

# In the Wilds of

# Florida

by W. H. G. Kingston



## Chapter 13

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An unusual silence appeared to reign in the woods surrounding the fort; even the birds, whose notes were wont to be heard, were silent. The sun had already risen above the tops of the trees, and shone down with intense force into the confined space which enclosed us. Not a breath of air stirred the leaves. It seemed as if all nature had gone to sleep. The sentries paced up and down on the platforms, watching on either side, for it was impossible to say on which the Indians would make their threatened attack. I asked Rochford if he did not think, after all, that they had changed their minds, and would not venture near.

"I am very sure that they have not," he answered. "They know that you are but ill supplied with provisions and ammunition; besides which, they have vowed that they will drive all the Palefaces into the sea, and their late success in destroying a large detachment has encouraged them to continue their efforts to liberate their country. I acknowledge that they are vain, for they are ignorant of the vast resources we possess, and fancy that the power of the whites is represented by the few hundreds of troops which they have seen. It would have been more merciful if the United States Government had sent an overwhelming force, which would have rendered resistance impossible. But even had ten times as many troops as are at present in Florida been employed, they could have proceeded but slowly in a country covered in all directions with impenetrable thickets and swamps; and unless good roads are cut, the war will not be brought to a close for many a year to come. Meantime, both white men and natives will suffer cruelly. The great object should be to show the Indians that the whites must conquer at last, and that is what I have endeavoured to do; but the Redskins declare that the country is their own, that they have right on their side, and that the Palefaces will be the first to get tired."

While we were speaking, one of the men on guard shouted, "Here they come!"

On springing on to the platform, we could see a large body of men, some on foot, others on horseback; besides which, we could make out many more emerging from a wood to the north-west. They halted, apparently surprised at our numbers, as they saw the heads of our men appearing above the stockade; for, with the exception of the sentries, all had hurried over to the side towards which they were approaching. The enemy were deceived in another way, by supposing that we should only fire down upon them over the stockade, whereas the lower portion under the platform was well loopholed. After holding a short consultation, during which not a sound reached our ears, they again advanced, led on by their chiefs, uttering the most fearful yells and shrieks. I had often heard of the Indian war-whoop, but I little knew, until now, the extraordinary power of which the human voice is capable when excited by rage and the desire to inspire terror into the hearts of enemies. I confess that



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I should have been not a little alarmed had I not known what effect our bullets would soon produce on the advancing foe.

“Shout as ye like, ye yelpin’ savages,” cried Tim, who was standing near me; “it won’t make one of us wink an eye, an’ we’ll soon send ye to the rightabout when you get within range of our rifles.”

A few of the chiefs now dashed forward, flourishing their spears, but quickly retreated behind the warriors on foot, who advanced rapidly towards the fort. Captain Norton, as they approached, ordered us all to jump down from the platform and take our posts at the loopholes, whence we could pour a deadly fire on the ranks of the Indians, while we ourselves would be under cover. No sooner was the order given to fire than we began blazing away. The enemy, little expecting the reception they met with, had fancied they could get close up to the foot of the stockade, and climb over without opposition.

Our men had been ordered not to throw a shot away. They fully carried out their instructions. At the very first discharge fully a dozen Indians were either killed or wounded. Staggered by this warm reception they halted, when again their chiefs cried out to them to advance, which they did after discharging a shower of bullets and arrows. The former came pinging against the thick posts which formed the stockade; the latter flew over our heads and fell into the fort, without, however, injuring any one. Half of the garrison only had fired; the remainder at once took their places, while the first party reloaded. We were thus able to keep up a successive fusillade, which evidently greatly astonished our foes. Still they continued to assail us with their missiles, both from fire-arms and bows; and with remarkable courage they again rushed on to the assault. We let them approach until they were close up to the stockade, when we once more opened so withering a fire that few made the attempt to climb up, and those who did quickly dropped down, either with cloven heads or hands well-nigh chopped off. The whole force, apparently seeing that they had no chance of getting into the fort, hurriedly retreated, dragging away, as they did so, the bodies of the slain.

Our men cheered, under the belief that we had won the victory; but the Indians, though they had abandoned the assault for the moment, did not consider themselves defeated, and halting as soon as they had got beyond the range of our rifles, once more faced about. From their costumes and wild appearance Captain Norton declared that they were not Seminoles, but probably some of the allies who had, it was said, lately joined the rebels from the north. Such, certainly, were the chiefs on horseback; who now, having again arranged their men, and encouraged them to renewed exertions, dashed on towards us at full speed, waving their lances and shrieking at the top of their voices.

