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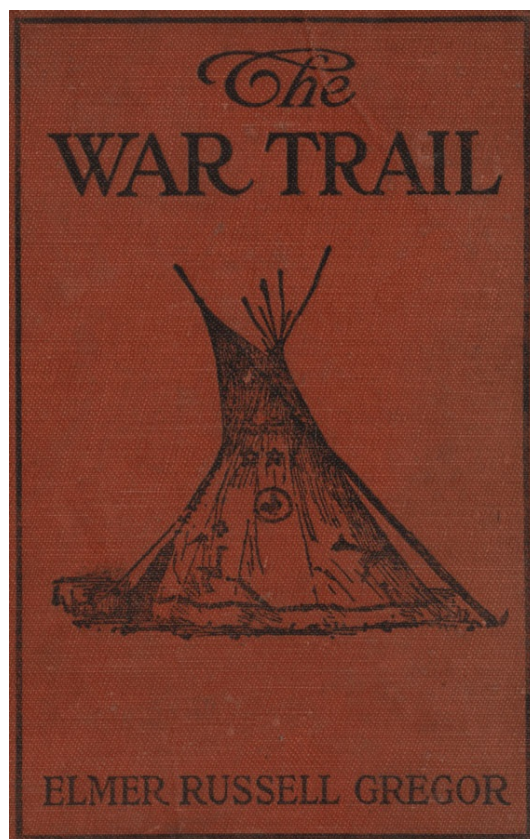
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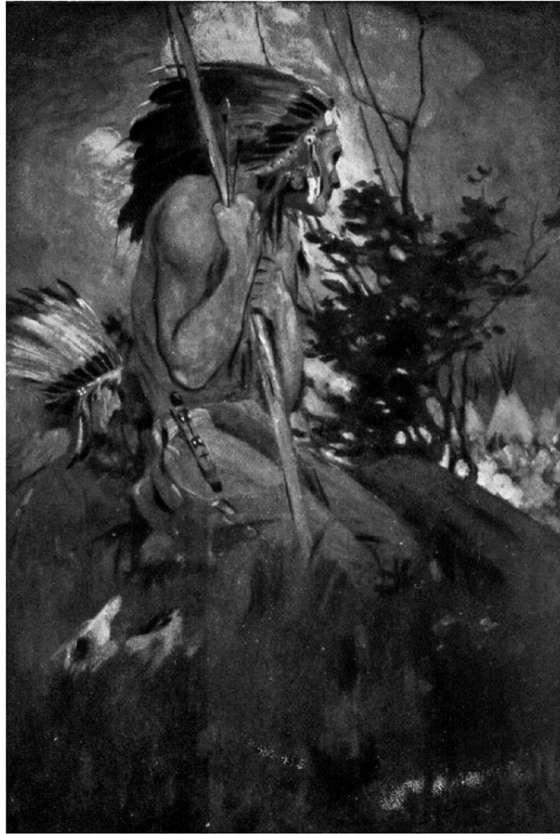
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THE WAR TRAIL  
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SPOTTED DEER  
RUNNING FOX  
THE WHITE WOLF



NOW WE MUST WATCH OUT!

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## **THE WAR TRAIL**

**BY**

**ELMER RUSSELL GREGOR**

**AUTHOR OF "THE WHITE WOLF,"  
"RUNNING FOX," "WHITE OTTER," ETC.**



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# THE WAR TRAIL

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## CHAPTER I

### A COURIER FROM THE WEST

The sun was setting behind the western rim of the plain, as White Otter, a famous young war-chief of the Ogalala Sioux, drew near the low ridge of foothills which he had been approaching since daylight. He was bound on a hunting expedition for deer, having promised to kill a fat young buck for his grandfather, old Wolf Robe, the aged Sioux chief.

White Otter approached the timber with his usual caution. He knew that the forest often concealed foes as well as game, and he determined to take no risks. He rode slowly toward the cover, therefore, watching for the slightest warning of danger. He was within easy arrow range of the woods when his pony suddenly stopped and snorted nervously. White Otter instantly became alert. Drawing his bow, he slid to the ground, and sheltered himself behind his pony. Then for some time pony and rider watched the forest.

A loud crackling of undergrowth, and a number of soft, bounding footfalls told him the cause of his alarm. He had startled a deer from its feeding ground at the edge of the plain. Convinced that the place was free of foes, he mounted his pony, and rode to the edge of the timber. [Pg 2]

This range of heavily timbered foothills was a favorite hunting ground of the Ogalalas, and White Otter had visited the locality many times. He was entirely familiar with the usual haunts of game, and knew the location of every spring and salt lick. Once in the timber, therefore, the young Sioux rode slowly along a well-worn game trail which brought him to a small grassy park in the dip of the hills. A little stream trickled through one end of it, and made it an ideal feeding ground for deer and elk. As it was also an attractive and sheltered camp site, and offered an abundance of feed for his pony, White Otter decided to remain there for the night.

The twilight shadows were already gathering as the Sioux tied his pony in the woods and seated himself at the edge of the little park to watch and listen. Although the day was about gone he hoped that he might secure his game before darkness finally settled down. It was not long before he was roused by a rustling of wings above his head. Looking up, he saw a pair of plump spruce grouse on a limb directly over him. As the birds stretched their necks and cocked their heads to look at him, he drove an arrow through the body of the cock grouse. The bird fluttered helplessly to the ground, and White Otter immediately broke its neck. The remaining grouse still sat peering down at him. He made no attempt to kill it. It was a law of his people to kill only what they required that there might always be sufficient game to replenish the supply. [Pg 3]

"Wakantunka, the Great Mystery, has sent me something to eat," White Otter said, reverently. "It is good."

As it was getting quite dark, and as there seemed little probability of seeing game, the Sioux decided to abandon his vigil until daylight. He brought his pony from the timber and tied it in the center of the park to graze. Then he selected his camp site and made a tiny fire of dry sticks. As a precaution against being seen by some prowling foe, he inclosed it with a barricade of rocks to hide its feeble glow. He plucked the grouse and spitted it on a forked stick before the fire. Then he drew his elk skin robe about his shoulders and seated himself to enjoy his evening meal.

After he had eaten the grouse White Otter allowed the fire to die out. Then for a long time he sat in the darkness, listening to the night sounds. The wind whispered softly in the tree tops. The shrill yelping of the coyotes came from the open plain. Then the plaintive cry of the little red owl sounded within bowshot. White Otter listened anxiously. He knew that the call often was used as a signal, and he determined to be on his guard. However, he soon convinced himself that it was genuine, and dismissed it from his mind. Shortly afterward he brought his pony from the park and tied it near him. Then he wrapped himself in his robe and lay down to sleep. [Pg 4]

White Otter awakened at daylight and crept stealthily to the edge of the park. As he saw no game, he sat down to watch. He felt quite sure that either deer or elk would soon come there for food and water. In fact he had waited only a short time when he heard something approaching

through the undergrowth. Fitting an arrow to his bow, White Otter looked anxiously in the direction of the sound. In a few minutes he saw an old bull elk standing in the shadows at the edge of the woods. It was thin and emaciated, and White Otter knew that its flesh would be tough and unpalatable. It was well within bowshot, but he had no thought of killing it. He had promised his aged grandfather a fat young buck, and he had no intention of disappointing him. As the old bull walked slowly into the open, White Otter grunted, and the elk instantly stopped and looked toward him. Then as the Sioux rose to his feet and showed himself the aged bull turned awkwardly and trotted stiffly into the cover.

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"Go, old man," laughed White Otter. "You have lived a long time. I will let you live on. I am——"

He stopped abruptly, for at that moment he heard a loud snort, and a great crackling of brush, as the buck for which he had been waiting raced safely away through the woods. The young hunter flushed with anger.

"I am like a noisy old woman," he grumbled, savagely.

After he had gone to examine the trail of the buck, he again seated himself at the edge of the woods to watch for game. A long time passed before he heard anything. Then he was surprised to hear something coming directly toward him through the woods. It made a great noise, and sounded like a deer or an elk in wild flight. White Otter sprang to his feet and held his arrow in readiness.

In a few moments a splendid blacktail buck leaped into the open. White Otter was astonished to see a huge gray lynx clinging to the buck. As it reached the park, the deer was dragged to its haunches. Then, apparently unmindful of the interested young hunter, the lynx relaxed its hold and sprang at the throat of its victim. The cruel fangs sank deep into the flesh, and although the buck struggled desperately it was soon overcome.

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Then White Otter drove his arrow through the lynx. It fell dead with the arrow through its heart. A second arrow ended the agony of the blacktail buck. Elated at his luck the Sioux ran forward to examine his game. He lifted the head of the lynx and gazed intently into the cruel face. Then he addressed the dead animal and made excuses for having killed it, so that its spirit would not depart in anger and seek to avenge itself upon him at some future time.

"Ho, old man, you were very fierce," White Otter said, softly. "You were a good hunter. If I had not come here you would have had something good to eat. Well, I saw you. I came here to get meat for my grandfather, the great chief Wolf Robe. When I saw that buck I decided to take it. That is why I killed you. But you must not feel bad about it. You have done many bad things to my people. Yes, that is why I felt like killing you. You have killed many young ponies. You have driven away many deer. You have made it hard for our hunters to find meat. Now you know why I killed you. But you must not feel bad about it. Now I am going to do something good for you. I am going to give you some meat to take with you on the Long Trail. Then I am going to tell my people about you. I will speak good words about you. Now you must feel good about this thing."

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Having complied with the ancient custom of his people, White Otter opened the carcass of the deer and placed the entrails beside the lynx. Then he packed the buck upon his pony with a long lariat of twisted rawhide and rode from the park.

When he reached the edge of the timber, White Otter stopped to search the plain. A prairie wolf trotted slowly from sight over a rise of ground. It was the only sign of life on the vast sage-grown waste. Assured that there was nothing to fear, White Otter set out upon his journey.

White Otter had covered two thirds of the distance to the Sioux camp when his pony suddenly turned its nose toward the wind and whinnied shrilly. White Otter looked about him with considerable alarm. He felt certain that other horses were somewhere in the vicinity. The possibility roused his suspicions. He dismounted and grasped his pony by the nose to keep it silent. It was snorting and nervously watching a low grassy knoll several arrow flights away.

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"There are horses behind that hill," White Otter told himself.

Two possibilities suggested themselves. Perhaps there was a small bunch of stray ponies grazing on the opposite side of the hill. Perhaps his foes had discovered him and were lying in ambush behind the knoll. The thought made him uneasy, as the day was far spent, and he was still a considerable distance from his people. He had great confidence in the ability of his pony, however, which was one of the best in the entire Sioux tribe. He believed that in an open chase he would have little difficulty in keeping well beyond range of any pursuers who might set out upon his trail.

