

## CHAPTER XXV

### A LONG TRAIL

War is far-reaching in its consequences and often lays its unsparing hand upon the innocent. Our civil strife for the liberation of slaves set in motion, to the farthest frontiers, those native tribes, whom, on account of coveting their vast possessions, we have unceasingly robbed and oppressed and enslaved, and thousands of whom we hold to-day, the innocent with the guilty, as half-starved prisoners of war.

When we struggled, brother against brother, these tribes shifted ground, eagerly watching to strike at the hosts of invasion when opportunity should offer, and also to inflict injury upon the ancient enemies of their kind.

The story of the little voyagers must have ended at the Yankton village had not war made for them, of their own country, a wilderness more bewildering and more dangerous than even the vast woods of the northland. They might have followed the Yanktons but for the loss of their ponies. On foot, however, there could be but little chance of overtaking these people before the rains or the trampling herds of buffalo should obliterate their trail. There was no certainty in the minds of these Sioux children that

---

### A L O N G T R A I L

---

they should find the Oglalas at their town, but, child-like, they tried each to hide this fear from the other.

They were at least upon familiar ground upon the Smoky River trail, and this they followed day after day with plodding but untired feet, and they chattered joyously whenever they could point out the exact spot where their own tepée had been pitched in their eastward journey of the year before. Once even they found the forked stakes, with a willow pole resting in one of the crotches, where their kettle had hung to boil, standing exactly as their mother had left them when she had slipped the bail of her pot from the cross-piece.

Although it was not yet night they stopped to make camp at this place. They had not felt so much at home for a year and, after they had eaten a meal of roasted ground-squirrels and wild turnips, they were very happy.

They sat under a fringe of willows as night came on, with a tiny blaze of dry sticks before them.

"Younger brother," said Zintkala, "why do not those people over there build a fire and tell stories as they did that other time?"

"I think those people will do so very soon," said Etapa. Thereupon the mimic, whose mood could always be depended upon for a real make-believe, collected some fuel and made a fire at



---

## TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

---

the point indicated. He also made several other fires, so that there appeared to be quite a large camp of people about. When he returned to their secluded nook the two were very happy. They spoke often of the folks camped about them and whither they were going. It seemed that somebody had come into the village saying there were a great many buffaloes to westward, and so the people were all feeling very good indeed, and they were all going to the killing, men, women and children. There would be much to do in the morning in packing the travois and getting ready for the start, but at this time the people were all sitting in front of their tepées, talking and smoking.

"At High Wolf's wife's tepée there are some people telling stories," said Zintkala after a time. "I heard some one laugh because a foolish one got the porcupine's needles in his fingers. He supposed that he had caught a rabbit."

Etapla laughed. "I do not know that story," he said. "I would like to hear those people talk. Did you hear the story a man on this side was telling about Iktomi? They were talking, sitting at the fire of Standing Buffalo's women."

"I did not hear that story, younger brother," said Zintkala, "pray do tell it to me."

And so Etapla told about:

---

## A L O N G T R A I L

---

### IKTOMI AND THE MICE

"One time Iktomi was walking in the long grass. He was very tired, and as he walked he was wishing to be entertained. Suddenly this one thus desiring heard very beautiful music. This music was very mysterious and wonderful, and Iktomi was astonished. The voices of many strange people singing fine and very soft he heard everywhere. Sometimes it appeared that these people were in the sky, and then Iktomi thought surely they were in the grass, and then he said: 'Certainly, they are on the water.'

"He became very much confused, listening to these strange people. 'Ho,' said Iktomi, 'this is indeed mysterious. Some one has surely made a great medicine. I will discover about this. If I can find this medicine I shall sing very acceptably indeed. I shall marry the daughter of a rich person, who will not be able to resist this singing.'

"Because he was very ugly to look upon no young woman would marry Iktomi. Thus he was anxious to learn the secret of this wonderful singing.

