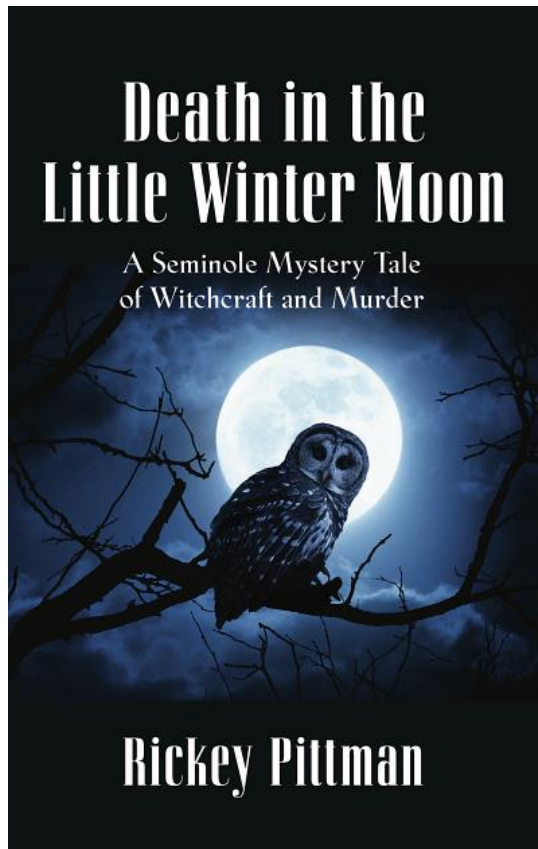




This book is a collection of historical fiction framed by the three Seminole Wars (1816-1858). This Seminole mystery tale combines tales of witchcraft and murder in the newly formed Seminole Nation in Indian territory.

**Death in the Little Winter Moon:
A Seminole Mystery Tale of Witchcraft and Murder
By Rickey Pittman**

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Death in the Little Winter Moon

*A Seminole Mystery Tale
of Witchcraft and Murder*



Rickey Pittman

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THE BOY FROM THE SEA

The ocean moans over dead men's bones.—

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

With bundles of deer hides and Lenten dried fish at their feet, Ya-Ha Hadjo and Juan Caballo stood near the mouth of the Caloosahatchee River on the edge of the Atlantic where the Spanish and Cuban traders were to appear with a load of trade rifles and percussion caps. The sky was clear, but the sea was rough that day, and in the distance, they could see the *chalupa* as it danced atop four-foot seas between three-second sets of waves. Normally a seaworthy vessel, the Spanish *chalupa* was overmatched by angry waves, tossing it so high into the air that it crashed on the water, cracking oars and splintering its hull. As its occupants were flung into the water, one smaller passenger rose high in the air, flapping his arms like a desperate seagull.

The *chalupa* with its cargo sunk into the water while shattered pieces of the boat and drowned Spaniards washed toward the shore.

Ya-ha Hadjo's eyes followed the path of the small passenger as his head rose above the water and he dog paddled toward the wave-lashed shore. Hadjo waded out and snatched up the young boy by his shirt collar and dragged him out of the surf. He studied the boy who gasped for air and coughed up the seawater he had swallowed. Juan Caballo said, "He has gold hair and blue eyes. A Spaniard. What will we do with him? Kill him? Take him to the Spanish fishing ranches?"

Ya-ha Hadjo said, "No. We will take him with us. We can always sell him back to the Spaniards later. *Hijo, cuantos años tiene. Como se llama?*"

The boy held up his hand and spread his fingers. "Soy *Alvaro. Tengo seis años.*

"*Está bien. Eres con su Padre?*"

The boy gazed at the water. "*Sí. ¿Dónde está?*"

"*El esta ahogado,*" Juan said.

"*¿Seguro?*" The boy looked sadly at the wild ocean.

