

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

seen ahead and when this was reached would look on to the next. But there were spots where the small growth stood so close he could only have made a straight path, laboriously, with his hatchet. So the small trail-maker would turn, as he supposed, at a direct angle, until he could pass the thick growth and take up his former direction. Even to a forest-bred Indian the tamarack swamp is an intricate puzzle, and the prairie-bred boy was no match for its mazes.

On and on waded the fugitives, veering to this direction or that as necessity demanded, becoming more and more confused, cold and thoroughly wretched as no outlet from the swamp appeared. They were rejoiced when rarely they found a fallen or a leaning tree upon which they could beat their cold feet and rest.

After a fearful length of time, famished with hunger, and ready to drop from the cold-water cramp and fatigue, they came out of the dreadful woods to set their feet gladly again upon dry ground, but to find, to their later amazement, that they had performed the miracle of the lost, and had returned exactly to the starting point. Again, of necessity, they built a fire of the dead tree's branches to warm their chilled legs and dry their clothes, and here they knew they must stay until the sun should shine.

CHAPTER VIII

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They felt quite safe from search of the Ojibwa, for who would risk life wading in this dreadful swamp upon the mere chance of discovering his friend or his enemy? Therefore, seeing that the smoke went upward, they piled wood upon their fire without fear of the trail hunters. But, having eaten nothing now for more than twenty-four hours, they were desperately hungry. Etapa fashioned some blunt-end arrows from young tamarack—for he would not use his "war arrows" except in defense—and, walking about the small oasis, scanned all the tree-tops in search of squirrels or small birds. The only sign of life the boy could discover, however, was at the far end of the grass plat, where several dead trees stood upon the dry ground. In the top of one of these trees there was a huge stack of small sticks so interwoven among the limbs as to impress upon the Indian boy a permanent dwelling of some large animal. For, though he had seen many bird's nests—the eagle's among others—built of sticks, he had never seen one anything like so large, or with an appearance so solid and permanent.

Despite the gnaw of hunger, the lad was curi-

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ously interested in this immense tepée of the tree-tops, and he sat upon the grass for a long time considering it. He finally reached the conclusion that mato sapa, the black bear, might have built his summer home where he could lie and enjoy the cool winds and perhaps at times there were young bears living in the stick wigwam.

He was thus sitting and puzzling in his mind when a big bird of white breast came flapping heavily out of the fog, flying low over some young tamaracks, and struggling with a large live fish in its talons. The bird dipped downward, evidently having a hard time of it—for the fish was wriggling violently—then soared upward, in an attempt to alight upon the stick house.

In doing so the captor struck its prey heavily upon the edge of its nest and the fish, suddenly wrenching itself free, fell to the ground. Doubtless the eagle would have recovered it, but Etapa pounced upon the God-send with a cry of wonder and triumph.

He forgot all caution and ran through the fog shouting with gladness. "See—see, sister," he cried, "what a bird has brought! It is certain Wakinyan has sent this fish!"

And Zintkala, too, cried out with wonder and joy, saying that surely they must now know that the thunder spirits had heard their prayers. "Younger brother," she said, "it is signified that

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we should not go from here until Wi (the sun) gives his light."

Reverently, this child of nature prepared and broiled the fish and in no less devout spirit, though tortured with hunger, the two ate of it. Who shall say that He whose ravens fed Elijah was less mindful of these truer children of the wilderness?

When they had finished eating Etapa procured some bark from a cluster of willows upon the grass land and, filling his wooden pipe, smoked to the spirit of thunders, pointing the pipe's stem toward the huge fish-eagle's nest as he exhaled the vapor. As if in answer to his prayers, the bird returned presently bearing another fish in its talons. This time the eagle alighted without difficulty upon its nest. A moment later a piercing scream sounded out of the fog and the bird's mate swooped across to the nest, also bearing a fish.

Etapa and Zintkala approached with awe in their faces. They wished to speak to the birds and to show a humble and grateful spirit before them. But the eagles both flew away. The one bore its prey, the other left a fish upon the great nest.