“Let them play that trick as long as they like,” cried the captain. “Wait until some of them get near enough, then bring down their horses. It will require a good shot to kill the riders; but if their steeds fall, we can easily capture them, and they would be of the greatest use to us. However, do not throw a shot away, and wait patiently until they come near. Perhaps they think our ammunition is exhausted; and if they find we don’t fire, they may come close up to the stockade.”

The captain’s orders were strictly obeyed. The warriors continued wheeling round and round, now advancing, now retreating, but still keeping at a respectful distance from the fort. At length they got so near, it seemed to me that we might have knocked over the whole of them. Captain Norton, however, did not allow us to fire. This, as may be expected, made them still bolder, and at length they



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came sweeping on at full speed, shaking their spears and shouting defiance, till they got within fifty yards of us.

“Now give it them, lads!” exclaimed Captain Norton.

As we had but a limited supply of ammunition, only such men as were looked upon as the best shots had been told off to fire. Among these was Tim, near whom I was standing. He was the first to draw trigger, and so sure was his aim that he shot the horse of one of the chiefs through the head. Down came the animal on its rider, over whom it rolled, crushing his leg, and preventing him from rising. The rest of the chiefs, however, throwing themselves over the sides of their horses, so as to be completely concealed, galloped off like the wind, and as far as I could see, not a man or horse was hit.

“Now, lads, let’s get hold of that fellow before he gets on his feet,” cried Tim; and, jumping over the stockade, followed by three other men, he ran towards the prostrate chief, who in vain, flourishing his spear, called on his companions to rescue him. Finding that none of them returned, he made a desperate lunge with his spear at Tim, who, however, leaping on one side, warded it off with the butt of his rifle, and dealt the Indian a blow on the head which rendered him incapable of further resistance. The Irishman and his companions then seized the nearly-stunned warrior by the shoulders, and dragged him to the gate of the fort. It being opened for their reception, all in another minute were safe within, and the gate again closed.

Our captive soon recovered his senses, and looked about like a wild beast when it finds itself in a cage, seeking for some means of escape. His countenance fell when he saw the strong palisades and the number of armed men by whom he was surrounded. He, however, showed no other signs of fear, and appeared to resign himself to his fate, expecting, apparently, that he would at once be put to death. Captain Norton, who spoke the language of the Seminoles with perfect ease, inquired why he and his companions had attacked the fort.

“Because the desire of the red men is to drive their enemies the Palefaces out of the country, and regain their rightful heritage,” answered the chief.

“But you and your people have signed a treaty agreeing to leave the country in possession of the United States Government, and you have broken that treaty by remaining and attacking the whites.”

“The treaty was signed by traitors, and could not be binding on the rest of the people,” answered the Indian. “We have once more dug up the war-hatchet, and have resolved to regain our own. I have spoken. You have me in your power; my life is in your hands; do as you list.”

“Do you wish to live or die?” asked Captain Norton, detecting less confidence in the Indian’s tone than his words, of which I give a very meagre translation, appeared to exhibit.

“Black Hawk has no desire to die. He has many in his lodges who would mourn his loss,” was the answer.

“Your life is in your own hands, then,” answered Captain Norton. “If you will promise to render us faithful service, you shall live, and obtain an ample reward, with which you can return to your own and gladden the hearts of your squaw and children.”

The Indian’s countenance brightened, and Captain Norton at once saw that in spite of his boastful bearing he would be easily tempted to act any part required.

“Our desire is to make the red men our friends, and we have no wish to induce you to betray your



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people: but we require information, and if you have the power of giving it, and will enable us to attain our object, we shall be content," said the captain.

"What is it the white chief desires to know?" asked Black Hawk.

"One of the daughters of the Palefaces was carried off some weeks ago by your people. Is she residing anywhere in this neighbourhood; and if so, will Black Hawk undertake to restore her to those to whom she desires to return?" said Captain Norton.

The Indian, for some time, made no reply to this question. He was apparently considering how he should act. Should he be unable to assist us, or refuse to do so, he would lose his reward, and perhaps be put to death. At last he answered:—

"Black Hawk wishes to serve those who have saved his life. He cannot do so if his own people suspect that he has allied himself to their foes. The daughter of the Paleface chief is alive, and living in the lodges of our great chief Ocoola, where she was brought some time back. It is said that he desires to wed the damsel, but that she has refused to become his bride, and that he is unable to compel her."

"So far what you tell us is satisfactory," observed Captain Norton. "Can you conduct a party to the lodges of your chief, so that the damsel, should she desire it, may return to her home?"

"The undertaking would be difficult and dangerous," observed the Indian. "Still, if the white chief wills it, Black Hawk will go; but it would be certain destruction to all those who might form the party, should Ocoola discover the attempt made to carry off his intended bride."

