

CHAPTER XXIX

TREACHEROUS CAPTURE OF COACOOCHEE AND OSCEOLA

To the great satisfaction of the general of militia commanding at St. Augustine, Coacoochee, unsuspecting of evil, and intent only upon carrying out his avowed purpose of arranging for a new treaty of peace, returned to the city on the exact date he had named. With an honest pride at the success of his negotiations he announced that Osceola, Coa Hadjo, Talmus Hadjo, and others would come in on the following day, and, camping a short distance outside the city, would there await the white commissioners. He also brought information that the Cherokee peace delegation had gone to the westward for a conference with Micanopy and other chiefs.

The general, still treating the young chief with a lofty consideration, thanked him profusely for his services, and asked as a favor that he would guide a wagon-load of provisions, intended as a present for Osceola and his people, to the place selected for their encampment. This, he said, was a small portion of the supply he was collecting for his Indian friends; and, when he went to meet them on the morrow, he

should take with him several other wagons laden with provisions, that they might have plenty to eat in case the negotiations were extended over a number of days.

Much pleased by this proof of the white man's thoughtful kindness, Coacoochee willingly consented to act as guide to the first wagon, and then asked that he might visit Philip Emathla's camp while it was being got ready, — a request that was granted, though with evident reluctance.

As the young Indian turned away from the general's quarters, he almost ran into the arms of Ralph Boyd, who had come to St. Augustine with his sister but two days before, intending to remain there until the end of the war should render it safe for them to return to their plantation. While Coacoochee was delighted to thus encounter the only white man whom he could call friend, the young Englishman was more than amazed to meet him amid such surroundings.

“Coacoochee!” he exclaimed. “How is this? why are you here? Is it as a prisoner? Or have you decided to join the winning side, and become an ally of the Americans?”

“I am here neither as a prisoner or a traitor,” answered the other, proudly, “but to help in making a peace for my people while they are yet strong enough to insist upon honorable terms.”

“And do you trust the man whom you have just

left?" asked Boyd, indicating by a gesture the quarters of the general.

"Yes," replied Coacoochee, slowly. "I trust him, for I must trust him. Without trust on both sides there could be no treaty. Without a treaty the Seminole must be wiped out. My father and others of my people are even now held here as captives, and only through a treaty can their liberty be restored. I go now to see them. Will my white brother go with me?"

"With pleasure. I knew there were Indian prisoners here, but had no idea that your father was among them, or I would have visited him ere this, to congratulate him on having so fine a son. Ah! here is their camp now; but I say, Coacoochee, who is that white girl sitting among the Indian women? By Jove! she is the most beautiful creature I ever saw."

"Her name is Nita Pacheco," answered the young chief, gazing fondly at the girl, who, intent on a bit of sewing, was as yet unaware of his presence.

"Not your Nita! Not the one that you — Why, confound it, man! You never told me she was white. You said she was a —"

"So she is," admitted Coacoochee, very quietly. "She is one of the Iste-lustee, as you were about to say. Her mother was an octoroon, and of every sixteen drops in Nita's veins, one is black. Although she was born free as you or I, she has been

claimed as a slave; and Philip Emathla was obliged to pay a large sum of money to establish her freedom. With the ending of this war she will become my chee-hi-wah, or what you would call wife."

"In which case I don't wonder that you are so keen for peace. If I were in your place, I would have it at any price, and I only hope I may speedily have the pleasure of dancing at your wedding. Won't Anstice be pleased, though? Ever since she discovered that you had a sweetheart, she has wished to meet her."

"Would the white maiden take the hand of her who is of the Iste-lustee?" asked Coacoochee, abruptly.

"Oh bother your Iste-lustees! of course she would," cried Boyd. "Not only that, but she would love her dearly. Why, the girl is as white as Anstice herself, and even if she were not, do you suppose that would make any difference? Don't you know that any one precious to you must also be dear to us, who owe you everything, including our lives. Don't you know the meaning of the word 'gratitude'? And don't you suppose we know it, too, you confoundedly proud Seminole, you?"

