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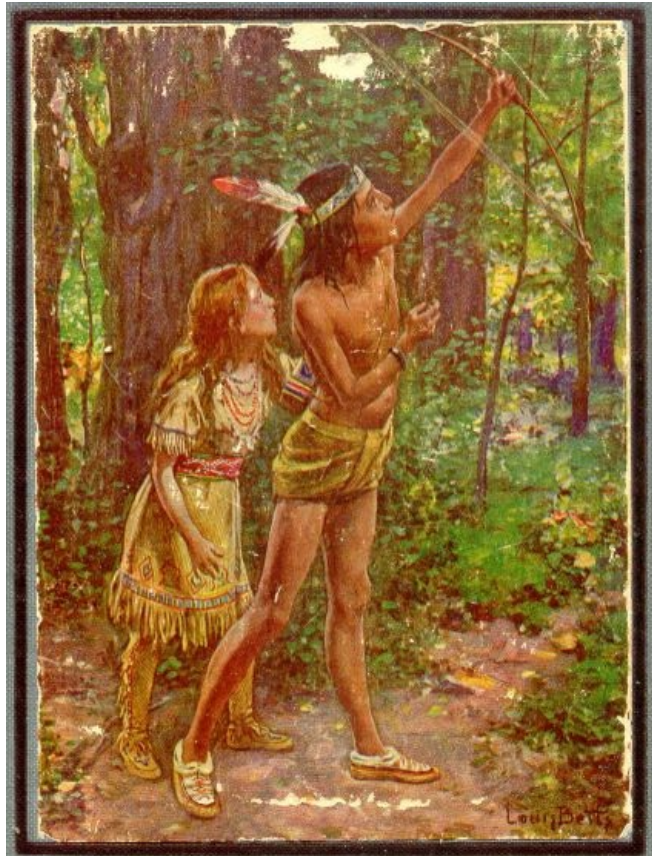
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[Illustration: Cover Art]



[Frontispiece: Buffalo Rib was a Handsome Youth.]

TIMID HARE

THE LITTLE CAPTIVE

by

MARY H. WADE

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ILLUSTRATED BY

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TIMID HARE

CAPTURED

Swift Fawn sat motionless on the river-bank.

"Lap, lap," sang the tiny waves as they struck the shore. "Lap, lap," they kept repeating, but the little girl did not heed the soft music. Her mind was too busy with the story White Mink had told her that morning.

After the men had started off on a buffalo hunt Swift Fawn had left the other children to their games in the village and stolen away to the favorite bathing place of the women-folk.

"No one will disturb me there," she had said to herself, "and I want to be all by myself to think it over."

After she had been there for sometime. Swift Fawn drew out from the folds of her deerskin jacket a baby's sock, and turned it over and over in her hands curiously. Never had she seen the like of it before. How pretty it was! Who could have had the skill to weave the threads of scarlet silk in and out of the soft wool in such a dainty pattern? Was it--the child whispered the word--could it have been her mother?

White Mink had always been so good to her, Surely no real mother could have been more loving than the Indian woman who had watched over her and tended her, and taught her from the time when Three Bears had brought her, a year-old baby, to his wife. Where he found the little one, he had never told.

And so she was a white child. How strange it was! Yet she had grown up into a big girl, loving the ways of the red people more and more deeply for eight happy years.

"Surely," thought the child, "I could not have loved my own parents more than I do White Mink and Three Bears."

"I wish--oh, so hard!" she added with a lump in her throat, "that White Mink had not told me. I don't want to remember there ever was--something different."

With these last words Swift Fawn lifted the little sock and was about to hurl it into the water, when she suddenly stopped as she remembered White Mink's last words.

"I give this shoe into your keeping," the woman had said solemnly. "I have spoken because of my dream last night, and because of its warning I bid you keep the shoe always."

With a little sigh, Swift Fawn drew back from the edge of the stream and replaced the shoe in the bosom of her jacket. Then she stretched herself out on the grassy bank and lay looking up into the blue sky overhead. How beautiful it was! How gracefully the clouds floated by! One took on the shape of a buffalo with big horns and head bent down as if to charge. But it was so far away and dreamlike it was not fearful to the child. And now it changed; the horns disappeared; the body became smaller, and folded wings appeared at the sides; it was now, in Swift Fawn's thoughts, a graceful swan sailing, onward, onward, in the sky-world overhead.

The little girl's eyes winked and blinked and at last closed tightly. She had left the prairie behind her and entered the Land of Nod.

She must have slept a long time, for when she awoke the sun had set, and in the gathering darkness, she was aware of a man's face with fierce dark eyes bent over her own.

"Ugh! Ugh!" the man was muttering. "It is a daughter of the Mandans. A good prize!"

As he spoke he rose to his feet and Swift Fawn, shaking with fear, knew that he was beckoning to others to draw near. A moment afterwards she was surrounded by a party of warriors. They were taller than the men of her own tribe, and were straight and noble in shape, but their faces were very stern.

"They must belong to the 'Dahcotas,'" thought the child. "And they are our enemies."

Many a tale had Swift Fawn heard of the fierce Dahcotas, lovers of war and greatly to be feared. It was a terrible thought that she was alone and in their power, with the night coming on.

"Ugh! What shall we do with her?" the brave who had discovered her said to the others.

"She is fair to look upon," replied one.

"But she is a Mandan," was the quick answer of another. As he spoke he looked proudly at the scalp lock hanging from his shoulder, for he and his companions had just been out on the war path.

"Let our Chief decide," said the first speaker. "It is best that Bent Horn should settle the question."

"Ugh! Ugh!" grunted the others, not quite pleased at the idea. However, they said nothing more, and turned away, moving softly with their moccasined feet to the place where their horses were restlessly waiting to go on with the journey.

Swift Fawn's captor now seized her hand, saying gruffly, "Get up."

Dragging her to his horse's side, he lifted her up, bound her to the animal's back, leaped up after her and a moment afterwards the whole party were galloping faster and faster into the night.

Hour after hour they traveled with never a stop. At last, by the light of the stars. Swift Fawn knew that she was nearing a large camp, made up of many tent-homes.

BEFORE THE CHIEF

As the party entered the camp the dogs came out to meet them, barking in delight at their masters' return. Swift Fawn's captor rode up with her to the largest of the tents, or tepees as the Dahcotas called them. Springing from his horse, he unbound the little girl, and again seizing her hand, drew the scared child into the lodge.

A bright fire was blazing in the fireplace, for the night was cold.

Beside it squatted a noble-looking brave, wrapped in a bear-skin robe, and with eagles' feathers waving from the top of his head. Chains of wampum hung around his neck and his face was painted in long, bright lines.

Not far from him sat a beautiful and richly-dressed young girl, his daughter. She looked kindly at Swift Fawn as if to say: "Do not fear, little girl."

"Behold, a child of the Mandans. I give her into your hands, great Chief," said Swift Fawn's captor to the brave by the fireside.

Bent Horn seemed in no hurry to speak, as he looked keenly at the child who could not lift her eyes for fear.

"Is the girl of the weak Mandans to live, or to be a slave among our people?" asked the warrior.

Bent Horn was about to answer, as his daughter broke in: "Father, let her live. I wish it."

The Chief turned toward the young girl with love in his eyes. He smiled as he said, "Sweet Grass shall have her wish."

His face became stern, however, as he added: "That shrinking creature must be trained. Give her into the keeping of The Stone, and let this girl henceforth be known as Timid Hare."

As Bent Horn spoke he motioned to Swift Fawn's captor to take her away, and the man at once led her out of the lodge and through the camp to a small tepee on the outskirts, where the old woman, The Stone, lived with her deformed son, Black Bull.

THE NEW HOME

Drawing aside the heavy buffalo-skin curtain which covered the doorway, the man shoved his little captive inside and followed close behind her.

"Ugh, Timid Hare," he said scornfully. "This is your new home. Does it please you?"

The child shuddered without answering, as she mustered courage to look about her. The fire on the hearth in the middle of the tepee was smouldering. With the help of its dim light the little girl could see piles of dirty buffalo robes on either side; the walls of the tent, also made of buffalo skins, were blackened by smoke. Long shadows stretching across the floor, seemed to take on fearful shapes in the child's fancy as the low fire, now and then, gave a sudden leap upward. Furthermore, the tepee was empty,--no face looked out from any corner; no voice spoke to the new-comers.