"*Sí.*" Juan Caballo, also known as Gopher John, knew that sometimes the bodies of the drowned traders would wash up on the shore, but more often, the bodies vanished, pulled down by strong currents, abandoned to be food for the *notesasci*. The young boy would never see his father again.

The boy did not weep and shrugged his shoulders. Ya-ha Hadjo, a medicine man, whose name meant Crazy Medicine, said, "Juan, we will not give him back to the Spanish. I will take him. The sea claimed the others but gave him to us. Did you not see him fly in the sky as he left the boat? I dreamed last night of a small white bird flying from the sea and landing on my shoulder. Yes, the sea has sent him to us for a reason. He looks strong. I will adopt him. I will call him *Hatke Owewah*, White Bird, the Boy from the Sea."

"Why was the boy with them?" Juan asked.

"There is no way to understand the ways of the *ishtahutkee*. Come, let us go and return another time. Perhaps the sea will calm itself and wash the boat closer with the tide."

They loaded the boy, their furs and fish onto their dugout and poled up the Caloosahatchee toward Lake Okeechobee to their camp, staying close to the edge of the shallow and meandering banks lined with live oaks and wild grapes, passing tributaries, canals, oxbows, and islands centuries old. The river, which they knew well, was once the main highway of the

ancient and fierce Calusa, who built giant mounds of shells and midden, which were often thirty feet in height.

They traveled in a silence broken only by an occasional splash of fish, the plaintive cries of birds, bellows of alligators, and the grunts of frogs. The exhausted boy fell asleep in the dugout as the river whispered in his dreams its secrets and plans for his violent future in an ancient tongue he had never heard.

SKETCH: CHITTO'S LIFE AS A SEMINOLE

We learned that orphans are easier to ignore
before you know their names... But once you
do, everything changes.—David Platt

White Bird was adopted into the Snake Clan, one of the eight Seminole clans. His training began immediately. The boy accepted his new life and followed his new father's direction without question. His new father wondered if this attitude came from his drowned father's training, or if the boy had a natural intuitive gift and ability to adjust. He and his new mother talked to him in Spanish along with Muscogee, counting on the boy's immersion into the Seminole culture to build fluency in his new language. This Seminole town held almost a hundred families, and was located south of Okeechobee, in a pine stand surrounded by palmetto. A mile away was the town of the Maroons and their families. Some of them were Seminole slaves; others were slaves who had escaped the white plantations. Some blacks were technically slaves who had been bought for forty head of cattle from the whites. Black Seminole slaves were allowed to form families and were granted absolute freedom to live as they pleased, and like crop farmers, were only required to share a portion of their crops to the tribe. Some intermarriage occurred, though separation of the races was maintained. The maroons were all armed and determined not to be returned to their former masters.

Yaha Hajo, his adopted father and adopted Maroon uncle, Juan Caballo, taught him all a young Seminole boy needed to

know—how to hunt, fish, and fight. First, he learned to steer a canoe through the sawgrass with a long cypress pole. Then he was taught how to fish with a spear while standing in the dugout, and how to make a fish trap of *olani*, river cane. He was shown how to make and use a blowgun for smaller game like squirrels, rabbits and birds. The six-foot blowgun was made of river cane and used foot-long, sharpened, hickory darts fletched with thistle or fluffy head of cattail. The darts could easily penetrate the skins of rabbits and bodies of birds. Hunting with a blowgun trained him to move in silence and stealth in order to get close enough to animals without alerting them.

His father taught him to load and fire a rifle so he could hunt deer, bear, and wild hogs. One day, his uncle handed him a rifle wrapped in buckskin. “Here is a rifle for you.” It was a Deringer percussion rifle, one of the 2,000 given to the Seminole after the Treaty of Payne’s Landing. White Bird was even more surprised when his mother presented him with a beaded bandolier filled with rifle patches, percussion caps, and musket balls.

