, and had crawled behind a bush, where he lay and witnessed the slaughter of his comrades. As evening approached, favoured by the darkness, he crawled farther into the wood, to die in peace. He heard the shouts and shrieks of the Redskins, triumphing over their victims, when suddenly they had hurried off, as he supposed, to the northward.

While we were listening to the poor fellow's account, the dogs had been sent in to the other side of the forest, where they discovered three more soldiers, almost at the point of death. Two, indeed, died before they could give any account of what had happened; but the other corroborated the statement of the first in all particulars, adding that he had seen the savages dance round the slain; and that while thus engaged the horses had escaped, with the exception of two or three, which they had succeeded in carrying off with them. Several, indeed, lay dead on the battle-field, almost torn to pieces by the wolves. My father, who had had some experience in gunshot wounds, did his best to attend to the poor men; but the last discovered died in the course of a few minutes, and we had now only one, the sole survivor of the massacre, to carry with us. A rough litter was at once formed, as he could not bear the jolting of a horse; and he was carried forward on the shoulders of some of our people, who willingly undertook the task. As it was dangerous to remain in the exposed position in which we were, we now advanced as fast as possible, fearing that at any moment we might be attacked by a vastly superior force. Every man of the party, however, was resolved to fight to the last, and to sell his life dearly.

Spotted Wolf had appeared as much astonished as any of us at the discovery of the massacred troops. Carlos observed to me that he thought the fellow was looking out for an opportunity to escape. "If he tries to do so, I'll shoot him," he added. "I have mistrusted him from the first. I suspect that, in advising us to take this route, he expected to lead us up to the ambush into which our troops have fallen; and I believe that he wants to get off for the purpose of letting Ocoola know how small a party we are. Probably the enemy were deceived, and, getting information of our approach, supposed that we were a large force coming to the assistance of our friends."

I thought that Carlos was right in his conjectures, as did my father when I told him of them. Carlos also spoke to Captain Norton on the subject in a way which induced him, at all events, to be cautious in further trusting Spotted Wolf. He also issued an order to all the men to keep an eye on Spotted Wolf, and to shoot him without ceremony should he attempt to escape.

Before long we came upon a well-defined trail made by wheeled vehicles, as also by the feet of horses and men, and we had no doubt that it led directly to the fort which we desired to reach. We



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pushed forward, therefore, with revived confidence, hoping before long to get within strong walls, where, with the assistance of its present garrison, we might bid defiance to all foes likely to attack us. As we approached, however, we saw that it was little more than a block-house, and that no flag waved above the stockade. Advancing nearer, we expected to be hailed. No friendly voice, however, reached our ears.

“Can it be deserted? or have the Redskins got possession of it?” I heard my father exclaim.

“We must not be taken by surprise,” observed Captain Norton. He called for two volunteers to go forward and ascertain the condition of the fort. Tim, who was always ready for anything, sprang to the front. I begged my father to let me accompany him. He hesitated; but he considered that it would be setting a bad example to the men if he refused, and he gave his consent. Tim and I immediately advanced, looking out for any hole or opening through which the muzzle of a rifle or the point of an arrow might appear. The building had lately suffered either from fire or assault. Many of the palisades had been broken down, and the buildings inside were roofless. No one was to be seen, and the gate was open. We entered, still, however, keeping our rifles ready for instant use. Not a voice was heard. We soon discovered what had taken place. The small garrison had been overpowered and slaughtered to a man. The larger number lay inside the house, into which they had evidently retreated to defend themselves. The remainder were found close under the stockade. Nearly all had been killed in a hand-to-hand fight, and few, if any, had been shot down from the outside.

“Depend upon it,” said Tim, “there was treachery here, an’ the gate was opened at night to let the enemy in. A place like this might be defended against any number of Redskins, unless the garrison ran short of ammunition.”

“That’s just what I suspect they did,” I answered, examining the pouches of two of the men who lay nearest me. They were both empty.

