

CHAPTER XXXVII

COACOOCHEE IS AGAIN MADE PRISONER

ALTHOUGH the Seminoles had generally been victorious in their battles with the whites, they were struggling against a power so infinitely greater than theirs that the four years of war already elapsed had made very serious inroads upon both their strength and their resources. Their entire force was in the field, and they had no reserves from which to draw fresh warriors. They must raise their own food supplies even while they fought. They could not manufacture powder nor arms, and could only gain infrequent supplies of these by successful battles or forays. The fresh, well-armed, and well-fed troops, operating against them, outnumbered them ten to one. Their entire country was dotted with stockaded posts, called by courtesy "forts," garrisoned by troops who were continually driving the Indians from hammock to hammock, destroying their fields, and burning their villages.

One line of these posts extended across the Territory, from Fort Brooke on Tampa Bay to St. Augustine, cutting off the northern bands from those who had sought refuge amid the vast swamps of the

south. Another line extended down the west coast, and up the Caloosahatchie to Lake Okeechobee ; while a third line commanded the Atlantic coast from St. Augustine to the mouth of the Miami River, where it empties into far-distant Biscayne Bay. Of this last chain the principal posts were Fort Pierce, on the Indian River opposite the inlet, Fort Jupiter at the mouth of the Locohatchie, Fort Lauderdale on New River, and Fort Dallas on Biscayne Bay. The last named was most important of all, because of its size, its strength, nearly all of its buildings being so solidly constructed of stone that some of them are in a good state of preservation to this day, and on account of its situation, which commanded the Everglades and the system of waterways connecting them with the coast.

Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that the Indians were weary of the hopeless struggle against such overwhelming odds, and that Colonel Worth found Coacoochee willing to talk peace.

The two war-chiefs seemed drawn to each other, and to understand each other from the first. During the four days that Coacoochee remained in the camp of the soldiers, they held many informal talks concerning the subject of greatest importance to them both. For a long time, Coacoochee argued stoutly against the removal of his people to a distant country, and pleaded hard for a reservation in their own land.

To this Colonel Worth replied that more than half the tribe were already removed, and could never be brought back. Also that, with the great tide of white immigration setting steadily southward, no reservation in Florida, worth the having, could be secured to the Indians for more than a few years; at the end of which time the existing troubles would rise again with exaggerated violence.

These arguments finally prevailed, and with a heavy heart the young chief admitted the necessity of leaving the land of his birth. He, however, made one stipulation.

“There are among us,” he said, “those of a darker skin than ours, but who are yet our brothers. Many of them were born to freedom in the land of the Istechatte. They have fought with us for our liberty, and have died by our side. They are with us as one people, and where we go they must also go. If Coacoochee surrenders, and exerts his influence for the removal of his people, it is only on condition that those of the Iste-lustee now dwelling with the Seminoles shall go with them, and that no one of them shall ever be claimed by a white man as his slave. Are the words of Coacoochee good in the ears of the white war-chief?”

“They are good,” replied Colonel Worth, “and, were I in full command, your condition should be granted unhesitatingly. But there is another war-chief more powerful than I, who must be consulted.

I believe he will gladly accept your terms. He is now at Fort Brooke. Will you go with me and see him? If you will, no matter whether you come to an agreement or not, I pledge my sacred word, as a man and a soldier, that you shall return to your own people, free and without harm."

For some minutes Coacoochee meditated this proposition in silence. Then he said slowly:

"Micco-hatke [white chief], in the hope of ending this war, and saving the lives of my people, I will do what I have said I never would do. I will trust myself again within the walls of a white man's fort. I will go with you to talk with this great white chief. First, I must return to my warriors, and tell them where I am going, that there may be no fighting while I am gone. I give you these ten sticks. With the rising of each sun throw one away. When all are gone, Coacoochee will come again, and go with his white brother to the place of the great white chief."

So the Wildcat left the camp of the soldiers as free as he had entered it, journeyed far among the scattered bands of his people, and in ten days returned, prepared to accompany his white friends to the place from which they had set forth in search of him.

At Tampa, General Armistead expressed himself as greatly impressed with the manliness and evident sincerity of the young chief. He readily consented

to the condition imposed, and bade him bring in his people at once, that they might be embarked for emigration.

