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## TWO WILDERNESS VOYAGERS

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as they ran like fleeing dogs. They knew that in all those watching throngs no hand would be raised to help or hinder. Their fighting blood prevailed and they wheeled apart to meet the attack.

"Come on, dog of a Sioux!" they shouted, affixing their shields to protect their bodies from his arrows.

The flying rider passed his glad children without so much as a glance at them. He reined his horse at fifty paces from the enemy and loomed large in the saddle, painted, gaily bedecked, cool of manner and keen of eye, but carried only a war-club slung at his wrist. He had not even a bull's hide shield to protect his half-naked body!

"Ho, Kangi! My cousins, who it seems are enemies, since you wished to kill my children, who have arrived; I, their father, am here." He spoke calmly but with deep fire of excitement in his eyes.

The Crows looked at each other and laughed. They understood that this man had heard the cry of his lost children, had discovered them pursued, and had leaped his horse without waiting to arm himself; that all the others had seen him come forth and supposed the man wished merely to adventure his body in battle. Very well, they would count coup upon his body and kill his dodgers also if these should stay to wit-

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ness his death. They began to circle rapidly around him, no longer afraid.

The chief sat his horse, making no move at first, but as the Crows drew nearer, suddenly began to whirl his war-club. The stone head of the weapon swung about his body so that he seemed encircled by an unbroken ring.

The wheeling riders charged him, one from either side, thrusting at him with lances. Both their weapons were flung aside by his whirling club, and the chief executed a swift demi-volt and again impassively faced them. From the crowds of onlookers shouts of approval greeted his successful maneuver.

Out on the prairie a little way Zintkala stood, with clinched hands, panting from exertion, her eyes fixed with mingled longing, love and terror, upon the figure of that bold Sioux chief. And, squatted cross-legged upon the ground, Etapa, without a ramrod, worked frantically trying to fit a bullet to his buffalo gun.

The two Crows again circled, wheeling like birds of prey about the Oglala, and again charged him from opposite sides. The encounter was sharp and fierce; the Sioux's war-club seemed to play on all hands at once. Out of this encounter the big Crow emerged with a broken lance, but the smaller, with a yell of triumph, carried away, strung upon his spear, the Sioux chief's gorgeous war-bonnet.



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Yet the Oglala soldier faced his enemies a second time unscathed, and the prairie was shaken by the vast shrill chorus which greeted his exploit.

As the Crows again wheeled into position for attack the larger, who had exchanged his broken spear for the tomahawk, yelled a sharp note of warning to his fellow.

The smaller turned his pony in a sharp circle to see the boy he had so lately chased rush at him with a leveled gun. There was no moment to spare—to retreat was not to be thought of, and with a wild yell he lowered his shield and charged.

When the horse was almost upon him, aiming at the center of that shield, Etopa fired. As when he had shot at the bear, his gun exploded with a mighty roar, and knocked him backward off his feet. The Crow's lance, hurled downward, struck deep into the ground where he had stood. But this Indian did not stop to fight further. His shield fell to the ground, an arm dangled at his side, and he galloped away to his fellows, only bearing the war-bonnet, which had fallen across his saddle pommel.

This time the kicking buffalo gun had saved Etopa, and very likely the chief and the girl. The boy leaped to his feet, seized the fallen shield and wrenched the lance from its hold.

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"I have taken war weapons of the enemy!" he shouted in a shrill exultant treble, which reached to all the crowds of horsemen; and these greeted his success with cloud-touching yells.

For the first time the Dakota father turned to one of his children.

"How—how—my son!" he said, and instantly rode to attack the big Crow, who now waited his turn.

Fire Cloud rushed his pony at this man without regard to tactics, and they came together in a duel, such as delighted the souls of a thousand wild riders.

The two wheeled rapidly about each other, striking, dodging, turning demi-volts. The Crow warrior had an advantage in his tough bull's hide shield, and again and again turned aside swift and dextrous strokes which would have maimed himself or horse.

As he wheeled about, this soldier saw that the chief's son was not reloading his gun, and so took heart and fought manfully; while the voyagers shouted to their father that now indeed he should overcome the enemy. Their faith was justified. Suddenly as Fire Cloud charged, hurling his horse against that of the big soldier, the Crow's tomahawk flew from his hand, and his shield was crushed by a swinging stroke, which flung him out of the saddle and measured his length upon the ground.



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The Sioux chief leaped from his horse and set his foot upon the helpless enemy.

"Ho, Kangi!" he cried. "Now, indeed, I might easily count a coup upon your body and give your flesh to the dogs, but I will not do so! My children have arrived. My heart is glad, and I wish to kill no one."

The bruised and astonished Crow struggled to his feet and stared unbelievably at the victor.

"Hoh!" he exclaimed, "hoh—hoh!"

The Sioux stepped back. "Yonder is your horse, Kangi," he said, "now go."

The man's pony had stopped to graze quite as though fighting were a daily incident. The Crow walked slowly to the animal and mounted. He rode away, shaking his head and muttering.

"Hoh—hoh—hoh!" he said. He could not understand.

Fire Cloud's children now stood together. They would not approach their father until he bade them. But their faces shone with such joy as those may feel who look upon angels.