"I will find out about this thing," he declared.

He planned to ride about the knoll at a safe distance in the hope of discovering what lay hidden on the other side. As he was about to mount his pony, however, he saw a warrior rise to his feet, and stand boldly outlined on the top of the hill. It was an entirely unexpected maneuver, and White Otter instantly became suspicious. He feared that it was a trick to lead him into a trap. He looked anxiously about the plain to make sure that other crafty foes were not circling around behind him to cut off his retreat. He saw no one except the mysterious stranger on the top of the hill. He seemed to be watching White Otter as intently as the latter was watching him. For some time neither moved.

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White Otter finally decided that, as the unknown scout was too far away to be identified, it would be foolish to waste more time watching him. He determined to continue on his way toward the Sioux camp. If he learned that he was being followed he planned to turn aside on a false trail

until it grew dark. Then he would circle back toward the Ogalala village.

As White Otter mounted his pony and started away, however, the warrior on the knoll suddenly showed signs of life. The Sioux had ridden less than an arrow flight when the sentinel disappeared over the brow of the hill. White Otter felt quite certain that his pursuit had begun. He watched anxiously over his shoulder for the first glimpse of his foes. The Crows had lately been seen in that vicinity, and he wondered if a company of those hated enemies were about to come racing along his trail. He did not force his pony, however, as he was eager to learn the identity of his pursuers before he raced away for the Sioux camp.

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White Otter did not have long to wait. In a few moments a solitary horseman swept over a rise of the plain and galloped toward him. The Sioux felt sure that it was the warrior who had been watching him. As the stranger appeared to be alone, and eager to fight, White Otter prepared for battle. Before venturing within arrow range, however, the rider suddenly wheeled his pony, and raced around White Otter at great speed. The Sioux immediately stopped and prepared to defend himself. Then he suddenly discovered that the horseman was a friend.

"Ho, Dacotah! Ho, my brother!" shouted the rider.

"Yes, yes, now I see who you are," cried White Otter, as he lowered his bow.

A moment later they dismounted beside each other. White Otter recognized the rider as a Minneconjoux warrior named Lean Wolf, an old friend with whom he had shared several perilous adventures.

"I have brought you some words from your brother, Sun Bird," said Lean Wolf.

"It is good," White Otter replied, eagerly, as his eyes lighted with pleasure.

"It is bad," Lean Wolf said, soberly.

"Has something bad happened to my brother Sun Bird?" the young Ogalala inquired anxiously.

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"No, I have not come to tell you that," Lean Wolf assured him. "I have come to tell you that our enemies, the Blackfeet, came to our camp. They crawled around the village in the dark like dogs. We did not hear them. They ran off many ponies. Sun Bird is going to bring back those ponies. He is the leader of a war party. He is going to fight the boastful Blackfeet. He wants his brother White Otter to go with him."

Lean Wolf finished speaking, and looked inquiringly at the young Ogalala war chief. For some moments the latter remained silent. He knew that a warrior must not speak hastily, or pledge himself too eagerly. Although his heart beat wildly at the thought of joining his friend in a war expedition against the Blackfeet, he carefully concealed his emotion lest he might lose respect in the eyes of the stern Minneconjoux scout. Then, after the proper interval, White Otter replied:

"Lean Wolf, tell my brother Sun Bird that I will go with him to fight the Blackfeet," he said, quietly.

"It is good," replied Lean Wolf.

"See, pretty soon it will be dark," said White Otter. "You must go with me to my people."

"No, I will go back," Lean Wolf told him. "I was going to your village to find you. Then I saw you here. It is good. I have brought you the words of your brother Sun Bird. It is what I set out to do. I have done it. Now I will turn back. Sun Bird is waiting."

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"Go, my brother," replied White Otter. "Tell Sun Bird that I will come to meet him at the end of three suns. If I do not come then he must wait one sun more. Then if I do not come he will know that something bad has happened to me. Now I am going away."

They parted without further ceremony, riding away into the twilight in opposite directions. Once they had separated neither looked back. After he had ridden a short distance, however, White Otter raised his head and uttered the wild, piercing war cry of the Dacotahs. It echoed defiantly across the plain, and the young war chief thrilled at the sound. Then, after a short silence, it was answered from the west. White Otter laughed gleefully as he raced his pony toward the Sioux camp.

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## CHAPTER II

### OFF ON THE WAR TRAIL

When White Otter reached the Sioux camp he rode directly to the lodge of old Wolf Robe, the famous Ogalala war chief.

"Ho, grandfather, see, I have brought you some meat," he cried gayly.

"Ho, I see that you have killed a fat young buck," said Wolf Robe, as his eyes lighted with pleasure. "Come, woman, cut some meat."

At his command, old Singing Wind, the grandmother of White Otter, came from the lodge. White Otter dragged the buck from his pony. Then, as Singing Wind called some of the younger women to help her, White Otter asked if he might talk with Wolf Robe.

"Yes, my son, come into the lodge and sit down with me," said Wolf Robe.

The old chief listened attentively while White Otter described his unusual adventure with the lynx. Then he told of his meeting with Lean Wolf, the Minneconjoux scout, and the message which the latter had brought from Sun Bird. Wolf Robe looked sharply at his grandson.

"I am going with Sun Bird to fight the Blackfeet," declared White Otter.

Wolf Robe nodded understandingly, but made no reply. For a long time he gazed thoughtfully at his battle-scarred war shield which hung on a tripod of poles at the rear of the lodge. It appeared as if the aged war leader was recalling his own glorious achievements on the war trail in the days of his youth. White Otter waited patiently for him to speak.

"It is good," Wolf Robe said, finally. "The voice of a friend travels far. The ears of a Dacotah are open for the words of a friend. Sun Bird has called you. He is your friend. You must go."

Having given this advice, Wolf Robe again subsided into silent meditation. As White Otter rose to leave, however, his grandfather motioned for him to be seated.

"Wait, my son, I have some words for you," he said.

"It is good," replied White Otter.

"You say that you are going to fight the Blackfeet," said Wolf Robe. "Those people are strong. They are braver than the boastful Pawnees. I have fought with them many times. When I was a young man I was taken to their village. They kept me there many moons. Those were bad days. Then I got away. After that I fought many battles against those people. Once I went to their camp, and took away some ponies. It was a hard thing to do. Yes, my son, the Blackfeet are great warriors. Well, I have told you about them. Now you can tell our brothers, the Minneconjoux, about it. I believe you will have a big fight to get back those ponies. My son, you are a Dacotah. It is enough. I have spoken. Go!"

The following day, at sunrise, White Otter set out to join the Minneconjoux war party. He was dressed and decorated for the war trail. Naked above the waist, he had daubed and streaked his face, chest and arms with yellow clay. A great war bonnet of eagle plumes proclaimed his rank as a famous Ogalala war chief. His dress consisted of buckskin leggings, buffalo-hide moccasins, a buckskin breechcloth, and a silky cow buffalo robe for protection against wind and storm. He carried a wolfskin case containing his bow and arrows, a flint knife in a buckskin sheath, his buffalo-hide war shield, and a weasel-skin pouch containing his fire sticks and some dried meat. Mounted upon his best war pony, the dashing young warrior made a striking appearance as he rode proudly from the great Sioux camp.

Many friends shouted good wishes from the edge of the village. White Otter turned his pony, and answered them with the thrilling war-cry of the Dacotahs. Then he raced away toward the west.

Once beyond range of the camp, however, White Otter drew his pony to a walk, and carefully scanned the plain. He had little fear of encountering foes so near the Ogalala village, but he determined to take every precaution. A small band of antelope were feeding far away toward the south, and as they seemed to be the only living creatures on the vast expanse of plain White Otter urged his pony into a canter and proceeded on his way.

It was a glorious day in early summer. The sky was blue and cloudless. The prairie was dotted with flowers. Birds sang gayly from the thickets. The air was perfumed with the fragrance of blossoms, the sweet aroma of growing grass, and the faint, spicy scent of distant sage.

White Otter rode on his way in high spirits. He was carefree, and happy, and eager for adventure. The fact that he was about to expose himself to the perils of the war trail caused him slight concern. He had implicit confidence in the ability and courage of his tribesmen, the fearless Minneconjoux, and he had little doubt that their expedition against the powerful Blackfeet would be entirely successful. The thought of being injured or killed in the adventure never entered his mind. If it had he would have wasted little time upon it, as he had long since learned to scoff at danger, and to accept injury and death as inevitable possibilities in the life of every warrior.

Toward the end of the day White Otter came in sight of a familiar little grove of aspens which marked a former camp site. He had encountered a company of Ute warriors at that spot the previous year, and he was somewhat suspicious of it. It offered a splendid hiding place to foes, and the wily young Sioux determined to make sure that the place was unoccupied before he ventured within arrow range. He stopped at a safe distance out on the plain, and watched the grove with considerable anxiety. Then, as he saw nothing to arouse his suspicions, he rode slowly about the camp site, looking for fresh pony tracks. He soon discovered them. They led away from the grove. White Otter dismounted, and studied them with great care. He saw that it was the trail of a single pony, and the tracks were several days old. Having learned that much, he walked slowly ahead of his horse, watching carefully to discover where the trail had entered the grove.

"Perhaps it was Lean Wolf," he told himself.

He soon learned otherwise, as the trail approached the grove from the south. White Otter followed the tracks a short distance out on the plain, and found evidence which convinced him that the pony had carried a rider. As there seemed little to be gained by following the trail farther in that direction, he turned and followed it to the grove.

The camp site was unoccupied, and as there was a spring, and plenty of grass for his horse, White Otter decided to stop there for the night. He picketed his pony, and then began to examine the place for signs. The ashes from a small fire, and some charred bones scattered near by, told him that some one had spent the night at that spot several days before. He worked diligently to find a clue to the identity of the traveler, but found nothing which would tell him what he wished to know. The little mound of ashes, the remnants of a meal, and the pony tracks were his only clues.

The fact that the unknown horseman had come from the south aroused White Otter's interest. Both the Pawnees and the Utes lived to the southward. As he had already encountered a war party of the latter at the grove he wondered if it was a favorite stopping place for those mysterious foes. However, as the signs were at least two days old, the possibility caused him little concern.

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Having finished his reconnaissance, White Otter seated himself at the edge of the grove to watch the plain. The sun had already set, and the purple evening shadows were creeping out of the east. The prairie appeared lifeless. The Sioux was at a loss to account for the scarcity of game. He feared that foes of some sort had driven it from the locality. The thought suggested the possibility that the lone rider was a scout, loitering behind a hunting party to watch for enemies.

At dark White Otter returned to his pony. He feared to make a fire, lest the gleam might betray him to his foes. He sat beside the little spring, and ate several cakes of pemmican, composed of dried meat and berries, which he had brought for just such an emergency.