He learned to herd, train, and ride their growing herd Marsh Tacky ponies. He and other young boys, along with Maroon slaves, were also expected to help herd the several hundred cows in the village herd, and like the white cow hunters, used the loud cracks of whips to control them. His father told him their horses and cattle had first come with the Spaniards. The original cattle were first used to help Spanish missions and ranches, but after the Spanish left, the free-ranging stock became feral, and the Seminole began herding them. When sent to watch the herds, the young boys were told to watch for the white cow hunters who tried to steal Maroons, Seminole ponies and cattle. The boys sent to the herds were expected to count the cattle they watched, especially how many calves they saw

running loose, and use their trained dogs to find and flush out any cattle that wandered off into the brush.

Boys were also expected to occasionally patrol the gardens, which were usually a half mile from the village. The rich Florida soil produced bountiful crops of tobacco, bananas, pumpkins, squash, beans, sweet potatoes, and corn. When harvested, dried corn was stored in above-ground cribs that protected the corn from the damp ground and pests. During the day, while the women and girls worked the crops with their digging sticks, young boys would use their bows and arrows, spears, or throwing sticks to kill any birds, rabbits, and squirrels found ruining the crops. Boys were also taught to track, to handle a canoe, to set snares and deadfalls to catch animals. After he was given a rifle, White Bird hunted raccoons, bears, and deer that often found their way into the crops. He also learned to fish from a dugout with spear, bow and arrow. He hunted otters, opossums, manatees, bobcats, and alligators for their hides to take to the white or Spanish traders.

At first, his father and other Seminole spoke to him in Spanish until he had learned the Seminole tongue. At night around fires, he listened with delight to their legends and memorized them quickly. His father taught him how to read the night sky, how to survive in and move through the Everglades. The boy's short life in Cuba faded from his memory and he accepted his new place as a Seminole. By the time he was fourteen, he possessed a toughness few boys his age had, and he quickly learned all the ways of the Seminole and grew tall, hard and strong, wrestling with the other boys. For play, he and the other boys played stickball.

At night would listen to the tales of the warriors, who often spoke of warriors who had died in battle and now walked the *Solopi Heni*, the Spirit Way. They said that sometimes the path would shine brighter when a warrior dies, to give him a clear

path to the spirit world. White Bird was introduced to the warrior culture of the Seminole, a people who created warriors who were very good at the art of war. He listened carefully to the men as they discussed and planned their attacks on homesteads, plantations, and columns of soldiers. He often contemplated the village's tall glory pole bearing many scalps taken as trophies from previous raids and battles. *Someday, he thought, Scapls I take will be added to poles like this, and when I die, I will walk the Warrior Trail in the sky.*

One day, White Bird and another boy, Nokosi, whose name meant "Bear," were sent to herd the tribe's cattle, and as he approached, he heard shrill whistles and the loud crack of whips and saw two cow hunters separating a dozen cows from the herd. White Bird lifted his rifle above his head, gave a shrill battle cry, and galloped toward the cattle thieves, with Nokosi following close behind him. When White Bird neared them, he reigned his pony to a halt, aimed his rifle, and shot the cow hunter closest to him. The other cow hunter spurred his horse to flee, but White Bird urged his horse forward until he was close to the cow hunter and clubbed him with his rifle, knocking him from his horse. He dismounted, bashed in the cow hunter's skull with the butt of his rifle, caught the cow hunters' horses and tied them to a tree. He left the bodies of the two thieves where they had fallen. Unsure about what to do with their bodies, he asked Nokosi to return to the village and ask Yaha Hojo to come to him.

When his father arrived, other warriors were with him. His father placed his hand on White Bird's shoulder and said, "Nokosi told me of how you killed the cow hunters. He said you struck them suddenly like an angry rattlesnake. You have become a man and earned the right to be given a warrior name: You will be known as Chitto Harjo."

The warriors with him shouted, "*Ho! Enca! Chitto Harjo!*"

His father said, "Their horses now belong to you, as do anything else you find on them."