The victor looked after the retreating Crow, and intently toward the hosts of astonished horsemen for a moment—for the air was rent with shouts of surprise, of anger, of approval. Then apparently satisfied that no one would advance to molest, he mounted his animal and turned to his children.

"My son—my daughter!" he said, and he

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stooped and swung the boy with his war weapons up in front, and lifted the girl to a seat behind his saddle.

"My children," he spoke again, "you have come a long way?"

And into his glad ears the voyagers began to clamor, "Até, the Hohé took us!" cried Zintkala.

"We escaped from the Ojibwas!" shouted Etapa.

"We ran a very long way in the woods——"

"The Ojibwas chased us——"

"We were in a swamp!"

"The eagles brought fish!"

"We escaped——"

"Brother was very sick——"

"Han—han—han!" said the chief.

"We stole many ponies from the Hohé!"

"Han—han!"

"I indeed struck a Scili! I also struck mato-sapa!" the boy raised his voice to a shout.

"How—how, my son—my daughter—my children!"

To their bewildering cross-fire of adventures the glad father could only answer by exclamations.

He rode slowly with his double burden, past the squads of wondering Sioux, but none came forward to question, though many must have shrewdly guessed the truth about these slim young strangers, little as they seemed to



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resemble the small boy and girl their chief had lost.

When nearly half way to the Sioux town, Fire Cloud set his children's feet upon the earth.

"Long enough there has been mourning in your mother's tepée," he said. "Run ye hither quickly." And he turned and rode back to his soldiers.

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At the Sioux village many women, old men and young people were gathered about the willow railings which surrounded their town. Others sat in groups out upon the prairie at a little distance. Many of these were women who had sat cross-legged and immovable for hours, and despite the heat, with blankets close drawn about their heads. Among these were anxious mothers, wives and sweethearts, and a number had already lifted their voices in wailing. They had been glad when the fighting ceased. As the afternoon wore on and no more runners arrived it was said among these groups that now it was evident, of a truth, that the Crows and Mountain Indians were afraid of their soldiers.

"Ho, ho," they said, "our warriors have indeed defeated those wicked Kangi!"

Presently, however, they heard a great shouting which seemed to indicate that some exciting move was on foot among the armies. But away off there on the prairie all the groups of

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horsemen appeared as blurred patches with no movement of an intelligible nature. The shouting arose several times like the swell of shrill far-away music, then all appeared to be quiet again.

At length a young man, standing upon a high cedar post and acting as crier for the home groups, shouted in a loud voice that a runner was coming—a large man upon a white horse. There had been no message since a large number of young men had returned to the soldiers, bearing loads of dried meat.

There was a hush of expectancy—the people patiently waited. Presently the young man cried again that three persons had ridden the white horse, that one was going back with the pony and the other two coming on foot. These two were running very rapidly. In a little time all who craned their necks above their fellows' heads could see two slim figures leaping toward them.

"These are strange soldiers!" shouted the lad upon the post. "One has a gun and the other a lance and shield."

The runners came nearer. They appeared to be running with marvelous speed, and eagerly, with tangles of matted hair flying, their thin bare legs skimming the ground with rabbit-like ease.

"Hoh!" shouted the crier presently, "these two are very young. One is indeed a girl!"

There were exclamations of incredulity. As the strangers drew nearer they seemed to



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belong to black people. They were certainly very dark—they were also illy clothed. Suddenly the voices of these two loping ones were raised in shrill, joyous notes.

"Ina! Ina! we are coming—Zintkala—Etapá—your son—your daughter!"

There was a moment of dead silence then a chorus of exclamations, which expressed the single emotion of amazement.

Then there fell upon the ears of all a wild yearning cry—a mother's cry—and a woman rose from one of the outer groups. Her blanket dropped from her shoulders and she staggered for a moment, clasping a hand to her forehead. Then she ran, though unsteadily, toward the fleet newcomers, and two wee girls, with arms and hair flying, sped at her heels.

The voyagers dropped their weapons and came on more swiftly.

"Ina! Ina! Ina!"

They leaped, panting like blown hares, into the mother's arms. The woman strained them to her bosom. She lifted her face and cried, "My children!—my children!" She could say nothing more.

Two little sloe-eyed girls flung themselves upon the voyagers' bare legs and clamored piteously for attention, shouting that now indeed they knew that tanké and sunkaku had come back to them.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE WARRIOR FATHER'S APPEAL

The Oglalas among the Sioux had reached a conclusion. They had seen Fire Cloud go homeward with the rescued children, having spared a man who had tried to kill them—his own children doubtless—and they knew that their chief soldier's heart had become very soft. They feared even that some evil spirit, suddenly in the moment of victory, had made him witko.

Yet they held themselves in readiness to fight so soon as the Crows and Mountain Indians should make a move in their direction.

While the head soldiers were consulting together, Fire Cloud wheeled his horse and came swiftly back to them. A group gathered about him.

"My children have arrived," he said simply. He removed the war-club from his wrist and tendered it to one nearest. The man took it and others looked on wondering.

"I wish to talk to these Kangi and Mountain Crows," he said. "How, how, speak to them," said some of the older warriors, well pleased.

Immediately Fire Cloud rode toward the enemy, who were moving about in a restless fashion. The chief approached half way, and