

TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

peared, walking in this cloud. My grandfather prayed very earnestly to this large bull's ghost. He desired to know where the buffaloes were.

"Very soon thereafter he saw the buffaloes. There were many of them on some high hills. My grandfather's horse was tired, nevertheless he rode swiftly after the buffaloes, desiring greatly to secure some meat.

"The buffaloes ran down off the hills. They were going in the cloud, which was lying on the grass. Then my grandfather saw very mysterious things. The buffaloes were running in this cloud and some very tall women appeared driving them off in a hurry. These women were taller than the trees, and my grandfather knew that they were the buffalo ghost women. They were truly the buffaloes' grandmothers. They wished to keep the hunters from shooting their grandchildren, therefore they chased them swiftly out of that country. They caused a cloud to cover their grandchildren, so that the buffaloes disappeared. My grandfather did not see them again. That winter the Oglalas suffered greatly for lack of meat."

"Truly those people are very mysterious," murmured Zintkala.

She felt no little relief, however, in the assurance that the buffalo women only desired to protect their grandchildren, and were not likely to chase and devour two small Dakotas.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE BUFFALOES—A VOYAGE BY BULL BOAT

The trail of the Oglalas led through a land of plenty. Elk, deer and antelope were seen in large numbers every day. Of marmots, bush rabbits and sage hens there was never lack in the warm seasons. On this trail the little voyagers were never in want of meat.

After leaving the flat valley they crossed a high rough country and came to a stream which ran beside a low range of mountains. Among the coulées of the foot hills they now found plums ripening in great abundance. Here for a number of days—probably during the last weeks of August—they lingered, feasting continuously. It now appeared that, as the buffalo killing season had approached, the Oglalas would, if indeed they were coming back that way, soon return upon their trail. If they were to return by some other route it would be impossible for people on foot to overtake them.

The voyagers did not reason this out together, but it was the unspoken thought in their minds. To tell the truth each was fearful of further advance into an unknown country upon an aging trail. So they spoke together quite often about the return of their people, saying that they must

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look for them to appear during the next moon. A cold rain fell for several days, and drove them to the rock covert of a coulée. In this coulée, after the rains, they discovered a lair of the big yellow cats; and as these great flesh eaters were very mysterious in their actions the wandering ones moved on again, going slowly down the stream. The now dim trail of the Oglalas led directly along this river, but so it had followed two streams before and the distances between camps showed that the tribe had abated nothing of its hurry to go to some far country.

Thus the voyagers loitered aimlessly. Their only cheer was found in the abundance by which they were surrounded. The numerous plum thickets of the river ravines were red with luscious fruit. The young of the sage grouse were so numerous and so tame that one could, at any time, kill a number by knocking them over with sticks. The cow-men have dubbed these unsuspecting and apparently witless birds "fool hens." When quickly dressed, after killing, the meat of the young is excellent.

In spite of disappointments and desperate uncertainty the little voyagers grew plump and vigorous upon their diet of fruit and birds. Yet, as the days wore on, they became surfeited with eating and the home hunger again gripped their hearts. They feared to go back to the Smoky River even more than they dreaded to

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go forward. The dim Oglala trail still lay along the river's course.

"Wan, older sister," said Etapa, one morning, "we must now go quickly on to find the Oglalas. Because of the war it appears that they have gone, and they will stay all winter at that place where they have arrived. They have surely gone far down this river."

Zintkala had been thinking of this also, and she acceded with energy to the proposal to go on with more speed.

"It appears that we have indeed stayed too long at this place," she said.

All that day they traveled with expedition upon the old trail. During the next forenoon they passed beyond the low range of mountains and suddenly found themselves among the buffaloes. The trail had led for some time through a narrow pass of the river valley and, at a sharp turn, the travelers were startled by a mob of huge brown cattle which lunged down the steep slope of a near bluff.

"The buffaloes! The buffaloes!" they shouted joyously. "Now we shall surely find the Oglalas!"

Some big bulls ran off the hill directly toward them. As these lunged downward they bellowed and kicked up a great dust. They were evidently young bulls having a frolic. But they were leaders, and a whole herd plunged after them, roar-

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ing and leaping amid clouds of dirt. They acted so crazily that the voyagers became alarmed. They sped swiftly across the river—drenching themselves thoroughly—and ran out upon the highlands beyond. Fortunately the buffaloes checked their mad stampede and filled the channel of the stream, jumping against and over each other, to get into the water. The animals drank eagerly of a current thick with the mud of their trampling.

