

CHAPTER XVIII

TROUBLE ON CRUSOE ISLAND

"I didn't say anything about the Revells," replied Bert, replying to Tommy's remark, as the boys stood by the fire on Crusoe island.

Both boys turned to Anse.

"Tell us where you found him!" Tommy demanded.

"I found him in a hiding place in the swamp."

"How did you manage to get him away?" chuckled Chet.

"Well," Anse answered with a sly smile, "this seemed to be a busy day for his friends, the Revells, and so I had little difficulty in persuading him to leave their hospitable abode."

"You mean the robbers?" asked Tommy.

Bert sprang excitedly to his feet and shook his head vigorously.

"Set down, Bert!" Anse said. "You may as well own up."

"Yes," Tommy went on, "we all know the Revells are hiding in the swamps. In fact, we pulled a boy away from them this afternoon, or this evening, rather. You may as well tell us where you were when Okee and Will and George were in the Revell hut at the end of the lagoon."

"Do they know all about that?" asked Anse, turning to Chet.

"Of course they do," was the reply. "You boys may as well tell the whole story!"

"But I'm not going to betray my friends!" exclaimed Bert.

"They're no friends of yours," Anse assured him.

"Well," Bert began, "I came to the Everglades with the Revells and remained with them at the hut at the head of the lagoon, or bayou, I guess, is a better name for it, until you boys came in with the motor boat and John tried to run away."

"Yes, we know he tried to run away!" Tommy cut in.

"Then they took me to another place where they said there would be no danger of my being found. I don't know what took place after that. All I know is that I waited there several hours and then Anse came in his canoe and brought me away."

"How'd you know where to go, Anse?" asked Tommy, suspiciously.

"I didn't know at first, exactly where to go," was the reply, "but you must remember that I'd been on this job for a matter of two weeks."

"The Ananias Club has nothing on you fellows," Tommy exclaimed. "Chet has been telling me all day that you went to Webster lake after supplies. What do you know about that?"

"That's what I told him!" replied Anse.

"Didn't you go to Webster lake?" asked Chet, indignantly.

"I did not!" was the reply.

"Then where have you been all this time?" Chet demanded.

"Chasing about the bayous and lagoons in this vicinity," was the cool reply. "Many a night I visited this island while you were asleep."

"That's a nice thing, too!" exclaimed Chet, now angry beyond a doubt.

"Well, I had to have provisions, didn't I?" demanded Anse.

"So you're the fellow who took the grub?" laughed Tommy. "Chet has been laying it to the outlaws."

"I think it's about time we had an explanation!" Chet suggested.

"Well," Anse went on, "I coaxed Chet out of Chicago without letting him know my real business in this vicinity. I promised the man who sent me not to mention the object of my mission to any one."

"You never even told me you had a mission!" Chet complained.

"Of course not!" was the reply.

"You're another one of these mysterious little boys!" Tommy grunted.

"I came down here," Anse went on, "to get track of the heir to a lot of property in Chicago. A relative of mine succeeds to the estate in case a certain boy never shows up. My relative wanted to know whether he was honestly entitled to the property or not, so he asked me to come here and investigate a rumor that the direct heir was living here in company with a band of outlaws."

"Gee whiz!" Tommy exclaimed. "That's

just the job we've had loaded onto our shoulders since we came in!"

"Well, we both found him," Anse replied, pointing to Bert. "That's Albert Hoover all right."

"Je-rusalem!" Tommy exclaimed. "Mickey Murphy will knock your head off for taking his job away from him. He expected to find the lost heir himself!"

"How do you know this is the lost heir?" Chet inquired.

"Tell him how I know, Bert," Anse said, addressing the boy.

"He knows," Bert answered, "because I have told him all about my early life. Because he knows everything about me that I know about myself."

"During the past two weeks," Anse went on, "I've had several conversations with Bert at two hiding places. And you must understand," he continued, "that he never suspected that I had any motive except curiosity in asking him questions about himself. My business here was to honestly establish the identity of Albert Hoover if he still lived. I did it without his knowing anything about my motive."

"I guess you did a good job all right!" Tommy observed.

"The relative who sent me down here will be disappointed," Anse went on, "but he'll take his medicine like a little man."

"Did he expect you to report that the boy here was not Albert Hoover?" asked Chet.

"He certainly did!" was the reply. "But,

as I said before, he'll take his medicine all right. In fact, the proof is beyond dispute! The boy has the papers to show who he is!"