"He ran about in the grass. He stopped often to listen. No one came to tell Iktomi about this singing. Once Iktomi ran, looking upward. He expected to see some people in the clouds. He prayed to the clouds, 'Ohé-ohé, Mahpiya-sa,



## TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

teach me this beautiful singing and I will do your bidding. Thirty pieces of skin I will cut from my arm when I am arrived at home.'

"Then as he ran, thus looking upward, Iktomi fell over something.

"'He-he-he!' cried Iktomi, 'now I have hurt myself upon this worthless buffalo skull.' Iktomi sat groaning—'Yuh-huh! winswi! this is indeed very bad.'

"Suddenly he heard wonderful singing—many voices singing very fine came out of the buffalo skull.

"'Oho,' said Iktomi, 'it seems that these mysterious ones, after all, are in this old buffalo skull.' Iktomi made a light of some dry grass and looked in at the large hole in the back of this skull. It was very dark in there, but the people were much disturbed. There were mice dancing and singing in there. They cried with very fine voices, 'Do go away, Iktomi. Do not bother us, for we wish to finish our dance.'

"Nevertheless, Iktomi, wishing to see these people, thrust his head in at the larger opening, and the mice ran out of the smaller holes, very much frightened. Thus Iktomi's head became fast inside the buffalo skull. He could not remove it. So he arose wearing this old skull. He cried out with fear because his eyes were in darkness.

"'O good spirits,' cried Iktomi, 'assist ye me to

## A L O N G T R A I L

get out of this evil place!' But no one came to help Iktomi; therefore he ran, crying for assistance. He came to the river, where there were many trees. Iktomi wished to find some water, for he was very thirsty, having run about and cried a great deal.

"He ran against a tree. 'What tree is this?' Iktomi asked this one. 'I am the oak tree,' said this one. 'O yes, I know you,' said Iktomi. 'You stand apart somewhat from the water.'

"Iktomi ran forward again. He came against another tree. 'What tree is this?' Iktomi asked this one. 'I am the elm,' said this one. 'O yes,' said Iktomi, 'I know you. You stand, indeed, quite near to the water.'

"Iktomi ran forward. Yet another tree stood in the way. This tree bruised Iktomi. 'He-he-he!' bawled Iktomi, 'now indeed I have lost some pieces of my skin. What tree has done this to me?' 'I am the cottonwood,' said this one. 'Why do you run thus carelessly, seeing that I stand in this place?'

"'Oho,' said Iktomi, 'I know you. You stand very near to the water. Now I shall truly quench my thirst.'

"So Iktomi ran quickly and suddenly he fell head downward into a muddy stream, which ran by there. Iktomi's head was fast in the bottom of this stream. He was drowning. Pehan, the crane, came by that place. He was wading and



---

## TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

---

he wished to find some fat snails. Pehan was thus looking into the water when Iktomi's great toe appeared moving. Iktomi's moccasin was torn; therefore, his toe was seen moving.

"Pehan seized Iktomi's great toe and pulled very hard. He drew Iktomi out of the stream, leaving the buffalo skull in the mud. Iktomi ran homeward. His face was bleeding and very muddy."

The sister was pleased with this story. She smiled with a rapt, far-away expression, which the flickering firelight converted into a look of most flattering attention.

"It appears, older sister," said Etpa, "that you like to hear stories of Ikto'."

"Yes, indeed, younger brother," she murmured. "Who does not?"

So Etpa again told a story of

### IKTOMI AND THE NIGHT-JAR

"Once Iktomi wished very much to be a night-jar. He wished to dart downward, holding his wings so," and the mimic sprang lightly to his feet and ran forward several steps with a swooping motion and with his arms akimbo.

"Iktomi felt deeply about this. He went about watching the night-jars. 'Gh-o-o-o-o-g!' said the night-jars. They darted upward and soared aloft very prettily.

---

## A LONG TRAIL

---

"'O some mysterious one, do make me a night-jar. I wish to dart downward, making a loud noise with my mouth,' said Iktomi.