Rochford had been an attentive listener to this conversation, of which I give only a few particulars as they were interpreted to me. He had been sufficiently long with the Indians to understand the greater part of the conversation.

"If Miss Kearney be held captive in the lodges of the Seminole chief, I will undertake to bear any message to her which her uncle or brother desires to send, and endeavour, should she be willing to accompany me, to escort her to her family," he said. "I have the means of communicating with the Indians in all parts of the country; and in spite of dangers and difficulties, I am sanguine of success."

"But should the Indians find out that you have communicated with us, they will look upon you as an enemy to their cause, and will probably detain you, if they do not take your life," observed my father. "Anxious as I am to recover my niece, I think it right to point out to you the danger you incur."

"I have considered all the difficulties, Captain Kearney, and I count them as nothing compared to the object to be attained," answered Rochford. "I would set out this very day, but I think it is of importance to know whether our late assailants have taken their departure; for should I fall into their hands, they might detain me until Black Hawk was delivered up to them; or, should they think him killed, they might take my life in revenge for his in spite of Ocoola's safe-conduct. Besides, I am very sure that you require a larger supply of provisions than you now possess; and as none of your party can with prudence venture far from the fort, I propose spending a day in hunting. I have a sufficient reason for this, as I have greater hopes of being able to conduct Miss Kearney to this fort than I have to reach her father's house; and if you are compelled to abandon the fort for want of provisions, my plan would be defeated."

Both Captain Norton and my father agreed to Rochford's proposals, but it was a question



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whether the Indians could be trusted. They might prove faithful, but it was more likely that they would play him some treacherous trick. He, however, was not to be turned from his purpose. On hearing of his intended hunting expedition, Tim volunteered to accompany him; and I, after a considerable amount of persuasion, induced my father to let me go also. Rochford, having thought over the matter, consented to accept our assistance, believing that he could be answerable for our safety. It was impossible that so large a body of Indians could move through the country without leaving a well-defined trail, and we should thus be able to ascertain the direction they had taken, and to keep out of their way. Both Tim and I, having so long lived in the wilds, were well able also to take care of ourselves; and we promised not to go farther from the fort than was necessary to reach the ground where game was to be found.

Rochford promised to leave his dog behind him, as not only might its trail be discovered, but, though the animal was useful in many respects, it was not required for deer-shooting. A small party like ours was much more likely to escape observation than a large one, so that we hoped to get back to the fort without difficulty.

Taking with us an ample supply of ammunition, and some cooked food to prevent the necessity of lighting a fire, we set out a short time before daybreak, so that, should any of the Indians by chance be approaching the fort, our departure might not be discovered. Rochford led, followed by Tim and me in Indian file, we all three keeping our eyes around us, and our ears open for any sounds which might show the presence of an enemy. We had reached the thicker part of the forest by the time the bright streaks in the east announced the rising of the sun. We soon discovered a track made by the deer on their passage to a neighbouring pool. Rochford stationed Tim and me behind some thick bushes where we could lie concealed and have a good chance of shooting a couple of the animals on their passage to or from the water; while he carefully explored the country farther to the north, to ascertain whether the Indians, as he supposed was the case, had really gone in that direction. It was truly hunting under difficulties. Should any Indians be near, the sound of our shots would reach them, and it would be no easy matter to conceal ourselves from their keen eyes, which would discover the trail we could not avoid making. However, we had not waited long, when a fine stag, followed by two does, came walking leisurely along, little suspecting the fate awaiting them. Tim fired, and knocked over the stag, while I killed one of the does. The other was bounding off, when Tim brought her down with his second barrel.

Delighted at our success, we rushed out, eager to secure our prey, forgetting altogether the possibility that enemies might be in the neighbourhood. We were busily employed in clearing out the inside of the deer, so that we might the more easily carry them, when I heard a sound among the trees a little distance off. Both Tim and I, having reloaded our rifles, retreated behind the bushes from which we had emerged, and knelt down, ready to defend ourselves against any enemy who might appear. Our minds were soon relieved, however, as we saw Rochford step out from the brushwood. He looked somewhat astonished at seeing the three deer on the ground, and greeted us heartily, as we presented ourselves, on our success. He was satisfied, he told us, that we might continue our hunting, as he had discovered the Indian trail leading due north, and had no doubt that the party had been summoned by Ocoola to proceed in that direction. Having packed up the venison so that we





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might carry it, we secured it to the boughs of a tree, and continued our search for more deer. We were fortunate enough to kill three or four others in the course of the morning.

