

CHAPTER VIII

THE SEMINOLE SETTLES A POINT

"Now, I wonder what they're calling us home for," Sandy remarked, as the four columns of smoke lifted into the sky.

"Perhaps we'd better run along and see!" suggested Mickey.

"They never sent up that signal because they wanted us to come home and eat, or anything like that!" Sandy insisted. "There's something doing there, unless I'm very much mistaken."

"Then, if there's something doing," Micky suggested, "we don't want to go rushing in. What we want to do is to sneak up and find out what's going on. I wonder where Okee is."

"He's not very far away," Sandy replied, confidently.

The boys drew up and waited for the approach of the Seminole, who halted when he came in sight of the other canoe.

Mickey beckoned him to approach and he did so, paddling with caution and keeping his eyes fixed on the Boy Scout signal streaming up from the island. In a moment his canoe was close alongside.

Mickey pointed to the smoke signal.

"Can you find out what that means?" he asked.

"Aw, cut that out!" cried Sandy. "I can

find out all about that myself! I'll row in, if you're afraid, and you can get into the canoe with the Indian," he added with a grin.

"Just you wait a minute," advised Mickey. "Okee can find out what's going on at the camp better than you can."

Realizing that what the boy said might be true, Sandy nodded to the Indian and pointed in the direction of the island.

In a moment the Seminole had his canoe in motion, flashing swiftly down the creek and across the channel. It seemed to the boys to disappear in an overhanging thicket on the other side as if by magic.

Sandy was not slow in following the suggestion. It was these shots, it will be remembered, which sounded along the channel as Tommy and Chet drew near in their canoe, and which Will and George heard while, under the direction of the outlaws, they were carrying the provisions from the camp to the motor-boat.

It seemed a long time to the waiting boys before the Seminole reappeared.

"What is it?" Mickey asked as Okee's canoe came alongside.

The Indian pointed to the island.

"Bad men!" he said. "Steal boat!"

"I thought so!" cried Sandy.

"Have they got possession of it?" asked Mickey.

The Seminole answered by an affirmative grunt.

"What are they doing?" asked Sandy.

"Steal boat. Move camp!" was the reply.

"They must have caught the boys asleep!" suggested Sandy.

"Well, what are we going to do?" demanded Mickey.

"Shoot!" advised the Seminole.

"I'm afraid they'll blow up the motor-boat if we do," Sandy observed.

While the boys studied over the situation, the sharp clamor of the motors cut the air.

"There!" Mickey exclaimed. "The thieves are running away with the boat! Whatever we do, we've got to do right away!"

"Shoot!" the Indian advised once more.

"He's a bloodthirsty old fellow, isn't he?" suggested Sandy.

"I don't know much more about him than you do," was the reply. "I hired him to bring me in from Webster lake in his canoe, and he seems to object to being discharged. I guess he thinks I'm in a bad nest and wants to protect me."

"And I guess he's right about that, too!" declared Sandy.

"I guess we all need protection!" added Mickey.

"Well, well," Sandy exclaimed. "Are we going to sit here all day and let those outlaws run away with the motor-boat?"

The boys began paddling swiftly toward the channel, and as they did so the Seminole's canoe shot ahead and disappeared around the bend which half concealed the creek from the body of water beyond.

"Now where's he going?" asked Sandy.

"You know as much about it as I do," answered Mickey, "but the chances are that he isn't doing that for his health. It's oranges to oats that he'll make good in some way!"

"Here's hoping he does!" exclaimed Sandy fervently.

When the boys passed the bend so that an unobstructed view of the northern shore of the island in Lost Channel might be had, they expected to see the motor boat gliding away in charge of river thieves, but the boat was not in sight!

They drew up close to the shore of the island and listened for a moment to the sparking of the motors. Although power seemed to have been turned on, the boat did not appear to be in motion. While they listened the clamor of the motors died out completely.

"Perhaps they've changed their mind about taking the boat away!" suggested Sandy. "That will give us a chance to fight for it."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth when a volley of shots came from the direction of the camp. The boys lost no time in getting under way again and soon came within sight of the landing.

The Beaver lay moored near her old position. Two rough-looking men, one of whom Sandy declared to be the fellow he had seen early in the morning, were crouching behind the little trunk cabin, firing harmless bullets at a canoe which was skulking under overhanging boughs not far beyond. Without coming into view the boys drew nearer and waited.

"There's Tommy in the canoe," whispered Mickey. "I wonder why he doesn't keep out of sight."

"Yes," commented Sandy, "those fellows might accidentally hit him."