Before he ventured to sleep, White Otter returned to the edge of the plain, and spent a long time listening for a warning of approaching enemies. The howling of some distant prairie wolves, the gentle rustling of the aspens, and an occasional grunt from his pony were the only sounds. He continued to listen, however, until the night was half gone. Then he returned to the camp site, and lay down to sleep.

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Dawn was just breaking when White Otter was suddenly awakened by the snorting of his pony. Seizing his bow, he moved cautiously to the edge of the grove. A buck antelope was standing within easy bowshot. It had scented the pony, and stopped to investigate. Unable to resist the temptation, White Otter drove his arrow through its heart. It was a yearling in prime condition, and he cut a choice steak from the carcass. Then, as the light strengthened, and he saw no evidence of foes, he made a tiny fire and broiled the antelope meat. He ate heartily, and gave thanks to Wakantunka, the Great Mystery, for sending him food.

Shortly after sunrise White Otter resumed his journey toward the Minneconjoux camp. As the pony tracks led in that direction he followed them with keen interest. If the lone horseman really were a hostile scout, White Otter knew that to follow him would be the surest and safest way of locating any enemies who might be in the vicinity. He kept a sharp watch, therefore, and approached the knolls and ridges with great caution.

It was midday before he saw anything to make him suspicious. Then he discovered a dense cloud of dust rising behind a slight elevation of the plain. He immediately stopped to watch it. It suggested two possibilities—a herd of frightened buffaloes or a company of horsemen. White Otter longed to peep over the top of the ridge, but he realized that it would be folly to take the risk until he knew what was before him. He knew that hostile scouts might be watching from that spot, and the possibility made him cautious.

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"Perhaps some one is hunting buffaloes," he said.

Realizing that he might have been seen, White Otter looked for a place of concealment. The plain was open and bare of shelter, however, and there was no chance to hide. He determined to remain where he was, hoping that something might appear along the crest of the ridge.

It was soon evident that whatever was raising the dust was moving rapidly toward the north. White Otter felt quite certain that it was a herd of buffaloes in wild flight. Perhaps they were pursued by wolves, which were always loitering about the herds at that season to prey upon the young calves. It was just as probable, however, that a hunting party of foes had invaded the great Sioux hunting grounds.

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"Well, I will wait here and see what comes of it," declared White Otter.

The dust cloud finally faded out some distance farther toward the north. White Otter was perplexed. He was undecided as to what he should do. The ridge extended like a barrier directly across his path, and it would be necessary to cross it to continue his journey. Still, he realized the peril of venturing within bow range.

White Otter waited a long time, and then finally turned his pony toward the south, and rode along parallel with the ridge. Having seen nothing which would lead him to suspect enemies, he planned to cross the ridge some distance to the southward. When he believed that he had gone a sufficient distance, he turned and approached the ridge. As he finally came within arrow range he stopped and searched the top of the slope for signs of foes. Although he failed to discover them, he realized that they might be lying just below the top of the ridge, in which event it would



be impossible to see them. He rode forward with great caution, therefore, and was prepared to flee at the first hint of danger.

White Otter had actually begun to climb the slope when he was startled by a chorus of whoops and yells, and turning toward the left he saw a company of horsemen racing toward him. He lashed his pony up the slope and crossed the ridge. Then he rode furiously toward the west.

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The maneuver completely fooled the Pawnees who had expected him to turn down the ridge and flee in the opposite direction. Their confusion gave White Otter a chance to get beyond arrow range before they dashed over the ridge in pursuit of him. He looked over his shoulder and counted eight riders whom he instantly recognized as Pawnees. His eyes flashed dangerously as he thought of those hated foes.

White Otter was holding his lead over his pursuers when he suddenly saw a solitary rider gallop from a little grove of trees, and race diagonally across the plain in an effort to intercept him. The Pawnee was mounted on a particularly fast little buckskin, and White Otter realized that unless he swerved from his course he would soon come within easy bow range of him. The Sioux however, refused to give way.

"I will kill that man," White Otter declared, grimly.

The other Pawnees had failed to come within bowshot, and although they were yelling fiercely, and forcing their ponies to the limit, White Otter gave little attention to them. His eyes were fixed on the daring rider who was racing recklessly across the plain in an attempt to get in front of him. The Pawnee seemed equally intent upon watching White Otter. The ponies appeared well matched, and the race was a thrilling one.

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When they finally came within bow range, White Otter was sufficiently in the lead to foil the plan of the Pawnee. The latter, however, immediately began to shoot his arrows, and one of them penetrated deep behind the shoulder of the Sioux pony. Mortally wounded, the unfortunate animal made one great bound and then crashed to its knees, and White Otter was thrown heavily over its head.

Jarred and stunned, the Sioux staggered to his feet to find the Pawnee almost upon him. Quick to realize his peril, White Otter dropped behind his dying pony as the Pawnee shot his arrow. The next moment he drove his own arrow through the body of his foe, as the latter rode at him with his war club raised for the fatal stroke. As the Pawnee toppled to the plain, White Otter sprang forward and seized the bewildered pony. An instant later he was racing away through a volley of Pawnee arrows.

Enraged at the fate of their comrade, the Pawnees were risking their necks to overtake the Sioux. White Otter feared that at any moment either he or the captured pony would be pierced by their arrows. In their frenzy, however, they shot wildly, and their arrows flew wide of the mark. White Otter lashed the Pawnee pony without mercy in an effort to place himself beyond arrow range. He was astonished at the speed and stamina of the buckskin, and he soon realized that it was the equal of the horse he had lost. The discovery gave him confidence. A glance backward told him that two of his pursuers were steadily losing ground, and he was holding his lead against the others. He was still within arrow range, however, and he crouched low upon the buckskin, and urged it to still greater efforts. It responded nobly, and the fierce yells from his enemies convinced him that they were falling farther behind. The Pawnee pony was speeding over the plain with great bounds, and White Otter was forced to admit that his favorite war pony would have been sorely tried to maintain the pace.

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Having begun to increase his lead, White Otter took hope. The little buckskin had won his confidence, and he had little fear of being overtaken. The day was far spent, and he believed that he would have little difficulty in keeping well ahead of his pursuers until darkness came to his aid. Then he knew that it would be a simple task to shake them from his trail. Feeling sure of escape, therefore, he sat erect and shook his bow defiantly at the helpless Pawnees. They replied with wild yells of rage, and White Otter laughed mockingly.

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The Pawnees continued the chase until darkness finally blotted them from sight. Then White Otter turned sharply from his course, and rode directly toward the north. Feeling confident that the maneuver would baffle his foes, he slackened the pace of his pony to an easy canter. Thus he rode until the night was half gone, and then he stopped and dismounted from the tired little buckskin.

Fearing that the Pawnees might continue to search for him, White Otter made no attempt to sleep. He sat close beside his pony, watching and listening for a warning of his foes. He hoped that if they failed to find him before daylight they would abandon the pursuit rather than venture farther into the Minneconjoux hunting grounds.

Shortly before daylight White Otter mounted his pony and rode away toward the west. Having heard nothing from the Pawnees he felt quite certain that he had thrown them from his trail. His confidence was rudely shaken, however, when he suddenly heard the sharp, husky bark of the little gray fox a short distance at his left. A few moments afterward a horse whinnied, and before he could interfere the little buckskin replied.

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"That is bad," White Otter murmured, uneasily.

He was fearful and perplexed. The signal was a favorite one among the Sioux, and still under the circumstances he mistrusted it. He waited, therefore, listening anxiously to locate whoever confronted him. In a few moments the call was repeated at his right. He knew that either friends or foes were on both sides of him. At length he answered the challenge. A voice sounded from the

darkness.

"Ho, Dacotah."

"Ho, my brother Sun Bird," White Otter replied, joyfully, as he recognized the voice of his friend.

Then Sun Bird and his brother Little Raven rode forward to meet him. The three young warriors had shared many perilous adventures, and they greeted one another with boyish enthusiasm. Then Sun Bird repeated the call of the little gray fox three times in quick succession, and fifteen grim Minneconjoux warriors came to join them.

"Lean Wolf told us about this thing," Sun Bird explained. "Come, Lean Wolf, here is White Otter, tell him about it." [Pg 28]

"Ho, my brother," said Lean Wolf, as he rode up beside White Otter.

"Ho, my brother Lean Wolf," White Otter replied, heartily.

"When I was riding back to my people I saw some Pawnee hunters," explained Lean Wolf. "They saw me, but I was a long ways off. They did not come after me. I told my people about it. Sun Bird said, 'It is bad. Those Pawnees may kill White Otter. Perhaps we can help him. Come, my friends, who will go with me to find White Otter?' That is how we came here."

"It is good," said White Otter. "The brave Minneconjoux are my brothers. I believe when the Pawnees heard your ponies they ran away. But see, my friends, I am riding one of their ponies. It is very fast. I will tell you how I come to have it."

The Minneconjoux listened with great interest while White Otter told of his adventure with the Pawnees. When he finished speaking there were many exclamations of approval from the stern warriors who had gathered about him.

"White Otter, you have done a good thing," declared Sun Bird. "See, it is getting light. Come, we will go and tell our people how you fooled the boastful Pawnees." [Pg 29]

They turned their ponies toward the west, and rode away singing boastfully of White Otter's triumph over the Pawnees.

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## CHAPTER III

### THE COUNCIL FIRE

Late the second day the Sioux came in sight of the great Minneconjoux camp. It was situated beside a wide stream that flowed down from great snowy peaks farther to the westward. The little company of riders stopped on the summit of a grassy knoll and looked with pride on the great circle of lodges which dotted the plain. Their pride was somewhat humbled, however, by the absence of the vast herd of ponies which usually were to be seen grazing near the village. The few horses that had escaped the Blackfeet raid were carefully guarded within the camp.

The riders had already been discovered and recognized by watchers at the edge of the village, and a company of horsemen was soon racing across the plain to meet them.

"See! my people are coming to take you to their village," Sun Bird told White Otter.

As the Minneconjoux dashed up to them White Otter recognized several old friends in the company who had come out to welcome him. There was Feather Dog, a famous scout, with whom he had shared a number of thrilling adventures; and Sitting Eagle, another great scout, was in the party. Then there was Kicking Bull, a renowned hunter, whom White Otter had saved from death in a buffalo stampede. All those men greeted the famous young Ogalala chief with great respect, and his heart filled with pride as he realized the esteem in which he was held by those renowned warriors. [Pg 31]

"You have come to help us fight the Blackfeet," said Feather Dog. "It is good. We will do some big things."

"I was going with my brother Sun Bird to find you, but the great chief Curly Horse asked me to stay behind," explained Kicking Bull. "Some of our young men saw smoke over near the mountains, and we were afraid that the Blackfeet were coming back. That is why I held back."