"Ugh!" The man shrugged his shoulders as he grunted in displeasure. He was in haste to get to his own lodge where a supper of bear steak was no doubt awaiting him.

"Where can The Stone be that she is not here, now that darkness covers the earth?" he muttered. "And the crooked boy away too!"

The sentence was barely ended when the sound of quick, soft footsteps could be heard outside. The Stone and her son, Black Bull, were hurrying home. They had been gone all day, having gone to a clay pit miles away from the village to get a certain clay for making red dye with

which The Stone wished to color some reeds for basket weaving. Night had taken them by surprise, and wolves howling in the distance made them travel as fast as the poor deformed youth could go.



[Illustration: The Stone and her son Black Bull were hurrying home.]

The Stone was the first of the two to enter the lodge. She was bent and wrinkled, and her cunning, cruel eyes opened wide with surprise as she saw her visitors.

"Ugh! what does this mean?" she asked sharply, as she looked from the brave to the cowering child still held in his strong grip. "Are you bringing a daughter of the pale-faces into my keeping?" She ended with a wicked laugh.

"Not much better--it is a child of the Mandans who fell into my hands. Better to kill her at once--a goodly scalp that!" With the words the man pointed to his captive's long and beautiful hair.

He continued: "But Bent Horn says, No. Let The Stone take her into her keeping. So it is then--Timid Hare, shall draw water for you and wait upon you and your son."

Black Bull, who had followed close upon his mother, stood staring at the captive with wild eyes. The poor fellow was small-witted, as well as deformed. He was eighteen years old, yet he had no more understanding than a small child. His face was not cruel like his mother's, however. His eyes were sad and spoke of a longing for something--but what that something was even Black Bull himself did not understand.

As the little girl looked at him a tiny hope leaped up in her heart. "He will not be unkind to me, at any rate," she decided. "And I am sorry for him that he has such a mother."

Following close upon this thought came another. It was of White Mink--dear, kind White Mink who was perhaps at this very moment weeping over the loss of her little Swift Fawn.

"But there is no Swift Fawn--she is dead, dead, dead. There is now only Timid Hare, the slave of a wicked woman."--The child shuddered at the thought. She came to herself to hear The Stone saying,

"Leave her to me and I will train her in the good ways of the Dahcotas." The man smiled grimly and went his way, and the woman turning to her charge said: "Come, don't stand there cowering and useless. Busy yourself. Pile wood upon the fire and put water in that kettle. My son

and I are hungry and would eat, and the meat must yet be cooked."

With The Stone's words came a blow on Timid Hare's shoulder. It was the first one the child had ever felt, and though it did not strike hard upon the body, it fell with heavy weight upon her aching heart.

Stumbling about, she tried to do the old squaw's bidding, and the two soon had the supper ready. The Stone now served her son on his side of the fireplace, after which she herself began to eat her fill while Swift Fawn sat huddled in a dark corner, hungrily watching.

"Take that," the woman said as she finished her meal, and she threw a half-picked bone to the little girl. Then she got up, put away whatever food was left from the supper, and began to spread out some buffalo skins, first for her son's bed on his side of the tepee, then on her own side for herself to sleep on.

"You can lie where you are," she told Timid Hare, pointing to the pile of skins on which the child was crouching.

Soon afterwards The Stone and Black Bull were quietly sleeping, while the little captive, with tears rolling down her cheeks, lay thinking of the kind friends far away and of the dreadful things that might happen on the morrow. All at once she remembered the baby's sock hidden in her dress, and of White Mink's words. Perhaps--perhaps--the sock would help her. But how? She must guard it, at any rate; not even The Stone should discover it. Kind sleep was already drawing near. The tired eyes no longer shed tears. Till morning should come, Timid Hare was free from trouble.

HARD WORK

The sun, shining into the tepee through the opening over the fireplace, roused The Stone to her day's work. She lost no time in setting a task for her little slave. Handing her a needle carved from the bone of a deer and thread made of a deer's sinew, she had her sew up a rent in the skin curtain of the doorway.

Poor Timid Hare! she had learned to embroider and to weave baskets in the old home, but sewing on heavy skins had never yet fallen to her share of the daily duties. "There will be time enough," White Mink had thought, "when the little fingers have grown bigger and the tender back is stronger."

So now the hands were clumsy, and the stitches were not as even as they should be. The Stone watched her with a scowl and frequent scoldings; often an uplifted arm seemed ready to strike. But seeing that the child was trying to do her best, the expected beating did not come.

After she and Black Bull had eaten their own breakfast of bread made out of wild rice, together with some buffalo fat, she gave a small portion to Timid Hare. Then she and Black Bull went out of the lodge, leaving the little girl alone at her work.

How different--how very different--this home was from the one among the Mandans! The old one was so big and comfortable, and there was such a jolly household of parents and grandparents and uncles and aunts, and children of all ages gathered together under one roof. Then, too, the floor was so smooth and shiny, and the bedsteads, each one shut off by a curtain and made pretty with fringe and pictures, seemed almost like tiny sleeping rooms. Moreover, the banking of earth over the framework of the lodge kept out the chill winds and biting cold of winter.

But here, in The Stoned tepee, where the skin covering was old and torn, one must often suffer. At least so thought Timid Hare as she looked up now and then from her work to get acquainted with her new home.

"Besides, it is so small," she said to herself, "and only two people in the whole household before I came. How strange it is!"

It was quite true that the ways of the Dahcotas were unlike those of the Mandans. Each family lived by itself and thus the home did not need to be so large. Timid Hare did not know this, nor that the people, as a rule, lived in great comfort. They preferred tents, rather than houses like those of the Mandans, of frame-work covered with earth because they liked to move from place to place and they could thus carry their homes with them. Yet their tepees were warm and comfortable because the covering of strong, thick buffalo skins was generally double. Fires were kept burning on their hearths in winter and supplies of food and clothing were easy to obtain from the wild creatures of the woods and prairies. What more could any red people wish?

Timid Hare had heard her foster father tell much of the powerful Dahcotas and that they were rich, as Indians count riches.

"Why are they so powerful?" she now asked herself. "Ugh! it was because of their fierce war spirit. It was this that made them drive other tribes before them, so that they became free to roam over the prairies and enjoy the richest hunting grounds."

"I cannot help myself," now thought the child. "If I should run away, the braves would either find and kill me, or I should be devoured by the hungry wolves that go forth at nightfall."

But might not Three Bears make up a war party and go forth to seek her? "Alas! that may not be," Timid Hare told herself. "My dear father would himself meet death at the hands of these cruel warriors."

The rent in the curtain was nearly sewed up when Black Bull stole into the lodge. He wanted to talk to the little stranger with eyes sad like his own, and he did not wish his mother to know it.

Behind Black Bull came his dog, wolfish-looking like most of his breed, but as Black Bull squatted in his corner, the animal crouched close at his master's side as though he loved him.

"Poor fellow, he has a pet to follow him about just as I had at home," thought Timid Hare. "Perhaps by-and-by the dog may learn to love me too." There was a big lump in the little girl's throat, and she coughed as she tried to choke it back.

"Hard work," said Black Bull as he watched her pulling the coarse thread through the buffalo skin and trying not to tear it. "Hard work," he repeated. "Too bad."

Timid Hare nodded. "Good dog," she ventured after a while, looking at the dog with a sad little smile. "I had a dog; I loved him," she added.

"Very good dog. He is my friend," replied the youth. "He goes with me everywhere--everywhere. He makes me--not lonely. I call him Smoke."

Black Bull put his arm lovingly around Smoke's neck and the dog whined softly. It was the only way in which he could say, "I love you, poor master, if no one else does."

"My people are great people," Black Bull went on. "They are very strong." Timid Hare nodded. "The Dahcotas are brave above all men. Their bands are so many I could not count them." The very thought of counting a large number made the simple-minded youth look puzzled. "And they are tall and strong of body beyond the red men of all tribes."

Again Timid Hare nodded. But she also shuddered as she thought that she was in their power, a helpless captive. Then, as her eyes turned towards Black Bull, they filled with pity. Here was one of the Dahcotas, at least, who was not strong and tall and well-shaped. Nor would he do her harm, she felt sure.

Black Bull had turned to his lute which lay on the floor behind him and begun to play a low, sweet tune when The Stone entered the lodge. She looked sharply at Timid Hare, and then at the work which the little girl had just finished.