As it was necessary to convey the venison to the fort without delay, we set off, each loaded with as much as he could carry, intending to return with a horse and a couple of men for the remainder. Our arrival was hailed with infinite satisfaction by our friends, and Lejoillie and another man volunteered at once to accompany us. Spotted Wolf, seeing us about to set off, begged that he might also go. As he had come into our camp voluntarily, it was difficult to refuse him without showing that we suspected his honesty. On perceiving that Captain Norton hesitated, he declared that he was as willing to remain as to go; but he thought that he might be of service in assisting to obtain game, and that he had another reason for offering to join the party. Notwithstanding the suspicions which had been entertained of him, somewhat to my surprise Captain Norton consented.

“We shall have to repent it, depend upon that,” said Carlos. “I should like to go too, for the sake of keeping my eye on him; but Uncle Michael says he won’t allow me. He has the right to permit you to run any risk, but he has to answer for my safety to my father. Still, I advise you to watch him narrowly; and do not scruple to shoot the fellow should he show any inclination to play you a treacherous trick.”

I replied that I could not undertake to shoot the man, but should watch him as far as I had the power.

After Rochford, Tim, and I had taken some food and rested, we set out with our fresh companions. We were again successful. In the evening we agreed to camp out, hoping to kill the next morning as much deer as we and the horse could carry together. Lejoillie was in high spirits, his volubility contrasting with Rochford’s taciturnity. We camped in the centre of a wood, so that the flames of our fire might be concealed; and we took good care to examine the neighbourhood, to ascertain that no one was concealed there. We had, of course, an abundance of venison for supper. Having finished our meal, we lay down to rest, Lejoillie volunteering to keep the first watch. I was to have the second, and Rochford and Tim the third and fourth; for we did not invite the Indian and the other men to keep guard. We lay down as close to the fire as we could, that the smoke might assist in keeping off the mosquitoes and other stinging insects. Spotted Wolf, observing that he was indifferent as to their bites, rolled himself up in a blanket which had been given him at the fort, and lay down a short distance off, at the foot of the nearest tree. I remember, as I closed my eyes, seeing Lejoillie walking up and down, his rifle in his hand, now approaching the horse, which was tethered close at hand, at a spot where the grass was abundant, now taking a look at the Indian, who appeared to be sound asleep. It seemed to me not a minute after my eyes had been shut that I heard Lejoillie’s voice rousing me to keep my watch. The fire was lower than I expected to find it. I asked him why he had not kept it up.

“Better not to have more blaze than we can help,” he answered. “It is just possible, too, that I may have dozed for a moment while I sat down against a tree. However, no harm is done; and I will now finish my nap.” Saying this, he threw himself on the ground in the place I had just left vacant.

“I suspect that our friends, as you also, will thank me for putting some more sticks on the fire,” I



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observed. "The smoke will help to drive off the mosquitoes, which have been biting abominably; and I heard them buzzing round my ears the moment you called me."

I found by my watch that Lejoillie had allowed nearly an hour to pass since he ought to have aroused me, and that I should in consequence have but a short time to stand sentry. Taking up my rifle, I determined to be more wakeful than he had been. I stepped towards where Spotted Wolf was lying. He appeared to me to be sleeping soundly, with his head covered up in his blanket, and his feet thrust into a heap of leaves. The horse was farther off than it had been before, and I supposed that Lejoillie had shifted its tether so as to allow it to obtain more grass. I continued pacing up and down, now and then stopping to throw a few more sticks on the fire. The stars shone bright overhead, but there was no moon, and the lean-tos threw a dark shadow over the ground around, so that, except when the flames burst up, I could distinguish nothing clearly at any distance from the camp. The usual sounds which were wont to reach our ears during darkness in the forest were alone heard: the screeching of some night-bird, the croaking of frogs, the burr and buzz of insects innumerable, and occasionally a rustling among the dry palmetto leaves, which I knew was probably produced by a rattlesnake. I was thankful when I saw that it was time to call up Rochford. While I was arousing him, I thought I heard the sound of a horse moving rapidly over the ground.

"Hark!" I exclaimed, "can that be our horse which has got loose?" We both looked in the direction where we had last seen the animal, but it was nowhere visible.

"It has got loose somehow or other. We must try to catch it," cried Rochford.

Before I followed him, I sprang forward to where I supposed the Indian was sleeping. I lifted the blanket,—a heap of leaves alone was beneath it. He was gone. There could be no doubt that he had carried off the horse. We might as well try to overtake a fleet deer as to attempt to catch him on foot. I shouted to Rochford, fearing that he might be led too far from the camp to be able to regain it.