"He cried aloud and often to the night-jars. One of these birds heard Iktomi speaking. This one took pity on Iktomi.

"'Thus I understand,' said this one, 'you wish to be a night-jar, that you wish to dart downward, thus. Gh-o-o-o-g!' said the night-jar."

The mimic was upon his feet yet. He darted to and fro, imitating the movements of the birds with lively gestures. One not seeing him and understanding would have thought that several crazy night-jars were trying to outdo each other with their outlandish noises.

"'Gh-o-o-o-g! gh-o-o-o-o-g!' said this night-jar. 'Come ye thus, Iktomi. Lie here upon your back upon this rock—gh-o-o-o-g. I will make a great wind—gh-o-o-o-g—gh-o-o-o-g—ek-kek, ka-a-a-ak,' said the night-jar. 'Thus the wind shall go into you, gh-o-o-o-g,' said the night-jar. 'Gh-o-o-o-g,'—he indeed made a great wind. Iktomi felt this wind blowing all about him. Suddenly he felt himself borne aloft. 'Gh-o-o-o-g, ek-kek, ka-a-a-ak,' said Iktomi; and thus, they say, he became a night-jar."

This story, because of its mimicry, was very amusing and, though she had often heard it, Zintkala laughed delightedly.



---

## TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

---

The little voyagers did not leave this camp until long after sunrise in the morning. It was with difficulty they could tear themselves away, and, while they were still within range, they turned more than once to look back at the fringe of willows which marked the spot where a mother's kettle had hung.

Day after day they followed the river's course across the prairie country—a prairie of rich grasses and flowers, abounding in small life. There was no lack of food, edible roots, ground-squirrels, young grouse, curlews and river birds and wild currants in abundance. A native boy with bow and arrow, and a string for snare, must indeed have been a shiftless lad to have gone hungry in this country in the summer time. But Zintkala did her share in the providing. She had a positive genius for discovering things good to eat, and so, upon the whole, the voyagers lived rather luxuriously. Now and then they met with elk, deer or antelope, but Etapa was not strong enough to drive an arrow through one of these large animals, and, as he now had but five of the Cree arrows left, he could not afford to risk losing them. In Iron Soldier's ammunition pouch, also, there were not many bullets, and in his horn but little powder. His gun, which the boy secretly hoped might finally become his own property, was of a peculiar model. The weapon known in the '50's as the

---

## A L O N G T R A I L

---

"buffalo gun" was made especially for the robe hunter, and was designed for horseback hunting. It had an ordinary rifle, or rather musket, breech and stock, but the barrel was usually but fourteen inches, and never exceeded sixteen inches in length. It had no sights—the hunter simply ran his eye along the smooth, round barrel—and was intended chiefly for single hand use when the horseman was in swift pursuit of buffalo or elk. However, the gun was a strong shooter, carrying but twelve bullets to the pound, and was effective when carefully aimed at long range. This weapon was almost as noisy as a small cannon, and was also expensive to use where bullets were accounted as currency.

Etapa regarded this gun with awe, and carried it proudly. Only the great hunters among his people were able to afford such guns, and when Zintkala, longing for a piece of juicy venison, would urge him to shoot at elk or deer, the boy would answer, "Whi, Tanké! the gun of Iron Soldier makes a very great noise. Thus people a long way off might hear me shooting and so the enemy would come to take us."

To tell the truth, the boy was somewhat fearful of firing so powerful a gun, which sometimes bruised the shoulder, and with the manner of loading of which he was not well acquainted.

As they traveled westward the voyagers gradually left the rich green of the fertile prairies



## TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

behind them, and climbed the plateau of the arid plains, into the country of sagebush, cactus and buffalo grass; but they were still traversing a land of plenty; the ground-squirrels were yet abundant, and there were sage hens, grouse and marmots in great numbers. Now and then, too, a fat badger, wandering away from its burrow, was overtaken and pierced with an arrow. These furnished juicy meat, and the oil ran down the brown chins of the voyagers as they stuffed themselves to repletion.