Bert sprang excitedly to his feet once more and began walking up and down before the fire.

"The papers!" he said. "Can we get back to the hut at the head of the bayou tonight?"

"What for?" asked Tommy.

"My proof is there!" the boy answered. "When I was moved to the new hiding place, I neglected to take the papers with me. Do you know," he continued, "that the Revells have been good to me because of those papers? They have been hoping all along to share the fortune with me as soon as I became of age!"

"We can't get the papers tonight!" Chet declared.

"Well," Tommy said musingly. "The Boy Scouts have lost out on finding the lost heir, but then," he continued, "we haven't done much looking for him and we've had a lot of fun."

"But see here," Anse suggested, "you're likely to earn half the reward yet. I've got the lost boy on this island, but I haven't got him back to Chicago. There may yet be trouble ahead!"

"There'll be trouble ahead for you!" Chet exclaimed. "The idea of your going off hunting for a lost heir and leaving me alone night and day for two weeks. Why didn't you tell me all about it, then I could have helped you in the search?"

"I promised not to say a word about it!"

was the reply. "Besides," he continued, "I wanted you right here on the island to help after the proof of the boy's identity was established. If I had informed you that I was hanging around this place making the search, I should have had to tell you everything."

"A sweet old time I had here all alone, too!" Chet exclaimed.

"I guess we'd better be getting back to the motor boat," suggested Tommy. "I don't see any profit in chewing the rag here. Chet's mad because Anse deceived him, and I'm mad because Anse beat us to the lost heir, and Bert's mad because he's lost his papers, so I guess we'd better cut off debate and join the crowd on the Beaver."

Tommy ran down to the place where the Oldtown canoe had been left and chased back to the fire breathless with excitement. At the same moment, Anse raced up to the shelter with his eyes almost sticking out of his head with wonder and dismay.

"My canoe's gone!" Tommy shouted.

"And my canoe's gone!" Anse declared.

The boys made a circuit of the little island in the hope of finding the boats but they returned to the camp without success.

"If you leave it to me," Chet whispered in Tommy's ear, "the fellows who stole the boats didn't all leave the island again! Unless I'm greatly mistaken, I heard voices as I passed the jungle at the north end!"

"I'll bet it's the fellow we fed the cayenne pepper to!" exclaimed Tommy. "It would

be just like him to come back and make trouble!"

"I wish we'd shot him!" declared Chet.

In a moment the sentiment expressed by Chet was earnestly echoed by his companions, as the man who had received the cayenne pepper treatment walked coolly out of the thicket and sat down by the fire.

Three automatics were instantly drawn, but the fellow turned his still disfigured face toward the boys with a cynical smile on his bearded lips.

"No use, lads!" he said coolly. "You've got to take your medicine now! If you don't put up those guns, you'll regret it. I have half a dozen friends in the undergrowth who have had you covered for the last half hour!"

For an instant the boys doubted. Then exclamations of approval came from the darkness on all sides of the fire. The clouds were thinning, and now and then the moon looked through. By its light they saw at least half a dozen figures dimly outlined against the darker background.

"I'm going to pay you boys for the trick you played on me this afternoon," the fellow by the fire cried.

Anse and Bert looked at their companions questioningly, but no one explained at that time.

"What are you going to do to us?" demanded Tommy.

"I've been thinking of that," was the reply, "and I've made up my mind that I'll give you the same treatment that you gave me. only

I'll be obliged to use hot water. You'll be lucky if you're able to see each other's faces after tonight!"

"You wouldn't put our eyes out, would you?" asked Chet.

"I wouldn't, eh?" exclaimed the other.

Under the threatening weapons held by the fellow's companions, there was nothing for the boys to do but to surrender their automatics. The entire group of outlaws approached the fire shortly and entered into an earnest discussion. While they talked, Tommy nudged Chet with his elbow.

"Listen!" he said.

The steady sparking of motors was heard, and the boys looked at each other hopefully.

The outlaws heard, too, and stepped aside for a more earnest discussion of the situation. They apparently did not agree as to the course to pursue, for they argued excitedly.

"Can you run?" whispered Tommy then.

"Can I run?" repeated Chet. "Give me a chance!"

"You've got it!" the boy answered, taking to his heels.

As may be imagined, the others followed his example. Bullets whizzed past their heads as they ran, but in a minute they were outside of the circle of firelight, crouching at the bank of the channel where they would be under the protection of the guns of their friends as soon as the on-coming motor boat made her appearance.