
TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

She drove two crotched stakes and laid a pole upon them parallel with the top of the bank, laying sticks thickly across from this pole and again slanting from the pole to the ground beneath. A cross pole and more sticks inclosed an end of the structure and the other was left open for entrance and exit. The roof of this framework she covered thickly with young pine boughs, thatching them cunningly with vines and strips of tough bark.

By the time the energetic little maiden had her roof finished night was coming on. So she built a swift fire of dry leaves and sticks upon the floor of her wickiup until the sands were heated. Then she raked out the embers, awoke Etapa, half dragged and half persuaded the stupor-ridden lad inside and put him to bed with a parflêche drawn over his feet and another about his shoulders.

Fortunately for this small nurse and her plans, spring comes quickly in the northland. The weather had come on warm; buds were swelling upon the trees; bluebirds, thrushes and other warblers sang joyously, with promise of summer, among the small woods. And the sun sank in a great red glory beneath the waters of the lake.

CHAPTER XIII

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Zintkala built a large fire at the opening of her wickiup. She dragged a number of dry limbs in place and chopped them into fagots, for the air was yet chill after nightfall and she wished to keep a fire going until morning.

It was after midnight, and Etapa was yet breathing heavily, when the little nurse composed herself to sleep with only a parflêche covering for her shoulders. She slept until the sun was shining when Etapa in delirium awoke her with his mutterings. She knew that he wandered in mind, for he said things which were witko (foolish and incoherent).

She rebuilt her fire and sat near her patient with a great fear in her heart. With an almost fierce insistence, however, the little girl shut out of her mind a thought of the end which might come to such illness. Such fevers were frequent among the Indians, but with the violent sort they were ill-prepared to contend. So, despite her brave spirit, the sister listened with a pinched face and heavy heart to the brother's mutterings and watched his restless tossing, well understanding how powerless she was to do for

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him. After a dark hour of despair, Etapa again fell into a deep sleep.

Then his nurse aroused to action. She ate a hasty breakfast of baked clams, then very carefully passed some thongs around the boy's ankles and tied them so that he might not get up and run off in one of his witko moments. Then she took her knife and his hatchet and went to the woods. Diligently she searched for the roots and herbs known to use in her mother's family. There was as yet no green vegetation, and her search was tedious in the extreme, compelling her to dig much under the dry leaves and stems of such weeds and wood plants as the melting snows or the wild creatures had left undisturbed.

At last she chanced upon a bed of mandrakes, and her face lighted with a great joy. Ah, this was indeed waste-s^{te} (very, very good)! She dug many of the roots. With these and some freshly peeled bark of the wild cherry she returned to her wickiup.

She looked in upon her patient with anxiety. He was sitting up with fevered face, sullenly trying to untie the thongs about his feet. She assisted him and, after walking about upon the sands with unsteady legs for a moment, he came back to his couch and turned his face to the bank.

Zintkala now took her basin and two extra

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large clamshells and shaved into these receptacles small bits of the root and bark she had gathered. She longed for some of the bitter sage leaves from her mother's bundle of dried herbs. But there was no sage bush in all this northland, and so she did what she could with what she had.

She set her dishes, filled with water, upon some stones which she had placed to heat upon the embers of her fire. She knew the roots and bark must not be freely boiled and arranged her dishes so as to keep the water gently simmering. She now fished for clams, and it was a long time after she had roasted some mollusks and eaten them before her teas were bitter enough for medicine.

Etapa would not eat although she urged him, hoping to thus prove to herself that his illness was not a serious matter. She was encouraged that he did not get violent and beyond her control. In one of his rational moments, after a time, she succeeded in getting him to drink, with a wry face, a basin of mandrake tea. After this he again fell into a stupor of sleep.

Zintkala kept her brews going, setting away in shelter clamshells filled with bitter teas until she had enough to last for hours. Then, knowing that her patient was too weak to wander off, she went to look for food. She was tired of the tough clams.

In a little exploring expedition she discovered

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a marsh bayou where many large fish were to be seen feeding among the reeds in shallow water. Ehé-ho! Here was good meat in plenty. She affixed her long knife to a pole and went spearing. After some adventures, and several hard struggles, she succeeded in killing two large catfish and lugged them to her wickiup in triumph. Her elation in this exploit would have been very great but for the anxious heart she bore.

Oddly enough, it was but a little time after she had dressed these fish and hung the meat upon curing sticks that she found three unsuspected fishhooks in her own roll of belongings. The hooks were concealed within a bundle of colored threads and pieces of trader's twine which she undid to further her mending. This was great good fortune, for she was an expert fisher and the possession of these cunning little weapons settled the question of food supply where there were fish to be caught.

