

## CHAPTER II

### MR. TROUP JEFFERS PLOTS MISCHIEF

FOR a full understanding of this startling interruption of the young Indian's meditations it is necessary to make a brief excursion among the dark shadows of a history which, though now ancient and well-nigh forgotten, was then fresh and of vital interest to those whose fortunes we are about to follow.

Florida had only recently been purchased by the United States from Spain for five millions of dollars, and its vast territory thrown open to settlement. Being the most nearly tropical of our possessions, it offered possibilities found in no other part of the country, and settlers flocked to it from all directions. As the Spaniards had only occupied a few places near the coast, the interior had been left to the undisturbed possession of the Seminoles and their negro allies. The ancestors of these negroes escaping from slavery had sought and found a safe refuge in this beautiful wilderness. By Spanish law they became free at the moment of crossing the frontier boundary line, and here their descendants dwelt for generations in peace and happiness.

With the change of owners came a sad change of fortunes to the native inhabitants of this sunny land. The swarming settlers cast envious glances at the fertile fields of the Seminoles, and determined to possess them. They longed also to enslave the negro friends and allies of the Indians, whom they discovered to be enjoying a degree of freedom and prosperity entirely contrary to their notions of what was right and fitting. Slavery was a legally recognized institution of the country. The incoming settlers had been taught and believed that men of black skins were created to be slaves and laborers for the benefit of the whites. Therefore to see these little communities of black men dwelling in a state of freedom and working only for themselves, their wives, and children was intolerable. Slaves were wanted to clear forests and cultivate fields, and here were hundreds, possibly thousands, of them to be had for the taking. The villages of these negroes and those of their Indian allies were also affording places of refuge for other blacks who were constantly escaping from the plantations of neighboring states, and seeking that liberty guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States to all men. This condition of affairs could not be borne. Both the Indians and the free negroes of Florida must be taught a lesson.

General Andrew Jackson was the man chosen to teach this lesson, and he entered upon the congenial task with a hearty relish. Marching an army into

Florida, he killed all the Indians whom he encountered, killed or captured all the negroes whom he could find, burned villages, destroyed crops, and finally retired from the devastated country with a vast quantity of plunder, consisting principally of slaves and cattle.

To impress this lesson more fully upon the Indians, General Jackson compelled an American vessel lying in Appalachicola Bay to hoist British colors in the hope of enticing some of them on board. Two Seminole chiefs, deceived by this cowardly ruse, did venture to visit the supposed British ship. When they were safely on board, his Majesty's ensign was hauled down, that of the United States was run up, and beneath its folds the too confiding visitors were hanged to the yard-arms without trial or delay.

After this General Jackson summoned the Indians to come in and make a treaty; but they were fearful of further treachery, and hesitated. Finally some thirty warriors out of the entire tribe were bribed to lay aside their fears and meet the Commissioners. These signed a treaty by which the Seminoles were required to abandon their homes, villages, fields, and hunting-grounds, in the northern part of the territory, and retire to the distant southern wilderness, where they would be at liberty to clear new lands and make new homes. The tribe was also bound by the treaty to prevent the passage, through their country, of any fugitive slave, and to deliver

all such seeking refuge among them to any persons claiming to be their owners.

The United States on its part promised to compensate the Indians for such improvements as they were compelled to abandon, to allow them five thousand dollars annually in goods and money for twenty years, to feed them for one year, and to furnish them with schools.

With the signing of this alleged treaty the trials and sufferings of the Seminoles began in earnest. They were literally driven from their old homes, so eager were the whites to possess their fertile lands. Most of their promised rations of food was withheld, that they might be induced by starvation the more speedily to clear and cultivate new fields in the south. The goods issued to them were of such wretched quality that they were contemptuously rejected or thrown away; and on one pretext or another nearly the whole of their cash annuity was declared forfeited. The most common excuse for thus defrauding the Indians was that they did not display sufficient activity in capturing the negroes who had sought refuge in their country.

Any white man desirous of procuring a slave had but to describe some negro whom he knew to be living among the Seminoles and file a claim to him with the Indian agent. The latter then notified the Indians that they were expected to capture and deliver up the person thus described, or else forfeit his value

from their annuity. Thus these liberty-loving savages soon discovered that, under the white man's interpretation of their treaty, they had bound themselves to deliver into slavery every man, woman, and child found within their territory, in whose veins flowed one drop of negro blood, including in some cases their own wives and children, which crime they very naturally refused to commit.

