



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

Chapter 39: A Black Squall and the Stranded Streamer

ALTHOUGH the Psyche was flying at racing speed dead before the wind, which freshened with each moment, and was rolling frightfully under her press of canvas, she was no match in running for the long dugout of which she was in pursuit. Had the latter been properly trimmed and steered, the light cedar canoe could never have caught it. As it was, Sumner saw that he was gaining, but so slowly that he could not hope to overtake it before being carried miles out to Sea. In that weather and with night coming on, this was by no means a cheerful prospect. Still he had no thought of turning back. He had entered upon this race with a full knowledge of its possible consequences, and he would either save the helpless little figure that had appealed to him so imploringly, or perish with it.

So the clutch on his deck tiller tightened, and the taut mainsheet held in the other hand was not slackened a single inch, until the hissing rush of the black squall was in his ears. Then the canoe was sharply luffed, the Sheet was dropped, the halyard cast off, and the white sail fell to the deck like a broken wing. As it was gathered in and made fast with a turn of the sheet, the squall burst on the stanch little craft and heeled it far over. It offered too little resistance to be capsized, and a minute later, steadied by the double-bladed paddle, it was once more got before the wind and was scudding under bare poles.

While doing all this, Sumner had been too busy to look after the object of his pursuit. Now he could not see it, and he almost choked with the thought that his brave effort had been made in vain, after all. No, there it was, close at hand, but no longer showing a sail or flying from him. Heeling over before the blast, its long boom had been thrust into the water, and in an instant the slender craft had been upset. Now, full of water, it floated on one side like a log. At first, Sumner failed to see its tiny occupant, and the thought that he had been drowned almost within reach was a bitter one. But no. Hurrah! There he is! With head just above the water, and chubby hands clutching at the slippery sides of his craft, the plucky little chap was still fighting for life.

As the Psyche swept alongside, steered to a nicety, Sumner reached out, and, nearly overturning his canoe by the effort, caught the little fellow by an arm. The water was pouring in over the cockpit coaming, and had the child been a pound heavier, the next instant would have seen two helplessly drifting canoes instead of one. As it was, he was hauled in and safely deposited in the inch or more of water that swashed above the cockpit floor.



With infinite self-possession the child smiled up into the face of his rescuer and lisped: "How, Summer!"

Then the boy recognized the little Ko-wik-a whose acquaintance he had made in Ul-we's camp, and as a relief to his own overstrained nerves, called him a littler imp, and abused him roundly for getting them into such a scrape. At the same time tears stood in his eyes, and he could have hugged the child cuddling between his knees and smiling so confidently in his face.

Though the rescue of Ko-wik-a had been so happily accomplished, they were still in a sad plight — driving out to sea in an eggshell, with no chance of battling back against the tempest, and the darkness of night enshrouding them. With each moment the storm-lashed waves were mounting higher. All Sumner's skill was required to prevent the canoe from broaching to and turning over. How much longer would his strength hold out? Already he felt it failing. He would soon become exhausted, and then —

Hark! What was that? The note of a steam whistle? Yes, and another, and still others, struggling back hoarsely against the wind; Then a light twinkled through the darkness, and directly other lights were outlining a huge black shape right in their track.

Sumner remembered the steamer he had seen just before parting from Worth. Could this be she? What was she doing there, apparently at anchor?

Driving under her stern, a few minutes' hard paddling brought the canoe into the quiet calm of the towering lee. Then Sumner shouted again and again, but the voice of the ship calling for aid in her own distress drowned his cries. After a while the whistle notes ceased, and he shouted again. This time he was heard, and an answering hail came from the deck high above him, "Who is it, and where are you?"

Sumner answered, and in a few minutes a port low down in the ship's side was flung open, and a flood of light poured from it. Two ropes were lowered, and Sumner getting the bights under the bow and stern of his canoe, it, with its occupants, was lifted to the level of the open port. Strong arms first received the little Ko-wik-a, and then helped the young canoeman aboard the steamer.

"Where is your vessel?" demanded the captain, who was among those assembled to witness this unexpected arrival.

"There," answered Sumner, pointing to the Psyche.

"You don't mean to say that you are navigating the ocean in that cockleshell?"