To this Coacoochee replied that, while he had become convinced of the necessity for removal to the west, it would take time to convince his followers, especially as the soldiers had so driven them that they were scattered in small bands all over the country. They would not be gathered together until at their great annual festival or green corn dance, which would be held in June. Before that time he doubted if he should be able to accomplish very much.

Understanding this state of affairs perfectly, General Armistead still desired Coacoochee to go and collect his people as speedily as possible, designating Fort Pierce on the Indian River as the place at which they should assemble.

So the young war-chief having renewed his confidence in the words of the white man, departed cheerfully, and filled with a new hope for the future. He had received every mark of friendship and distinction from officers and soldiers, and had been given no cause to doubt for a moment the sincerity of these expressions.

As Colonel Worth was about to leave for Palatka, and the Boyds were taking advantage of his escort to return to their own home, Coacoochee decided to accompany them as far as the plantation on the St.

John's, where Nita was still to be left until his return from the great enterprise he had now undertaken.

About this return much was said; for it would mean the beginning of the young chief's long journey to the west, and of course on that journey, from which there was to be no return, Nita Pacheco was to accompany him. Anstice had set her heart on having what she termed the "royal wedding" take place at the plantation, and had so nearly gained Coacoochee's consent to being married according to the way of the Iste-hatke, that she already considered her pet scheme as good as adopted.

The only officer accompanying the colonel to Palatka was Lieutenant Douglass; and, on the evening of their arrival at the plantation, as he and Anstice sat together on the verandah, while Coacoochee was strolling with Nita beneath the oaks, and Ralph Boyd was entertaining Colonel Worth inside the house, he startled the English girl by asking:

"Wouldn't it be just as easy, Miss Boyd, to have two weddings as one when Coacoochee returns?"

"Why, yes. I suppose so. If there was any one else who wanted to get married just at that time."

"Well, there is. I do, for one."

"And who is the other, pray?"

"Can't you guess, Anstice? Don't you know? Won't you—?"

Here the young officer caught one of the girl's hands in both of his, and though he was obliged to

release it a moment later, as the other men appeared on the verandah, the mere fact that she had not snatched it away filled him with unspeakable joy. It was a sufficient answer to his question, and he knew as well as though told in words, that he had won something better and sweeter far than rank, or honors, or position, or whatever else besides love the world holds most dear.

During the weeks that followed this happy evening at the plantation, while Colonel Worth, with Irwin Douglass as his hard-worked adjutant was always in the field, giving the Indians to understand that the vigilance of the troops was in no way to be relaxed, by the prospects of peace, Coacoochee, in the far south, was using every effort to redeem his pledged word, and persuade his people to come in for removal. He often visited Fort Pierce, the appointed rendezvous, which was commanded by Major Chase, the same who as a captain had destroyed the swamp stronghold of Osceola. This officer had long been conducting similar operations in the south, despatching small bodies of troops in all directions from his post, on the soldierly tasks of destroying fields, capturing women and children, and burning the rude roofs that had sheltered them. Upon receipt of orders to stay his hand, and hold his troops in check, that Coacoochee might be given an opportunity to collect his scattered warriors, Major Chase became impatient at the loss of his

favorite occupation. So he sent word to the general commanding, that Coacoochee was so dilatory in fulfilling his promises, that it was believed he meditated treachery.

At this, General Armistead, who was on the point of being relieved of his command, and ordered to Washington, consummated his official career in Florida by an act calculated to bring a blush of shame to the cheek of every American soldier. It was nothing more nor less than an issue of instructions to Major Chase to seize Coacoochee, together with any who might accompany him, the very next time the young chief visited Fort Pierce, and hold them as prisoners of war.

Upon the retirement of this general, the man appointed to succeed him to the command in Florida, was Colonel Worth, then at Palatka, on the St. John's, which was headquarters of his regiment. The distance between that point and the Boyds' plantation was so short, that the colonel, together with his adjutant, was in the habit of frequently visiting it and sharing its bountiful hospitality. Here were often held discussions of the war, and of the efforts then being made by Coacoochee toward securing peace. During these conversations, the colonel was apt to sigh for an extension of his powers, that he might be enabled to put some of his pet theories into practice. In these aspirations the plantation household heartily sympathized.