Ere he finished this speech the Englishman was left alone; for, at the sound of his raised voice, Nita looked up, and flushed so rosily at sight of her lover, that he was drawn to her side as irresistibly as needle to magnet. Then, forgetful of all save each

other, they strolled among the lodges of the little encampment.

Suddenly while they walked, Coacoochee started as though he had been shot. In a whisper he bade the girl at his side return to her companions, and as without comment she obeyed him, he stood motionless, his face black with rage, and his whole frame quivering with excitement. The cause of this emotion was a voice coming from the opposite side of a tent that had been appropriated to the especial use of Philip Emathla. The voice was saying :

“ They tell me, old man, that you don’t savey American ; but I reckon you can understand enough to know what I mean when I say that if you’ve got any niggers to sell, I’m the man that’ll buy them of you, of co’se at a reasonable figger. As things stand now, your travelling expenses are likely to be heavy, and there’s two or three wenches in your camp that I’d be willing to stake you something handsome for. There ain’t no drop of Injun blood in ary one of them, and they are certain to be took from you, anyway. So you, might as well make something out of ’em while you’ve got the chance. One of ’em, that Pacheco gal, is mine by rights, anyhow ; but if — ”

At this point the speaker uttered a yell of terror, and instinctively reached for his pistol, as with a bound like that of a panther and blazing eyes, Coacoochee leaped upon him. Mr. Troup Jeffers

was hurled to the ground with such force that for a moment he lay stunned and motionless. As the Wildcat glared about him for some weapon with which to complete his task, two of the guards rushed in and dragged the slave-trader beyond the lines of the camp. At the same time, Boyd, who had witnessed the scene from a distance, came hurrying up from an opposite direction.

“For Heaven’s sake Coacoochee! What does this mean?” he cried; “you’ll have a war on your hands right here if you don’t look out.”

Without answering him, the young Indian turned to Philip Emathla, who was sitting before the tent, and uttered a few hurried words in his own tongue, the purport of which was, “Look well on this man, my father; for he is my friend, whom you can trust as you would me. If he comes to thee for Nita, let her go with him.”

Then he and Ralph Boyd hurried away in the direction from which they had come. As they passed the group of women, Coacoochee stopped to whisper in the ear of Nita Pacheco, who was also bidden to trust the white man now before her, and then they passed on.

“That dog, whom I would I had killed,” said the young Indian, when they were safely beyond the camp, “is a catcher of slaves, who seeks to steal my promised wife. For this night, I cannot protect her, for I must meet Ah-ha-se-ho-la. If I do not,

he will not stay, and there will be no peace. Before the setting of to-morrow's sun Coacoochee will be free to protect his own. For this night, then, I would have you and the white maiden, thy sister, give to Nita the shelter of thy lodge; or, if that be not possible, watch over her and see that she is not stolen away."

"Certainly, my dear fellow! Of course we will look out for her as long as you like, and glad of the chance to thus repay some portion of our indebtedness," interrupted Ralph Boyd, heartily. "But who is the rascally beggar?"

"His name I know not," replied the other; "but certain things concerning him I do know. He, more than any other, caused this war between the Iste-chatte and the white man. He broke up the home of the Pachecos and sold the mother and brother of Nita into slavery, as he would now sell her. He stole and sold into slavery the wife of Osceola."

"The scoundrel!" exclaimed Boyd.

"When my white brother was shot down at the battle of the Withlacoochee, the bullet came from behind, and from the rifle of this man."

"What!"

"When the home of my white brother was attacked by white men, painted to look like the Iste-chatte, this man was leader of the band. He it was who took the white maiden, thy sister, captive and left her to perish in the forest."

