



by Kirk Munroe  
*Canoemates*  
*A Story of the Florida Reef and Everglades*

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**Chapter 32: Crossing the Glade Without Seeing Them**

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THEY had an early supper, so as to be all ready for a start whenever their jailers should see fit to make one. By sunset their blankets were rolled up, and they were impatiently awaiting some signal; but none came until darkness had fully set in. Then once more from the direction of the water came the now familiar cry of a screech owl. It was answered from several points about the camp, which showed their Indian guards to be still on duty. As Quorum had been allowed to go freely to the shore for water during the day, the Lieutenant now told him to go down again and discover the meaning of the signal. He returned a minute later with the news that Ul-we was waiting for him and the cooking utensils, and that the canoes for the other passengers would arrive with the setting of the new moon, which hung low in the western sky.

So Quorum left them, as on the previous night. As the silver crescent of Halissee, the night timepiece of the Everglades, sank from sight, the others went to the shore, carrying their blankets with them. There they found two canoes, apparently manned by the same silent crews of the evening before, awaiting them.

As they shoved off and plunged once more into the trackless 'Glades, the Lieutenant turned for a look at the island. He could distinguish its black outlines from end to end, and it was a very small one. This overthrew the only theory they had formed concerning their close imprisonment, and left him more than ever puzzled as to its object.

Hour after hour the long poles were steadily wielded by the silent Indians, who seemed not to know fatigue nor to require rest. All through the night the heavy dugouts pursued their steady way, crashing through the crisp bonnets, and bending down the long grasses, that flew up with a "swish" behind them. It was a marvel to the passengers that the channels, followed as unerringly by the dusky canoemen as though it had been daylight, always led into one another. Their own experience had been that, even with sunlight to guide them, half the channels they had attempted to follow proved blind leads. But with the Indians it was never so.

Through the night Lieutenant Carey pondered his situation, and studied their course by the Stars. These told him that it was a little to the north of east, the very one he would have chosen, and in this respect the situation was satisfactory. But what information was he gaining concerning the



Everglades, their resources, and present population? About as little as was possible for one who was actually passing through them. Could he obtain any more? Evidently not, under the circumstances. Long and deeply as he pondered the subject, he could not think of a single feasible plan for altering the existing state of affairs. He was compelled to acknowledge himself completely outwitted by the simpleminded sons of the forest into whose power he had so curiously fallen. "If I could only get at them, and talk to them, and explain matters to them!" he said aloud; and the sailor answered:

"It wouldn't do no good, sir. There's none in the woild so obstinate as Injins and Malays. Once they gets an idea inside their skulls, all the white talk you could give 'em wouldn't drive it out. Fighting is the only argument they Can understand; and, if you say the word, I'll have these two heathen pitched overboard in no time."

"No," said the Lieutenant, "it wouldn't do any good, and my orders are to treat such Indians as I may meet with all possible friendliness. I only wish I could meet with some besides these two young automatons, but there does not seem to be any prospect of it."

At the same time Sumner and Worth, crouched snugly among their blankets in the bottom of the other canoe, were also talking of their strange situation.

"Do you suppose any other two fellows ever had such queer times on a canoe trip as we are having?" asked Worth.

"Indeed I do not," replied Sumner. "And this is the very queerest part of it. Here we are still on a canoe cruise, without our own canoes, without knowing where we are going, and without having anything to do with the management of the craft we are cruising in. It will be a queer experience to tell about when you get back to New York, won't it?"

"Yes, indeed, it will, though New York seems so very far away that it is hard to realize that I shall ever get there again. If we could only see an Indian village, though! It seems too bad to be going right through an Indian country and yet see nothing of its people."

"Oh, well, we are not through with the 'Glades yet, and you may still have a chance to see plenty of Indians."

In spite of Sumner's hopefulness, Worth's wish did not seem any nearer being gratified four days from that time than it did then. Each night's journey was a repetition of the first, except that they grew shorter with the growing moon. The Indians refused to travel except in darkness, and never came for their passengers until after the moon had set. Each day was spent in a comfortable camp, to which they were so closely confined that they could learn nothing of their Surroundings. These camps were always located on small islands, and were always reached before daylight.

Quorum always arrived at the camping place some time in advance of the others, and he always found the canoes and the cruiser awaiting him. From them he was allowed to take whatever he thought the party would need, but after that first night the boats invariably disappeared before the others reached them.

Sumner said this was a trick the canoes had learned early on the cruise, and they had probably taught it to the other boat.

Who caused their disappearance or where they went to, none of them knew; and but for Quorum the owners of the several craft would have heard nothing of their whereabouts or welfare.



During this strange journey, as they were unable to do any hunting or foraging for themselves, Quorum was obliged to exchange so many of their stores for fresh meat, fruit, and vegetables, that he finally announced them to be nearly exhausted.

At length, one very dark night, the passengers, who were half dozing in the bottoms of the canoes, became conscious of a change. The darkness all at once grew more intense, until they could barely distinguish the forms of the Indians in the bow and stern of their respective boats. A rank odor of decaying vegetation filled the air, while the swish of grass and bonnets was no longer heard. They seemed to be moving more swiftly and easily than usual. Finally, when they landed, it did not seem as though they were on an island; and as they made their way towards the light of the campfire, about which Quorum was already busy, they suddenly realized that it was reflected from a background of pine trees.

“Hurrah, boys!” shouted Lieutenant Carey; “there is a sign that our trip is nearly ended. Pine trees don’t grow in the ‘Glades, and therefore we must be somewhere near the coast. I can’t say that I am sorry, for the trip has been a most disappointing one to me. It has been a decidedly unique and remarkable one, though — has it not? I wonder how many people will believe us when we say that we have crossed the entire width of the Everglades without learning anything about them, and almost without seeing them? When we add that we have passed dozens of Indian villages, and yet have not seen an Indian village; have been surrounded by Indians, but cannot describe their appearance; have come all the way by water, and brought our own boats with us, and yet have not set eyes on our own boats since the day we entered the ‘Glades — I am afraid that we shall be regarded much as the old woman regarded her sailor son when he told her that he had seen fish with wings and able to fly. In fact, I am afraid they will doubt our veracity. How I am going to get up any kind of a report to send to Washington, I am sure I don’t know. By the way, Quorum, were our canoes here when you landed?”

“No, sah, dey wasn’t; an’ I is troubled in my min’ frum worryin’ about dem. I is ask dat feller Ullwe, but he don’t say nuffin.’ Pears like he done los’ he tongue, like de res’ ob de Injuns. De wust ob hit is, sah, dat de grub jes about gin out, an’ I is got er mighty pore ‘pology fer a breakfus.”

So excited were our explorers over their new surroundings, and over this report that their boats were again missing, that instead of turning in for a nap, as usual, they sat round the fire and waited impatiently for daylight. Sumner was the most uneasy of the party, and every few minutes he would get up and walk away from the firelight, the better to see if the day were not breaking.

On one of these occasions he was gone so much longer than usual that the others were beginning to wonder what had become of him. All at once they heard him shouting from the direction of the place at which they had landed:

“Hello! In the camp! Come down here, quick! I’ve got something to show you.”