"Ugh! Ugh!" grunted the squaw. "You must learn to sew better than that, you little cringing coward. Ah, ha! I know something that may help you." The Stone cut the air with a switch that she held in her hand. "Something else may also help you to gain the spirit of a red woman. Of that, by-and-by. And now you shall fetch me fresh water from the spring. Black Bull, put yourself to some use. Show the girl where the water may be drawn."

Handing an earthen crock to Timid Hare, she turned to her own work--that of making dye out of the clay she had got the day before.

Timid Hare, holding the big crock as carefully as possible on her shoulder, followed Black Bull out of the tepee. It seemed good to be outdoors, even in a village of the Dahcotas. In the doorway of the next lodge stood a young woman with pleasant eyes and beautiful glossy hair. She looked curiously at the little girl, for she had just heard of her capture. She must have pitied the child, for she smiled kindly at her. Black Bull, catching the smile, said, "The Fountain, this is Timid Hare. Is she not strange to look upon--so fair? She must be like the pale-faces I have never seen."

The Fountain had no chance to answer, for Black Bull now turned to his companion. "Hurry, Timid Hare, hurry, lest my mother be angry and beat you."

As the two went on their way, the little girl saw other children like herself, playing together and laughing happily. One of them had her doll, and was carrying it in a baby-cradle on her back. She was pretending it was too small to walk, and was singing a lullaby to make it go to sleep.

All the children stopped to look at the little stranger.

"A Mandan! Oof!" cried one.

"Her hair is not black like ours," said another.

"Nor is her skin as dark. She is more like the pale-faces whom we hate," remarked a third.

Then they turned to their play as if she were not worth noticing, and poor little Timid Hare blushed for shame. It was hard indeed that even the children should despise her.

A little farther on she noticed a group of men dancing together in the sunlight. They were much taller than the Mandan braves, and noble to look upon, as Black Bull had said. But to the little girl holding in mind the capture of the day before, they seemed cruel and fearful even now while they were dancing.

"The Dahcotas dance much--always," explained Black Bull, pointing to the men. "We have many, many dances. For everything there is a dance. When we feast, and before we hunt, when councils are held, when guests come among us, we dance. It is a noble thing to dance. Sometimes," he went on, "it is to make us laugh. Sometimes it is to make our faces grow long--so!"

At this Black Bull's face took on a look of sadness as though he were grieving.

Timid Hare was used to the dances of the Mandans, and she loved them. But they were not so many as those of the Dahcotas, she felt sure. Why, the night before, whenever she wakened, she heard the sound of dancing in different lodges in the village.

"There is the spring. Now I go," said Black Bull, pointing it out half-hidden in a hollow shaded by clumps of bushes. The youth, with Smoke who had followed close at his heels ever since leaving the lodge, turned back and Timid Hare stooped down to fill the crock.

As she did so her eyes met a pair of large black ones fastened upon her own, and just above the water's edge. They belonged to the chief's only son Young Antelope, who had come for a drink of cool water before going off on a hunting trip. He was a handsome youth. As he lay stretched out on the grassy bank above the spring he had heard the sound of Timid Hare's steps as she drew near, and looked up to see who it was.

"Oof! the stranger," he said, but he did not scowl like the little girls whom the little captive had passed a few minutes before.

The next minute he had sprung to his pony's back and gone galloping away. Timid Hare thought sadly of the dear foster-brother far away on the wide prairie, as she trudged back with her load to the tepee where The Stone awaited her.

THE CHANGE

"Bad," scolded the squaw as she looked into the crock and saw that some of the water had been spilled on the way home.

She reached for her willow switch and used it twice on Timid Hare's back.

"I have a nice little task for you," she said. "Do you see this?" She pointed to a dish full of a dull red dye. "It is for you," she continued. "No more pale-faces about us now. You are to take this dye and paint yourself--every part of your body, mind you. Then, when you have used this on your hair--" she pointed to a smaller dish containing a black dye--"we may be able to make a Dahcota out of you after all."

"Waste no time," she commanded, as Timid Hare turned slowly to the dishes of dye. "I leave you now for a little while and when I come back--then I may like to look at you."

The Stone left the lodge and Timid Hare was left to change herself so that even White Mink would not know her. Trained as she had been in the ways of all Indians, her tears fell often as she covered her body with the paint. She dare not leave one spot untouched, nor one tress of the beautiful hair that had been White Mink's pride. When the work was at last finished, there was no mirror in which to look at herself.

Once--just once, during her eight years of life among the Mandans, she had seen a looking-glass. It was no larger than the palm of her small hand, and belonged to the chief into whose hands it had come from a white hunter years before. It was such a wonderful thing! Timid Hare thought of it now and wished that she might see the picture that it would of herself reflect.

"When I am next sent to the spring," she thought, "I will seek the quiet little pool where some of the water lingers. Then, if the clouds give a deep shadow, I can see the Timid Hare I now am."

"Good," muttered The Stone when she returned and examined her little slave. But when Black Bull noticed the change, he said nothing--only looked sad. Perhaps he felt that the little stranger had somehow lost herself.

THE VISIT

One day, soon after Timid Hare's coming, she was sent to the chief's tepee on an errand. The Stone and she had been gathering rushes for the chief's daughter Sweet Grass who wished them for a mat she was weaving. It was to be a surprise for her father; she meant it to be so beautiful that he would wish to sit on it at feasts when entertaining chiefs of other bands.

The Stone and Timid Hare had spent many hours searching for the most beautiful rushes, and the old squaw was pleased at having succeeded at last.

"Sweet Grass's mother will give me much bear meat for getting the rushes for her daughter," she thought. But to Timid Hare she only said: "Take these to the home of our chief and place them in the hands of Sweet Grass. Make haste, for she may already be impatient."

The Stone did not know that Sweet Grass had ever seen Timid Hare, nor that she had begged her father for the child's life.

The little girl was glad to go. She had thought many times of the chief's daughter, and of her kind face and gentle voice. Whenever she had gone near Bent Horn's tepee she had been on the lookout for Sweet Grass, but she had not been able to get a glimpse of her.

As Timid Hare trudged along with her load she thought of that dreadful night after her capture. "I think I would have died of fright but for the sight of the chief's beautiful daughter," she said to herself. "But after she spoke, my heart did not beat so hard."

Now, however, as she neared the chief's lodge, she began to breathe more quickly. The chief had such power! The Stone said ugly words to her and did not give her enough to eat; sometimes she beat her; but she would not do her terrible harm because the chief had given the order: Care for the child. Suppose he should change his mind!

Trembling, Timid Hare stopped in front of the lodge.

"Come in. I am waiting for you," called a sweet voice, for Sweet Grass, looking up from her work, had caught a glimpse of the little girl standing outside with her bundle.

Timid Hare's heart leaped for joy. It was so good to have some one speak kindly to her once more. And the young girl who had spoken was so lovely to look upon! Her eyes shone like stars. Her long hair was bound with a coronet made out of pretty shells. Her robe of deer skin was trimmed with long fringe. Her moccasins, cut differently from those of the Mandans, were bound into shape with ribbons made of rabbit skin. Around her neck were many chains that made pleasant music as they jingled against each other.

While Timid Hare was peeping out of the corners of her eyes at this beautiful sight. Sweet Grass was in her turn examining the little captive.

"You are--changed," she said slowly. "What has The Stone been doing? Ugh! I see. She has tried to make a Dahcota out of you. Well, it may be well, and yet, I think I liked you better as you were before."

"Lay the rushes here, beside me," she continued. "And now, little Timid Hare, tell me about The Stone. Is she good to you? And Black Bull--does he treat you well?"

Sweet Grass was tender as a sister as she asked these questions and many others. And Timid Hare's tongue slowly became brave. She told of the hard work which The Stone made her do. She showed scars on her hands which the work had left. And--yes--there were also scars on the little back from the cruel touch of The Stone's switch.

But Black Bull--poor Black Bull! The child spoke of him with loving pity. "I am sorry for him," she said. "He has only his dog to make him happy."

"Would you like to live with me?" asked Sweet Grass, when the story was finished.

"Oh-h!" The little girl drew a long sigh of wonder and delight. If only it were possible!

"We will see. I will talk to my father by-and-by. And now you must run home. Good-by." The young girl bent over her work and Timid Hare ran swiftly out of the lodge and back to The Stone who was angrily waiting.

"You must have stopped on the way, you good-for-nothing. Sweet Grass could not have kept you all this time," she scolded.

The little girl made no answer.

