

## CHAPTER XV

### OKEE BRINGS GOOD LUCK

During the next minute, the fleeing boats came within the circle of the strong searchlight and then shot out of the mouth of the creek.

Their appearance was greeted with cheers from the motor boat, and the Seminole waved his dripping paddle in the air in response. The pursuing boat came to the curtain of leaves and drew back, firing badly-aimed shots at the motor boat. Without waiting to return the compliment, the occupants of the two canoes clambered over the gunwale and the Beaver was soon under way.

"Wait!" grunted the Indian. "Shoot!"

Okee was following his own suggestion to the letter, for, standing half concealed by the gunwale, he was emptying an automatic taken from one of the boys in the direction of the creek.

"You're the bloodthirsty old villain!" shouted Mickey. "What do you want to kill the fellows for?"

"Bad man!" answered the Seminole, passing the empty weapon back to its owner. "Shoot bad men!"

"You have already fed two pirates to the alligators today!" observed Mickey. "If you keep on killing folks at this rate, you'll never be taken into the Boy Scouts!"

The Indian threw himself down on the deck and gazed about stolidly.

"I'll bet he's hungry!" exclaimed Mickey.

"He looks hungry, doesn't he?" grinned Tommy.

"Speaking of hunger," George broke in, "I'm the only real representative of starvation on board the boat. Let's get back to camp and eat!"

"Camp!" repeated Sandy. "This is our camp!"

Will gazed about dubiously.

"Did you bring the tents and provisions?" he asked.

"Sure we did!" was the reply.

"I'm glad of that!" Will answered with a smile. "To tell you the truth, I've had my fill of the island in Lost Channel."

"If we could take the island in Lost Channel, just as it is this minute, and swarm a lot of beachcombers and pirates in the center of the bald spot of it, and move it up to Chicago, we'd have a bigger attraction than was ever put on at the World's Fair!" declared Sandy. "The next time any man suggests that that bum old bald-headed heap of sand is a suitable place for a Boy Scout vacation, he'll get his crust broke!"

"You may go as far as you like in that direction!" George replied. "But just now I think we'd better see what we can find to eat."

"Why don't you introduce your friend?" demanded Tommy, nodding toward John. "We

seem to pick up a new boy every time we turn around."

"That's John Smith!" answered George, with a grin.

"Welcome to our midst, John!" laughed Sandy.

"You don't happen to be the lost heir, do you?" demanded Mickey.

John gazed at the boys with questioning looks and then turned to Will.

"Is this a cut rate excursion to the Everglades?" he asked.

"Sure it is!" broke in Tommy. "We're the original band of Boy Scout investigators. We're going to write a book entitled 'Why Did He Leave His Happy Home; or, Every Boy Scout His Own Detective!'"

The strange boy, not appearing to appreciate the humor of the remark, sat down on the gunwale and glanced in the direction of the cabin.

"I'll bet he's hungry, too!" declared Tommy.

"Gee!" exclaimed Sandy. "If this party keeps on increasing in numbers, we'll have to send up to Chicago for a chef!"

"I can go back to the swamp if I'm not welcome," the boy answered, with a melancholy twist of his mouth.

"You'll stay right where you are, me son!" Sandy replied. "Say," he went on directly, "are you the boy I saw trying to climb out of a canoe this forenoon?"

"I was trying to climb out of a canoe, all right!" John answered.

"Keep it dark!" laughed Tommy. "Let's feed the lad before we ask him to tell us the story of his life. It's been two or three hours since I've taken any sustenance, and I'm just about starved!"

Okee almost smiled at this additional mention of supper.

"Well, what are we going to get for supper?" demanded Tommy.

"You might go catch a fish!" suggested Sandy.

"For the love of Mike!" exclaimed Sandy.

"Don't send Tommy off after fish! If you do he'll get lost, and it'll take the whole bunch to find him. And he never brings back any fish!"

"Where's the fish you went after?" demanded Tommy.

"Had 'em for supper!" answered Sandy, with a grin.