A little way out upon the highland stood a sharp knob or butte of red earth. The voyagers ran swiftly and climbed this high hill. Upon its cap they stood and whooped and exclaimed in joyous wonder. They had seen many bison but never such herds as now greeted their eyes. The buffaloes were mostly at that moment to west and north. Over a great stretch of rough plain—as far as the eye could reach—their masses extended. Brown patches upon the hills and hill sides, dark moving lines on the prairies, thin veils of dust hanging upon the far horizon, told of bison, in countless herds, moving into the river country. It appeared indeed that all the tribes of buffaloes must have agreed to meet at this river.

“Wan ho, I think that all the Indians will have to come to this river to hunt the buffaloes,” shouted Etapa. “Therefore there will be much fighting unless they make a peace.”

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“They will not wish to fight,” said Zintkala, with conviction. “They will wish to take much meat and many robes for the tepées. I think now, younger brother, that we may travel safely to find the Oglalas. I do not think that any Indian hunters will pay attention.”

This seemed so reasonable, when one came to think of it, that Etapa whooped with elation.

“Whi, Tanké!” he cried, “they will see nothing but these buffaloes. I also will shoot some of those very large bulls. It is so. If any come up here I will make big holes in their skins. I will make holes thus large!”

And with the ends of thumb and forefinger touching he showed the sister what perforations the great bulls might expect. He flourished his buffalo gun and pranced about excitedly, pointing the weapon at one or another of the nearer herds. For the time they quite forgot that the trampling of such numbers must blot out the trail of the Oglalas. Indeed it would seem that no one could have thought of anything but the vast panorama of animal life.

The armies of Xerxes were doubtless of insignificant numbers as compared to the far-reaching multitudes which spread upon the plains under the eyes of these wandering children. From the top of the red butte they could command a vast scope of rough lands and everywhere soon,

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except to southward, were to be seen the mighty increasing throngs of the bison.

"All the buffaloes are coming!" shouted Etapa.
"All the buffaloes are coming!" repeated Zintkala.

Upon their height the wet and ragged waifs, unheeding the packs upon their shoulders, stood for hours, with eyes and ears for nothing but the march of innumerable herds. Like a vast tidal wave the throngs of brown humps spread until only a narrow strip of unoccupied country lay, in a fading gray belt, to southward. Still the herds came on from north and west in undiminished numbers. They filled the valley of the stream, plunged down its steeps in roaring, bawling mobs and converted the river's current to a flow of mud in which thousands wallowed in huge enjoyment.

The Sioux children were filled with strange and thrilling emotions. Their faces were as the faces of those who stand above armies. They were no longer alone. The world was suddenly peopled with such mighty and crowding hosts as no hunter's tale had enabled them to imagine.

"All the buffaloes are coming," they repeated again and again. A breeze which had been blowing abated, and a fine dust arose, veiled the sky and hung upon the horizon. Into this haze the sun descended and became a vast ball of blood red fire.

The voyagers, at last tired of standing, sat

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upon the butte. The buffaloes did not attempt to climb the steep cap of its knob, but nowhere else in all the world—save upon such high points—did there seem room for two biped travelers. It became apparent as they watched the approaching multitudes, that the two must spend their night upon the butte. Presently the pangs of hunger and thirst began to be felt and, as the red sun was about to go under the earth, Zintkala spoke.

"Younger brother," she said, "I think you should now go down and fetch some water and some sticks. I have two birds in my *parflêche*. See, there are not now many buffaloes at that place," and she pointed to a turn of the river below.

"Ho, I will do as you have said, for I indeed can shoot with this gun," said the boy. He felt timid about descending the butte, but wished to appear brave, therefore he seized Zintkala's basin and his gun and ran, going in careful leaps on account of the cactus, down to the river. A band of buffaloes which had stopped to graze ran away as he approached and, thus encouraged, the boy lingered to dip the clearer water and to gather a good bundle of dry fagots. He returned in buoyant spirits and assured his sister that all the buffaloes were very much afraid of a hunter, and especially of one who carried a buffalo gun.

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So upon the red butte, which glowed in a ruby sunset like a huge and dying ember, and in the midst of marching hosts, the voyagers made a tiny blaze of willow sticks and ate much meat. As long as the light lasted, however, their eyes were but little turned from the throngs of buffalo people. As they ate and gazed, Zintkala was struck with an alarming thought.

"Younger brother," she asked with anxiety, "may it not be that those buffalo women are driving their people far, far away from the Oglalas?"

"Yuh-huh, Tanké!" cried the lad in amazement, "those old women cannot drive their grandchildren off until they have made a cloud to lie on the earth. My grandfather said thus."

The round face of the girl lost its anxious curves and she finished her meal in content. She was very sure that the Oglalas would be found in this buffalo country.