"Hm! has the child won the heart of the chief's daughter?" she muttered. "And next it would be the chief himself. That must not be. Moreover, no bear meat was sent me. Ugh!"

THE MISCHIEF MAKER

That afternoon the sun shone brightly. It was a beautiful day of the late Indian summer. Sweet Grass, taking the mat she was weaving, left the lodge and sought a pleasant spot near the spring to go on with her work.

The Stone had been skulking about near the chief's lodge for several hours. She wanted to catch Sweet Grass alone and yet as if she had come upon her by accident.

She stealthily watched the young girl as she made her way to the spring, but did not appear before her for some time. When she did, she held some fine rushes in her hands.

"I have just found more. You will like them, Sweet Grass," she said, trying to make her harsh voice as soft as possible.

The chief's daughter had never liked The Stone; and now, after hearing Timid Hare's story, it was not easy to act friendly.

"For the child's sake, I must not show my dislike," she thought quickly. So she smiled, and looking at the rushes, said, "These are good, very good. I can use them for my mat."

She turned to her work while The Stone stood silent, watching her. Then, suddenly, the old squaw bent over her and said, "Sweet Grass, listen to me. I sent the child of the Mandans to you this morning. She is bad--lazy--very lazy. Your father gave her into my keeping and I will train her, though it is hard. No one else would be patient with her wicked, lying ways. No one!"

The Stone stopped as suddenly as she had begun. She hoped that she had succeeded in making Sweet Grass believe that the little captive was as bad as she had said.

"Why do you talk? I do not care to listen to you," said the young girl, looking up into the ugly face bending over her. Then she went on with her weaving as though she were alone. There was nothing left for The Stone but to go on her way, muttering.

"After this," she promised herself, "Timid Hare shall go little from my sight. I need her to do my bidding and save my steps. She must not be taken from me through any foolish fancy that Sweet Grass may have taken for her."

THE HAPPY DAY

That evening the chief, Bent Horn, sat by his fireside, smoking with his friends. Close beside him was his handsome son. On the women's side of the lodge Sweet Grass and her mother squatted, listening to the stories of the men. As the hours passed by, the visitors rose one by one and went home for the night's sleep. When the last one had gone Sweet Grass got up from her place and held out to her father the mat she had been making for him. A pretty picture had been woven into the rushes; it had taken all the young girl's skill to do it.

"For you, my father," said Sweet Grass.

The chief smiled. He was proud of his young son who gave promise of becoming a fine hunter. But he was also proud of this one daughter. He loved her so dearly that he could not bear to say, No, to anything she might ask of him.

"My father," now said Sweet Grass, "I wish to speak to you of the child Timid Hare whom you gave into the keeping of The Stone."

The chief scowled. "That pale-faced daughter of the cowardly Mandans? She may thank you that she still lives," he said sternly.

"But I have seen her and talked with her, my father, and she has won my heart. I want her to live with me and serve me. Will you let it be so?"

There was no answer.

"And she no longer makes one think of the pale-faced Mandans. Her skin is now dark with paint so that she looks even as we do." The voice of Sweet Grass was tender with pleading.

"I saw her at the spring one day," broke in young Antelope. "The hump-back, Black Bull, had just left her. Her eyes spoke fright, but also a good temper. Let my sister have her wish."

The chief turned to his wife. In matters of the household the Indian woman generally has her will.

"Let the child come and serve Sweet Grass," said the squaw who had a noble face and must once have been as beautiful as her daughter.

"You shall have your wish." Bent Horn spoke as though not wholly pleased; but when he saw the delight his words gave Sweet Grass, his face showed more kindness than his voice.

Two days afterwards a messenger from Bent Horn appeared in The Stone's doorway.

"I bring you word from our chief," he told her. "The captive, Timid Hare, is to return with me. She will serve the maiden Sweet Grass."

The Stone's ugly eyes filled with anger. Yet she did not dare refuse the command of the chief.

"Go," she said turning to Timid Hare, who was busy at one side of the lodge pounding wild rice into flour. "Go, you cowardly good-for-nothing. Let the chief discover what I have borne."

Timid Hare was almost overcome with delight. To serve the beautiful maiden, Sweet Grass! It seemed too good to be true.

Yet it must be true, for The Stone, with uplifted arms, was fairly driving her from the lodge as she would a troublesome mosquito.

As the little girl passed through the doorway she met Black Bull entering, with Smoke at his heels. Over the youth's eyes swept a cloud of fear at the unusual brightness in the little girl's face. He felt instantly that she was going to leave him. Sad as she had been, she had brought a little sunshine into the dreary home.

"Good-bye, Black Bull," she whispered. "I will not forget you." Then, without a last glance at The Stone, she hurried on after the messenger who had come for her.

When she reached the chief's lodge, there was Sweet Grass waiting for her with a kind smile. The maiden's mother, whom she had never seen before, was also in the lodge. The squaw was busily cooking the evening meal like any other red woman, though her husband was the chief of the whole band.

Sweet Grass had just motioned to the little girl to take her place beside her, when Young Antelope burst into the tepee. The day before he had gone hunting, and when night came had not appeared. His mother and sister had worried at his absence, but the chief had said, "We will not fear. The lad has no doubt lost his way. But he knows how to care for himself."

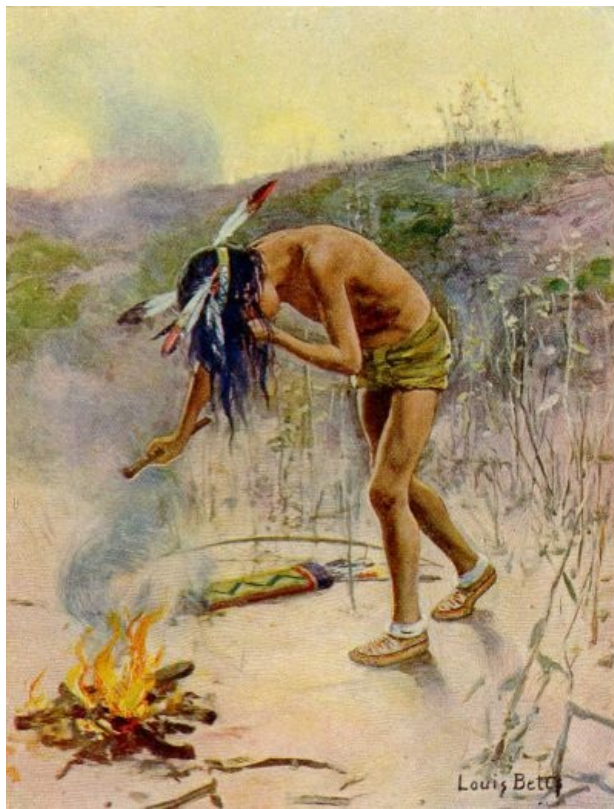
And now Young Antelope stood once more in the home, safe and happy! He had had an exciting adventure, and was eager to tell of it. Yes, he had lost his way out on the prairies. He was ashamed of this, for he had been taught that an Indian should always watch the winds and the heavens, and carefully mark every change in the appearance of the country over which he travels; then it is an easy matter to find his way back without trouble.

But his pony was fleet of foot, and the birds he was seeking flew fast. After many, many miles had been covered and his game bag had been filled, he decided to return. But he was hungry; he thought of the tender birds he had killed and of the feast they would make.

"I will rest for awhile and cook some of the game," he decided.

All this he now told his mother on his return home. So eager was he to describe his adventure that he did not notice the little stranger squatting beside Sweet Grass, and looking at him with admiring eyes.

"I soon had a fire started," he continued, "and then began to roast my game. Ugh! the feast was a fine one. But after it was over, I began the search for home. Then darkness fell suddenly and fast gathering clouds covered the setting sun. I was alone and far from you all. I could hear wolves howling in the distance. They were hungry as I had been."



[Illustration: "I soon had a fire started."]

The youth shivered. Then he went on: "But I remembered how to keep wolves from drawing too near. They do not love fire. I piled the brush high, and flames leaped up in the air. All night long I did this, and now, my mother and my sister, I am with you once more. No harm befell me."

"You did well, my son," replied his mother. That was all, but her eyes shone with pride and gladness. So did those of Sweet Grass who exclaimed, "Those fearful wolves! How I hate them! But you are safe. They did not devour you; that is enough."

THE DOG FEAST

Soon after Timid Hare went to live in Bent Horn's lodge to serve his beautiful daughter, there was a good deal of excitement in the village. Messengers had come from other bands of the Dahcotas saying that their chiefs were about to make a visit to Bent Horn. They wished to talk over important matters in regard to the good of the whole tribe.