It was only natural, then, that, on receiving his unexpected appointment as commander-in-chief, the honest soldier should hasten to impart the glad intelligence to his friends and bid them share his satisfaction.

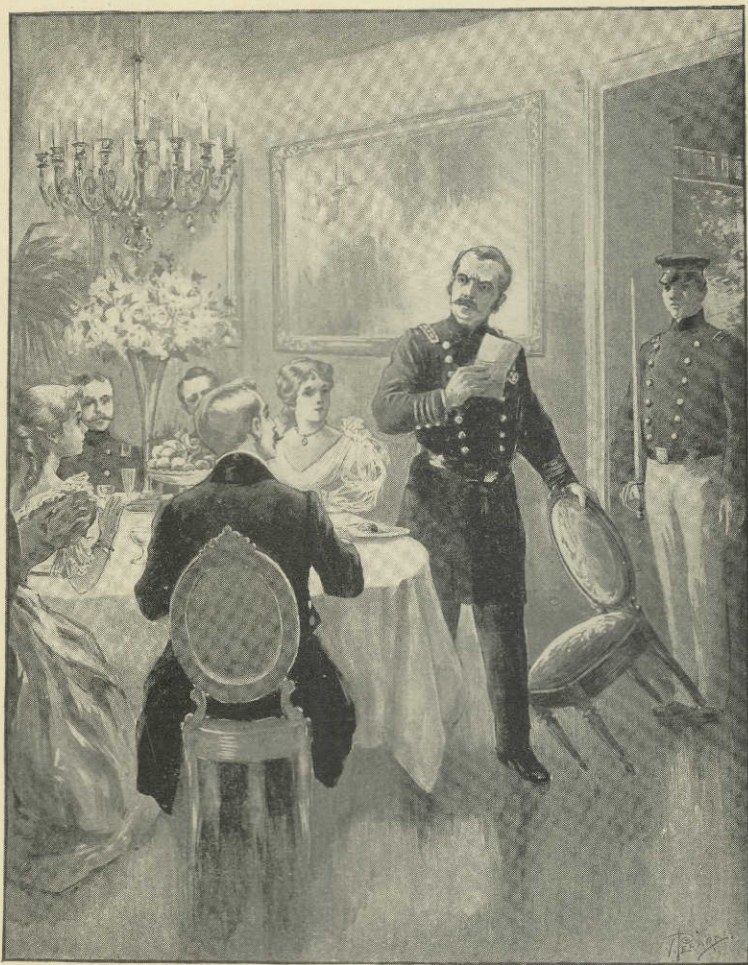
Thus it came about that, a few evenings later, Ralph Boyd gave a dinner in celebration of the event, at which, among other guests present, were "General" Worth, as he must now be called, and Lieutenant Douglass.

The occasion was one of unrestrained happiness, for all believed that the tedious war must now come to a speedy close. Frequent blushes were brought to the cheeks of both Anstice and Nita, by sly allusions to the rapid approach of a certain double wedding that now appeared among the probabilities of the immediate future.

When the festivities were at their height, and all were in the gayest of spirits, there came a clatter of horses' hoofs, and a rattle of arms, from outside. The next moment a travel-stained courier entered, saluted, and handed the general a despatch marked "urgent."

The commander tore it open, glanced with paling cheeks at its contents, and sprang to his feet, exclaiming:

"My God, gentlemen! all is lost, and the war is about to break forth with greater fury than ever! In violation of our plighted word, Coacoochee and



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fifteen of his followers have been treacherously seized at Fort Pierce, sent in irons to Tampa, and despatched in cruel haste to the west. A transport even now bears them toward New Orleans. In this emergency there is, to my mind, but one thing to be done. Coacoochee must be brought back. Without his aid to end it, this wretched war will continue indefinitely. Lieutenant Douglass, within fifteen minutes I shall want you to start on an overland ride to New Orleans. Intercept Coacoochee and bring him back to Tampa. For so doing you shall have my written authority. Boyd, pen and paper, if you please, and quickly."

Less than a quarter of an hour later, Douglass, splendidly mounted, armed with all requisite authority, and followed by but two troopers, dashed away down the long avenue, fairly started on his momentous mission.

As Anstice bade him farewell, she whispered in his ear: "Remember, Irwin, a double wedding, or none."