



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

Chapter 40: The Happy Ending of the Cruise

ON their entire cruise our young canoemates had not enjoyed a day's run so much as they did this one in company with the Indians who had crossed the Everglades with them, but of whom they had seen so little. The wind was so fair that the boats without centerboards could sail as well as those with, and the run was a series of match races, of which the Psyche and Cupid were winners in nearly every case.

As Ul-we's canoe had been lost the night before, the Lieutenant invited both him and the little Ko-wik-a to a sail in the Hu-la-lah, and even the self-contained young Indian was compelled to express his admiration of the graceful craft. When he ventured to ask what such a canoe would cost, and the price was named, his face indicated his despair at ever being able to accumulate such a sum, and he murmured:

"Heap money! Injun no get um."

At Cape Florida, while the camps were being pitched but a short distance from each other, the boys went with Ul-we to set another fish trap, such as he had been about to prepare when Ko-wik-a ran away with his canoe the day before. The little fellow went with them, but he no longer showed any inclination to go sailing on his own hook. After Ul-we had fixed his trap they went over to a submerged bank that extends southward several miles from the cape. Here, while the boys waded in the shoal water collecting sea porcupines, urchins, tiny squids, bits of live coral, and numberless other marine curiosities, Ul-we was busy gathering and throwing into his canoe a quantity of big greenish shells that looked like so many rocks. When they were ready to go back, and Sumner saw this novel cargo, he exclaimed:

"Good! Now we will have some conch soup for dinner!"

"How do you know?" asked Worth.

"Because here are the conchs, and Ul-we has enough for all of us."

"Those things!" cried Worth, in a tone of disgust. "You surely don't mean that they are good to eat?"

"Yes, I do," laughed Sumner, picking up one of the shells and showing Worth the white meat with which its exquisitely pink interior was filled. "I mean that these fellows can be made into the very best soup I know of."



“Seems to me I have seen that kind of a shell before,” said Worth, “but I never knew that any one ever ate their contents.”

“Of course you have seen the shells. You will find them in half the farmhouses of the country, where, with the point of the small end cut off, they are used as dinner horns. As for the eating part, you wait till Quorum gives you a chance to test it this evening. If you don’t find it fully as good as sofkee, then I shall be mistaken.”

The boys had been greatly disappointed at not finding either the Mantons’ yacht nor the Transit awaiting them at the cape. Several times in the course of the afternoon they climbed to the top of an abandoned lighthouse tower near their camp, in the hope of sighting a sail bound in that direction. As they did so just before sunset, they saw several far over towards the mainland, but they were too distant for their character to be distinguished.

Never had they seen anything so exquisitely beautiful or so royally gorgeous as that Southern sunset, and they lingered at the top of the tower until the last of its marvellous flame tints had burned out, and the delicate crescent of the new moon was sinking into the ’Glades behind the distant pine trees of the mainland.

At supper time Worth was introduced to conch soup, and he agreed with Sumner that it was fully equal to sofkee.

After supper the boys strolled over to the Indian camp, to which Lieutenant Carey was attracted soon afterwards by their shouts of laughter. He did not recognize the boys until they spoke to him, for they had persuaded Ul-we to array them as he had after the forest fire, and they were now in full Indian costume.

In the mean time the distant sails that they had sighted from the top of the old tower had been running across the bay before a brisk breeze, and two vessels had quietly come to anchor just inside the cape. The glow of the campfires could be seen from these, and from one of them a boat containing several persons pulled in to the beach. A minute later two gentlemen, whose footsteps were unheard in the sand, stood on the edge of the circle of firelight, and one of them said to the other, in a low and disappointed tone:

“It’s only an Indian camp after all, Tracy,”

“So it is,” replied the other, regretfully. “Still, they may be able to give us some news. Let’s go in and inquire.”