Chitto, proud of his new name which meant "Crazy Rattlesnake," took knives from each rustler, a flintlock pistol from the belt of one, but found nothing of value in their vest pockets or haversacks. He handed one knife and the pistol to Nokosi saying, "My gift to you, my friend!"

The warriors who came with his father stripped the dead cow hunters, taking their hats, clothes, and boots as trophies. His father lifted one cow hunter by the hair and gestured for Chitto to scalp the man. He did, and then he took the scalp of the other. That night, his father shared with the camp why he had changed White Bird's name to Chitto Harjo. Then his father attached the two scalps to the camp's Glory Pole.

The young herder had now become a warrior in the eyes of his adopted people.

One evening, his new uncle called him to join him and his father at the cooking chickee. They sat on a log of the star fire, and each dipped carved wooden spoons into the pot of sofkee that was always simmering at the fire and then sat on logs. Chitto had learned to like the sour, corn gruel. A spoon of sofkee would kill hunger pains and hold a person until the next meal.

His father said, "Chitto, you must also learn to speak and read the language of the *Hutke*."

"Why must I learn the language of the *blancos*, the *iste-hatke*? Who will teach me?"

His uncle said, "Ned Pompey, a Maroon leader respected by Abiaka, will teach you the white man's tongue. He was a slave of the whites several years. He speaks the white man's tongue with eloquence, as well as Spanish, and Kreole. You will learn much from him."

White bird had often seen Ned Pompey in council with his father and uncle. Occasionally, Abiaka himself would enter the village silently, almost like a ghost, and join the men in council. Chitto said, "Uncle, why will a Maroon be my teacher? I remember in Cuba they would hunt the black men with big dogs and when they caught them, they would whip and hamstring them and sell many of them at the slave market. I know they have a large village near us. Why are there so many? Are the Maroons our slaves? Will we sell them?"

Juan shrugged his shoulders. "You ask many questions. We buy Maroons sometimes, from whites, but we do not sell them to the whites. They have fled slavery on the white plantations and found life and safety with the Seminole. We agree to protect them from the slave hunters. In return, they pay some tribute from their crops and hunting and agree to fight and defend us against the whites should we be attacked. They are glad to live among us. We do not beat, whip, or brand them as the whites do. We learn much about the whites from the blacks who come to us. They are fierce warriors and hate the whites as much as we do.

"When will I begin to learn *Engles*?"

"Soon."

The next morning, Yaya Hadjo led the boy into the piney woods. "I will lead you today to the Maroon village, but after this, you must find your way here and back to our village. So, you must pay attention to our path. Memorize what you see before you and behind you." As they wove their way through the pines and palmetto to the Maroon village, Chitto's father often stopped, pointing to tracks, plants, and trees, saying their names in Muscogee and having the boy repeat the words.

After spending many weeks with the Maroon leader, Chitto learned to speak English quickly, and Ned Pompey also began to teach him how to write in Spanish first, and then in English. Life in the Maroon village was much like his own. Though the two groups remained separate and generally were not mixed by marriage. Each group kept to itself.

One evening, his father asked him to sit with him. They sat in silence while his father smoked his pipe, perhaps indicating this was a serious moment. “Both Abiaka and I have had visions about you. Visions that predict you have a purpose, a mission to the whites that you must complete in the future. The whites are determined to take everything from us and take us to the far lands to the west. For many years, the whites have shown they mean to destroy our people—cow hunters have stolen our cattle and horses, slavers have taken the blacks who live among us, and manhunters have stolen our women and children to claim white man’s bounty money. Abiaka knows these things and has sworn revenge, and he has dreamed that in years ahead, you will complete tasks in the Western lands. Many of our people have abandoned Seminole ways and betrayed us for money or goods.” He paused, looked at the boy who was fast becoming a strong man, then looked up at the full moon above them. “It is *Otauwooskocheem*, the Little Chestnut Moon.” Chitto looked up at the bright September orb just as a great owl passed silently overhead, its form a shadow on the face of the moon. It landed on a nearby tree, and its deep hoot echoed through the pines. His eyes looked at them and glowed orange and red from the reflective light of their fire.