Both braves and squaws were busy preparing for the great time. There would be dances and feasts, games and wrestling matches. The warriors must make ready their best garments and noblest head-dresses. They must use much grease and paint to look as grand as possible when receiving their guests.

Sweet Grass and her mother had much to do getting ready for the celebration, and Timid Hare tried her best to help. She ran errands, pounded rice, brought wild sweet potatoes and dried berries from the pit in which the stores of food were buried, and tended the fire in which buffalo and bear meat were roasting, for much would be eaten during the visit which would last several days at least.

Sweet Grass smiled upon her little helper. So did her mother. Both of them were pleased with the child, and came near forgetting that she was not one of their own people.

Then came the day when word was sent through the village that the coming visit was to be celebrated by the Feast of the Dog. Different families would be asked to sacrifice the dog dearest to their hearts. Every one believed it would be a fit offering to the Great Spirit and would fill his heart with tenderness for his red children.

It would also bind the hearts of the chiefs more closely together.

As Timid Hare went through the village one morning--it was the last one before the visitors

should arrive--she met Black Bull. It was the first time she had seen him since she had gone from his lodge. As she ran towards him he did not seem glad to see her. He simply looked at her pitifully.

"What is the matter, Black Bull? Is there trouble? Tell me. Everyone else is happy over the coming good time." Timid Hare spoke fast.

"My dog," he said brokenly. "My one friend must die. I must give him as a sacrifice, so my mother has said." The poor fellow began to cry.

"Your dear Smoke! I am so sorry for you, Black Bull." Timid Hare's own eyes filled with tears. "So sorry," she repeated.

"I will try to save him, though." The deformed youth looked wildly about him as he spoke, as though he feared some one besides Timid Hare would hear him. Then, without waiting for her to reply, he went off in the direction of the spring, beyond which was a sharp bluff. Below this bluff flowed a stream of water which in the autumn was deep--so deep that any one could drown in it easily.

"I wonder what Black Bull meant when he said he would try to save Smoke," thought Timid Hare, as she stood watching. "He cannot save the dog. How hard it is! No one in the village seems to care for Black Bull. The Stone, his own mother, treats him cruelly. The dog is his only friend, as he says. I will tell my young mistress about him. It may be she can help him."

As soon as Timid Hare had done her errand she ran home, still with the thought of Black Bull's trouble in her mind. She had been in the tepee only a few minutes before Sweet Grass noticed that something was the matter with her little maid.

"What has happened, Timid Hare?" she asked. "Your face is long--so!" She drew her own mouth down at the corners and made herself look so funny that Timid Hare, sad as she felt, broke into a laugh.

"It is Black Bull," she answered. "He is in trouble. It is greater than it would be with any one else in the village."

Then she went on to speak of the youth's lonely life, and that even his mother treated him badly. Only one loved him: this was the dog Smoke who followed him wherever he went and who did not mock him as the children of the village sometimes did. Smoke was ever ready to smile at him in the one way dogs can--with his tail. It was Smoke's love alone that made Black Bull glad to live. And now--Timid Hare's voice broke as she went on to tell of what must soon happen.

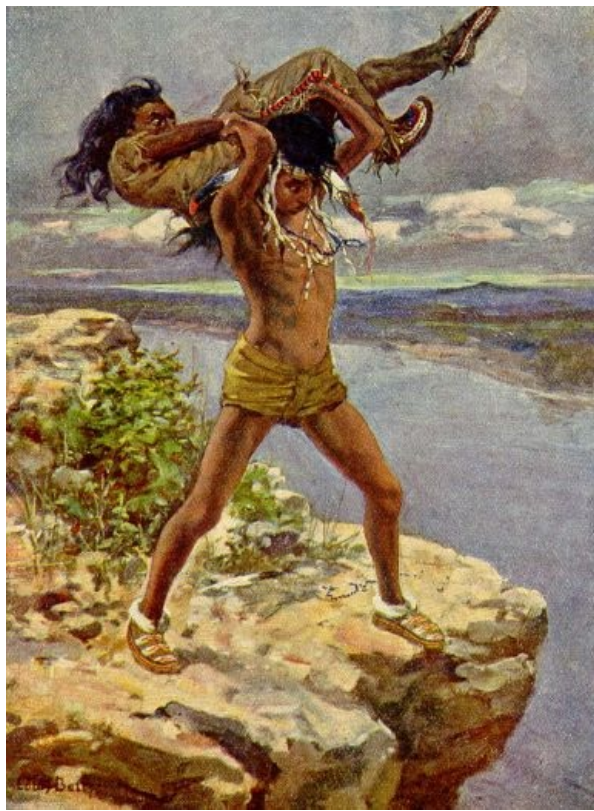
"Poor fellow!" said Sweet Grass softly. "Poor fellow," she repeated, half to herself.

As it happened, Young Antelope was in the lodge when Timid Hare was telling the story. He was busy making a shield; he intended to wear it when first allowed to go forth on a war party with the older braves. But though he was busy at his work, he listened with interest to the words of Timid Hare.

Soon afterwards he left the tepee and ran along the path leading to the spring. "If I see Black Bull," he thought, "I will speak kindly to him even if he is such a useless creature."

When Young Antelope reached the spring he heard some one talking angrily. This was followed by a cry of fear. The sounds came from the direction of the bluff beyond, but the youth could see no one because of clumps of brush which shut off the view from any one at the spring below.

Young Antelope hurried along, till suddenly he caught a glimpse of two figures on the very edge of the rocky summit of the bluff. One was that of Thunder Cloud, a worthless fellow; the other which he held struggling in his arms was that of The Stoned's deformed son. Black Bull was helpless; he was at the mercy of Thunder Cloud who was about to cast him into the stream below.



[Illustration: Black Bull was helpless.]

"What is this?" shouted Young Antelope. Thunder Cloud, startled, turned suddenly about.

"I would punish this worthless fellow as he deserves," he answered. "Do you know what he dared to do? He brought his dog to yonder brush and fastened him in the midst. He thought to keep the animal from the sacrifice. Ugh! A wretched creature indeed. His mother bade me follow him."

"Make him free," said Young Antelope with the air of a mighty chief. "My father will take care of him. As for you, go from my sight."

Thunder Cloud, who had already set Black Bull on his feet, though he still clutched him tightly, let go his hold, and skulked away.

"Let your dog loose," Young Antelope now ordered Black Bull who stood before him, still shivering from fright. "There! Now we will go to my father and let him settle the matter. Follow me."

Black Bull, with Smoke capering about him in the joy of being set free, followed Young Antelope silently till the two neared the council house where Bent Horn was busy planning for the coming celebration. There, in the autumn sunlight, they waited till the chief should appear and the son whom he loved dearly should have a chance to ask for a certain boon.

That night Black Bull went to sleep as happy as a king, even though his mother had just given him a beating. Smoke was safe! Another, Young Antelope, who had more treasures than he, was willing to make the sacrifice in his place.

THE FESTIVAL

The celebration was over and Timid Hare was tired out from excitement. Never before had she seen so many wonders. Why, the chief of chiefs, the chief of all the Dahcotas, had been one of the visitors and had slept in Bent Horn's tepee. Timid Hare herself had helped to serve him. And when he had gone forth to the council and to the feasts he was the grandest looking person she had ever beheld in her life. He wore a head-dress of war-eagle feathers. Thick and heavy was this head-dress, and beautiful were the feathers beyond compare. The great chief's face shone with grease, and was made fearful to look upon with much paint. On his robe were pictured the many battles in which he had taken part; it was trimmed with a heavy fringe of scalp-locks. His leggings and moccasins were richly embroidered with porcupine quills. He walked forth like a

king. The children of the village trembled as they gazed upon him.

Bent Horn looked grand also in his own robes of state. Many a day had his wife spent embroidering this robe with porcupine quills and trimming it with fringes of his enemies scalp-locks. Heavy chains hung around his neck. His long hair, which he had greased well, had been divided into two parts and crossed on the top of his head, where it was then gathered into a knot.

"Bent Horn's head-dress is almost as handsome as that of the Great Chief," Timid Hare said to herself, as she watched the two men walking together towards the council house.

The sun shone brightly throughout the whole celebration and the feasts were spread outdoors. The chiefs and braves sat in a half-circle at these feasts and the food was passed to them from steaming kettles. There was bear meat in plenty, fat and rich; baked turtles; juicy buffalo steaks and stews; but at the principal feast of all, only dog flesh was served.

