

CHAPTER X

AN INDIAN WAR-WHOOP

Involuntarily Sandy and Chet crept closer to the Seminole as the three roughly-clad men approached the tent.

"Bad man! Shoot!" grunted the Indian as the trio gathered in front of the fire.

Sandy shook his head, and the Indian slipped the automatic which he had used to such good purpose earlier in the day into a convenient pocket. However, he still viewed the men threateningly.

"Cripes!" exclaimed Sandy. "Those fellows seem to understand that there's no one at home! They act like they owned the camp."

"I was just thinking of that," Chet broke in, "and wondering whether they haven't lured the boys away—or worse."

"If I thought they had interfered with my chums," Sandy gritted, "I'd advise the Seminole to open fire."

"Perhaps we'd better wait a little while and see what takes place," advised Chet. "The boys may be out fishing."

After signifying by grunts and gestures that the lads were to remain where they were, the Seminole crept away to make a circuit of the thickets. It was plain that he, too, was considering the safety of the remainder of the

party. In a moment he disappeared from view.

In the meantime the outlaws, for such they appeared to be, were rummaging through the tents in quest of anything worth carrying away. Now and then they peered into the bushes on either side, as if suspicious that the owners of the camp might not be far away.

"I'd like to blow their heads off!" Sandy whispered.

"This thing reminds me of the sort of plays they used to put on at the old Alhambra theatre, on State street, Chicago," commented Chet.

"The companies always carried a double supply of villains, and as soon as one set left the stage the other walked on."

"That hits this case exactly," Sandy chuckled. "The fellows who were killed by the Indian captured the camp not long ago, and were outwitted and put out of business for good. Now here comes this new bunch to capture the camp again."

"Just like one of the old Alhambra plays!" agreed Chet.

After a time the outlaws gave over their searching of the tents, principally for the reason that there was nothing in them to pull about. It will be remembered that the tents had been taken down and moved to the motor-boat not so very long before. In fact, the boys had just begun restoring the camp at the time of Sandy and Chet's departure on their fishing excursion.

There were very few tins of food on the

island, but what were there were broken open and the marauders began the preparation of a meal.

"It seems to me," Chet whispered, "that you boys came down from the north merely for the purpose of establishing eating houses. The fellow who received the cayenne pepper treatment at my camp, the two men devoured by the alligators, and these three outlaws have all been feasting on camp supplies today."

"It's a wonder they wouldn't bring in their own supplies!" grumbled Sandy. "We won't have enough to last more than a week if this thing keeps on," he added regretfully.

"I wish we knew how many of them there are on this island," Chet suggested. "I presume, however," he went on, "that Okee will soon return with the information. I imagine that's what he went away for."

"That and to find out what's become of the boys," the other added.

"If there were any more on the island, they would be up there eating with their fellow robbers!" Chet declared. "That coffee they're beginning to make smells good to me right now."

How wrong this supposition was the boys discovered the next moment. As they crouched in the thicket two heavy, muscular forms crunched down upon them, almost pressing the life from their bodies and rendering resistance absolutely impossible. It was only after their weapons and cartridges had been taken from their pockets that the heavy weights which

pressed them, half suffocated, to the ground were removed!

"What's the matter with you fellows?" panted Chet, rubbing an arm which had been crushed under his side during the search of his person.

"Shut up!" cried one of the assailants.

"Why don't you go out to the camp and help your friends eat the dinner they are stealing?" demanded Sandy the next moment.

"No lip, young fellow," one of the men said sullenly.

The men who had attacked and overpowered the lads were short, heavily-built fellows, dressed in wide-legged trousers, worn without suspenders, and blue woolen shirts open at the neck. Their arms and that portion of their breasts in sight were covered with tattoo drawings of anchors, and ships, pricked in with colored inks. It was plain to the boys that they were not natives of that part of the Everglades, but sailors who had drifted in from the vicinity of the Keyes.

"Where are the other boys?" asked Sandy, in a moment.

"The others?" repeated one of the sailors.

"Yes," answered Sandy, "the boys who were in camp just before those other thieves came up."

One of the sailors scratched a tangled head of hair and peered through the thicket in the direction of the camp. As he did so his face took on an expression of amazement.

"Look here, mate," he said to his companion, "did you know about this?"

He indicated the scene as he spoke.

"It's him is it?" the other asked.

"Sartin sure!" was the reply.

As the men gazed upon the three figures now gathered about the fire the expressions on their faces turned from amazement to dread. Almost involuntarily they both retreated a few feet into the thicket.

"Don't you belong to that crowd?" demanded Sandy, noting their queer actions.

"Don't you know who those fellows are?"

The two sailors regarded each other inquiringly for a moment, and then one of them shook his head.

"Look here," Sandy said, then, something like hope showing in his tone and manner.