“Ah, this great horned owl is a sign. You must learn from the owls. Notice how they perch motionless, how they keep out of sight, nearly invisible camouflaged by their *tafa* and the plants about them. You cannot hear them when they fly because the Breathmaker designed their feathers for silence and their

prey cannot hear them when they swoop in. You must also learn to move and hunt in the dark in complete silence. Do you remember the stories I've told you about the *stikini*?"

"Yes, Chilth-key." He did remember the stories about the undead witches who would vomit up their souls and transform themselves into owls by night, feeding on human hearts. When the dark of night ends, by day, they look just like Seminoles.

"Take care not to anger the *stikini*, the man-owls. Abiaka says you will be in danger from them as some have already been taken on the Trail of Sorrows to lands in the West. The *stikini* are driven by a great hunger to find victims and feed on human hearts. If they want, they can shoot medicine arrows from far distances. They can deceive you because they can take other shapes. They can poison one's food and drink. Abiaka and I will work magic to protect you against them."

The great horned owl spoke again, his voice deep and strong. "Do you hear him call for you? This same owl spoke to me last night in dreams. He is to be your spirit helper. He will watch over you and guide you. You must fast and pray until you feel him in your dreams and hear him in your heart and mind. When he comes to you, tell me." Chitto nodded and looked again at the owl whose yellow eyes glowed red because of the bright moon above them.

His uncle continued, "When the hot summers end, the whites will once again renew their efforts to find and destroy us. It is time for you to go to war. You are ready. Go with Micanopy, Alligator, Jumper, and Wildcat, who will soon meet the white warriors on the soldiers' road."

WANTED

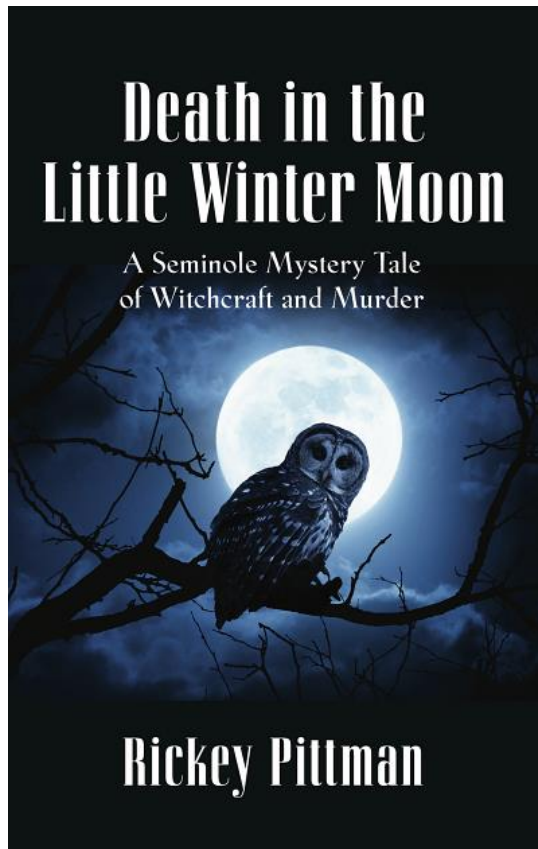
U.S. Marshal's Office, Fort Smith Arkansas
\$1,000 in Gold Coin Reward.



Chitto Harjo, alias Jacob Haines. Height is 6.0 feet. Dark hair. Fluent in Seminole, English, and Spanish. Light skin, brown eyes, and dark hair. Wanted for murders committed in the Seminole Nation. Last seen fleeing south on a grullo pony toward Texas. Reward will be paid for the apprehension and delivery of the said fugitive to the custody of the marshal at Fort Smith, or for his confinement in any jail so that he can be brought to justice.

LOGAN H. ROOTS

U.S. Marshal, Western District of Arkansas.



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