

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

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.

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

True, these people might not feel kindly toward those of the Dakota nation, but it seemed quite certain to her that they were not a cruel folk, on the lookout to do others harm, or they would have discovered and set upon her little camp long since. The Ojibwas of Tall Gun's village were almost forgotten, so distant was their country and so long it seemed since her escape from them.

She remembered that once in her home village a young Pawnee—a Scili—had thrown himself upon the mercy of the Oglalas. He had been lost, and had come upon their tepées in a violent snow storm. This young man had been well received. He stayed with his benefactors many moons, hunting faithfully for them during the buffalo killing season, and then returned, unmolested, to his own people.

So Zintkala determined to seek the strangers across the lake and ask for hospitality for a season.

She now used her buckskins—the parflèche and loose skins—making moccasins and garments and in mending. She had much colored pack-thread and some pretty beads among her pickings, and she fashioned herself an overskirt of Sioux pattern which she ornamented with many fringes. When she had donned this skirt, her elk-teeth necklace and some real Dakota leggings and moccasins, she felt as much like some

GOING TO THE ENEMY

genuine person as a Sioux waif might in that wilderness.

In these days of Etapa's slow recovery Zintkala took on new life and capability. She was the camp's fisher and hunter, and her larder was well supplied with fresh fish and duck's eggs, upon which diet, and a daily swim in the lake, she thrived as a healthy animal. Her plump, round face and snapping black eyes glowed with animation.

She did not after that one time see mato-sapa, who, it seemed, preferred a more solitary haunt. Yet some creature, which left strange tracks upon the wet sands, came one night and stole fish which she had hung to a pole for safe keeping. Thereafter for a time she kept her meat in the wickiup, and still the marauder came regularly, eating the fishheads which she threw upon the beach and leaving those queer tracks all about her domicile.

Then she hit upon the expedient of carrying her refuse out to the heap of clamshells, and there the strange creature came and devoured it. She again hung a fish upon the cross-stick she had arranged, and that same night, when the moon was shining, she was awakened by a snapping sound as of a fagot broken across the knee. Peering out she saw a black creature, about the size of a common dog, eating her fish.

More angered than alarmed, she seized Etapa's

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

bow and arrows and discharged a shaft with all her might at the range of three or four paces. The animal was hit in the neck and sprang high with a fierce whistling snarl. It whirled about and about upon the sands, growling and striking at the slender shaft which had gone through its throat, and then, making curious leaps along the beach, disappeared from sight.

On the following morning the voyagers found a big brown carcajou lying dead upon the sands near the bayou. When she saw what a savage creature she had slain Zintkala was almost as much frightened as elated. The body was so heavy that all her strength was required to drag it to the wickiup. Etapa praised her skill in shooting. "How, big sister," he said, "that was indeed well done. Now you shall make me a chief's garment."

With what strength he had, the boy helped his sister to take off the carcajou's skin. It was a beautiful pelt, and they left a very pretty black bush of tail pendant.

Zintkala at once set about fleshing this fine skin in readiness for tanning, which process was completed by aid of wood ashes, fresh brains, and by much rubbing with the hands. The fur was long and thick, of dark brown, with two bands of cinnamon and, when she had sewed the flaps of the forelegs into sleevelets, Etapa was truly furnished with a "chief's

GOING TO THE ENEMY

garment," which he wore hanging down his back with the tail ornament brushing his heels. And the Sioux children thought it a very beautiful dress. Zintkala was so struck with the wearer's appearance—despite his thin face and pipe-stem legs—that she immediately set about ornamenting the turned-down head-piece and his moccasins with what remained of her beads.

It was more than half a moon after Etapa had been taken with the fever before they left the invalid's quarters and took up their journey along the eastern coast of the lake. In all this time no human being had been seen, only the far specks of canoes. There was, however, the warm, blossoming, spring-inhabited world which catered to all their needs except the longing for home. They did not hurry in their departure, for Etapa was far from strong, and Zintkala carried the small burden of their belongings.

The sister had said nothing to the brother of her plan of going to the strange people. She did not wish to seem to think him unwell and that he might not be able, for a long time, to travel a great distance. The length of the way homeward was only measurable in her mind by recollections of the seasons of her travels away from the Oglala country. She guessed that it would require two moons of walking for them to reach their home, and she now felt that they

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

might have to wait until another melting of the snow.

Zintkala had developed physical strength with self-reliance, and she carried her pack, hatchet, basin, bows and arrows, a leaf or two of dried fish, a bundle of pieces of skin and thread, with lightfooted ease.

As they made their way along the lakeshore, walking wherever they could upon the sand and gravel beaches, Zintkala often said, "Stay, younger brother, I think there are some of the sweet roots" (ginseng) "in this wood. I will go a little way to dig it," or, "Whi! sunkaku! Let us have the eggs of maga-win. I saw her fly from those reeds."

Thus, while the lad rested without seeming to rest, Zintkala would go exploring. Sometimes she found the nest of a goose or duck upon a muskrat's conical dwelling among the rushes, but the eggs were no longer good to eat, as a glance at their shiny shells easily convinced the wader.