Having outworn their moccasins, and with no buckskins to replace them, the children were now forced to go with bare feet. Though their soles were toughened by long travel, they were not impervious to the keen spines of the cactus and their way was sometimes difficult and painful.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE VALLEY OF DESOLATION

One morning the little voyagers came suddenly upon the mouth of a creek, which was a favorite resort of the Oglalas in the seasons of small fruits and of plums. The children, on account of extreme heat, had been traveling of nights for two days and had not realized, having kept within the monotonous river valley, how far they had advanced into the heart of their own country. Etapa was first to discover familiar ground.

"Hoye, Tanké!" he shouted explosively. "Here are the plum trees of the Wakpala where we indeed used to gather plums. Ya-la! Ya-la!" and he ran whooping to the crest of a low bluff. Zintkala followed, unbelieving, but in a whirl of excitement.

Once upon the highlands there burst upon them, in the clear atmosphere, familiar sights on every hand. Upon their left was a gray mound of neutral tint which they knew as the Hill of the Porcupine. Upon their right, to north and west, there stretched, in dark, irregular outlines, the wonder country of the Mini-skanskan, or god-waters, the sacred ground of the Black Hills. In their front there extended the



## TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

ragged-edged tablelands of the upper Smoky River, lying like a dense and convoluted cloud along the horizon.

Joy convulsed the little voyagers. They stretched out their arms to this beloved land and, with streaming eyes, cried to their people that they, Zintkala and Etapa, were indeed coming back to them.

"Ina! Ina! Até! Até! We are coming! We are coming! Etapa—Zintkala—your son—your daughter!" they cried, with the joy of home arrival already in their hearts. It seemed to them that the beloved mother and father whose names they shouted must surely hear their voices and that these anxious ones would hasten to meet them.

Only one long day's march with the travois lay between them and the tepées of their people. After the first transports of discovery, in which their eyes drank in every detail of the familiar land, the fierce home hunger gripped their hearts, and they were instantly impatient of everything which could impede their progress.

With one accord they ran back to the plum thicket, and there, in a secure place of hiding, deposited their blankets, the carcajou skin, the gun and accoutrements of Iron Soldier, every article they had carried save the light bow and arrows of the boy. They divided these, Zintkala carrying the five arrows, Etapa the bow in

## THE VALLEY OF DESOLATION

hand. These light weapons, as they held them, were rather a help than a hindrance in running.

Thus equipped for speed they set out going at a swift trot across the open plain. They had a perfect guide in a certain bold prominence of the Smoky River breaks. This cloud-touching bluff was but a half-hour's walk from the Oglala village and its crest was the lookout point of scouts who watched for the appearance of buffaloes, of enemies or strangers, or of parties returning from the chase.

Ardently the little voyagers hoped that keen eyes upon that bluff, toward night, would discern their own approach and at a great distance, and that some one with ponies would come out to meet them. In all their long durance they had never so burned with impatience.

On and on they ran. With eight hundred miles of successful journeying behind them, with perfect health and unconquerable wills, their muscles had grown to a hardihood of endurance which was nothing less than astonishing.

Simple children in mind and heart, innocent as the birds and animals of their wilderness, they had, with these, attained the supreme command of those forces of body and brain which make for the "survival of the fittest." Truth compels the admission, however, that they were not, at this time, as enticing in appearance as most of



---

## TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

---

the wild things of their wilderness. They had lost 'Lizbet's comb in crossing the Missouri and their hair hung in tangled, unkempt braids. Their buckskins were worn, torn and dirty, their leggins in tatters. But they had kept their bodies clean, as healthy Indian children always do where there is water to swim in.

The soles of their feet had become toughened by barefoot travel until only the keener spines of the cactus would penetrate them. Bristling patches of these needle points they avoided with a sub-conscious dexterity, as they ran. They had eyes for the ground, although their gaze was fixed with intent and passionate longing upon a certain sharp projection against the southwestern horizon.