"It is good," declared White Otter.

As the horsemen approached the camp the Minneconjoux began to shout the name of White Otter and to sing songs of welcome. The daring exploits of the young Ogalala war chief had made him famous throughout the great Dacotah nation, and the Minneconjoux were prepared to honor

him with the courtesies due a great chief. When he reached the edge of the village he was met by a delegation of noted warriors who led him through the camp, so that all the people might have a chance to welcome him.

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"See, here is White Otter!" cried the Minneconjoux. "It is White Otter, the great chief of the Ogalalas. It is White Otter, the great war leader. See, White Otter, our lodges are open. We have cooked much meat. You must come to our lodges, and eat with us."

Men, women and children followed behind his pony, as his escort led him toward the lodge of the famous chief, Curly Horse. The Minneconjoux war chief was waiting to receive him. Beside him stood Rain Crow, the noted Minneconjoux medicine man, who was the father of Sun Bird and Little Raven. The most renowned men of the tribe composed the company which Curly Horse had summoned to greet the Ogalala. They were dressed in their choicest possessions and they made a splendid appearance. Each of them wore the coveted war bonnet of eagle plumes, and carried his coupstick with a record of his achievements on the war trail. It was a notable gathering, and White Otter thrilled with pride as he looked upon those splendid men of the great Dacotah nation.

Curly Horse, the chief, was particularly imposing. He was a middle-aged man, tall, and of powerful physique, with stern features, and steady, penetrating eyes. His voice was deep and commanding, and he carried himself with the pride and dignity appropriate to his rank. He wore a great headdress of eagle feathers which extended to the ground. Each feather was tipped with a small tuft of hair taken from the scalps of his foes. His buckskin shirt was decorated with weasel tails, and mystic symbols traced with colored porcupine quills. His buckskin breeches were deeply fringed, and ornamented with porcupine quills and elk teeth. A breastplate composed of the leg bones of deer covered his breast. About his neck was a necklace of bear claws. His moccasins were of buffalo hide, beautifully decorated with porcupine quills and colored grass. Over his arm he carried a magnificent robe of the grizzly bear.

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"White Otter, you have come to my lodge—it is good," said Curly Horse. "These great warriors have come here to meet you. Many moons have passed since you came here before. My people have talked about you. They wanted you to come back. Now I will tell you that we feel good because you have come here."

"I have listened to the words of the great chief, Curly Horse," replied White Otter. "They make me feel good. I will keep them in my heart. The Minneconjoux are my brothers. When my brothers call, I come. My brother Sun Bird called me. I am here. I am going with my brothers to fight the Blackfeet. We will bring back many ponies."

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As White Otter ceased speaking Curly Horse glanced at Rain Crow and the famous medicine man stepped forward to greet the Ogalala.

Rain Crow appeared older and less robust than his chief, but he, too, was of striking appearance. His face was seamed and scarred, and his hair was streaked with gray. His eyes, however, flashed with the fire of youth. He wore a large wolfskin cap decorated with a great pair of buffalo horns. His face was painted with white clay. His hair was divided into two braids bound with otter skin. His buckskin shirt and breeches were decorated with mysterious medicine symbols. About his neck was a necklace of sacred charms or tokens, each believed to possess some strange power which would aid him in overcoming the Evil Spirits, and preserve him from the attacks of his foes. In his right hand he carried the sacred medicine pipe. Over his left arm was a handsome robe of wolfskins.

"White Otter, Curly Horse has spoken," said Rain Crow. "Now I will give you some words. I feel good when I see you here. You are a young man, but you are a great chief. I believe you will do something big when you meet the boastful Blackfeet. White Otter, you say that Sun Bird and Little Raven are your brothers. It is good. I will make you my son. My son, the lodge of Rain Crow is open for you. I have spoken."

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"Rain Crow, you are a great Medicine Person," replied White Otter. "You have done some big things. I have heard my people talk about you. It is true that Sun Bird and Little Raven are my brothers. You have called me your son. It is a great thing. I feel good about it. I will tell my people about it. It will make them feel big. My father, I will bring you some ponies from the Blackfeet camp. I have finished."

Many other noted warriors made speeches praising the ability and courage of the young Ogalala, and welcoming him to the Minneconjoux camp. When the ceremony was finally concluded Sun Bird escorted White Otter to the lodge of Rain Crow.

"Now I will tell you how the Blackfeet ran off all those ponies," Sun Bird said, when they were alone.

"Yes, tell me about it," urged White Otter.

"We were dancing the Buffalo Dance," said Sun Bird. "My father was singing the Medicine Songs. The people were sitting near the fire. The fast war ponies were tied near the lodges, but many good hunting ponies were out on the plain. We left them there because our scouts did not see any signs of enemies. Only a few boys were watching those ponies. Well, while the people were dancing and singing we heard a great noise. There were many shouts. Then we heard many ponies running. Pretty soon a boy rode into the village. He was shouting, 'The Blackfeet! The Blackfeet! They have run off the ponies!' Then we jumped upon the war ponies, and were going out to chase the Blackfeet, but Curly Horse held us back. 'Wait!' shouted Curly Horse. 'Perhaps it is a trick. Perhaps a great war party is about to rush into the camp. We will watch, and see what

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comes of it.' We knew that those were good words, and we waited to guard the camp. Well, no one came. Then we knew that the Blackfeet had gone away with the ponies. When it got light one of the boys came back. His pony fell down and died when he came into the village. He rode a long ways to get away from the Blackfeet. The other boy did not come back. The Blackfeet must have carried him away."

"Who is he?" inquired White Otter.

"He is Dancing Rabbit," Sun Bird told him.

"His father was Lame Wolf. He was killed by our enemies, the Crows. His mother fell into the water, and was carried away by the fierce Water Monsters. Old Spotted Face is his grandfather. He feels very bad about this thing."

"I know Spotted Face," said White Otter. "He is a great man. We must try to help him."

"Perhaps we will find Dancing Rabbit in the Blackfeet camp," replied Sun Bird.

The day had already ended, and as the evening shadows fell upon the camp the Minneconjoux began preparations for the great war dance. A large fire was lighted in the center of the village, and the entire tribe assembled to honor the men who were going to fight the Blackfeet. The warriors who had enlisted in the war party marched noisily about the camp, singing their war songs, and shouting boastful threats against their foes. As they finally approached the council fire they were greeted with wild yells of approval from the great company who awaited them. Then all subsided into respectful silence as Curly Horse and the principal chiefs of the tribe walked solemnly into the council circle.

After the chief and his escort had taken positions, the warriors lined up before him and waited for him to address them. He looked upon them with pride and affection. Most of them were young men in the prime of their youth, and their bold, flashing eyes and fearless faces proclaimed their courage. They were led by Sun Bird who had organized the war party. He called White Otter to stand beside him, and the Minneconjoux murmured approval of the honor.

"My brothers, I see that you are ready for war," said Curly Horse. "You are going to fight the Blackfeet. It is good. They are our enemies. They have carried off many of our ponies. You must bring them back. You must also bring some good Blackfeet ponies. Perhaps you will find Dancing Rabbit in the Blackfeet camp. Then you must carry him away. Spotted Face is waiting for him. I will not tell you how to fight. You are Dacotahs. It is enough. Now I will ask Rain Crow to give you some words."

Before speaking, Rain Crow drew an ember from the fire and lighted the sacred medicine pipe. Then he puffed the smoke toward the heavens, toward the earth, and toward each of the four winds. He kept up a weird, high-pitched chant, and tossed small handfuls of dried sweet grass into the flames. It was evident that he was asking success for the war party, and the Minneconjoux watched him with grave interest. When he had completed the ceremony, he stood some time staring fixedly at the stars. Then he addressed the war company.

"My friends, you have seen me smoke the great Medicine Pipe," he said. "It is good. It will help you. I have asked Wakantunka, the Great Mystery, to make you strong. I have asked the Good Spirits to help you. I have asked the Bad Spirits to do you no harm. I believe everything will be good. I believe you will overcome the Blackfeet. Listen, my friends, I hear the noise of many ponies running. Yes, yes, those are Sioux ponies. Yes, I hear some Blackfeet ponies. They are running toward the Minneconjoux camp. I see these brave young men riding behind them."

His prophecy roused the Minneconjoux. Men, women and children united their voices in the war cry of the Dacotahs. It rang through the camp, and echoed off across the plain as a challenge to their foes. Rain Crow laughed, and shook his clenched hand toward the north.

"Hi, you Blackfeet people, do you hear that noise?" he cried, excitedly. "Pretty soon you will know what it means. Then you will shake, and cry like young deer when they hear the wolf cry."

His words again threw the people into a frenzy of excitement. The war cry again rang out across the plain, and before the sound had died away the warriors had assembled for the war dance. They formed a large circle about the fire, and stood awaiting the word from Sun Bird, their leader. A number of aged men had come forward with the war drums, and taken places near the dancers. A hush fell upon the vast assemblage, as the Minneconjoux watched eagerly for the interesting spectacle to begin.

Then Sun Bird raised his voice in the familiar strains of the great war song, and the dance began. Keeping time with the solemn, rhythmical throbbing of the war drums, the dancers moved slowly about the fire chanting the boastful words of the war song, and flourishing their weapons. They had not circled many times about the fire, however, before they cast off restraint, and flung themselves into ecstasies of the dance with wild abandon. The war song was forgotten, as the dancers began to shout their boasts and threats against the powerful foes in the north. Each moment added to their excitement, and as the war drums throbbed in shorter, quicker beats, the dancers quickened their steps to hold the rhythm. Although each held his place in the circle, they had abandoned all attempt to dance in unison, and each man was interpreting the spirit of the dance to suit himself. All, however, kept time to the beats of the war drums, and the droning chants of the aged musicians. As quick and sinewy as mountain cats, the young warriors pranced about the fire in a frenzy of enthusiasm. Each tried to surpass his fellows in the mad antics of the dance, and their maneuvers brought yells of approval from the fascinated onlookers. At one moment the dancers would stoop near the ground, and dance forward with short, mincing steps, shading their eyes with their hands, as if searching for the trail of their foes. Then they would

suddenly spring upright and announce their success with a piercing whoop. A moment afterward they would leap forward with war club raised to deliver the fatal stroke. Then they would begin a wild dance about the fallen foe. Some of the older warriors carried their coupsticks with the trophies won on former war expeditions. As they danced they shook these priceless possessions before the envious eyes of their tribesmen. Sometimes one of those dancers would drive his coupstick in the ground while he and several companions danced wildly about it, rushing up to touch it and reciting some great achievement as they did so. Then all would suddenly stand transfixed in their places while they raised their faces toward the stars, and united their voices in the piercing Dacotah war cry.