Then it was that the people of the village gathered in crowds around the feasters to watch and listen. Closest of all were the braves and their sons. Back of them were the squaws and their little daughters. Timid Hare, beside her young mistress Sweet Grass, listened with wonder to the noble speeches of the chiefs. Bent Horn spoke first of all.

"My brother," he said to the Great Chief, "our hearts are almost bursting with gladness that you are with us today.

"And you also"--Bent Horn continued, turning to one after another of the lesser chiefs, "we welcome you with gladness and feel that the Great Spirit has sent you to us. In token of our love we have killed faithful dogs that you may feast. May the Great Spirit bind us closely together. I say no more."

As Bent Horn ended his speech he lifted before the eyes of the feasters a carved necklace made of the claws of grizzly bears, and his own robe of elk skins which he had just taken from his shoulders. Then he slowly rose and, going to the side of the guest of honor, he laid the gifts before him. Next, he took other gifts--embroidered moccasins and leggings--and presented them to the lesser chiefs.

For a moment all were silent. Then the guests themselves made speeches, each one telling of his love for Bent Horn and his band, and giving rich gifts in return.

And now the pipe of peace was lighted and brought to Bent Horn. Solemnly he pointed the stem to the north, the south, the east, and the west. Last of all, he lifted it towards the sun. Then he spoke. "How--how--how," he said slowly. Then in silence he smoked it, but only to take one long whiff, after which he held it in turn to the mouths of the other chiefs, that they might smoke it also.

Not a word was spoken by any one during this solemn time. But as soon as the last guest had smoked, the dog-meat, floating in rich gravy, was brought from the steaming kettles and handed around in wooden bowls among the guests. All ate their fill. Then silently, they got up and went away. They had smoked and eaten the sacrifice together. Surely, they thought, there could be no better token of their friendship for each other.

Timid Hare looked on from afar. She felt pride in her dear mistress's brother who had given up his own pet dog, in place of Black Bull. She was also filled with wonder at the greatness of the Dahcotas.

"They are a mighty tribe," thought the little girl. She drew a long breath of sadness, feeling that she could never hope to go from among them. But when she afterwards looked on at the wrestling matches, races on horseback, and dances such as she had never seen before, she forgot everything else for the moment. Her eyes shone with excitement; her breath came quick. Never before, it seemed to her, had she seen such skill.

When the entertainment of each day ended, however, and Timid Hare went to her bed of buffalo skins, she would lie thinking of the old home, of the loving White Mink, the kind Three Bears, and the good foster-brother Big Moose. Then tears would roll down over the little girl's cheeks and she would choke back a sob.

"Can it be," she would think, "that the story White Mink told me before I was taken from her, is true? Am I truly a white child, and is she not my real mother?" Then the little captive would touch the baby's sock fastened by a cord of deer-sinews about her waist and next to her flesh.

"It is safe," she would whisper to herself, "and no one here has discovered it--not even The Stone. It did not save me from being captured, but it may yet bring good fortune, even as White Mink hoped."

MOVING DAY

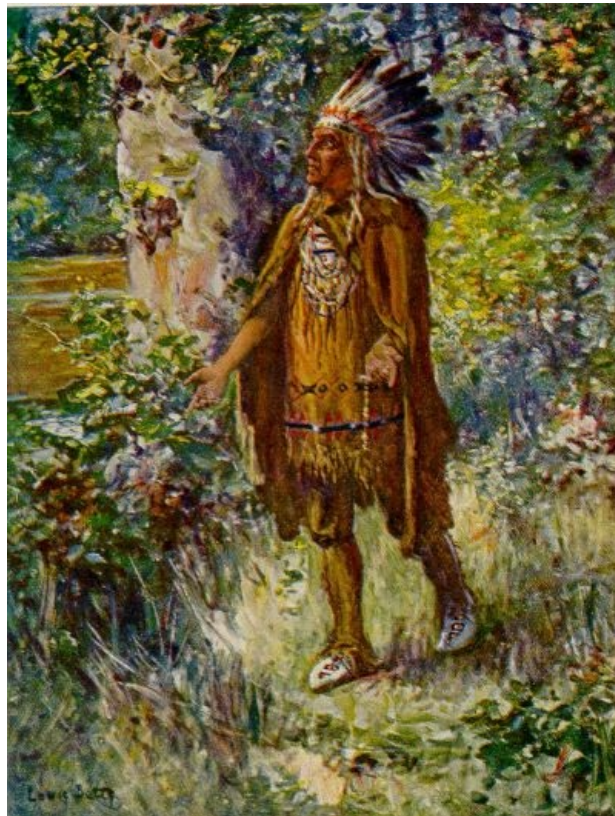
The visitors had all gone away and the village was once more quiet--that is, as quiet as it might be among the Dahcotas, the lovers of the dance and of music.

Now and then some of the braves went forth on a war-party, or on a hunt after bears or buffaloes. But the buffaloes were scarce, they told their chief; the herds must have wandered far, and the hunters often returned empty-handed. This was bad, because the winter was drawing near and supplies of meat were needed for that long season of bitter cold.

One morning Bent Horn rose earlier than usual and made his way to the council house. There he staid for some time talking with the medicine men and other leading braves of the village.

Should there be a bear dance and a buffalo dance to call the attention of the Great Spirit to the needs of His people, that He might send plenty of prey nearer the village? Or should the band first move to a different part of the country, where no red man dwelt and where the buffaloes, at least, might be plentiful?

When the talk was ended the men who had gathered at the council went their way. Bent Horn's mind was made up. "My people must move to a new camping ground," he said to himself. "We will journey to the eastward. In that direction, the hunters say, we are likely to draw near the feeding grounds of large herds of buffaloes. Tomorrow morning at sunrise we must be on our way."



[Illustration: Bent Horn's mind was made up.]

The news was quickly carried from one tepee to another and the squaws set to work with a will to prepare for moving.

When Timid Hare heard the news she thought sadly: "Shall I go farther than ever from my dear White Mink?" The little girl had been so frightened at the time of her capture that she was not sure in which direction she travelled.

There was not a moment now, however, to consider herself, as Sweet Grass and her mother kept the child helping them prepare for the moving. The stores of grain and other dry food, the dishes and kettles and clothing must be packed in readiness for the early start on the morrow.

THE JOURNEY

"Awake, Timid Hare, for there is a faint light in the eastern sky. The sun is already rising from his bed."

At these words from Sweet Grass, Timid Hare's eyes burst wide open and she sprang from her bed. There was much to do at once, for the signal must be given to the whole village from the home of Bent Horn.

So quickly did his squaw and young daughter work that a half-hour afterwards the walls of the chief's tepee were flapping in the morning breeze. Immediately afterwards the same thing happened to every other home in the village. Next, down came the tent poles of the chief's tepee, and then those of all the others.

Timid Hare went quickly here and there, obeying the orders of her mistress. Ropes of skin must be brought to tie the poles into two bundles. The little girl must help hold these bundles in place, while Bent Horn's best pack horses were brought up and the bundles fastened against the sides of their bodies, and at the same time allowed to drag on the ground behind.

"Quick, Timid Hare," Sweet Grass would say, pointing now to this bundle of bedding, and now to another of dishes or clothing. The horses were restless and the bundles must be well-fastened to the poles before they should be ready to start. Some of Bent Horn's dogs were also loaded in the same way.

While Sweet Grass and her mother, with Timid Hare's help, were packing their own stores every other woman in the village was doing the same. In a wonderfully short time the procession was on its way, the squaws leading the pack horses. When they started out, however, the braves and youths, riding their favorite horses and ponies, were already far ahead.

Timid Hare trudged bravely along beside her young mistress who led one of the pack horses. She carried a big bundle on her back. So did Sweet Grass and her mother. So did all the other squaws except those who were too old and feeble.

"Let us move fast while we are fresh," Sweet Grass would say now and then when Timid Hare began to lag. "When the day grows old, then is the time to move like the turtle."

As they travelled along, Timid Hare passed The Stone who looked at her with ugly eyes. The old squaw was thinking, "Had it not been for my sending the girl that day to Sweet Grass she would now be making my load light. Fool that I was!"

Afterwards Timid Hare and her mistress talked with The Fountain, the pretty bride who lived near The Stone. The Fountain smiled pleasantly at the little girl. She said, "Sometime, Timid Hare, you shall come to see me in the new home. I may have a surprise for you."