“ Good Heavens, man ! Do you know what you are talking about ? Can all this be true ? ”

“ The tongue of Coacoochee is straight. He would not lie to his white brother. ”

“ Yes, but may you not be mistaken ? I did not know I had an enemy in the world, who would thus injure me. Who can it be ? ”

“ What I have said is true. Does my brother remember talking with a man under a tree the day before the white soldiers reached the ferry of the Withlacoochee, and speaking scornful words to him ? ”

“ Yes, though I don't see how you could know of that. I inquired about him and found out his name, which proved to be the same as that of the last overseer on my plantation. I had heard bad accounts of the man, and had him discharged before taking possession. ”

“ This man is the same who talked with my brother under the tree. ”

“ Well, whoever he is, you may be very certain that I shall look into this thing thoroughly, and if I find him to be guilty of half of these things, I will make him suffer sweetly. Meantime, my lad, do you rest easy about your sweetheart. Anstice shall go to her, and for your sake, if not for her own, her safety shall be guarded with our lives. ”

By this time they had reached again the general's quarters, and the wagon that Coacoochee was to

guide stood in readiness. So, with a warm hand-clasp, the friends parted, one to go on a mission that he fondly hoped would bring a lasting peace to his people, and the other to take measures for the safety of Nita Pacheco.

According to promise Osceola, escorted by some seventy warriors, all mounted, and preceded by a white flag, in token of the peaceful nature of their mission, arrived promptly at the appointed place of encampment. There they were met by Coacoochee with a welcome supply of provisions.

Long and earnestly did the two young chieftains talk together that night, in planning for the morrow, on which they believed the fate of their nation would be decided. On one point they were fully agreed. The negro allies, who had fought so bravely with them, and who were as free as themselves, must be considered as equal with them, and must, in any negotiations, be granted the same terms as themselves. If this should not be allowed, they would refuse to make peace, and would return under protection of their white flag, whence they came.

At ten o'clock on the following morning a blare of trumpets announced the coming of the general. He was accompanied by a staff of uncommon gorgeousness, and escorted by one hundred mounted militiamen, all armed to the teeth. Behind these rumbled several large, covered wagons similar in appearance to the one that had brought provisions

the evening before. These were halted a short distance away, where they were partially hidden in the palmetto scrub.

Coacoochee, Osceola, Coa Hadjo, and Talmus, arrayed in such finery as befitted the occasion, stood forth to meet the newcomers, while their handful of warriors clustered close behind them. Above their heads fluttered the white flag of truce.

Approaching to within a few yards of them, and utterly ignoring the formalities usual at such a time, and so dear to the heart of an Indian, the general began abruptly to read a list of questions from a paper that he held in his hand. The first of these struck like a blow:

“Are you prepared to deliver up at once all negroes taken from citizens?”

“Why have you not done this already?”

“Where are the other chiefs, and why have they not surrendered?”

There were other questions of a similar nature, and realizing from these, as well as from the tone of the speaker's voice, that the whites had not come there with any thought of discussing a treaty, Osceola, with a quick glance about him, like a stag brought to bay, attempted to speak, but his voice choked and failed him. He looked appealingly at Coacoochee, as though requesting him to frame an answer; but the son of Philip Emathla stood like one who is stunned.

"You, Powell," continued the general, harshly, "having signed the treaty of Fort King, shall be made to abide by it.

"As for you, Wildcat, I have learned of your recent outrages in the Withlacoochee Swamp. Never again shall you have a chance to murder white men, like the cowardly beast whose name you bear."

Thus saying, the speaker waved his arm, a loud command rang out, there came a rush through the palmettoes, a clash of weapons, and the too trusting Seminoles found themselves hemmed in on all sides by a hedge of glittering bayonets.

A strong body of infantry, brought in the supposed provision wagons, had gathered in a circle about the unsuspecting Indians. Thus, within ten minutes after the arrival of the troops, under the very shadow of a truce flag, was this most shameful deed of treachery accomplished.

Disarmed and bound like so many slaves, and guarded by double ranks of soldiers, the forest warriors were driven, like sheep, to the city and through the massive gateway of its frowning fortress. Here Coacoochee was separated forever from Osceola, who was soon afterwards taken to Fort Moultrie in Charleston harbor. There, a few weeks later, he died of a broken heart, far away from his friends and from the dear land for which he had fought so bravely.

With only Talmus Hadjo for a companion, the Wildcat was roughly thrust into one of those narrow dungeons from the deadly gloom of which he had shrunk with such horror on the occasion of his long-ago visit to the fort in company with Louis Pacheco.