At that moment the attention of the Indians was equally divided between Sumner, who was apparently accumulating a fortune by taking half dollars from little Ko-wik-a’s mouth and ears, and Worth, who was attempting to dance what he called a clog with Indian variations, to the music of Lieutenant Carey’s whistle. Suddenly little Ko-wik-a, who was nervously excited over Sumner’s wonderful performance, uttered a startled cry and sprang to one side, staring into the darkness.

All the others looked in the same direction, and probably the dignified Mr. Manton was never more surprised in his life than when a young Indian bounded to his side, flung his arms about his neck, and called him “Dear father!” His brother was equally amazed when another young Indian sprang to where he was standing, seized his hand, and called him “Mr. Tracy!”

When they discovered, by their voices and by what they were incoherently saying, that these young Indians were not Indians at all, but the very boys of whom they were in search, tanned to the



color of mahogany, and dressed in borrowed finery, the surprise and delight of the two gentlemen can better be imagined than described.

“Is it possible,” cried Mr. Manton, holding Worth off at arm’s-length so that the firelight shone full upon him, “that this can be the pale faced chap with a cough who left me in St. Augustine a couple of months ago? Why, son, you’ve grown an inch taller and, I should say, six in breadth!” Then, turning to the other boy, and scanning his features closely, he added: “And is this Sumner Rankin, the son of my old schoolmate Rankin, whom I lost sight of after he went into the navy? My boy, for your father’s sake, and for the sake of what you have done for Worth; this winter, I want you hereafter to regard me as a father, and continue to act as this boy’s elder brother. Ever since Tracy told me of you I have been almost as impatient to meet you as to rejoin Worth, for as schoolmates your father and I were as dear to each other as own brothers.”

While this joyful meeting was taking place, a boat from the Transit had come ashore, and Ensign Sloe was reporting to Lieutenant Carey. Then the whole party had to sit down where they were, and, surrounded by the grave-faced Indians, tell and listen to as much of the past two months’ experience as could be crowded into as many hours.

The Mantons were charmed with Lieutenant Carey, and he with them, while towards Ul-we their gratitude was unbounded. Old Quorum, too, was introduced, and warmly thanked for his fidelity to the young canoemates.

Before the schooners sailed for Key West, which they did the next day Lieutenant Carey presented Ul-we with the Hu-la-lah, and Worth gave him the handsomest rifle in his father’s collection, besides promising to send little Ko-wik-a a light canoe for his very own. Mr. Manton and Uncle Tracy between them not only purchased from the Indians, at fabulous prices, the costumes in which they found the boys, but everything else they could think of that would aid in reproducing their present appearance and surroundings for the benefit of their Northern friends. The properties they thus acquired included bear, wolf, panther, and deer skins, and even a sofkee kettle with its great wooden spoon. Besides this, they and the Lieutenant so loaded the Indian canoes with provisions, tobacco, cartridges for their rifles and shotguns, and other useful things, that this occasion formed a theme for conversation about every campfire throughout the length and breadth of the Everglades for many a long day. Should Lieutenant Carey and his party ever care to penetrate those wilds again, they will be certain of a hearty welcome, and of being allowed to go where they please.

Then the two yachts set sail for their run down the reef to Key West, where another joyful greeting awaited the young canoemates.

Before the Mantons left there, it was arranged that Mrs. Rankin should dispose of her Key West home as soon as possible, and sail for New York, where Mr. Manton said he had a cosy little house waiting for just such tenants as herself and Sumner.

“Be sure and come as quickly as you can,” he said, “for I want my new boy to design and build me a yacht this summer for next winter’s cruising.”

“I shall need one too,” added Uncle Tracy, “and I think I know of several more that will be wanted.”

“Don’t forget to bring the Psyche with you, Sumner!” shouted Worth, the last thing.



“As if I would!” answered Sumner. “Whatever boats I may own, I will never part with that dear canoe so long as I live.”

That evening, as the boy and his mother sat discussing their pleasant prospects for the future, Sumner said:

“Well, mother, I have learned one thing from the past two months’ experience, and that is that wealthy people can be just as kind and considerate, and may be as dearly loved, as poor ones. I didn’t believe it at one time, but now I know it.”

THE END.