"If you don't belong to that party, we can make it an object to you to amble up there and crack their crusts."

"Those fellows are thieves," Chet cut in, "and they're raiding our camp. You can make a hit with us by beating them up!"

"To tell the truth, young fellow," one of the sailors announced, "they're doing the very thing we came here to do! We're that hungry we could eat the feathers off one of these here palmetto trees, if we could only get to 'em!"

"If you'll just chase those ginks away," Sandy promised, "we'll feed you for a week! You know who the fellows are, don't you?"

Again one of the sailors shook his head.

"That don't go!" cried Sandy. "You said you did a short time ago."

"We ain't looking for no trouble with them fellows!" the other sailor said.

"Look here," Sandy said, whimsically, realizing now that they had nothing worse than robbery to fear from the sailors. "If you want to do me a favor, run up to the state census office and tell the enumerator to send his men down into the Everglades without delay. Because, you know," he went on, "if they get here soon, they'll discover a population equal to that of the first ward of the city of Chicago. We came in here to get away from the mob, and every other minute we bump into a new crowd of fellows. Anybody who tells me after this that the Everglades are not densely populated will be assigned to the Ananias Club."

"That's no dream!" exclaimed Chet. "And here's another little errand you might accomplish," he added with a grin at the sailors, "tell the chief of police that if he wants to fill out his memorandum of who's who in criminal circles, he'd better hustle down here and take a few pictures."

The sailors looked at each other as if they did not quite understand the humor of the boys and continued backing away.

"Don't forget to leave the guns and ammunition when you bring your very agreeable visit to a close!" Sandy suggested.

"Sorry, lads," answered one of the sailors, "but we've been needing these here weapons for a long time."

"For the love of Mike," whispered Sandy to Chet, "do something to keep them away from the landing. They're sailors, you know, and probably understand motors. If they ever get to the Beaver, it's 'Good Night' for us! I wish that Indian would show up about now."

As if in response to the wish, the Seminole's lithe form shot through the thicket and stood threateningly before the two sailors.

His appearance was accompanied by a war-whoop which echoed over the island like a call to battle, and brought the men at the tents to their feet in an instant. The sailors seemed to realize that something worse than automatics in the hands of white men threatened them. They dropped the revolvers they had taken from the boys and ran! They were heard crashing through the thicket for a moment, and then came the thud of oars in their locks.

"I guess they think the whole Seminole tribe is on the island!" snickered Sandy. "I'll bet they'll be running tomorrow at this time!"

The Seminole's eyes brightened for an instant, then he expanded his chest and let out such a succession of war-whoops as the boys had never heard before. They rang over the island and echoed back from the trees. In a second it seemed to the listeners as if every tree and bush held a painted warrior.

To make the illustration more complete, the Seminole began firing his automatic. The last thing the boys saw of the three men who had been preparing supper, they were plunging

headlong through the jungle in the direction of the landing.

"They mustn't get to the boat!" cried Sandy.

Realizing that the fugitives would attempt to escape the savages whom they believed to be in pursuit by getting away in their motor-boat, the three started on a run for the landing.

Before they had proceeded a dozen paces the sparking of the motors was heard and a shot was fired. Then, to the great relief of the lads, Mickey's voice was heard calling from the landing:

"O-k-e-e! O-k-e-e!"

The Seminole ran faster than ever, if that were possible, when the voice reached his ears, and the boys were not far behind when he gained the landing, apparently as fresh as at the start.

Tommy and Mickey stood on the deck of the motor-boat, pointing their weapons at the thicket to the north, where moving underbrush disclosed the presence of some one making pretty good speed in that direction.

"Friends of yours?" asked Tommy, pointing to the waving underbrush?

"Pirates!" answered Sandy.

"Aw, we miss all the fun!" wailed Mickey.

"It wasn't so funny a minute ago," Sandy said, as the three crawled over the gunwale.

"There's been two separate and distinct bands of outlaws on the island, and Okee's war-whoops settled them both."

Mickey stepped forward and gravely shook hands with the Indian and the other boys in-

stantly followed his example, evidently much to the satisfaction of the warrior.

Having thus expressed their gratitude, the boys began to ask questions of each other.

"Where are Will and George?" asked Sandy.

"I don't know!" replied Tommy. "We went duck hunting soon after you went fishing and left them at the camp."

Mickey turned to the Seminole and asked:

"Did you see anything of them on the island?"

The Indian uttered a negative grunt.

"Boat gone!" he said. "Many tracks."

He pointed to the margin of the channel as he spoke, then swept his hand in a circle, showing that the tracks he referred to had been found on the other side of the island.

"And now," complained Sandy, "Will and George have gone and got lost!"

"Serves 'em right!" grinned Tommy.

"We've been doing all the acting in this drama up to this date! It's about time they got into the center of the stage, that is, if the act isn't anything serious!"