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The spectacle was weird and fascinating. The grotesque contortions of the dancers in the lurid glare of the fire, the fierce expression on their faces, the solemn throbbing of the war drums, the picturesque assemblage of spectators, the dim, ghostly outlines of the lodges in the shadows, the gaunt, wolf-like dogs skulking along the edge of the camp, made a striking impression on the memory.

White Otter, as a famous war chief of the Ogalalas, was entitled to stand with Curly Horse and the prominent men of the tribe. He declined the honor, however, and took his place in the circle of dancers. The Minneconjoux watched him with approving eyes as he threw himself into the spirit of the dance. When the ceremony was finally brought to an end toward daylight, Curly Horse called the Ogalala to his lodge.

"White Otter, you are a great warrior," said Curly Horse. "A great warrior must have a good horse. The Pawnees have killed your war pony. It is true that you have taken a good pony from those boastful people. Well, you are a Dacotah, and you must ride a Dacotah pony. I am going to give you one of my fastest ponies to ride to the Blackfeet camp. I have spoken."

"Curly Horse, you have done a big thing," White Otter replied, gratefully. "You are a great chief, and I know that you have the fastest ponies. Yes, I will ride your pony to the Blackfeet camp."

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"It is good," declared Curly Horse.

When White Otter told Sun Bird of the gift which he had received from Curly Horse, Sun Bird beamed with pleasure. He believed that there were few, if any, ponies in the entire Dacotah nation which possessed the speed and endurance of those owned by the great Minneconjoux chief.

"Perhaps when you ride that horse you will leave me far behind," Sun Bird said, banteringly.

"Well, my brother, if I get to the Blackfeet camp ahead of you I will leave some Blackfeet for you to kill," laughed White Otter.

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## CHAPTER IV

### AWAY INTO THE NORTH

As White Otter and Sun Bird came from the lodge at dawn they found a boy waiting with a fiery little piebald pony.

"Curly Horse has sent you this pony," said the lad, as he passed the lariat to White Otter.

"Tell the great chief Curly Horse that White Otter feels good about this thing," said the Ogalala.

"I know that pony," Sun Bird told him. "It is very fast, but it is very wild. You must watch out for it."

"I will ride it," White Otter assured him.

He was no sooner upon its back, however, than the hot-tempered little beast began to rear and plunge in a manner that would have proved disastrous to a less expert rider. White Otter, however, refused to be thrown, and Sun Bird whooped with boyish glee as he capered wildly about the rearing pony and shouted encouragement to his friend. His shouts soon brought an appreciative audience from the lodges, and White Otter realized that his reputation as a horseman was at stake. He set his sinewy thighs more closely behind the shoulders of the plunging piebald, and pulled hard on the lariat which was twisted about the animal's lower jaw. The Minneconjoux soon saw that he was an expert, and they offered neither criticism nor advice. They watched with flashing eyes as horse and rider fought for supremacy. Then the pony suddenly whirled about and dashed among them, and they scattered like a covey of frightened quail to avoid the flying hoofs. The piebald bucked its way through the center of the camp, with a great company of men and boys racing along behind it and yelling at the top of their voices. Some

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women were broiling meat near the end of the village, and as they heard the wild commotion, and saw the pony racing directly toward them, they fled to the lodges in a panic, crying out that the Blackfeet had invaded the camp.

In the meantime the piebald had collided with a number of other high-spirited ponies which were tied before the lodges of their owners, and several of the animals broke loose and imitated the mad antics of the piebald. In a few moments the entire camp was in an uproar. The barking of the dogs, the shouts of the men, the screams of the women, and the frightened cries of the children mingled in one great din which turned the village into bedlam.

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"It is bad," cried Curly Horse, as he watched the disorder from the entrance to his lodge. "Some Evil Spirit must have gone into that horse."

The piebald, however, had finally exhausted itself. It stood upon trembling legs at the edge of the camp, with its head lowered in defeat. White Otter reached over, and gently stroked the sweaty neck. Then he raised its head and spoke sharply, and the piebald gave obedience to its master. He rode directly to the lodge of Curly Horse.

"That is a bad horse," said Curly Horse. "I will give you another pony."

"No, no!" cried White Otter. "I will keep this pony. It is fast, and strong. It will make a great war pony."

"Well, I see that you can ride it, so I will say no more about it," replied Curly Horse.

The wild escapade of the little piebald had aroused the camp, and as the members of the war party finally rounded up the loose ponies, and assembled in the center of the village, the entire tribe gathered to witness the departure. When the gallant company was ready to leave, Curly Horse came forward to address them.

"My brothers, you are about to ride away to the great Blackfeet camp," he said. "Before you lies a long and dangerous trail. We have many enemies in that country. The Blackfeet are the strongest. They are very sly. You must be as brave as great Matohota, the bear, and as cunning as Tokala, the little gray fox. I see many brave warriors among you. I see Sun Bird, your leader. He is a great warrior. I see White Otter, the great Ogalala chief. I see Little Raven. He is very young, but he has done big things. I see Short Bear. He is very brave. I see Feather Dog. He is a great scout. I see Lean Wolf and Sitting Eagle. They have been on many war trails. I see many more brave warriors. It is a great war party. I believe you will do what you are setting out to do. I believe you will bring back many ponies. I will ask Wakantunka, the Great Mystery, to help you. I will ask our brother, Huya, the great war bird, to lead you to the Blackfeet camp. Go, my brothers, Curly Horse has spoken."

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"Curly Horse, you have given us big words," replied Sun Bird. "We will keep them in our hearts. We will remember that we are Dacotahs. It is enough. We will go."

A few moments afterward the war party rode from the village. Many of the older warriors who were remaining behind to guard the camp accompanied the war party some distance across the plain. The old men, the boys, and the women and children gathered at the edge of the camp, singing the war songs, and calling upon Wakantunka to protect their warriors from the fierce and warlike Blackfeet.

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Sun Bird asked White Otter to ride with him at the head of the company. The youthful Minneconjoux war leader fully realized his responsibility, and he was glad to have the aid and counsel of the famous young war chief whom he had asked to accompany him.

The war party was not a large one. It contained less than a third of the fighting men of the tribe. The Minneconjoux feared to send a larger force from the village, for they knew that their old enemies, the Crows, as well as several scouting parties of Blackfeet, had recently been seen within a day's travel of the Minneconjoux camp. They determined, therefore, to send a small force of picked warriors against the Blackfeet in the hope of recovering the stolen ponies, and learning the fate of the young Minneconjoux who had been carried away. The company chosen for the perilous undertaking was composed mostly of young warriors famous for their courage and fighting ability, and a few older veterans, like Lean Wolf and Sitting Eagle, whose mature judgment would check the reckless impetuosity of their younger companions.

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"Well, my brother, how do you feel about this thing?" Sun Bird suddenly asked White Otter, as they cantered along in advance of the war party.

"The Blackfeet are very strong," White Otter replied, thoughtfully. "Wolf Robe, my grandfather, has told me about them. I have never fought those people. Wolf Robe says that they are braver than the Pawnees. Do you know about them?"

"Yes, I have fought against them many times," Sun Bird told him. "They are the enemies of my people. They are brave. Many Buffaloes is their chief. He is a great warrior. He rides a mysterious war pony. It is as swift as the wind, and as black as the night. Its eyes shine like the little lights up there in the High Place. My people believe it must be a Medicine Pony. Curly Horse would give many good presents for that pony."

At that moment their talk was interrupted by the appearance of a golden eagle, the war bird of the Dacotahs, which was circling slowly some distance toward the north. The superstitious Minneconjoux immediately accepted it as a good omen, as they recalled the words of Curly Horse, their chief.

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"See, there is Huya, the great war bird," they cried. "Curly Horse has sent him to lead us to the

Blackfeet camp. Come, Huya, our brother, look about you, and show us where our enemies are hiding."

The eagle, however, soon disappeared into the clouds, and the Minneconjoux cried, "Huya has gone up there to look around. He is looking for the Blackfeet. When he sees them he will fly over them, and show us where they are."

As they moved farther from the camp Sun Bird began to take precautions against the possibility of encountering foes. Two scouts were detailed on either flank of the war party, and other riders dropped back to guard the rear. Sun Bird, White Otter and Little Raven rode some distance in front. Thus the courageous band of Dacotahs made their way across the great plain that extended for unknown leagues into the northward, the stronghold of the mighty Blackfeet nation.

The day was two thirds gone when White Otter suddenly discovered a horseman on the summit of a low ridge far away toward the west. He immediately stopped and showed him to Sun Bird and Little Raven. Apparently aware that he had been seen, the distant rider began to ride rapidly in a circle. It was the signal for danger. Sun Bird appeared alarmed.

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"It is one of our scouts," he said, uneasily. "Running Dog and Lean Wolf went that way. That man is far away, but I believe he is Lean Wolf. He has seen something bad. Come, Little Raven, go and find out about it."

As Little Raven raced away to meet the scout, the main company of riders came up. They, too, had discovered the rider on the ridge, and many of them were eager to go over there in the hope of finding foes.

"No, that would be foolish," Sun Bird said, firmly. "We will wait here until Little Raven comes back and tells us about it. That scout has not called us. He is telling us that he has seen something. See, Little Raven is a long ways off. Pretty soon we will know about this thing. We must wait."

"It is the only thing to do," agreed the famous warrior, Sitting Eagle.

They watched anxiously as the scout turned his pony down the ridge, and rode to meet Little Raven. The distance made positive identification difficult, but most of them agreed that it was Lean Wolf. When the two riders finally met, the members of the war party watched them with breathless interest. They also watched the plain in all directions for the sudden appearance of foes. Then the warriors who had been loitering in the rear overtook them.

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"What has happened?" they inquired anxiously. "Who is over there?"

"Lean Wolf has made the danger signal," explained their comrades. "Little Raven has gone over to find out about it. Did you see anything?"

"We saw some wolves," replied the scouts.

"Perhaps they were Pawnees," suggested Sun Bird.

"No, we saw them running on the plain, and they were wolves," declared High Hawk, one of the warriors who had composed the rear guard.

"See, Little Raven is coming back," White Otter told Sun Bird. "He is riding fast. He has something to tell us."

"Lean Wolf has gone back to the ridge," said Sun Bird.

They waited impatiently as Little Raven rode toward them at top speed. In the meantime the other rider was cantering toward the ridge. When he reached it he rode up the low slope and disappeared over the summit.

"Lean Wolf has gone to watch something," declared his tribesmen.

When Little Raven finally reached them they listened with eager attention while he told Sun Bird what he had learned.

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"That man is Lean Wolf," said Little Raven. "He found fresh pony tracks over beyond that ridge. They were going the way we are going. There were many ponies. They were riding ponies. There were no marks of lodge poles. Lean Wolf says it must be a war party. He does not know who they are. Running Dog is following the trail. Lean Wolf says that we must watch sharp when night comes. He says that we must stop pretty soon at the water place. Then he will know where to find us. Perhaps he will come when it gets dark. Perhaps he will go to find the camp of those people. My brothers, I have brought you the words of Lean Wolf."