"Who's the boy with him?" asked Mickey. "I never saw him before!"

"He's a new one on me!" admitted Sandy.

While the boys waited, Will and George made their appearance, coming from the cabin of the Beaver. They appeared to be arguing with the outlaws, and in a moment one of the fellows struck at George.

The boy dodged away and retreated into the cabin. The man rushed after him, but his advance was checked by the burly form of his associate. The boys saw the two men talking excitedly together for a moment, and then one of them seized George by the collar and threw him down on deck, within easy reach of the motors.

"I guess the boys have blocked the motors in order to prevent the thieves getting away with the boat!" whispered Sandy excitedly.

"Yes," added Mickey, "and the fellows are trying to make George start it again. If we don't do something the lad may be murdered."

Even as the boy spoke one of the outlaws lifted a heavy boot to strike George. Before the blow could fall a shot came from the shore and the outlaw tumbled over into the water. His associate sprang for the cabin, but before he reached the door another shot came and he, too, crumpled and fell, striking first across the

gunwale, then dropping off into the water. Both men sank almost instantly.

When Sandy sprang to the deck of the Beaver, closely followed by Mickey, he came near bumping heads with Tommy, who was swinging in from the other side. Chet still remained in the canoe Tommy had left.

George arose rather stiffly from the deck and Will rushed out of the cabin as the boys came aboard.

For a moment all was excitement. The boys bent over the gunwale as if expecting to see some signs of the outlaws.

"Who did the shooting?" asked George.

"The Indian, I reckon," replied Mickey.

"He didn't shoot any too quickly," George went on. "I was expecting to have my ribs caved in when the shot came."

"I wonder if they're both dead?" asked Will, leaning far over the gunwale. "I don't see them in the river anywhere," he added.

After quite a search the bodies were finally discovered lying in the mud at the bottom of the channel. The Indian's aim had been accurate. The boys looked at each other questioningly.

"Where's this Seminole?" asked Will.

"I don't know!" replied Mickey. "He left us while we were coming down the creek, came over to the island to see what was going on, reported the situation here, and left us again."

"We want to adopt that Indian!" George exclaimed.

"You bet, we will!" agreed Sandy.

"Then you'll have to adopt me, too!" declared Mickey. "Okee adopted me two days ago!"

Will now approached Tommy and said in a low voice, aside:

"Who's your friend in the canoe?"

"Here!" cried Tommy laughing and motioning to Chet, "come aboard and show yourself. This is a Black Bear from Chicago," he went on, as Chet clambered over the gunwale. "I found him doing the Crusoe act on an island farther up the channel. He's waited two weeks for a friend to come back from Webster Lake. Looks pretty seedy, doesn't he?"

"Looks like an iron and rag man in a Chicago alley!" replied George.

"You want to look out for him, though!" Tommy suggested. "Because he's great on throwing cayenne pepper!"

Then the story of Tommy's adventures of the morning came out, and the boys agreed with Chet that he had done the sensible thing in joining them in their camp. He seemed grateful for the welcome he received.

"Have you got any more cayenne pepper?" asked Sandy, as the boy shook hands all round. "Because if you have, you know, I want to keep a pound or so of it in my clothes. It seems to be more effective than bullets."

"I'm afraid we used up the entire supply," laughed Chet. "But say," he went on, "it was a picnic to see the fellow making faces when he got that dose! Served him just right, too!"

After some further discussion, Will reached under the carbureter and closed the needle valve.

"You noticed how suddenly the motors stopped, didn't you?" he asked.

"Sure we did!" replied Sandy.

"Well," Will went on, "I flooded the motors, and the fellows never guessed what was the matter. It seemed they understood how to operate the motors as long as nothing serious intervened, but they didn't understand that flooding business."

"Is there anybody here that can catch a fish?" demanded Tommy suddenly.

Sandy and Chet both shouted that they could.

"Then each one of you go and get a bass weighing ten pounds," Tommy went on, whimsically. "Here you fellows stand around talking about what's been done while I'm starving to death. You go and get twenty pounds of fish," he went on, "and I'll go and get a couple of wild ducks, and we'll have a dinner like the ones we used to have in the alley back of West Madison street, near May."

Sandy and Chet started away in one of the canoes and Will turned to the other boys.

"What about these two outlaws?" he asked, pointing to the channel.

"I suppose," George suggested, "that we ought to bring them out for burial, but I prefer waiting until after we've had dinner. I'm sorry it was necessary to kill them, but I guess

the Seminole knew best. By the way," he added, "where is this Indian?"

Will made no reply but the Seminole answered for himself later on, in a most unexpected manner.