"Yes, I do; though I don't expect I should have navigated it much longer if I hadn't fallen in with you just as I did. How do you happen to be at anchor here, and what were you whistling for?"

"We are not at anchor. We are aground, and I was blowing the whistle in the hope of attracting some vessel or vessels, into which we could lighten our cargo. Now I suppose I shall have to throw it overboard."

"What for?" asked Sumner. "With this offshore wind there won't be any heavy sea, and unless you have stove a hole in her bottom she ought to float with the flood tide."

"Flood tide! Isn't it the top of the flood now?" exclaimed the captain.

"No; it's the very last of the ebb, and the flood will give you a couple of feet more water."

"Are you certain of that?"

"Certain."

"Then you are a trump!" cried the captain. "And I'm away out of my reckoning, somehow. Your coming just as you have has undoubtedly saved my cargo, for I should have begun heaving



it overboard by this time. You see, I was hugging the coast to escape the force of the Gulf as much as possible, but was keeping a sharp lookout for the red buoy that marks the end of the reef. I can't imagine how we missed it, unless it has gone; but we did, and when Fowey was lighted, I saw that we were too close in shore. I didn't know that we were inside of the reef; but we struck within five minutes after I altered her course, and that was nearly half an hour ago. We don't seem to have hit very hard, and she lies easy without making any water; but she's here to stay, unless, as you say, the flood tide will lift her off. You are certain that this is the last of the ebb?"

"As certain as that I am standing here," answered Sumner, who had a very distinct recollection of how the current had rushed out through the cut.

"Then let us go up into my room and have some supper. There you can tell me how you happened to be out here in such weather with a pickaninny aboard while we wait for the tide."

How safe and comfortable the great ship seemed, after that wild race to sea in a canoe! How the captain and mates and passengers marveled at Sumner's adventures, and what a pet they all made of little Ko-wik-a. As for that self-possessed young Indian, he accepted all the attentions lavished upon him in the most matter-of-fact manner, and with the utmost composure. He expressed no surprise at anything he saw; but his keen little eyes studied all the details of his novel surroundings, and he stored away scraps of startling information with which to astonish his young Everglade comrades for many a day.

The squall passed and the sea smoothed out its wrinkles soon after the crew of the *Psyche* came aboard?, and shortly before midnight the rising tide lifted the great ship gently off the reef. She was backed to a safe distance from it, and there anchored to await the coming of daylight.

Knowing what anxiety his friends and Ko-wik-a's friends must be suffering on their account, Sumner determined to return to them at the earliest possible moment. The first signs of dawn, therefore, found the *Psyche*, with her crew and passenger, once more afloat. A hearty cheer followed the brave little craft as she glided away from the great ship, and in less than an hour she was paddled gently up to where the other canoes and the cruiser lay on the beach.

It had been a sad night to the inmates of that lonely camp, and most of its long hours had been spent in a fruitless watching for the return of the well-loved lad, whom most of them had such slight hopes of ever again seeing. Only Worth had faith, and declared that while he did not know how Sumner would manage it, he was confident that he would turn up again all right somehow. Towards morning their anxiety found relief in a troubled sleep, and as Sumner walked into the camp there was none to greet him or note his coming.

"Hello, in the camp!" he shouted. "Here it is almost sunrise and no breakfast ready yet!"

No surprise could be more complete or more joyful than that. Worth was the first to spring to his feet.

"He's come back safe and sound!" he shouted. "Oh, Sumner, I knew you would! I was sure of it, and told them so!"

"The next time I let you away from my side it will only be at the end of a long rope, you young rascal, you!" said the Lieutenant, after the extravagant joy of the first greeting had somewhat subsided.

After an unusually late and happy breakfast, they sailed through the cut and into the beautiful bay to which it led. They soon discovered the camp to which Ko-wik-a belonged, and the canoe that had rescued him had the honor of bearing him to it. He was received with a wondering joy that was none



the less real for its lack of extravagant manifestation. As Ul-we took the child from Sumner's arms, he turned his face away to hide the emotion that would be unbecoming in an Indian and a warrior. It was there, however, and the look of intense gratitude that he gave the boy was more expressive than any words that he could have uttered.

Then the Indians broke their camp, and they and the whites sailed away together to the appointed rendezvous on Cape Florida.