By means of a pole which he cut, Etapa climbed into the branches of a tree which stood alongside and, after much difficulty, succeeded in poking the fish off its perch. It was now

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quite evident to him that a pair of fish-eagles had built the "house tepée," but he none the less devoutly believed that the birds were obeying some wakan-waste, or good spirit, in bringing and leaving the fish. Doubtless the eagles had thought that two fishes were enough for two small Dakotas and so had carried one away for their own eating.

"Ho, Tanké," said the boy, when he had descended, "we shall stay here a long time, I think, for the Ojibwa can not find us. They will say the Dakotas have perished."

"The smoke goes upward to the abode of Wakinyan—it is so," said Zintkala.

"Hoye, sister, let us make here a small tepée, so that rain will not fall on us," urged the boy.

"We have no skins for the covering," objected Zintkala.

"You shall see how it is," said Etapa. "I will put my blanket above the top." And forthwith he seized his tomahawk and attacked some young tamarack growth to secure his poles. Zintkala now produced a working kit from her parflèche and began to make a pair of moccasins, for those they wore were nearly ruined by wading and rough usage. In a little time the boy had set up a number of stakes and fastened his three-point blanket in the form of a tepée covering about the top.

"See, sister, go into your lodge and there

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work," pleaded the lad, and Zintkala was obliged to smile approval at the tiny affair. She sat under the covering which came perhaps one-third of the way down and was barely sufficient to have fended a light rain off her head and shoulders. Still, this bit of shelter made her feel more at home than she had done since leaving her own Oglala village. She spread her work about her and unconsciously assumed the air of a housekeeper.

Zintkala had been well taught at home. Although small of her age, and yet a mere child in appearance, she had seen eleven winters when taken from her mother's tepée, and she had been taught to do all kinds of work, housewifely and ornamental, which falls to the lot of an industrious Dakota girl.

She had no cutting-board or patterns but she went very handily about making a plain pair of moccasins. As she worked, she desired to be entertained, as was so often done at home, by some pretty, thrilling or humorous story. Therefore she said to Etapa, who had seated himself to watch and to criticise her cutting and stitching, "Ho, young warrior, you who have dreamed many curious things, tell me a story of Ikto'."

Etapa was already the story-teller of Fire Cloud's family. He had two older half-brothers who had been to war, but he, Etapa, on account

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of his influential Isanti relatives, had been chosen to succeed to such hereditary distinctions as the Dakotas recognize. He was to be a medicine chief and keeper of records and he had been drilled by his grandfather (father's uncle) in much of the Oglala folklore. There are no more vivacious or entertaining story-tellers than may be found among Dakotas of good memory and a lively manner. Their method is the method of nature, imitative in voice and gesture. Etapa was by nature a mimic, and he had been drilled in story-telling from the time that his vocabulary would permit.

Many of his stories were of Iktomi the spider, a fabulous character, half-goblin, half-fairy, and a pitiful devil into the bargain. Iktomi and his escapades serve quite often a sober and instructive purpose, pointing a moral to the giddy, the dishonest or the evil-minded.

Etapa liked now and then to give an exhibition of his narrative talent, and he had not for a long time had an opportunity. He was not above flattery, and the sister's complimentary address pleased him, and so he told this Dakota legend of

HOW IKTOMI COUNTED A COUP.

"Some people had mentioned to Iktomi that he should now go to war. 'Heretofore,' they said, 'we have urged you to do so. You have

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become very slothful and your enemies are lying in wait to attack. Unless presently you shall kill a buffalo bull, or strike the dead, you can not lead the people of this village. 'At the least,' they said, 'you should take horses of our enemies, the Scili.'

"Iktomi retired to his lodge. He sat a long time considering. He was much concerned lest the people should regard him with contempt. On the following day he went away and hid himself for a long time in a wood.

"He returned, singing: 'Something I have killed—something I have killed! Hiwo! iho! Dakotas, why followed ye not your partisan?'

"The people came forth from their tepées. Iktomi continued to sing very boastfully. As he walked about he shook his medicine rattle, making a loud noise. He spoke very highly of himself. He had no bow and arrows and no war-club.

"'Perhaps he has a knife,' said some one. Some one went behind, cutting off Iktomi's belt. This one held it up exclaiming, 'Oho—this man has no weapon whatever!'

