

## CHAPTER III

### A SEMINOLE CHAPERON

"Honest," asked Tommy, "did you see a boy in the canoe?"

"Sure I did!" was the reply. "He was lying on the bottom of the tippy old boat, trying to get up."

"Then why didn't he get up?" asked George.

"Because the man I've been telling you about was holding him down!"

"Holding him down and paddling, too?" demanded Tommy. "Then he must have been paddling with his teeth, for it ought to take a man's two hands to hold a lively young boy down in a canoe!"

"Perhaps he had his big feet on him," Sandy answered. "Anyway, the boy was trying to get out of the canoe and the man was keeping him in."

"Why didn't he let out a shout for help?" asked George.

"I thought I did hear a cry," Sandy replied.

"Why didn't you follow the canoe and help the kid out of the scrape?" asked Will. "Perhaps he was being abducted."

"Why don't you boys ask questions?" asked Sandy, impatiently.

"Honest, though," Tommy put in, "you ought to have followed that canoe."

"Sure!" agreed George. "That persecuted youngster may be the lost heir. We ought to find out about it, anyway."

"For the love of Mike!" cried Mickey Murphy. "Don't you boys go and find the lost heir right now! I want to stay here about a month and hunt and fish."

"Who said you could stay with us?" demanded Tommy, with a wink.

"President Herrick, of the Lake Trust Company!" answered Mickey.

"Is this his island?" grinned George.

"Cut it out boys!" advised Will. "We haven't had any breakfast yet, and we're likely to go without entirely if Mickey keeps on eating."

"Go get a fish then!" Mickey suggested.

Will and George now returned to the campfire, taking Mickey with them, while Sandy and Tommy returned to the canoe and set out after fish.

Presently the boys came to a deep pool which looked inviting. There were sunfish darting about the edges, and that gave them the impression that there were big fellows in the center. While they looked a monster weighing, perhaps five pounds stuck his nose inquisitively above the surface and scuttled down again.

"There!" Tommy cried. "I've got to have him!"

He dropped his bait low in the middle of the pool and something bobbed the float gently twice. Then it sank steadily, and when it stopped, he was sure the big fellow was on.

Tommy pulled valiantly and so did the fish, but the boy's muscles prevailed, and soon a fish weighing several pounds was flopping on the ground. As soon as the fish had been fairly conquered the lads had paddled to the shore, fearing to attempt to land such a monster in the frail canoe.

The fish was rather a fine looking chap, with a long, black fin that nearly included his tail. The boys regarded him with all the pride a hunter feels in bagging his first game.

"I wonder what they call him?" asked Sandy.

"Why, that's a sea trout, of course!" Tommy insisted.

"Well, one's enough for breakfast, I reckon, Sandy suggested, "and we'd better be getting back to the camp. If we don't, that Mickey Murphy will be eating everything in sight."

The fish was dressed and fried and made a very fair breakfast. In fact, the boys all declared that it was a great deal better eating than the most expensive fish purchased at the Chicago markets.

At various times during the meal the boys had heard sounds in the thicket which remained unexplained. Several times Tommy and Sandy left the fire to chase about in the fringe which bordered the island, but nothing unusual was discovered.

"If you leave it to me," Tommy said on one of these occasions, "there's some one sneaking about here!"

"It may be Mickey's Seminole!" suggested George.

"Mickey said the Indian was afraid to come near the island."

"Yes, but that might have been a bluff."

However, on each occasion, the boys returned to camp without discovering the source of the mysterious noises they had heard.

At the completion of the meal Mickey declared that he was going back to the Beaver to sleep, as he had been up most of the time for two nights. Sandy accompanied him, and the two sat down by the table in the cabin to discuss the journey in from Webster lake.

"Do you know," Mickey said, "I half believe that Okee, the Seminole Indian who paddled me in, is hanging about this channel?"

"You said he was afraid!" suggested Sandy.

"He is afraid!" was the reply. "There is no doubt about that. And he's afraid for me as much as he is for himself, too! You see," he went on, with a grin, "Okee took a great liking to the little red-headed boy from Chicago. Pretty good old scout, that!"