We had, however, no time to discuss the matter, as it was our duty to hurry back and report what we had discovered. On hearing it, Captain Norton resolved to occupy the fort. Our first business on entering was to carry out the bodies of the late garrison. It was a mournful task, as we had no means of burying them, or, at all events, no time to devote to this object. As soon as this duty was performed, we set to work to repair the fort. Most of the men had axes, which they vigorously plied, and soon cut down a sufficient number of trees for our purpose. The men laboured hard, knowing that their lives might depend on their getting the fort into a fit state to resist the enemy. Not until every breach was repaired, the gate strengthened, and the centre hut—for it was little more—roofed in with the split trunks of trees, did we cease from our toil. It was nearly morning by the time our work was accomplished. Not until then did the captain or any of the men lie down to snatch a short sleep. Fortunately, the storehouse had escaped, and in it we discovered a supply of salt provisions sufficient to last us several days, while a well dug within the stockade afforded an ample supply of water. We might thus hold out for a considerable time, without the necessity of venturing far from the fort to obtain game.

The captain was still unwilling to make it impossible for Spotted Wolf to escape, by shooting him or binding his limbs; but he charged two of the most intelligent of the men to keep a constant



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watch over the Indian, and not to allow him on any pretext to leave the fort. It was necessary to send out a few men to cut grass for the horses, as it was important to keep them in good condition. Those who went, however, were ordered not to venture beyond the immediate vicinity of the fort, into which they could escape should an enemy appear. We had reason to be thankful that we had not been disturbed. But we had made no progress, as far as we could judge, in the object of our expedition; neither Rochford nor Juanita had been discovered, and they might still be leagues away.

Two days passed. Captain Norton and my father were constantly talking over plans for our future proceedings. The captain even asked my father if he would take command of the block-house, while he himself with three others should make their way on horseback to one of the larger forts, where he could obtain information for his guidance. As we all knew that it would be impossible to hold the block-house during a protracted siege without a larger supply of provisions than we possessed, it became necessary, as soon as possible, to obtain game, so as to enable us to keep the salt provisions for such an emergency. Though we had little to fear from their usual style of warfare—for the red men, when they fail in an attack, generally abandon it altogether—still, it was possible that, under their bold and sagacious chief Ocoola, they might adopt a new system, and attempt the destruction of one fort after another, until they had rid the country of the Palefaces, as they boastfully asserted they intended to do.

As soon as the fort was placed in an efficient state, Captain Norton sent out the scouts to ascertain if any Indians were in the neighbourhood. They returned, stating that they had seen none, and that they believed the country would be found open to Fort King, or to the eastward, and that we might therefore return to the river, should such a movement be considered desirable. None of them brought any game, asserting their belief that the Indians had driven off all the deer and wild cattle, and that, except some birds and small animals, we were not likely to obtain any. Thus we all felt that the expedition would be bootless, as we had utterly failed to obtain tidings of those of whom we were in search.

Captain Norton now determined to take two of the best horses, one for himself and the other for a companion, and push on to Fort King, trusting to their speed to escape any enemies they might fall in with. Carlos and I both volunteered to accompany him. He decided, however, to take only one of us, and fixed upon Carlos, as he knew the country better than I did. It was settled that they should set out by daybreak the next morning. The horses had been well fed, and the captain hoped that in three or four hours they might reach their destination. When the animals, however, were led out, the one Carlos intended to ride was evidently lame. Its leg was examined, but no cause could be discovered for its lameness, and none of the others were fit for the journey.

“I must then start by myself!” exclaimed the captain. “I am sorry not to have your company, Carlos; but as there is some hazard in the expedition, it may be better for you to remain in the fort.”

“I suspect that Indian fellow has had something to do with the lameness of the animal,” whispered Carlos. “Captain Norton, who still thinks him honest, would not believe me if I said so. However, I will keep my eye on him; and I will shoot him through the head if I find him playing any trick.”



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I urged Carlos not to do that, at all events; though I agreed that he ought not to be allowed to go out of sight of his guards for a single moment.