The sun had nearly set when word came down the line: "The chief has chosen a place for the new camp. It is beside a stream of clear water and the tracks of buffaloes are not far distant."

Timid Hare was glad to hear the news, because her feet and back ached. She was not strong as an Indian girl of her own age should be and she knew it. "But I look like one," she said to herself. She was glad now that her body was stained. She had colored it afresh of her own accord just before the journey, for she felt she would not be jeered at by the children of the Dahcotas so long as her hair and body were of the same color as their own.

When the new camping ground was reached, she was very tired. "But I must not show it," she thought. "I must be bright and cheerful." So she moved quickly, helping to set up the tepee and get supper for the family. But her eyelids closed the moment she lay down to rest, and she knew nothing more till the barking of the dogs roused her the next morning. At the same time she heard Sweet Grass and her mother talking together.

"The Fountain was last seen when we stopped at a spring to get water in the late afternoon," one of them was saying.

"I hope she is safe," replied the other, "and that the gray wolf was not abroad."

Timid Hare shuddered. "Where can The Fountain be?" she wondered. "She is so good and so pretty, I hope she is unharmed."

The very next moment a neighbor appeared in the door. "The Fountain has just reached us," she said. "She spent the night by the spring, and she now brings with her a baby son. He is a lusty child. May he grow up to be a noble warrior!"

"I will go to her and give her my best wishes," declared the chief's wife. "It is a good sign for the new home that one more is added to our people."

Soon afterwards Timid Hare and her young mistress were also on their way to visit the young mother. She was very happy. So was her husband. So was her baby; at least it seemed happy to Timid Hare as she looked at it nestling quietly in its mother's arms. The little girl longed for it to

open its eyes.

"By and by," The Fountain told her with a smile, "my son will awake. But now he must sleep, for he finds this world a strange one, and he is tired."

"The Great Spirit has been kind to The Fountain," said Sweet Grass as she walked homeward with her little maid.

"How powerful He must be," declared Timid Hare thoughtfully. "Whenever He speaks to us in the thunder and lightning I tremble with fear. But when I looked at the little baby just now I felt His love."

THE MEDICINE MAN

The next morning Timid Hare was allowed to go once more to visit The Fountain and her little son. The baby lay fastened into a pretty frame the young mother had made for him. The straps were embroidered with porcupine quills, and finished very neatly.

As Timid Hare entered the tepee, The Fountain was about to lift the baby in his frame to her back.

"I am going to see Black Bull," she said. "He is ill. He has not been well since before the Dog Feast."

Timid Hare at once thought of a reason for Black Bull's illness,—he had worried much over the thought of losing his dog. But Young Antelope had not told her that he came near losing his life and of his terrible fright at the time.

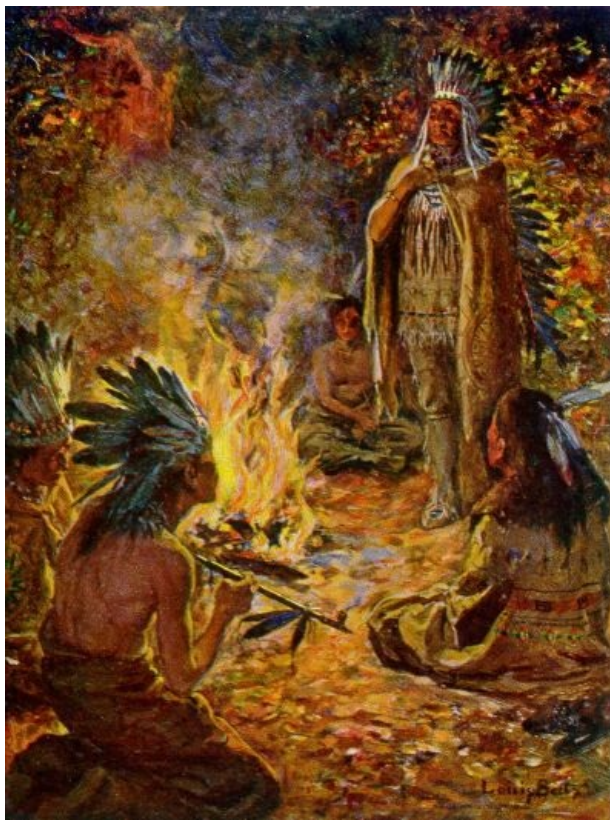
"Has the medicine man visited Black Bull?" asked Timid Hare.

"Not yet." The Fountain shook her head sadly. "I doubt if The Stone cares whether her son lives or dies. But I am going to see the poor creature. Afterwards, if the medicine man has not been sought, I will ask my husband to get his help."

The Fountain started on her errand, and Timid Hare went back to the chief's lodge to tell her young mistress what she had learned. On the way she passed a clump of trees beneath which she saw several people sitting and listening to the voice of a tall man who stood before them. He was one of the most powerful medicine men of the band.

"He must be speaking of some great mystery," thought Timid Hare. "How noble he is! How much he must know! It may be that he is telling of the secrets he reads in the fire."

Turning her eyes towards the listeners, she saw they were thinking deeply of his words. They looked with wonder at the medicine man. "Yes, he must be speaking of the secrets no one but he can discover."



[Illustration: They looked with wonder at the medicine man.]

When Timid Hare reached home she spoke of this medicine man to her mistress. "If only he could go to Black Bull, the sickness would leave the poor fellow," she said.

Soon afterwards Sweet Grass herself sought the medicine man. She brought him presents of buffalo marrow, deer meat, and a juicy, well-cooked land turtle. Then she asked his help for the deformed youth, and he promised to go to him.

The next day word came to the chief's lodge that Black Bull had gone to join the people of the grave. Though the medicine man had gone to him and worked his mysteries with songs and drum beating, the Great Spirit had not willed that he should live.

"Better so," declared Bent Horn, when the news was brought to the lodge. "Black Bull was of no help to his people. He suffered, and was not happy. Better so!"

"I will take his dog," Sweet Grass promised her sad little maid. "Smoke shall be cared for, though his master has left him."

THE WINTER HUNT

The new home proved to be a good one. Each time the hunters went forth they returned with a load of game. The squaws were kept busy drying buffalo and bear meat, packing away the marrow and cleaning the bones and skins. Every part of the animals was put to some use.

The days of the long, cold winter were at hand, and all must work busily. Timid Hare had much to do, but sometimes she was allowed to play outside of the tepee with other children; they were kinder to her now that she lived in the chief's home. She had plenty to eat, and Sweet Grass and her mother treated her well, but she longed for something that was lacking here but was freely given in the old home: it was love.

The snow fell thick and fast. It covered the prairie for miles in every direction. In some places it was deeper than Timid Hare was tall. A thick crust formed over the top.

Young Antelope set to work to make himself new snowshoes. As he bent the hoops for the frames and crossed them with networks of leather strings. Timid Hare looked on with longing. She had had snowshoes of her own before, and she had enjoyed skimming over the snow fields on them, but they were far away--very far away.

"I will help you make some shoes," Young Antelope told her, when he caught the look. "You can do the easy part, and I will do the hard."

Timid Hare was pleased because Young Antelope did not notice her very often. The snowshoes were soon made and the little girl longed to try them.

The very next day Young Antelope went out with the men on a winter hunt. There were large stores of meat in the village, but the cold was bitter and more warm buffalo robes were needed for beds and coverlets. Moreover, at this time of the year the fur of the animals was heaviest.

"It will be easy to get our prey," Bent Horn said to his son the night before the hunt. "There is little snow on the south slopes of the hills, where the buffaloes will be feeding. We can take them by surprise and drive them down into the ice-crusts fields. They are so heavy that their feet will fall through. Then the hunter can draw near on his swift snowshoes, and will pierce the heart of his prey with his spear without trouble."

"I will be such a hunter on the morrow," the youth had replied. "My spear is already sharpened. It shall bring death to more than one of the creatures that provide us with comfort through the moon of difficulty," as he had been taught to call the month of January.

As Young Antelope skimmed along over the snow fields next morning, he thought more than once of the little captive at home.

"She behaves well," he said to himself, "and she will be a good homekeeper when she is older. It may be--it may be--that I will yet choose her for my wife."

Young Antelope was only sixteen years old, but he was already thinking of getting married! It was the way of his people. The girls married even younger than the boys--sometimes when only twelve or thirteen years had passed over their heads. It was therefore not strange that the chief's son should be considering what wife he would choose.