"Spotted Wolf has escaped, and has gone off with the horse!" I cried out.

My voice aroused our sleeping companions, who sprang to their feet. Fortunately Rochford had heard me, and came back. We at once held a consultation as to what was to be done. It was the general opinion that Spotted Wolf would rejoin our late assailants, and probably bring them down upon us. We therefore agreed to load ourselves with the venison, and set off at once for the fort. Lejoillie was very much ashamed of himself, as it was evident that the Indian had made his preparations for escaping while he had been dozing. The stars served to guide us, and although we frequently stumbled over logs of wood and branches, we managed to get some distance before daylight. We then pushed on as fast as our weary legs and heavy loads would allow us.

Our friends were very much surprised at seeing us arrive without the horse.

"I thought so!" exclaimed Carlos, when we told of the Indian's flight. "I knew that fellow was trying to play us a trick from the first; and he would have done so before now, had we not kept a watchful eye on him."

We brought venison enough to last a couple of days, or even longer on short commons, provided we could manage to dry it in the sun or smoke it.

Rochford told me that he had resolved to set out immediately, and make his way to the lodges of Ocoola. Captain Norton, on hearing of his determination, though anxious to recover my cousin, saw



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clearly the danger our friend would run, especially since the spy had made his escape, and coming into the hut where we were standing, spoke earnestly to him on the subject.

“Spotted Wolf will tell the Redskins that you have been with us,” he said. “They, of course, considering that we are their enemies, will treat you very differently to what they might previously have done.”

“I am fully prepared for every danger I may have to encounter,” answered Rochford, as he took the captain’s hand; “but I have resolved, at the risk of my life, to restore Juanita to her family, if she be willing to intrust herself to my care. I have become acquainted with Ocoola, and know him to be as generous as he is brave, although he may not have been able to restrain his followers from committing the cruel and sanguinary deeds of which they have been guilty. We shall meet again, I trust, ere long; and if not, those here will know that I have fallen in a righteous cause.”

Captain Norton, on receiving this reply, no longer endeavoured to dissuade Rochford from his enterprise. “I believe that your plan, from its boldness, is more likely to succeed than any I can devise,” he answered. “Go; and may success crown your efforts!”

Rochford’s dog, which stood by, looked up into its master’s face, as if asking leave to accompany him.

“Yes, my faithful Rob,” he said, patting the animal’s head, “I will not leave you behind this time. You have already saved my life, and will, I know, keep a careful watch over my solitary camp at night.”

Having bade us all farewell, and wrung his cousin’s hand for the last time, Rochford, followed by Rob, hastened from the fort, and was soon lost to sight among the trees.

We remained for the next two days, in the hope of receiving information from the commandant of Fort King; but neither of the two trusty scouts who had been despatched thither returned. At last our provisions had come so nearly to an end that Captain Norton considered, unless we could obtain a fresh supply, it would be necessary to proceed there at once. Had Spotted Wolf not deserted us, we might have sent out a hunting party in the neighbourhood; but as it was thought that he would to a certainty give information to our enemies, and that they would in all probability return and cut off any small party outside the fort, arrangements were made for recommencing the march. Our chief difficulty in a forced march, such as we intended to make, was to convey the wounded man, the sole survivor of the massacred party we had discovered. A strong litter had been prepared, and several men had volunteered to carry him. He had, however, made no progress towards recovery, and the evening before we were to start he was evidently worse.

Tim, who had assisted my father in doctoring him, entered the little room appropriated to the officers. “I am afraid, sir, that Mike Dillon is going to slip through our fingers after all,” he said. “He has asked to see you and the captain, but I fear, by the time you get to him, he’ll have little power to say anything.”

On receiving this summons, we hastened to the hut, where, on a rough pallet, lay the wounded trooper. His eyes turned towards us as we entered.

“The Indians have done for me, gentlemen; and I want to thank you for the care you have taken of a poor fellow,” he gasped out. “If any of you get back, and ever visit Philadelphia, I would ask you





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as a favour to visit my poor mother, Widow Dillon, and tell her how I came to my end. Give her my love, and say I died in the hope that she would forgive me for the trouble I had caused her.” His words grew fainter as he spoke.

Captain Norton promised that he would carry out his request; and in a few minutes after the young soldier breathed his last.

We buried him that night, just outside the fort, not far from where its former defenders lay. We none of us could tell how soon we might share his fate. Captain Norton, well aware of the dangers to which we should be exposed, charged the scouts to keep a vigilant look-out, so as to avoid being led into an ambush, or surprised in any other way.

Next morning, no messenger having arrived from Fort King, or from any other direction, we commenced our march.