"It is good," replied Sun Bird. "My friends, you have heard the words of our brother, Lean Wolf. I believe that some of our enemies are over there behind that ridge. Lean Wolf says there are many pony tracks. There must be many riders. Perhaps it is a big war party. We must watch sharp. We will go ahead until we come to the water place. Then we will stop. Perhaps Lean Wolf will come there after it gets dark."

As they were about to resume their way they saw one of the scouts from the east riding toward them. As he came nearer they recognized him as Feather Dog.

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"Why have you stopped?" Feather Dog inquired, curiously.

"Lean Wolf found many pony tracks over there behind that ridge," they told him.

"Perhaps those are the ponies which the Blackfeet took away," said Feather Dog.

"No, the tracks are fresh," Sun Bird explained.

"Then we must watch out," declared the famous scout.

"Did you see anything over there?" inquired the Minneconjoux.

"We saw some buffaloes, but they were far away," replied Feather Dog.

After he had learned where his comrades intended to stop for the night, he immediately left them, and rode away to join his companion, a young warrior named Proud Hawk. At the same time the war party resumed their way toward the north. They were enthusiastic over the possibility of an early encounter with their foes, and Sun Bird had considerable difficulty in restraining some of the younger warriors who were eager to ride after the unknown horsemen. His rank as war leader, however, gave him authority to command. They accepted his orders, therefore, and followed him across the plain, chanting their war songs, and boasting of the deeds which they pledged themselves to perform.

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The evening shadows were already falling when the Sioux finally came in sight of the appointed camp site. It was a small water hole in the midst of a straggling growth of stunted trees. However, as it offered good pasturage for the ponies, it was a favorite stopping place. It marked the northern boundary of the Minneconjoux hunting grounds, and few of even the most venturesome hunters cared to risk going farther into the north unless accompanied by a strong force of their tribesmen. It was dangerous ground, as both the Blackfeet and the Crows were constantly roaming about those boundless northern plains.

"Well, my friends, we will stop here until the next sun comes up," said Sun Bird, as he dismounted from his pony.

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## CHAPTER V

### SIoux SCOUTS

Alert to their peril, the Sioux took every precaution against an attack. As the twilight slowly faded, and the night shadows settled upon the plain, the ponies were picketed in a circle about the camp site, and details of warriors were appointed to take turns in watching through the night. There was no fire, and the evening meal consisted of the usual war rations of dried buffalo meat and berries.

The warriors who had been scouting behind the war party arrived at the camp site before dark, but the scouts who had ridden along the flanks failed to appear. The absence of Feather Dog and Proud Hawk, who had been scouting toward the east, caused considerable comment. The Sioux knew that some time might pass before Lean Wolf and Running Dog gained the desired information about the mysterious horsemen to the westward, but they were keenly curious to know what had detained Feather Dog and his companion.

"Perhaps something bad has happened to them," suggested a young warrior named Many Feathers.

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"No, I do not believe it," Sun Bird declared, confidently. "Feather Dog is a great scout. He has been on many war trails. It is hard to catch an old wolf. Come, White Otter, you are a great war leader. Tell us how you feel about it."

"My brothers, what Sun Bird says is true," declared White Otter, "Feather Dog is a great scout. Perhaps he is trying to find out about something. I believe he will come here."

While they were talking the familiar bark of the little gray fox sounded from the eastward. It was speedily answered, and a few moments afterward Feather Dog and Proud Hawk rode to the camp site.

"Well, my brother, what did you find?" Sun Bird asked Feather Dog.

"We saw three scouts," replied Feather Dog. "They were far away and they did not see us. We hid behind a hill, and watched them a long time. Then we followed them. When it got dark we could not find them. They did not make a fire. I believe they were looking for enemies."

"Do you know who they are?" Sun Bird inquired, eagerly.

"No, we could not get close enough to find out about it," Feather Dog told him.

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"Which way were they going?" asked Sun Bird.

"They were going the same way we are going, but they were far away toward the place where the sun comes up," replied the scout.

"My brothers, you have heard the words of Feather Dog," said Sun Bird. "Our enemies are on two sides of us. We must be very cautious. We will wait here until it gets light. Perhaps Lean Wolf



will come and tell us something."

In the meantime the wily Sioux prepared themselves against the possibility of a sudden attack. The camp was surrounded by sharp-eared scouts who stationed themselves some distance out on the plain to listen for the approach of foes. The ponies were picketed inside the circle of warriors, who lay upon the plain with their weapons beside them.

Sun Bird and White Otter, however, remained awake. The young Minneconjoux war leader was anxious to consult his friend concerning the perilous advance across the Blackfeet hunting grounds. The young warriors moved beyond earshot of their companions, therefore, and seated themselves to talk.

"White Otter, I believe we are in danger," said Sun Bird.

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"It is true," White Otter replied, soberly. "There are many enemies in this country. I believe we will have some big fights before we get to the Blackfeet camp."

Sun Bird was about to reply when they were startled by a strange rumbling noise toward the north. They listened a moment in anxious suspense, and then they leaped to their feet in alarm. It sounded like the hoofbeats of many ponies bearing down upon the camp site.

"Call our people! Call our people!" cried Sun Bird, as he rushed to arouse the sleeping Minneconjoux.

At that moment they heard the guards, who had been stationed on the plain, racing toward the camp. The picketed ponies were plunging and snorting, and the alarmed Minneconjoux were frantically untying the picket ropes.

"The Blackfeet! The Blackfeet!" they shouted, excitedly.

"Tatanka! Tatanka! The buffaloes! The buffaloes!" cried the sentinels who had been watching on the north side of the camp.

Then the Sioux suddenly realized the truth. A vast herd of stampeded buffaloes were thundering down upon them. There was not a moment to spare. Springing upon the frightened ponies, the Sioux rode madly into the night to escape from the great mass of panic-stricken beasts behind them. The buffaloes were sweeping across the plain with the irresistible force of an avalanche, and the horsemen knew that only the speed of their ponies could save them. They kept close together, and rode at a breakneck pace. A false step meant destruction for horse and rider, and the Sioux made little attempt to guide the agile little beasts beneath them.

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Sun Bird and White Otter soon found themselves beside one another at the head of the company. The two ponies were running evenly, and it was apparent that neither of them had reached the limit of its speed. Nevertheless, they were well in advance of all the other ponies, and appeared to be increasing their lead with each stride.

"That wild horse can run," laughed Sun Bird as his blood tingled with the excitement of the race. "Come, we will see what that pony can do."

"Hi!" shouted White Otter, as Sun Bird suddenly took the lead.

He had carefully estimated the ability of the little roan which Sun Bird rode, and felt sure that it was a worthy competitor for the piebald. Now, as Sun Bird applied his rawhide quirt, the roan began to show its speed. The piebald, however, quickly accepted the challenge, and although White Otter made no effort to force it the fiery little beast was soon at the shoulder of the roan. Then they raced madly through the darkness at a speed which few if any of the ponies in the great Dacotah nation could equal. Sun Bird was leaning forward and vigorously applying his whip. White Otter, however, was still allowing the piebald to make its own pace. Inch by inch it crept steadily forward until the roan's lead was cut to a nose length. Then, as he perceived that the roan had reached the limit of its powers, White Otter pulled heavily against the lower jaw of the piebald. He knew that a few more strides would take it into the lead, and regard for the pride of his friend made him unwilling to claim the victory.

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"Listen," he cried, suddenly. "Our people have turned around. Come, we must follow them."

"No! No! I see what you are trying to do," Sun Bird cried, impatiently. "Come, let me see that pony run."

Then the Minneconjoux struck the piebald a sharp blow with his quirt, and the marvelous beast bounded past him and raced away at a speed which astounded its rider. White Otter could scarcely believe that he was mounted upon a creature of real flesh and blood, for the piebald was rushing through the night at a pace which seemed beyond the powers of anything mortal. Carried away with enthusiasm, the Ogalala applied his quirt for the first time, and the piebald reached the limit of its speed. White Otter was forced to crouch close over the pony's neck to keep his breath. He was dazed by the pace at which he was being carried across the plain. It seemed as if he were flying through space on the wings of a tempest.

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"It must be a Medicine Horse," he whispered, superstitiously.

When he finally succeeded in pulling the piebald to a canter, he found that he had completely lost Sun Bird, and the valiant little roan. He had also raced beyond sound of the buffalo herd. The piebald was breathing hard, but it showed no signs of exhaustion, and White Otter believed that its stamina was equal to its speed. Then, as he stopped to listen, he heard a signal some distance toward the east. He had heard the Minneconjoux turn in that direction as Sun Bird forced him into the last desperate sprint. It was evident, therefore, that having gained a sufficient lead upon the buffaloes, the Minneconjoux were circling back toward the camp site. He believed that the

signal was from Sun Bird. To reassure him, White Otter replied with the bark of the little gray fox.

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"Hi! the buffaloes are coming," he said, as he heard the distant rumble of their hoof beats.

Realizing that he was directly in their path, White Otter turned his pony toward the east, and rode off at a brisk canter. The buffalo herd was a long ways behind him, and he had little fear of being overtaken. There were other perils, however, which caused him more concern. He had heard Feather Dog tell of three mysterious riders to the eastward, and it was possible that they were scouts from a larger company. Therefore, White Otter determined to advance with caution. He believed that Sun Bird was close at hand, and his first thought was to find him. It was not long before he overtook him.

"Ho, my brother, that pony did not come back as fast as he went away," laughed Sun Bird.

"It is foolish to run when the race is finished," replied White Otter.

"That is the fastest horse I ever saw," Sun Bird declared, enthusiastically.

"Do you believe that this pony could catch that great horse of Many Buffaloes, the Blackfeet chief?" White Otter asked, eagerly.

"No," Sun Bird told him. "There is no Dacotah pony that can catch that horse."

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White Otter was not so sure about it. He could not believe that any horse had greater speed than the piebald. He kept his opinion to himself, however, as he did not wish to appear boastful before his friend.

"Well, we got away from those buffaloes," said Sun Bird. "Now we must go back to the water place. We will find our friends there."

Feeling sure that they had passed beyond the edge of the great buffalo herd, they began to circle toward the camp site. They were riding at an easy canter, when they were suddenly halted by the howling of a prairie wolf directly ahead of them. Determined to take no chances, they listened to convince themselves that the call was genuine.

"Yes, it is Mayash," declared Sun Bird.

As White Otter agreed that it really was a wolf which had raised the cry, they advanced on their way. However, they neither saw nor heard anything of the skulking gray prowler. It was evident that the wolf had slunk away at their approach.