She had thought some of hunting with Etapa's bow, but the Cree arrows would every one be needed when they should take up their journey homeward.

Most of that day she sat upon the sands in the sunshine mending clothes, leggins and moccasins. Rents in her jeep (skirt) she darned by sewing in soft pieces of buckskin, ornamenting them with stitches of red and blue packthreads. This occupation was varied with brief visits to

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the invalid, who was several times induced to drink of her bitter teas. All day the boy lay, burning with fever, taking no nourishment but water and the bitter drinks.

Upon the sister there settled at length that strange aloofness and preoccupation which seizes upon the Indian, as a defense against the ravages of emotion, in times of suffering and grief.

Zintkala spent a busy day. Among other work she finished thatching her wickiup, which thus became a prominent feature of the immediate beach, an oval hummock setting its vivid green against the sand wall. She went about all these duties with the intent air of a small housekeeper.

Now and then, however, her eyes strayed, as she sat, seeking the calm and placid blue waters of the lake where the sun beat warmly, and a light glimmer of radiation arose in which, as in some far-removed ethereal world, there floated great white swans and pelicans amid armies of smaller water-fowl. There sang in her ears also in gentle undertones a murmur of puddling and quacking, which seemed to come from a far country, a drowsy dreamland, where people moved with slow reluctance and yawned and stretched and flapped their wings protestingly.

Across this placid mirage country the little maid looked in vain for sight or sign of land. The sheen of misty water, with its herds of

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birds vanishing to mere specks in the distance, seemed illimitable, and she wondered indeed if here were not the end of the earth at that distant sunset sea which she had heard of among her people.

At night, however, this illusion was dispelled. After the sun had set redly, falling into the water, clouds obscured the stars, and, as darkness came on, a red sky light appeared across the lake, a cloud glow which her vision—associated with many prairie fires—could not mistake. The red sky meant a forest fire across the water. Woods were burning there, and the lake was not as wide as it had appeared. And there were people over there, too. As night advanced the dash of scarlet upon the clouds became a broad band, and its ruby light was reflected upon the ripples of the lake until beach and shore line were visible as by moonlight.

Zintkala was not sleepy. She sat in the opening of her wickiup for a long time looking out upon the wonder world of fire-lit night and with the fascination of a child of whatsoever complexion. The now dancing ripples, the white birds and the dark ones with the fire's glow upon them, the far-seen herds of fowl moving in a red dusk like war-parties of horse-men going upon a level plain to strike their enemies, all the curiously peopled water-world, held her imagination.

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It was not a still world, neither of woods nor lake. Out of the sky came now and then the reed-like piercing laugh of the loon, the bugle note of the arctic going swan, the harsh squawk of the night heron, and, from the tree-tops near at hand, two owls mocked at the puddling ducks which presently they intended to pounce upon.

Once, startlingly close, a crackling of bushes caught the watcher's ear and brought her heart fluttering into her throat. At last the Ojibwa! But no, a dark hulk moving upon four legs came out upon the sands and she understood that mato-sapa had come to his clam fishery. She shrank within the door of her tepée and peered fearfully forth.

The king of the woods, it appeared, was not hungry. He simply wallowed in shallow water, rolling himself about like an agency pig, and then shuffled away into his bushes. Once only he lifted his head and stood at gaze, appearing to be mildly interested in her domicile against the sand wall.

Once Etapa spoke asking for water and again after she had given him a drink and fallen asleep, he awoke her with the persistent cry. He drank more greedily than before. Lacking desire to sleep, Zintkala again sat in the opening of the wickiup. And while she looked out over the water and upon the red sky, lo, a wonder happened. It began with forked lightning

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which paled the fire's glow and then a far-off deep mutter shook the earth, announcing the approach of the thunder birds. These vast and powerful creatures came nearer and ate up the fire in the sky. They played upon the water with their brilliant forked tongues, and the waves began to lash the rocks and sands and the wind to roar in the trees, and, in the crackling tumult of their wings and the blinding light of the bolts they shot, terror seized upon the little brown girl. She forgot her patient and cowered, her head wrapped in a *parflèche*, in the darkest corner of her wickiup.

Though the rain fell in bucketfuls, and the waves rolled high, and the wind howled the wicked song of *Unk-té-hi*, no harm came to the little voyagers who, so well was the wickiup lodged and thatched, were not even wetted.