As darkness came on the voyagers, wrapped in their blankets, fell asleep to the roar and murmur of trampling herds.

In the morning there were many buffaloes grazing upon the plains and hill slopes as far up and down the river as the eye could reach, but the vast armies of the day before were scattered, leaving again the calm and peaceful plains.

The voyagers rejoiced greatly for, they said, "Now indeed, if the Oglalas are not already upon

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this river, they will come to hunt the buffaloes—so we shall surely find them."

They ate a hurried breakfast and, at sunrise, again followed the river to northward. They did not try to keep to the Oglala trail, for the rains and the armies of buffaloes had nearly everywhere obliterated all trace of it. They kept rather to the winding river's course, looking at every turn to see the tepées of their people or to meet with Oglala hunters out in chase of the bison. They ran—where they had not to avoid cactus—much of the time, shouting now and then to frighten off big bulls which grazed in their front. Sometimes the old leaders of a band were saucy and would stand, with shaggy fronts reared, pawing up dust and snorting defiance at the small bipeds, and then these would dodge behind the river's bank, wade the stream and follow on upon the other side.

Once they came upon two bulls circling about each other, each roaring a challenge. They stopped to watch and presently these angry ones came together with a mighty bump and their horns clicked like the rattle of bones at a medicine dance. With swollen muscles and shrunken flanks they heaved and tugged, ripping the sod with their hoofs. Then, in sheer impatience at useless expense of energy, they parted and again sparred for advantage. Again they bounced together and their horns cracked and they

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weaved to and fro in frantic buckings. One, the heavier, seemed now to gain an advantage, and pushed his antagonist slowly backward, but, when the latter broke away suddenly, he did not chase him.

Again the combatants circled and the weightier bull roared and threatened quite as though assured of victory. His confidence was vain. As he pawed and bawled he exposed an incautious flank and, like a stroke of lightning, the lithe antagonist caught him amidribs. He was bowled over by the shock and, in a twinkling, his entrails were ripped from his body and wound upon the victor's horns.

The Sioux children looked upon this bull as a great brave—an expert and valiant fighter—and they would gladly have addressed him paying their compliments, but prudence forbade and they dropped behind the river's bank and passed on out of sight.

Now and then the voyagers climbed a solitary height to take observations and everywhere they saw the bunches of brown cattle, but no sign of human presence. Toward noon the herds began to come to the river for water, and the children several times ran narrow races before bands stampeding off the bluffs. The buffaloes seemed possessed of a craze to leap, roaring and bouncing, off the river hills.

At something after midday the voyagers

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stopped to cook some young sage grouse, for they were ravenously hungry after so much running. They made their noon camp upon a high bank, where there were plenty of dry willows. They had nearly finished eating when they heard the muffled thunder of hoofs which told of another stampede.

They leaped to their feet to see presently a wide front of heaving humps forge, in a cloud of dust, over the hills to westward. Like an avalanche this mass of animals rolled over and down upon the river flats. They were running as such great herds run when the hunters are upon their heels and not as creatures at play.

The voyagers looked wildly about them for some place of refuge. There were some trees down the river, but these were too far away. The buffaloes were almost upon them and, in sheer affright, they seized their belongings, ran into the river and took refuge under an overhanging bank, fringed with willows.

Almost instantly the thundering rout rolled over their heads. Buffaloes, plunging after and upon each other, rained into the river's channel throwing water and mud upon the hidiers, who were half-choked in the dust which fell. The edges of the bank above their heads caved and huge chunks of earth fell upon them. They cowered in this ruck and confusion, hiding their faces against the bank.

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Doubtless the network of willow roots above their heads alone saved them from destruction, and the blind heaving mass passed over and around, leaving them uninjured.

They were muddy, bedraggled and sorry looking waifs who emerged from the debris of the caving bank. But their half-blinded eyes fell upon creatures in yet more piteous plight. A number of buffaloes had been trampled to death in the stream, and still others, mortally injured, struggled to keep their noses above water. One large bull, with a broken shoulder, was trying to leap upon the low bank opposite. He gave it up presently and stood sullenly upon a dry bar with horns pushed into the earth in his front.

It seemed that the hunters must have been after these buffaloes, but the voyagers neither heard nor saw any horsemen, therefore presently they went above where the stampede had passed and washed their clothes and bodies clear of mud. The gun of Iron Soldier had been wetted, but Etapa wiped it dry with the inner folds of his blanket and put a fresh cap upon the tube.

Hitherto they had scarcely spoken, but had taken account of the dead and living buffaloes, and performed their ablutions in a dazed and mechanical fashion. But now the boy awoke to animation.