Then as they drew near the camp site the little piebald raised its head, and whinnied softly. The cautious young Sioux again stopped to investigate. They knew that the piebald had caught the scent of other ponies. While they waited, listening for a clew, the familiar Dacotah signal sounded within bow range of them.

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"It is good," said Sun Bird. "We have found our people."

A few moments later they met the scout who had challenged them. He was Hollow Bear, a famous Minneconjoux hunter.

"We have been watching for you," Hollow Bear told them. "There is much buffalo meat at the water place. Some of the buffaloes ran against the trees. Some fell into the water hole. Some were dead. Some we killed. There must have been many buffaloes in that herd. The ground is all broken up."

"Has Lean Wolf come here?" Sun Bird inquired, eagerly.

"No," replied Hollow Bear.

They left the scout, and rode on toward the camp site. They found the members of the war party lying some distance out on the plain, as the camp site was littered with the bodies of dead buffaloes. The Sioux said that they had dragged several of the great beasts from the pool.

"It is good that we got away," said Sun Bird. "Those buffaloes would have pounded us into the ground."

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"Well, there is good meat over there but we cannot use it," complained Sitting Eagle. "There are many robes, but there is little hair upon them."

The Minneconjoux said that they had ridden far enough to get a safe distance in front of the herd, and then they had turned eastward and circled back to the camp site. They seemed rather curious to know why Sun Bird and White Otter had been so long returning. Those crafty young warriors, however, made no explanation. White Otter had no desire to proclaim the superiority of his pony, and Sun Bird was quite content to keep silent concerning the defeat of his famous little roan.

Dawn was breaking when Running Dog, the companion of Lean Wolf rode in from the west. The war party crowded eagerly about him, asking for news of the horsemen whom he and Lean Wolf had followed.

"We followed those people a long ways," Running Dog told them. "When it got dark we saw their fire. We went pretty close. Then we got down from our ponies. We turned their heads out of the wind so they would not call. I held the ponies. Lean Wolf crawled up near the fire. He was away a long time. Then he came back, and told me about those people. They are Crows. They are carrying meat. It is a great hunting party. They are going straight ahead. Lean Wolf says that you must watch sharp. Perhaps the Crows will send out scouts. Perhaps they will see you. Then there

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will be a fight. Lean Wolf says to go straight ahead. We will keep following the Crows until we find out where they are going. Then we will come and tell you about it. I cannot tell you any more."

"It is good," replied Sun Bird. "Tell Lean Wolf that we will do as he tells us to do. We will keep a sharp watch for our enemies."

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE LONE RIDER

After Running Dog had left them, Sun Bird made preparations to resume their advance toward the distant Blackfeet camp. Profiting by the warning which the scouts had brought, the cautious young war leader determined to make every provision for the safety of the war party. In addition to the two expert scouts riding along each flank, Sun Bird appointed a strong rear guard under command of Sitting Eagle. Then, as a further precaution against blundering into a trap, he asked White Otter and Little Raven to accompany him on a reconnaissance far in advance of the war party.

"My brothers, you must wait here until we are far ahead," he told the Minneconjoux, as he rode away.

Once beyond sight of their comrades, the three young scouts realized that their mission was a perilous one. They had little doubt that foes were on both sides of them, and it was possible that the Sioux war party had already been discovered. In that event there was great probability that crafty foes might circle around behind them, and separate them from their companions.

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"We must watch sharp," cautioned Sun Bird.

He hoped to lead the war party within an easy day's travel of the Blackfeet camp. Then he planned to go into hiding and send scouts under cover of the darkness to locate the Blackfeet ponies and reconnoiter about the village. In the meantime Sun Bird realized the constant peril of colliding with his enemies. However, he relied upon the skill and daring of his scouts to give him timely warning of an approaching war party. As they were riding cautiously across the plain they again saw the war eagle circling high up toward the eastward. They stopped and watched it with great interest.

"See! our brother, Huya, has come down out of the clouds," said Sun Bird. "I believe he is flying around over there to show us where our enemies are hiding."

Soon afterward they saw a solitary horseman ride over a distant rise of the plain. He quickly discovered them, and immediately stopped his pony. For some moments he continued to watch them. Then he turned about and galloped from view. The Sioux also had stopped at sight of the stranger, and now that he had disappeared Sun Bird was at a loss to determine just what to do. The rider had been too far away to be identified, but his actions made it plain that he was neither Feather Dog nor Proud Hawk.

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"Perhaps he is one of the scouts that Feather Dog told about," suggested Little Raven.

"Yes, that may be true," said Sun Bird. "White Otter, what do you make of it?"

"I do not know what to make of it," acknowledged White Otter. "That man saw us. If he is a scout he will go to tell his people about us. It is bad. We must watch sharp."

"We are scouts," said Sun Bird. "We must tell our brothers about this thing."

"It is the best thing to do," agreed White Otter.

"I will go back, and tell them about it," Little Raven volunteered.

As the others agreed, he immediately turned his pony, and rode back to warn the war party. The main company of Minneconjoux had not come in sight, and Sun Bird and White Otter felt somewhat anxious for the safety of the youthful scout who had gone to meet his tribesmen. If a strong force of foes were loitering in the vicinity, it would be easy for them to intercept the solitary Minneconjoux. In spite of his youthfulness, however, Little Raven was an experienced warrior, and Sun Bird felt certain that he was competent to look after himself in an emergency.

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"Sun Bird, I believe that warrior is watching over the top of that hill," White Otter declared, suspiciously.

"How do you know that?" Sun Bird inquired, anxiously.

"I do not know it, but I believe I saw him peeping over the top of that hill," replied White Otter.

They looked anxiously toward the grassy knoll, and strained their eyes to discover the skulking foe. The thought that he was watching made them uneasy, and they were eager to learn if their suspicions were true. It was some moments before White Otter finally became convinced.

"Yes, I see him," he declared, positively. "He is peeping over the top of that hill. I see his head over there near that little bush. Watch sharp."

"Yes, yes, I see his head," Sun Bird declared, a moment later.

Convinced that the mysterious horseman really was watching them, they believed that he was waiting to learn if they were followed by a larger company. They had little doubt that he was a scout reconnoitering in advance of a force of their foes.

"It is bad," White Otter said, uneasily. "That man saw Little Raven ride away. He will know that some one is following behind us. He will watch until our friends come. Then he will tell his people about it."

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"Yes, I see that it is bad," said Sun Bird. "Perhaps if we ride over there we can chase him away."

"Come," White Otter proposed, recklessly.

As they cantered briskly toward the knoll, the scout withdrew from sight. They felt quite sure that he had merely slipped farther down the opposite side of the ridge, and was still peering cautiously over the top. As they felt convinced that the horseman was alone, they had little fear of running into an ambush. When they got within arrow range, however, they approached with great care. As a precaution against attack, they separated and rode forward several arrow flights apart. Once at the foot of the slope they rushed their ponies to the top, and prepared to attack whoever confronted them. The scout, however, was nowhere in sight. They searched the plain in vain; the mysterious stranger had entirely disappeared. For a moment or so they were completely baffled. Then White Otter suddenly smiled, and nodded understandingly.

"I know about it," he told Sun Bird.

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"Tell me," Sun Bird asked, eagerly.

"That scout is very sharp," declared White Otter. "He has thrown his pony, and he is hiding over there in that high grass."

"Yes, I believe that is where he is hiding," agreed Sun Bird.

The spot where they believed the scout had concealed himself was many arrow flights away, and they knew it would be difficult to discover him at that distance. They felt almost certain, however, that he was still watching them from his new hiding place. The thought disturbed them. His persistence made them suspicious. They wondered if he were trying to fool them with some wily bit of stratagem.

"Well, we will ride over there and chase him out," proposed Sun Bird.

They had not gone an arrow flight, when a pony suddenly rose to its feet in the long grass. An instant later the rider sprang upon its back and raced away toward the south. He was too far in the lead to be easily overtaken, and besides, the Sioux realized that it would be perilous to follow him. They watched, therefore, while he sped across the plain.

"We have chased him away—it is good," said Sun Bird.

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"Perhaps something bad will come of it," White Otter warned him. "If that man is a Blackfoot, he will tell his people about us. Then it will be hard to get near the camp."

"Perhaps he is a Crow," Sun Bird suggested, hopefully.

"Lean Wolf has told us that the Crows are over there," White Otter reminded him, as he pointed toward the west.

"That is true," agreed Sun Bird. "But perhaps they sent scouts over here to look for the Blackfeet."

White Otter remained silent. The appearance and the actions of the unknown scout had made him wary. He feared that the Sioux war party was in imminent danger of being surrounded and attacked by a superior force of foes. The possibility distressed him. There seemed little chance of avoiding the peril.

"Sun Bird, I believe the best thing to do is to find our people," White Otter declared, finally. "Perhaps Lean Wolf and Feather Dog have told them something."

"Yes, we will go to find our brothers," agreed Sun Bird.

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## CHAPTER VII

## SMOKE SIGNALS

As Sun Bird and White Otter rode cautiously over the ridge they saw the Minneconjoux war party moving slowly across the plain. As soon as the Minneconjoux discovered the two horsemen they immediately stopped to watch them.

"Our brothers are as cautious as Hitunkasan, the weasel," laughed Sun Bird. "Well, we will tell them who we are."

He raised his arms and clasped his hands together above his head. It was the sign for friends. Then the two scouts rode rapidly toward the war party. The Minneconjoux soon recognized them, and came across the plain. Little Raven raced on in advance of his friends.

"Well, my brothers, I see that you have come back," he said, as he rode up to them. "It is good. What became of that scout?"

"He has gone away," White Otter told him.

"Did you kill him?" Little Raven inquired, eagerly.

"No," replied Sun Bird. "When we rode after him he ran away."

"Well, when he saw that you were Dacotahs he was frightened," Little Raven said, boastfully.

While they were talking the war party came up to them. Sun Bird found Lean Wolf in command. He said that he had followed the Crows until he felt sure that they were going to their village. Then he left Running Dog to scout along the western flank of the war party, and returned to his companions.

"Do you believe those people know about us?" Sun Bird asked, anxiously.

"No," Lean Wolf assured him. "They are far away. The scouts did not go far from their people. Those Crows have killed plenty of game. They are afraid the Blackfeet will catch them, and take it away."

"Have you seen Feather Dog?" inquired Sun Bird.

"No," replied Lean Wolf.

Then the Minneconjoux inquired anxiously about the solitary horseman. They said that Little Raven had told them about him, but they were eager to know who he was and where he had gone.

"I cannot tell you that," Sun Bird told them. "He was far away, and we could not find out who he was. When we went after him he ran away. Perhaps Feather Dog will tell us about him."

"Yes, yes, perhaps Feather Dog will find out about him," the Minneconjoux told one another, hopefully.