"I hope he is in this vicinity," Sandy replied, "and I hope he will show up right away, too."

"You getting nervous about the wreckers and beachcombers?" demanded Mickey. "Do you think they really get as far away from the coast as this?"

"Didn't I see one of them this very morning?" demanded Sandy.

"How do you know that wasn't a native watching to see that you wasn't trying to steal one of his islands?"

"What was he doing with that boy in?" asked Sandy.

"Say!" Mickey exclaimed, rushing to the little deck and looking over the gunwale into the clear water of Lost Channel. "Have we got a canoe here—a canoe we can both ride in?"

"Of course!" answered Sandy. "Can't you see one tied to the stern?"

"Well," Mickey continued, "suppose we take the canoe and follow up that little creek the canoe ran into?"

"What for?" asked Sandy.

"To find that boy!"

Sandy considered the matter gravely for a moment and then began an examination of two automatic revolvers. He saw that the magazines were filled and stuffed his pockets with additional clips.

Mickey watched him with interest and grinned joyously when one of the automatics was placed in his hands.

In a moment the two boys were in the canoe, headed across Lost Channel in the direction of the thicket where Sandy had observed the canoe only a short time before. The stream up which the canoe had fled was not very wide, and its margins were thickly padded with grass and the hundred and one water-growths which flourish in the Everglades.

After an hour's hard work, they landed on an island and drew their canoe out of sight in a shallow lagoon which cut the island from what appeared to be the mainland beyond

"What's the idea?" Mickey demanded, as Sandy seated himself in a sheltered spot and motioned for silence.

"I've had a hunch for the last half hour," Sandy replied, "that we've been followed! If I am right, we'll see some one come sneaking along after us directly. Whoever he is, he'll probably think we've gone straight on and will undoubtedly do the same thing."

In a very short time the sound of a paddle was heard, and then a canoe shot into view, headed upstream.

"That's the man I saw this morning," Sandy whispered, as the two boys peered through the thicket. "He must have been lying in some hiding place when we came up."

"Huh!" Mickey whispered, "that may be another man entirely!"

"That's the man all right!" Sandy insisted. "I know that by the alfalfa on his map."

"That sounds like Clark street, south of Van Buren!" chuckled Mickey.

Glancing sharply to right and left, the canoeist, a heavily-built, lumbering figure of a man, passed on upstream. Once he hesitated, and the boys began to fear that he had decided to land. But he went on directly, and soon disappeared around a bend of palms and pines.

"He's after us!" suggested Mickey.

"There wasn't any boy with him this time!" Sandy commented.

While the boys discussed the situation the soft splash of a paddle was heard again, and

"Look here, Okee," Mickey said in a moment, "I thought you were in a hurry to get back to Webster lake?"

The Seminole's only reply was a grunt.

"Have you seen that man before this morning?" asked Sandy, pointing in the direction the other canoe had taken.

This time the Seminole nodded.

"Was there a boy in the canoe with him?" Sandy went on.

Another nod from the Seminole.

"Suppose we go and find that boy," suggested Mickey, but the Indian shook his head and paid little attention to any other questions asked.

After quite an extended discussion of the situation, the boys decided to abandon their undertaking and return to camp. When they entered their canoe the Seminole also entered his, and as they proceeded downstream his craft was always in sight, following stealthily, alertly and unobtrusively.

Although the boys laughed at the persistence with which the Seminole clung to them, they both felt a great deal safer for his presence.

"You've got us into a nice mess, Mickey!" Sandy exclaimed as they paddled along. "If you had only kept away with your blooming old lost heir business, we'd have been having all kinds of sport now."

"You needn't hunt for the lost heir if you don't want to!" Mickey replied with a grin.

"I can do the looking myself."

When the boys came within sight of the

island they were surprised to see four columns of smoke lifting into the air.

"That's the Boy Scout for 'Come on home,' "

Sandy exclaimed. "Perhaps there's been something doing at the camp while we've been away! There'll be something doing every minute now!" he went on.