"Hoye, Tanké," he said, "there is much meat in

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the river, but we can not easily get it. I will now shoot that big bull. I do not think any Indians are at this river now."

"Nakaes! younger brother, do so quickly," cried the girl. "Shoot tatanka so that he bleeds, for then the meat is best. It appears at any rate," she added, "that we must camp at this place to rub our clothes. I will also cook much good meat."

Approaching the bull carefully the lad gave it a shot behind the shoulders and ran away. The animal fell upon the bar and struggled, bleeding freely.

While the pair stood upon the bank waiting for the bull to die, two magpies alighted upon some willows near at hand and talked very strangely. These birds appeared to be speaking to them, Zintkala and Etapa, and the young Sioux watched and listened intently while these noisy ones flitted from willow to sage bush and from bush to bank and so passed clear around where they stood.

After the strange birds had done this, both alighted upon the bull, which had ceased to breathe. Sitting upon the dead buffalo they again called to the boy and girl and acted very mysteriously. Then, while the two looked and listened wonderingly, the magpies flew away down the stream.

These birds were known to be friendly toward

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all Dakotas. They often conveyed mysterious information to hunters and to people on the trail and, as the pair disappeared, a light broke in upon Zintkala's puzzled brain.

"Wan, younger brother," she cried joyously, "these birds have indeed told us to make a bull boat of this bull's skin and the willows and to go thus to find the Oglalas!"

"It is so! It is so!" shouted the lad, dancing with excitement. "Now we shall surely arrive at that place where they are, very quickly. I indeed know how to make these bull boats."

Instantly the two were alive with energy. They attacked the carcass of the bull with their knives which they had kept sharpened by whetting often upon pieces of sandstone.

Etapá, though less expert than his sister, gave directions, and cautioned frequently, "Do not cut the skin, Tanké; it is to make a bull boat."

They had flayed one whole side of the carcass before the necessity and the difficulty of moving its huge weight occurred to them. By good luck, however, the bull had fallen at a point where its back rested upon an incline of the bar, and, by a fierce tug at the feet with the legs for leverage, they were able to roll it more than half way over, and so to take the immense pelt whole. As they succeeded finally without making a cut in the body of the skin they were filled with elation.

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They now made a fire and ate broiled steak and sweet back fat until their stomachs were well rounded. For more than a year they had not tasted buffalo meat, and it was good—good.

For two days they camped, feasting, dressing the buffalo's skin and making a frame-work of stout willows for their bull boat. On the third morning their tub-like craft was launched.

Recent rains upon the mountains had swollen the stream until its mid current ran waist deep and they were easily able to keep afloat save, here and there, where they were obliged to wade over rapid shallows. A light pole served in place of a paddle and they were able to make as good, and much less tiresome, progress than by following the river's windings as they had done afoot.

For five suns they voyaged without much adventure, making perhaps one hundred miles as the crow flies. The buffaloes were plentiful, but not so numerous as they had been. Now and then these animals, coyotes, and other four-foots appeared upon the river's bank and scurried away at their approach. Once they caught mato osansan at his bathing. The grizzly reared its great hulk and floundered in affright, scrambling up the nearest bank, but turned about to look down upon the strange craft whirling by.

Still they had but once seen—at an old river camp—signs of the Oglalas, although they had

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frequently climbed the river's banks to look. Several times, however, the magpies had talked to them and flown on down the stream. The birds thus evidently beckoned them on to find the Oglalas.

The face of the country had changed, and the voyagers found themselves in a strange land, a country of tall buttes and gaping cañons, of wonderful high rocks of many colors, of colossal formations which appeared to be immense tepées of earth and stone. The stream had increased in volume but, with a courage not less than sublime, they steered their bull boat over rapids and into the dark forbidding shadows of the cañons.

CHAPTER XXX

A PARADE FIGHT

Fire Cloud's village of Oglalas together with several bands of Yanktonais and Brulés had gathered in a semi-military encampment in the Bad Lands. Hither they had come because of the war cloud which had gathered over all the land. Their soldiers had not fled to this country from fear, but to gain a stronghold for their women and children, and where they might fight to advantage should the armies of the blue coat come against them.

Too well they knew that a Sioux was a Sioux to be killed or captured without discrimination when the Great Father sent his angry soldiers into their country, and that to be captured was to suffer—worse than death—disease and slow starvation. And here was much good fighting ground; here were many cunning hiding places and covered lines of escape.

Being a large company of many hundreds, the Sioux did not seek to hide their village nor to pitch their tepées within natural defences. They depended rather upon their scouts to inform of the approach of enemies, and held themselves in readiness to fortify or to break camp and scatter upon short notice should necessity demand. So they were camped along the