The children had grown weary of seeing the great herds of pelicans which floated at lazy ease day and night, and the loons and grêbe everywhere specking the water, but there had lately arrived a myriad of new birds, piping creatures of spindle legs and slender necks, with feather dress of browns, drabs, grays and whites, which continually ran upon the sands or flew back and forth along the beach.

GOING TO THE ENEMY

These birds, of several varieties new to them, excited their wonder and comment. One small variety was seen in places in immense numbers. These were stupid, nodding little birds which settled in clouds at the water's edge and almost ran under the voyagers' feet.

"Hoye, sister," said Etapa, when their curiosity had been satisfied by observation, "shoot arrows among these little birds. Shoot the war-arrows, thus," and he showed her how she could skip an arrow low down along the water's edge, without danger of losing.

The ruse was successful. Zintkala tried several shots before getting the range and the level well, then a single arrow knocked over four of the birds, and afterwards she killed them at will. They found these small snipes delicious when the breasts were broiled, and Etapa ate heartier at midday than he had done since falling ill.

There were many large turtles and pretty snakes where there was mud and reedy shores, and there was particularly one green snake which Zintkala admired greatly. She would have liked the skin of this one dressed and tanned for a bracelet. All these creatures and many more commanded their interest as they sauntered leisurely upon the wave-washed sands and gravels or walked along high or muddy shores.

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

Toward night they passed around a bluff bank to descend again upon a very wide sand-walled beach. Upon this broad belt of shore line, as evening came on, they saw a number of deer come down to drink, and once a cow moose and her yellow-headed calf trotted away in their front.

As Etapa had slept a long time after the mid-day meal they traveled but a little way that afternoon. They camped at the mouth of a sedgy creek where there were many ducks' nests, and here Zintkala secured fresh eggs enough for the evening's and morning's meals.

The second day's slow travel was very much a repetition of the first, save that it rained a part of the day and they spent several hours in the shelter of a cliff of rocks. During the afternoon the dim southern shore line which they had seen very indistinctly from the wickiup took clear shape as a bold bluff which seemed to extend far out into the lake. The foot of this high land they reached before sunset and camped in the shelter of some bushes under a rise. Here there was a plain path made by fishermen and hunters coming off the bluff to the lakeshore. It was very evident that there was a large village near at hand.

When Etapa saw the path he pointed to it inquiringly but said nothing, and Zintkala said nothing that evening. At sunrise they had

GOING TO THE ENEMY

broiled snipe and a fish for their breakfast; then Zintkala set about making such toilet as she could, having no colored earths to paint her cheeks. She combed and braided her hair with much care, and, at the point of her elk-teeth necklace, she fastened the scarlet wings of a bird which a hawk had killed.

Etapa looked on without comment. He understood that they were to approach the strange village. He was listless and unable to offer serious objections had it occurred to him to do so. He donned his carcajou skin and put a feather in his braid to denote that he had struck an enemy, and so made an end of his toilet.

Thus arrayed, they went forward upon the bluff. As they were aware that they might be seen by hunters or fishermen at any moment, they made no attempt to conceal their movements. They advanced along a plain path traversing an oak ridge for a mile or more.

Presently a droning hum of sounds announced that they were drawing near to a very large village, and in a few minutes they were able to look down upon a broad open plat, with patches of brush here and there, upon which a great number of wigwams were newly erected.

From the temporary appearance of these lodges they knew that they had come upon a summer camp of woods Indians, pitched upon a favorite hunting and fishing ground. The bluffs,

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

also, far down their bases, were fringed with berry bushes. The children could not doubt that this was indeed a land of abundance, and the people moving about among the tepées on the flat a folk highly favored by their manidos. The village was pitched near to the lake shore, and they could see two or three canoes moving across a bay. On the beach, where it showed in yellow patches beyond the bush fringes, dark figures flitted chasing to and fro. The strange people's children were at play running races, perhaps, upon the sand.

Presently, as they began descending the hills, they heard the voices of women among the bushes near at hand, but could not tell what was said. They thought these women were digging roots.

They did not draw near to this Indian town without fear. But they had once more accepted the inevitable, and they took comfort from the appearance of things. They knew by shrewd instinct and observation that these were real Indians, like themselves, people of the wild lands unmixed and unmixing with the white folk of the agencies.

They halted for a time upon the bluff path within plain view of the village. Then, as no one appeared to be on the lookout to detect the approach of strangers, Zintkala said, "Come, younger brother, let us go among these people."

GOING TO THE ENEMY

They set forward at once and soon emerged from the bushes upon an open flat. A little way out from the nearest wigwams they met a woman with a large fat baby peeping over her shoulder, and this person uttered a slight exclamation of surprise.

The woman indeed stared at them in a rather unmannerly way. Yet she looked upon an unusual sight, for plainly by their dress the strangers were Sioux children and the foremost a young girl of erect bearing, with an earnest, intent face and quite the air of a chief's daughter and of having come upon an important errand. She had halted in the path in her surprise, but she stepped aside and the Dakotas passed on without seeming to take note of her.