"'I have slain an enemy with my magic,' boasted Iktomi. 'Fie! oh fie!' cried all the people. 'Hear this man—is it not ridiculous? Let us soldier-kill him. Let us burn his tepée and cut his blankets.'

"The chief person of this village was a woman.

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'Ho, my children,' said this old woman, 'give ye weapons to my grandson, who may yet prove himself a warrior. See, I have made for him a war-bonnet.'

"Then one ran quickly and brought a bow and arrows. So another fetched a coup-stick, and yet again one came bringing a war-shirt.

"So, here is your armament, great war-chief. Go ye forth and slay our enemies,' said the people.

"Therefore Iktomi took the vapor bath and purified himself. He danced the circle-dance and shot the wolf-image. In the following morning he went forth, walking a long way. After a time he came to a stream where there were a number of trees. 'These are my soldiers,' said Iktomi. Therefore he addressed them. He boasted greatly. 'Behold your war-chief,' he said. 'When have I run from the enemy? Only this winter I have slain a white rabbit!'

"Now the badger and the coyote and the skunk were sitting in the tall grass. They laughed.

"Ho-he—ho-he!' they said. 'Hear ye; this warrior has slain Maštinska, the white rabbit.'

"Iktomi supposed that these people were the trees speaking highly of his deeds. He became violent and shouted with a loud voice. He walked treading heavily and displayed his war-shirt to the trees. He flourished his coup-stick.

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'Last year,' he cried, 'I counted coup upon Itunkasan, the weasel—two coups upon the grasshopper—'

"Hupidansni! Wonderful!' exclaimed the coyote, the badger and the skunk; 'he has counted a coup upon the weasel and the grasshopper!'

"Only last year,' shouted Iktomi, 'I—I—I saw a buffalo bull!' He looked about fearfully to see if any buffaloes were near.

"Hun-hun-he!' cried the voices, 'he saw a live bull.' Hearing his words thus repeated, Iktomi became very boastful indeed. He made a long speech, bragging greatly.

"Presently the coyote said to the skunk: 'Hiwo, my friend, go forward now and lie down upon the grass. Iktomi will come forward to count a coup.'

"Do ye thus, this one time,' urged the badger.

"So the skunk went forward and stretched himself and Iktomi, seeing him lie thus, supposed that he was dead. He rushed forward very courageously. He struck with the coup-stick and the skunk arose and threw a vapor upon him.

"Iktomi ran homeward, crying, 'I have struck the enemy!' He ran crying thus to the village of the old woman. The people rushed forth. 'Behold, I have struck the enemy!' whooped Iktomi. The people came near.

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"'He-he-he!' they cried; 'Iktomi has struck the enemy!' and they ran away, holding their noses. That is all."

Zintkala laughed. "Younger brother," she said, "you indeed dream strange things."

"At any rate," declared Etapa, "my grandfather has told me of this."

Thus for a time the two enjoyed their newfound liberty and the undisturbed use of their mother tongue. Just before dark Zintkala held up a pair of rough moccasins she had finished. "See, brother," she said, "they are for you. I know, however, they are very awkwardly done, for I had no try-pieces nor cutting-board."

Etapa accepted the gift, as younger brothers are wont to do, without comment.

This night, remembering the terrors of the night before, they had supplied themselves with a goodly heap of fire-wood. The flicker of the fire was better than no light, although their little blaze but emphasized the intensity of the darkness which shut them in.

For a time, after they had eaten the last of their fish, they sat close to their fire, talking in low tones and shutting fears of Unk-té-hi out of their minds. Again the rasping shrieks of the swamp-owl pierced their ears, but they now recognized the voice of the bird. The hollow night-jarring notes of a bittern came to them from the far end of the grass plat and the trill-

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ing of numerous frogs began to be heard. The distant howl of a timber wolf was welcomed, for it admonished them that there was, somewhere in the direction they wished to go, an end to the swamp water. They knew that sung-manitu would not wet his feet in cold water overmuch.

Still, with these friendly sounds and the light of their fire to cheer, night brought to them the terrors of their primitive beliefs. They suffered so much from their fears of the unknown that they took turns in keeping the fire going. Indeed, who may guess at the depths of suffering within the soul of each little lone watcher sitting by that solitary campfire? Yet the composure of each was effectively stoical.