In the morning Etapa was at the height of his fever. He raged and tossed and muttered strange things. He was quite out of his head. The little nurse went about with compressed lips. She cooked several pieces of fish. "He will be very hungry this morning," she said. She set a basin of the broiled catfish at the side of his couch, and then went out and ate her morning meal, sitting with her back to the wickiup. When she had finished she went in and took away the basin, pretending that Etapa had eaten most of the fish. She threw the con-

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tents of the dish among the bushes, saying to some birds that they could have what was left. Then she set about brewing bitter teas again. This herb drink she gave to the sufferer in large doses when he cried out for water, and at mid-day he again fell into a heavy sleep.

The day was very warm and pleasant. Many large flocks of water-fowl left the lake and flew northward, honking and squalling with much uproar and fuss.

Seeing that Etapa was not likely to awake soon, his nurse cut a slender pole and with hook and line and some fresh clams went fishing at the bayou. The big pike and pickerel snapped at her tempting baits so greedily that they almost frightened her, and she returned with as many as she could carry.

When she came to the heap of clamshells she left two of her fish upon the stones. "They are for you, O *mato-sapa*," she said, turning toward the bushes and addressing the bear quite as though the animal were facing her. "Perhaps you will see that my heart is good, and thus you will not enter my *tepée*."

The Indian child speaks always the language of its elders, and, if it be not stupid or lacking in brain quality, will, at eight or ten years, have attained a vocabulary capable of more effective speech than the average child of similar age among English-speaking people.

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At ten Zintkala had been accomplished in her own tongue; in five months at a missionary school she had learned enough of English to converse with her teachers about ordinary matters, and six months' tutelage among the Ojibwa, in a tongue differing as widely from her own as Latin from Hindustani, she had learned to speak Chippewa readily.

When she again turned toward the wickiup Etapa was outside staggering and stumbling, making a half-crazed effort to reach the water. She ran to him in a great fright, for she thought that now he was surely witko and about to become violent. Partly carrying, and partly forcing him to walk, she got him back to his couch and supplied his wants with bitter drinks.

On the whole, she was glad—not knowing that the fever gave him strength—that he was able to stand on his feet. When, after more drink, he fell into another sleep, she became quite cheerful.

The afternoon was really hot, and the water around the edges of the lake had lost its winter chill. Zintkala shed her Ojibwa dress and, stripped to the breech-clout, a little brown water fairy, puddled and swam in the lake with as much apparent ease and enjoyment as the ducks.

Afterward she played upon the beach as she had done among her native sand hills, building conical tepées, setting up medicine poles and

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small twigs for people, rigging mimic ponies with mimic travois poles and loading them with mimic swaddled babies and camp effects.

For a time she seemed to be at home again on the Smoky River. In her ears there hummed sweetest music, low-voiced talk of women gossiping in front of their tepées, the sounds of mortar and pestle, the whinny of ponies and bark of dogs, cries which greet the return of the hunting party, and shouts of young men playing the haka game.

Thus she was pleasantly absorbed until awakened to bitter reality by Etapa's cry for water. She ran to obey the call and, when she saw his face, deep fear and depression again took possession of her.

That night Zintkala hardly slept, and for three days thereafter Etapa required her constant care, giving her only snatches of rest. The patient was violent at times, and it required all her strength to keep him within the wickiup.

During this time she ate only the fish which she had partly cured and preserved, and made but one excursion to the woods after roots and cherry bark for her brews. On this occasion she had the good fortune to kill a rabbit, which she hit with a stone. This game she dressed and hung near the fire to make soup for Etapa. Some of this, very weak, she gave him when he craved water. Some of the meat, too, she had

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on hand, with bitter cherry bark, when the fever left him.

This happened on the sixth morning of his illness.

When, upon awakening from a better sleep than she had had in several days, the little nurse no longer heard her patient's heavy breathing, but saw an emaciated figure with face turned away, with blanket unmoved where she had last tucked it around his feet, she caught her breath with a little gasp and ran outside, not daring to look at the features of that still one.

Distract and wild-eyed, she wandered for a time. She gazed far across the lake where the fire had burned and where, upon the horizon line, a mere speck, she had one day seen a canoe pass. There were people, there was a village over there, and she almost made herself believe that she ought at once to go around the lake and find these folk. Maybe their medicine-man, like Ghost Moccasin of Tall Gun's village, was a very great wonder-worker. Perhaps such a wonderful one would come and cure Etapa.

She raced away from the specter in her mind. She hastened to the pool of the bayou to see if there were indeed fish swimming there. Once there she noted that a pair of ducks flew out of the rushes upon the opposite edge, and she thought that she must now hunt along the reedy banks of this stream for the eggs of *magakšica*.

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Duck's eggs were delicious, yet she felt no hunger for them.