While we were still examining the horses, hoping that after a little while the lameness would go off, one of the scouts called out that a stranger was approaching.

“Maybe he is one of the blacks,” I observed. But on mounting the platform placed inside the stockade, I saw that the man was a white in hunter’s garb, and that he was carrying a deer on his shoulders. He was accompanied by a handsome hound, which every now and then turned round, as if on the watch to give him timely notice of the approach of any one who might be following him. He hurried on, notwithstanding the weight of the animal and holding his rifle in his hand, looking back every now and then as if he did not feel himself secure from pursuit.

“Who comes there?” shouted the sentry.

“A friend,” was the reply. “Open the gate, and let me in. I wish to see your commanding officer.” I hurried down to tell Captain Norton, who ordered the gate to be opened.

As the hunter advanced, what was my surprise to recognise our friend Rochford. The gate was opened, and the hunter entered. Throwing down the deer, he advanced with outstretched hand to meet Captain Norton. Though he was much disguised by his hunter’s dress, his sun-burned features, and a huge moustache, as I watched him I felt sure that I was not mistaken.

“What brings you here?” asked Captain Norton.

“I come to give you warning that you may at any moment be attacked by a strong body of Indians. Don’t you know me?” asked the hunter.

“What—Rochford!” exclaimed the captain, grasping his hand. “I am truly glad to see you. Your coming thus at once proves that you are innocent of the grave charge brought against you.”

“I am certainly innocent of any intention of acting wrongly, though I confess that I have allowed myself to be deceived in the character of those it was my honest desire to assist. I cannot, however, at present enter into particulars, nor tell you how I obtained the information I possess. It must be sufficient for you to know that I heard of your having occupied this fort, and also that you are very likely to be hard pressed for want of provisions. I therefore resolved to come and put you on your guard, and, if possible, not to appear empty-handed. I was fortunate enough to kill this deer at no great distance from the fort, as I was making my way towards it. Tell me, of what am I accused, besides having gone away to acquaint myself with the Redskin natives of the country?”

“You are accused of carrying off my sister Juanita; and I, for one, believe that you had a hand in the matter, whatever you may say to the contrary!” exclaimed Carlos, stepping forward and making a threatening gesture at Rochford.

“What is that you say?” exclaimed Rochford, with a look of unfeigned astonishment, while deep emotion was visible in his countenance. “On my word of honour, I am guiltless of any such act; and I say so, notwithstanding the language you use, young sir. When was your sister carried off; and how came it that those who should have protected her were not more careful?”

My father, not allowing Carlos to reply, gave the particulars to Rochford.

“I was at the time far away south,” he answered. “Had I been in the neighbourhood, I should



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probably have heard of the occurrence from the Indians, who had treated me with courtesy and confidence. It is only since they have been guilty of many acts of atrocity that I have separated myself from them. I told them that I would remain their friend, and do my utmost to defend and advance their cause, if they would act justly, and if resolved on war, would carry it on according to the customs of the civilised nations of the earth. But when I found that they had begun to massacre the unarmed and defenceless people, and had scalped those they had slain in fight, I told them that I could no longer remain their friend. To do them justice, they replied that I was at liberty to act as I judged right; and far from attempting to injure me, they allowed me to go wherever I chose.”

“I fully believe your account, Mr. Rochford; and I hope my nephew will apologise for his hasty words, or I will do so for him,” answered my father.

Carlos turned aside, muttering something which I did not overhear. Rochford, however, took no further notice of what Carlos had said, and seemed satisfied with the welcome which the rest of the party, including Lejoillie, gave him. We had, however, but little time for conversation. As a large body of the enemy was approaching the fort, it was necessary at once to make preparations for their reception. The captain addressed a few words of encouragement to the garrison, telling them what he had heard, and urging them to hold out bravely, expressing his confidence that we should drive back the Indians, however numerous they might be. Ammunition was then served out, and each man went to his station to await the attack, which, from the intelligence brought by Rochford, we believed might at any moment be commenced.