Some wolf-dogs came from the near wigwams and barked, but these, too, fell away before them. Children ceased to play, and some shy little folk ran behind shelter to peep at the newcomers. Older people, within and without the open lodges, also glanced curiously at the strangers; for the most part these regarded them with a kindly gravity which made itself felt and brought a faint glow into the girl's round face.

Zintkala was looking for the lodge of the chief soldier, and expected to find some totem or decoration to distinguish his wigwam. This she searched for with reason, for these Indians lived and dressed after the native fashion and not as

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

mixed bloods and agency people. Several skin tepées bore flags and ornamental designs, but none seemed to indicate the rank of its dwellers.

No one spoke to them, and Zintkala was much puzzled and even distressed to know to whom she might properly apply for hospitality. The children had passed the center of the village thus looking at the lodges and were feeling very much embarrassed when an old man confronted them.

"Ho, young Dakotas, you are come a long distance, it appears," said this one. The man spoke in Ojibwa, and Zintkala answered hesitatingly, her face reddening at her own temerity.

"We are Dakotas, therefore we wish to speak to the head soldier of this large town."

With a gesture the man bade them follow. He walked toward the lakeshore. When clear of surrounding wigwams he pointed to a large conical lodge which stood against a cluster of water willows near to a gravel beach.

"The man is there," said the old man simply, and he strode away and left them. The children approached the tall lodge as hesitating pilgrims approach a shrine. It was difficult to come near so great a man as this chief must be, unannounced. Therefore, at some unobtrusive paces, they halted to wait for some sign of recognition.

They saw before them—which gave their

GOING TO THE ENEMY

hearts encouragement—a big tepée of buffalo skins and upon its front, newly painted, the totem of a blue fish and an otter. For some minutes they stood, growing more embarrassed and very red of cheek.

They talked together in low tones to relieve their distress and, while they stood thus with their faces near together, a young woman came from the darkened interior of the lodge and stood in front of its triangular opening. This person regarded the strangers gravely and with evident inquiry. Zintkala saw the woman, but seemed to be looking straight beyond her, and Etapa turned his face toward the lake and shifted the carcajou skin to a shoulder. They were visibly ill at ease.

The young woman saw this and went into her tepée. She spoke something in low tones and a man's voice answered her. This talking continued for a moment, and a man came forth with a nervous shuffling stride and approached the newcomers. He was a young man with a mop of hair upon his shoulders and a fringe covering his forehead to the eyebrows. He wore no paints. He had a striped blanket about the shoulders, and his buckskin leggins had many-colored fringes, and his moccasins were beautifully decorated with turquoise beads. He had a keen face with shrewd eyes that seemed to look through one.

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

"How, how, Dakotas," he greeted, reaching a hand. They shook hands with him gladly, the boy following the girl.

"We are the children of Fire Cloud of the Oglalas, and we are come a long way," said Zintkala.

"How, I know that man. He has fought my people a number of times," said the young man grimly. He looked at them with a glance so searching that their little souls shrank within them. For an instant they felt far removed from this strange village and their faces were cold and lifeless.

Zintkala spoke in a far-away voice. "We were taken to the agency at Traverse des Sioux," she said. "We were to learn to be like white people. We did not like to do so. When we ran away from those people the Hohé came upon us very suddenly. They took us to a far country from whence we escaped, and one of us is not able to travel."

The man regarded her face keenly again, but he asked no embarrassing questions. "Come," he said, and led the way into his tepée.

"Some Dakotas have escaped from their enemies," he said to the woman they had seen. "Give them meat." He seated himself upon some skins and waved his visitors to some mats opposite. His wife immediately went out and put some fish in her kettle and set it cooking.

GOING TO THE ENEMY

Gravely, but with no other sign of emotion, the little voyagers took seats, squatting with legs decorously crossed. The man lit his pipe and smoked. A small child, affixed to a board which leaned against a bunk bed, blinked solemnly at the strangers.

There were a number of guns hung to the tepée stakes, also powder horns, bullet pouches, fishskin ornaments, tobacco pouches, pieces of unfinished work in braided buckskin, pelts of otter, mink, sable, white weasel and other small and beautiful animals. And there were bales of blankets and skins under the bunk, with saddles, trappings and various articles of furniture lying about. Evidently this man was rich.

Their eyes took in these things casually as they waited. They knew their host would not again speak to them until they had eaten, supposing them to be too much exhausted for conversation. Thus was maintained the etiquette of the lodge. Yet the little strangers, of impassive face, awaited with no small anxiety of heart. They were glad when the woman came in with a pleasant countenance and set a bowl of cooked fish before them. They ate slowly until satisfied, and the woman quietly removed her turtle-shell dish.

Then the man spoke.

"I am Black Otter," he said, "of the Awanse Pillagers. My father was Esh-ke-bug-e-coshe.