Noon came and found them still going at a swinging trot. They had stopped but once to drink sparingly—they knew better than to fill themselves with water—at a small stream. They were again burning with thirst when they came upon a little creek which marked the longer half of their run. Joyously they halted here to drink water—a few swallows at a time—to rest, and finally to eat some hard and tasteless strips of dried meat which they had saved with the providence (I say it advisedly) of their kind, for an emergency.

This rest and refreshment revived them. Like a pair of tireless foxes they were up and off

---

## THE VALLEY OF DESOLATION

---

again. And now as they came upon the highlands, their goal, in a shimmer of heat radiation, loomed large and specter-like against the sky line. Two hours more of running and they could plainly see the pine trees upon the breaks opposite the Oglala town.

Home—home—home, their rapidly pounding hearts beat to this rhythm, and their muscles grew more pliant, their feet lighter as they sped. Their eyes sought the crest of the hill of lookout for the figure of a lone watcher. Surely there was no scout posted, else they would have seen him making signals. But they did not pause to consider or to ask each other questions. They were too near to home. In their eager drumming hearts there was no room for doubts or fears.

Not until they had rushed over the crest of a rise which commanded a wide view of the river valley did they realize to what vain purpose they had run so far though so tirelessly.

Upon all the river's reach which lay before them there were to be seen no tepées, no grazing ponies, no signs of life. The Oglalas were gone, and above their deserted village site black vultures soared, casting ominous eyes of inquiry upon the bleaching, shredded bones of their abandoned camp.

Who shall describe the desolation of those young souls? My pen cannot attempt the task.



---

## TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

---

With a wild home hunger in their faces, with black despair in their hearts, they ran forward with arms outstretched in piteous yearning. "Ina! Ina! Até! Até!" They fell upon the sacred ground, once sheltered by a mother's tepée, and buried their faces in the earth.

Thus they lay, with heartbroken cries and bitter wailings, mingling their tears with the dust. And thus night found them, exhausted with weeping, and merciful sleep descended and clothed them with unconsciousness.

Naturally there came reaction to their healthy natures in the morning. Zintkala was first to awake, opening her eyes at the touch of the sun's rays upon their lids. She looked about her in bewilderment. She had been dreaming and was playing within her mother's tepée with all the cheerful sounds of an Oglala camp in her ears. The rude call to reality, to the drear prospect of the deserted valley, like the stroke of a whip, wrenched a cry of pain from her lips. Etapa leaped to his feet in alarm, and stared about him for an instant in bewilderment. Then he, too, realized where he was. But his stomach was empty and hunger instantly asserted a claim paramount to that of grief.

"Hoye, Tanké," he cried, "let us at once go back to the village of the pispiza, that we may have good meat to eat. Also we must get our blankets and the gun of Iron Soldier. I think

---

## THE VALLEY OF DESOLATION

---

that we should stay at this place until the Oglalas return from the buffalo killing."

Immediately the little girl responded to his more cheerful mood. "Nakaes, younger brother," she said, "what you say is indeed wise. I think, also, that the Oglalas may have returned when we shall come back from the wakpala."

"Ho, they will come back soon," asserted the boy stoutly. "They will also bring many ponies which they have taken from the enemy. We shall thus obtain better horses than those which the wasécun killed."

Their long exhaustive run and the paroxysm of grief which followed were speedily forgotten in hopes born of the morning and of reinvigorating sleep.

They only stopped to examine the trail of the departed villagers, and, when they had learned that their people had surely gone to the northwest, they were certain—seeing that women and children had been taken—that all had gone in pursuit of the buffaloes which they had discovered were a long way off at this season.

So they turned their faces toward the creek of the plums again. Upon the highland this trail soon brought them to the "village of the pispiza," a prairie dog town, of wide extent and a numerous population. The cunning hunter approached the outskirts of this commu-