She turned her attention to the great white herds of pelicans upon the lake. All the wild geese and many of the droves of ducks had vanished, but it did not occur to her to wonder where they had gone. She kept her eyes upon the immense white birds with big red pouches under their bills. She thought that she should have one of those pouches. They were very convenient. She had heard that the birds carried fish in them.

Yet something kept saying to her that she must go back to the wickiup—go back—go back—go back.

She hurried along the beach; her little feet stumbled among the stones; her breath, now suppressed, again came and went in spasmodic gasps; a strange misty world danced in her eyes; a tattoo of drums throbbed in her ears.

She approached the wickiup with halting steps and wavering eyes; her small round face was pinched and bloodless, white as one of the dead. Some compelling force drew her to the opening. She peered inside. Ah, *wašte-šte!* The sick one had moved—his thin face was turned partly toward her!

She bent over him with all her soul in her face. One look and her energies and faculties returned in a single throb. She flew outside,

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uncovered the embers of her fire, snatched her basin and ran for water. A large leg of the rabbit! This she had saved for a nourishing broth. Ah, Etapa must very quickly take some of her soup. He would like it; he would drink it eagerly perhaps. He must now be very hungry—they were always so. All her energies were concentrated upon the cooking of that broth, with nursing it with just enough of fire. She had a bit of salt and that she put in to make it very good indeed.

In a brief time she was bending above her scarcely breathing patient, clamshell spoon and dish in hand, and when the weak boy made a little strangling noise in his throat she almost laughed. When she saw that he had really swallowed two mouthfuls of broth, and that his hollow eyes had opened and he seemed to know her, she glowed with energy, a little dynamo of nature to give to the weak one life and strength.

Two or three times, within a little while, she succeeded in getting her patient to swallow broth, and then, to her great delight, he fell into a soft and natural sleep.

The rabbit soup—such a little bit—would soon be gone, and now to kill a bird! She would not have hesitated to undertake to catch one with her hands, but she took the bow and two of the precious arrows and sallied into the woods.

Any kind of birds would serve her purpose,

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but some better than others. Many times during her vigil she had heard the vigorous drumming of cock grouse near at hand. The thunder of their wings had sometimes startled her as the mutterings of Wakinyan. But she had heard the bird before, and she had seen many during her recent tramps. She now listened for their loud whirring roar as eagerly as the hawk which sought to peer into the depths where the birds were hidden.

Presently, as she stole on breathless tiptoe among some young trees, there burst upon her ears a thunderous humming which sent electric thrills prickling over her skin. Ah, the bird was located with a glance. Only a little way off the sprangled roots of a fallen tree protruded above some small growth. Upon that old dry log, deep within the shadows of evergreens, the cock pheasant had his parade ground.

With bated breath, and motionless, she stood until the bumming of wings began again; then she fitted an arrow to her bow and stepped, moving with infinite caution, toward the dead tree's roots. When the whirring ceased, a statue of an Indian girl stood among the young pines. Thus, with the sure instinct of a fox, she alternately approached and shrank to the stillness of her surroundings until, at last, in the midst of an ecstasy of whizzing vibrations, she crouched behind the upheaved tree roots.

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There was another interval of suppressed animation during which the huntress heard the cock's cooing kroo—kroo—kroo, as he spread his ruff and strutted, displaying his plumage, while awaiting the appearance of some coy female.

Bhum—bhum—bhm—n—d—r'r'r'! Mercy, what a noise! The shy little huntress arose, popping up like a jack-in-the-box, and aimed an arrow at that blinded puff-ball of conceit. At three steps even she, Zintkala, could not miss, and an instant later she ran at full speed bearing in triumph the still fluttering bird.

Very likely no strutting cock of any sort ever passed from dress-parade into a delectable broth with greater expedition.

CHAPTER XIV

GOING TO THE ENEMY

Violent fevers of the swamp and woods are emaciating and usually leave the system deranged for a time. Etapa did not mend rapidly and, though after some days he was able to walk about, it was evident that he would not be stout enough to travel for a long time. He resembled only the half-animated framework of the stout boy who had escaped from the sugar-camp.

He no longer spoke of going homeward. He seemed content to be provided for, to lie upon the sands and watch the white herds of pelicans. The sister saw how it was, and she pondered the matter gravely. Twice she had seen an elongated speck, almost upon the rim of the sky, move across the lake from a far-off headland. On one or two still, clear mornings, also, there were smoke indications hazing the sky above a dimly seen shore line of bluff and woods. That there was a large village in that direction she could have no doubt, and somehow she had arrived at the conclusion that the people were a peaceful sort of folk, who lived in a wonderful land of plenty and were generous to friends and strangers alike.