With many of the braves away on the hunt, the village was quiet, and the squaws took a little vacation from their work, as on the morrow they must be very busy caring for the supplies brought home by the hunters.

In the afternoon Sweet Grass said kindly: "Timid Hare, you have been a good girl and worked hard of late. You may have the rest of the day for play. Try your new snowshoes, if you like."

The rest of the day--two whole hours before sunset! It seemed too good to be true. Never had such a thing happened to the child since she left the home of the Mandans.

Without wasting a moment, Timid Hare got the snowshoes and left the tepee. For a moment she looked about her to see if any other little girl would like to join her in a skim over the fields. But all seemed busy at their games, and even now she was not enough at home with any one of them to ask them to leave their own play and go off with her, a captive.

So, binding on the shoes, she started off alone. What fun it was to move so fast and so smoothly! How clear was the air! How delightful it was to feel the blood rushing freely through every part of her body! Her cheeks tingled pleasantly; her heart beat with joy.

Mile after mile the child darted on in the opposite direction from that taken by the hunters in the morning. So happy, so free felt the child that she forgot how far she was travelling. Sometimes there were little rolls in the land. She would get up her speed as she approached them, so as to have force enough to reach the summit of a roll with ease. And then what fun it was to travel like the wind down the other side!

On, on, on! and then suddenly, Timid Hare came to herself. Where was the village? In what direction? Could she not see smoke rising somewhere behind her, telling of the fires burning in the homes of the people?

There was nothing, nothing, to guide her back--only some fields apparently untrodden in every direction. So light was the little girl's body that her shoes had rarely pressed through the crust. The short winter day was near its end. A bank of clouds was gathering about the setting sun, they told of an approaching storm; so also spoke the chill wind that blew in the child's face.

Fright clutched at Timid Hare's heart. She thought of the power of the storm-king. Here, in the snowy wilderness, it seemed that she must perish. Was there no one to turn to in this time of danger? Yes.

"Help me, Great Spirit," cried the child, lifting her hands towards the sky where she believed He dwelt.

With that cry came a feeling that somehow her prayer would be answered. And at the same time Timid Hare remembered the little sock which she always carried in her bosom. She pressed a hand against the place where it should rest. Yes, it was safe.

"White Mink had faith in it. So will I," Timid Hare said to herself. Many a time during the hard days with The Stone, she had repeated the same words. It had always helped her to do so.

And now she turned in the direction she hoped was the village of the Dahcotas, but her feet felt numb. It was hard to travel. Hark! what was that? It seemed as though men's voices could be heard shouting to each other in the distance. They came nearer. Could it be that Sweet Grass had sent some of the village boys out after her?

Nearer! Nearer! Timid Hare stood still, listening. If they would only hurry! She suddenly felt drowsy--the snow-chill was benumbing her whole body, and somehow she no longer cared whether she was found or not. She tottered, fell.

The next thing she knew, she was lying in the arms of a man with kind blue eyes. He was smiling at her, and he was white! Another man, white like himself, was rubbing her arms and legs.

"All right now," the first man was saying to the other. "Poor little thing! How did she ever get out here? That Dahcota village is a good dozen miles from here, and the child's moccasins tell that she is of that tribe."

"We must waste no time in getting farther away from them ourselves," replied the other. "Little time would be wasted in taking our scalps if they caught us alone."

"But we can't leave this helpless creature," said the first speaker. "Do you know, Ben, she must be about the age of my own little daughter if--" The man's voice broke suddenly.

"Poor fellow--yes, I understand. You never will get over that blow. But, really, Tom, we must not stay here. The savages may be upon us any moment. Here, use this. It may bring her to."

The speaker held out a bottle of cordial which the man who held Timid Hare held to her lips. She tried to swallow, but it choked her.

"There," she said with a gasp, "it is enough," and she lifted herself up.

"Good," said both men, who knew a little of the Indian tongue.

"Oh, but my shoe!" cried the little girl in fright. It had slipped a little from its usual resting place, and she now missed it. In spite of being alone on the snow-covered prairie, with two strangers, her first thought was of the little talisman White Mink had given into her keeping. Oh! she could feel it pressing against her waist, and she gave a happy sigh.

In the meantime, the men had decided that it would be best to take the child to their camp. The rest could be settled afterwards.

"Can you trust yourself to your snowshoes again?" the man whom his friend called Tom asked her gently.

She nodded, and with the help of one of her companions, they were bound on her feet. A biscuit was now given her--she had never tasted its like before--and she ate greedily. This was followed by another swallow of the cordial, and the little girl was ready for the start.

Many miles were before her, but the men often took hold of her hands to give her fresh courage. Besides, she was greatly excited. What was coming? Were these strangers bringing her back to the village of the Dahcotas, or guiding her to something far different? From time to time one of the men struck a match--such a wonderful thing it seemed to Timid Hare--and looked at a tiny instrument he carried in his pocket. It seemed to tell him if they were travelling in the right direction. "How wise," thought Timid Hare, "the white people must be! Perhaps they are as wise as the medicine men!"

And she--why, she was of their own race, though her stained skin did not show it! At the thought, she lifted her hand to her side. Yes, her treasure was safe!

When it seemed to the child as if she could not move her feet longer, a faint light shone out in the distance. The camp of the white men would soon be reached.

When the travellers at last arrived at the journey's end there was great excitement among the men who were anxiously watching for the return of their two companions. They had feared that their friends had lost their way and been overcome by cold; or more probable, that they had been killed or captured by the Indians. They were in the Dahcota country--this they knew; also that these Dahcotas were fierce warriors and hated the white men.

How surprised they were to see what they thought was an Indian child with their companions! How did it happen? What was to be done with her?

But now, as Timid Hare almost fell to the floor of the warm, brightly lighted tent, all saw that she was quite exhausted. She must be fed, and afterwards sleep. There would be time enough to question her next morning.

Hot soup was brought, and never, it seemed, had anything ever tasted so delicious to Timid Hare. And the heat of the burning logs--how pleasant it was! Timid Hare was too tired to be afraid, or even to think, and even as she ate, she fell sound asleep.

She awoke next morning with her hand clutching the place where the sock lay hidden, and saw a kind face bending over her. It belonged to the same man who had held her when she roused from the snow-chill.

"What is it?" he asked gently. He pointed to her hand.

"It is--my charm. It is to bring me good."

"May I see it?" The man's voice was so kind that it filled Timid Hare with perfect trust.

"You will--help me?" The child's eyes were full of pleading.

"Yes, little one."

Slowly Timid Hare drew forth the sock. It was faded and soiled, yet the pattern in which the silk had been woven into the worsted was quite plain.

"How did--Why, tell me at once how you got this." The man's voice was half stern, half pleading.

"It was--so." With this beginning Timid Hare repeated the story as White Mink had told it to her. Many a time she had since told it to herself during her hard life with The Stone. It was such a strange story--so full of wonder to her still. The wonder of it was in her voice even now.

The man listened with half-closed eyes, but saying never a word till she finished. Then, as in a dream, he said in a low tone: "It is my baby's sock--the pattern is one planned by my dear wife Alice who died out on this lonely prairie. And then--the sudden attack of the Dahcotas--and I made prisoner, while my baby Alice was left behind to perish. Afterwards I was rescued, though I cared little to live."

"But child, child," he burst out, "though your eyes have the same color, the same expression as those of my dear wife, your skin is that of the red people."

"I stained it--The Stone made me--and when I saw Sweet Grass liked me best so, I put on the color again and yet again."

"God be praised! I have found my darling who, I thought, was lost forever." The man lifted Timid Hare and clasped her tenderly in his arms. And she--well, the little girl rested there content and happy.

The next minute the rest of the party who had been out exploring, entered the tent with word that the start must be made at once. The clouds of the night before had lifted; the snow might not begin falling for several hours, and the most must be made of the morning towards reaching a larger camp where sledges would carry them a long ways towards a fur station.

Great was the joy of the others when they learned the good fortune that had come to their friend, and merry was the whole party as it made its way onward. Yes, Timid Hare, or rather Alice, now more like the Swift Fawn she had been, was merry too. But as she went on her way to the new and beautiful life that would soon be hers, she begged her father to take her back by-and-by for a visit to her foster-parents and Big Moose in the Mandan village on the river. And he promised gladly.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TIMID HARE: THE LITTLE CAPTIVE ***

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