"Where do wild ducks spend their evenings?" asked George.

"They've all got furnished rooms in the trees!" replied Sandy.

"I might go and pick a few off the limbs," suggested Tommy.

"No you don't," Will exclaimed. "We're going to keep this bunch together from this time on! Just think of the risks we've taken today wandering off into the swamps."

"Say, look here!" Chet laughed. "We can catch plenty of fish out of the channel tonight and it won't take long to cook 'em."

"Curfew rang for the fish an hour ago!" declared Mickey.

"You go and look over the gunwale and see!" advised Chet.

George and Sandy rushed to the port side of the boat and looked over into the water. The bottom was covered with white sand, and the rays of the searchlight penetrated with the brilliancy of the sun at noon.

Scores of fish of all sizes and descriptions could be seen darting about, attracted by the light. The denizens of the swamps and streams seemed to have gathered in mass convention at the bottom of Lost Channel.

"There's a big bass at the bottom!" Mickey shouted, pointing. "Drop a hook under his nose and see what he'll do."

Tommy dropped a hook baited with a minnow under the bass' nose and at least a dozen sunfish and smaller creatures of the water darted toward it. The bass lazily sniffed at the minnow and turned away, but one of the larger sunfish seized the alluring bait and was drawn to the surface. After that the boys gave over the attempt to catch large fish.

The boys prepared their sunfish for the pan while potatoes cooked and coffee simmered on the electric coils. They brought out eggs, and canned beans, and made baking powder biscuit, and, on the whole, prepared such a feast as the cabin of the motor boat had never seen before.

"Gee, when I get back to Chicago," declared Mickey, "I'm going to ask President Herrick of the Lake Trust Company to give me a steady job hunting up lost heirs. This is a picnic."

he added, with mouth full of fried sunfish.  
 "Home ain't no place like this!"

"You better find the lost heir you were sent to look up, first!" laughed Sandy.

"Willand George found him!" replied Mickey, pointing at John, who now sat dejectedly at the prow of the boat, looking toward the swamp from which he had so recently been rescued.

"I saw him first!" shouted Sandy.

"Are you the lost heir?" asked George.

"I've heard a good deal of talk about the lost heir since I met you boys," said John, "and I wish you'd tell me something more about the matter. Who is the lost heir, and who wants him?"

Then the story was told briefly and John shook his head.

"I don't believe I'm the boy you're after," he said. "I don't remember of ever being in Chicago, and I don't think I ever heard the name of Albert Hoover before. The first I remember, I was in New Orleans. One day I ran away from home, and soon brought up on one of the coasting steamers, which work among the Keys."

"With the Revells?" asked Will.

The boy gave a startled look and seemed about to spring into the water, but in a moment he settled back into his old position.

"Yes," he said finally, "I've been with the Revells."

"Were those the Revells in the hut?" asked Will

The boy gave another frightened start and hung his head.

"Don't be afraid!" advised Will. "They stand no show of ever getting hold of you again."

"Yes," John replied, "the three men in the hut were the Revells. I tried to get away from them this morning, when I saw you boys, and that's what they tied me up for. They were afraid I would tell where they were, and all I knew about them, if I got away."

"They are the men who killed Theron Tracy and wrecked his yacht?" asked Will. "They are the men for whom the reward is offered?"

"Yes, they are the murderers!" replied John.

"Reward, ugh!" cried Okee, who sat leaning against the gunwale apparently half-asleep.

"If we can't find the lost heir," suggested Mickey, "suppose we get that reward!"

The Seminole rose to his feet, stretched and yawned, and then sprang overboard. The lads saw him cut the line attached to his canoe and push the boat ahead of him to the shore. The next moment, Mickey leaped to the gunwale and dropped into the water.

"Catch 'em! Catch 'em!" shouted Sandy.

Before the boys could get out a canoe, both the Indian and the messenger boy had disappeared in the swamp.

"Now, what do you think of those fellows going out to catch three murderers like the Revells?" demanded Will.