Although Philip Emathla had thus far avoided an open rupture with the whites, an event of recent occurrence caused him grave anxiety. On the occasion of his last expedition to St. Augustine to receive that portion of the annuity due his band he had been persuaded by Coacoochee and Louis Pacheco, who happened to be visiting his friend at that time, to allow them to accompany him. The Indians camped at some distance from the town, but were permitted to wander freely about its streets during the daytime—a permission of which the two lads took fullest advantage. Thus on the very day of their arrival they set forth on their exploration of the ancient city, and Louis, who had been there before with his father, kindly explained its many wonders to his less travelled companion.

The massive gray walls of Fort San Marco, with their lofty watch towers, and black cannon grinning from the deep embrasures, possessed a peculiar fascination for Coacoochee, and it seemed as though he would never tire of gazing on them. From the

gloomy interior, however, he shrank with horror, refusing even to glance into the cells and dungeons, to which Louis desired to direct his attention.

"No," he cried. "In these I could not breathe. They hold the air of a prison, and to a son of the forest that is the air of death. Let us then hasten from this place of ill omen, lest they close the gates, and we be forced to leap from the walls for our freedom."

So the Wildcat hastily dragged his friend from that grim place, nor did he draw a full breath until they were once more in the sunny fields outside. He was infinitely more pleased with the interior of the equally ancient cathedral, and lingered long before the mystic paintings of its decoration. Its music and the glowing candles of its richly decked altar affected him so strangely, that even after they had emerged from the building and stood in the open plaza, listening to its chiming bells, he was for a long time silent.

Louis, too, was occupied with his own thoughts; and as the lads stood thus, they failed to notice the curiosity with which they were regarded by two men who passed and repassed them several times. One of these men, Troup Jeffers by name, was a slave-trader, who was keenly alive to the possibility of making a good thing out of the present embarrassment of the Seminoles. The other man, who was known as Ross Ruffin, though that was not supposed

to be his real name, was one of those depraved characters found on every frontier, who are always ready to perform a dirty job for pay, and who so closely resembled the filthiest beasts of prey that they are generally spoken of as "human jackals." With this particular jackal Mr. Troup Jeffers had already dealt on more than one occasion, and found him peculiarly well adapted to the requirements of his despicable trade.

"Likely looking youngsters," remarked the slave-dealer, nodding towards the two lads upon first noticing them. "Pity they're Injuns. More pity that Injuns don't come under the head of property. Can't see any difference myself between them and niggers. Now them two in the right market ought to fetch —"

Here the trader paused to inspect the lads more closely that he might make a careful estimate of their probable money value.

"By Gad!" he exclaimed under his breath, "I'm dashed if I believe one of 'em is an Injun!"

"No," replied his companion; "one of 'em is a nigger. Leastways, his mother is."

"You don't say so?" remarked Mr. Troup Jeffers, his eye lighting with the gleam of a man-hunter on catching sight of his prey. "Who owns him?"

"No one just now. Leastways, he claims to be free. He lives with his mother and sister in the

Injun country. I've been calculating chances on 'em myself for some time."

"Tell me all you know about 'em," commanded the trader, in a voice husky with excitement, while the evil gleam in his eyes grew more pronounced.

When Ross Ruffin had related the history and present circumstances of the Pachecos to the best of his knowledge, the other exclaimed:

"I'll go yer! and we couldn't want a better thing. Agent's in town now. I'll make out a description and file a claim this very evening. We'll claim all three. Jump this young buck before he has a chance to get away. It'll make the other job more simple too. Get all three up the coast, easy as rolling off a log. 'Quick sales and big profits'—that's my motto. I'll divvy with you. On the square. Is it a go? Shake."

Thus within five minutes, and while the unsuspecting lads still listened in silence to the tinkling chimes of the old cathedral bells, there was hatched against them a plot more villanous than either of them had ever conceived possible. Not only that, but the first link was forged of a chain of circumstances that was to alter the whole course of their lives and entwine them in its cruel coils for many bitter years to come.