"Well, my brothers, we will keep going ahead until we find a good place to stop," said Sun Bird. "Then we will wait for Feather Dog and Proud Hawk, and Running Dog. I believe they will have something to talk about."

The day was little more than half gone, however, when they saw three riders approaching from the east. As the horsemen did not stop when they discovered the war party, the Sioux believed that two of the riders must be Feather Dog and Proud Hawk. As they came nearer they recognized them.

"They are bringing a prisoner!" the Minneconjoux cried, excitedly. "It must be that scout. Hi! now we will see who he is."

Then they were suddenly astonished into silence. The three horsemen had come sufficiently near so that the Minneconjoux could plainly discern the dress and features of the third rider. They could scarcely believe their eyes. They looked many moments before they were convinced. Then they were thrown into an ecstasy of joy.

"See! See! It is Dancing Rabbit!" they shouted.

The young Minneconjoux who had disappeared when the Blackfeet ran off the band of Sioux ponies was riding between Feather Dog and Proud Hawk. He was mounted on a pinto pony, and as Sun Bird and White Otter recognized it the mystery of the lone horseman was solved.

"That is the pony we saw on the ridge," they told their friends.

As the riders joined the war party, the Minneconjoux crowded eagerly about their young tribesman to learn the story of his adventures. He was a tall, sinewy youth of about fifteen winters, and he exhibited the dignity and reserve of a seasoned warrior.

"Come, Dancing Rabbit, tell us how you come to be here," said Sun Bird.

"My brothers, you are great warriors," replied Dancing Rabbit. "I am a young man. I cannot talk big. I will tell you that the Blackfeet carried me away to their village. Well, they treated me very bad. Then I found a chance to get away. I took this pony. It is fast. I got far ahead and the Blackfeet did not come up with me. I was going to our village. Then I saw three riders. I hid behind a ridge and watched them. They were far away, and I could not make out who they were. I said, 'Perhaps they are Blackfeet scouts. Perhaps they are Crows.' Then they rode after me and I ran away. Then I found Feather Dog. That is how I come to be here."

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"It is good," Sun Bird told him. "Your words are the words of a warrior."

Feather Dog then explained how he had chanced to encounter the young Minneconjoux.

"I was watching for our enemies," said Feather Dog. "Then I saw some one riding toward me. He was a long ways off, but he was coming fast. I rode my pony down into a gully to hide. Then I crawled up the side of the gully and peeped out. That rider was coming right where I was. I waited for him. When he got near I was going to jump up and shoot my arrows at him. Well, when I jumped up I saw who he was. Then we rode away and found Proud Hawk. Then we came here. That is all I know about it."

"Did you see any Blackfeet?" Sun Bird asked him.

"Yes, we saw four Blackfeet scouts," said Feather Dog. "Two of them were the same riders we saw before. This time they were close, and we could see them. Then we saw that they were Blackfeet. They were going straight ahead. I believe they are going to the Blackfeet village. I do not believe they know about us."

"It is good," declared the Minneconjoux.

"Yes, it is good," Sun Bird told them. "But we must watch out. Perhaps we will run into those scouts. The Blackfeet are sharp. If they see us it will be hard to get near the camp."

"I will tell you something about that," Dancing Rabbit said, suddenly. "The Blackfeet have moved their lodges. Yes, they have gone away from the place where they were. They have gone over there in the shadow of the big mountains."

The Minneconjoux were astounded at the announcement. They looked anxiously toward the northwest, where a long range of dim, shadowy peaks showed against the sky. They had expected to find the Blackfeet camp on the open plain, a number of days' journey toward the north. It had never occurred to their minds that the Blackfeet might have decided to change the location of the village. The words of Dancing Rabbit gave them several reasons for concern. First, they knew that they had already gone considerably out of their way. Again, they realized that to reach the new Blackfeet camp they must go far to the westward, where they would be in peril from their old enemies the Crows, as well as from the Blackfeet.

"It is bad," declared Sun Bird.

"It is bad," agreed his companions.

As there seemed to be a difference of opinion as to just which way they should proceed, Sun Bird immediately called a council. Some of the Minneconjoux believed it would be safer to continue directly toward the north until they were about in line with the Blackfeet camp, and then turn toward the west. Others thought that they should move directly toward the new camp, and reach the mountains as soon as possible. There was considerable discussion.

"My brothers, I believe the best thing to do is to turn toward the mountains," said Sun Bird. "Then if we see our enemies we can hide. If we go to the mountains we can climb high up, and look for the Blackfeet camp. It will be hard for the Blackfeet to see us. In the day we will hide in the timber. When it grows dark we will send scouts to find out about the ponies. Yes, my friends, I believe it is the best way to get near the camp."

"My brothers, Sun Bird has given us good words," declared Lean Wolf. "I believe he has told us the best way to go to the Blackfeet camp. He is a good war leader. We must listen to his words."

"My friends, what Lean Wolf says is true," said Feather Dog. "I believe it would be foolish to keep going ahead. I have told you about those four Blackfeet scouts. I believe they are going to the Blackfeet camp. Pretty soon they will turn this way. If we keep going straight ahead we will meet them. We must turn toward the mountains."

"White Otter, how do you feel about this thing?" inquired Sun Bird.

"My brother, I believe you have told the best way to go to the Blackfeet camp," White Otter replied, quietly. "I believe what Feather Dog says is true. If we keep going ahead perhaps we will run into those Blackfeet scouts."

The opinion of the famous young Ogalala seemed to make a deep impression upon the Minneconjoux. It was only a few moments before those warriors who had suggested traveling toward the north changed their views, and agreed that it would be safer to ride toward the west.

"Well, my brothers, I see that we all feel the same about this thing," Sun Bird said, when all had agreed. "It is good. Come, we will ride toward those great mountains."

Having made their decision, they rode boldly toward the west, ready and eager to meet their foes. It was late in the day, however, before they saw any evidence of them. Then they discovered a smoke signal some distance to the northward. Three columns of yellow smoke were ascending into the sky. The Sioux watched them with considerable uneasiness. They wondered if the Blackfeet scouts had discovered the war party.

"No, I do not believe it," Feather Dog declared. "That smoke is a long ways off. Those scouts could not get so far ahead of us. It must be some one different."

"Perhaps the Blackfeet are calling the scouts to the camp," suggested Proud Hawk.

"No, the camp is not in that place," Dancing Rabbit told them.

Convinced that the smoke signals did not concern them, the Sioux continued on their way. Feather Dog said that there was a good camp site with plenty of grass and water a short distance

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ahead of them, and as the day was drawing to a close they determined to stop there for the night. They had not ridden far, however, before they saw three more columns of smoke rising a considerable distance to the westward of the first signals.

"It must be the Blackfeet," declared the Minneconjoux. "It is the danger signal. They are telling their people about us."

"Perhaps they have found the Crows," suggested Feather Dog.

A few moments later a horseman swept into view, far to the westward. He was riding at a furious pace, and seemed to be coming directly toward them. They had little doubt that it was Running Dog, and they watched him in great suspense. [Pg 84]

"Running Dog is coming to tell us about something big," they cried.

As the Minneconjoux scout came nearer, he began to point excitedly behind him. The Sioux looked anxiously toward the west, expecting to see a company of their foes racing along on the trail of Running Dog.

"Perhaps the Crows are coming, we must be ready," said Sun Bird.

Roused by the possibility, the hot-tempered Minneconjoux immediately got ready to fight. Then, as Running Dog finally came within shouting distance, they began to cry out and question him.

"Are the Crows coming?" they inquired eagerly.

"No! no!" shouted Running Dog.

Then he dashed up to them. As he threw the panting pony upon its haunches, his companions gathered about him to learn what had sent him racing across the plain.

"Listen, my brothers, I will tell you about it," said Running Dog. "The Crows and the Blackfeet are getting ready for a big fight over there behind that ridge. I was watching them. Then I saw you coming that way. Then I came over here to tell you to hold back. Do you see that smoke up there? Well, the Blackfeet are calling the people to fight. You must watch sharp. I saw many warriors over there behind that ridge." [Pg 85]

The words of Running Dog were received in silence. The Minneconjoux looked gravely into each other's faces. They realized the peril to which they were exposed, and they waited for the war leaders to speak. All eyes were turned upon Sun Bird.

"My friends, Running Dog has told you about those warriors over there behind that ridge," said Sun Bird. "We are in great danger. Something must be done. We must try to find a place to hide in until it grows dark. Then perhaps we can get away from here. If we meet our enemies we must fight them. We are Dacotahs. It is enough."

"My brother, I will tell you about a place to hide in," said Dancing Rabbit. "I found it when I was running away from the Blackfeet. It is a place where water used to run. Now it is dry. It is deep. It goes a long way across the plain. We can ride into it, and no one will see us."

"Where is this place?" Sun Bird asked anxiously.

"Over there," said Dancing Rabbit, pointing toward the north. [Pg 86]

"Come, my brothers, we will go to this place, and hide until it grows dark," proposed Sun Bird. "I will ask three scouts to go over to that ridge to watch those warriors. I will ask White Otter to be the leader."

"I will go," White Otter volunteered, eagerly.

Most of the war party desired to accompany the Ogalala on his perilous reconnaissance. Having been appointed as leader, however, White Otter was privileged to choose his companions.

"I will ask Lean Wolf and Little Raven to go with me," said White Otter.

"I will go with you," replied Lean Wolf.

"I will go," Little Raven said, eagerly, as his eyes flashed with boyish enthusiasm.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### A CLOSE CALL

A few moments afterward White Otter and his companions rode away on their hazardous mission. Running Dog had told them that the rival war parties were a considerable distance beyond the ridge, and the Sioux hoped to come in sight of them without being discovered. White Otter turned directly toward the south, as he believed that there was less chance of encountering

hostile scouts in that direction. He rode a considerable distance before he finally turned toward the west, and approached the ridge.

"The Crows have passed this place—the Blackfeet came the other way—they will not pass the Crows—the Crows will not come back here—this is a good place—we will stay here and watch," White Otter told his companions.

"It is good," agreed Lean Wolf, the famous Minneconjoux scout.

They approached the ridge with great caution. The sun had already set, but they knew the long summer twilight would give them ample time to discover their foes. As they finally came within bow range of the grassy slope, they stopped and spent many moments watching for signs of lurking foes. Then they suddenly heard the sounds of battle.

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"The Crows and the Blackfeet are fighting—it is good," White Otter declared, grimly.

Then, while Little Raven remained with the ponies, White Otter and Lean Wolf crawled slowly up the ridge. When they reached the top they parted the long grass and looked anxiously across the plain. The Crows and the Blackfeet were preparing to fight. They were a long distance from the ridge, however, and the Sioux felt in little danger. They watched with keen interest while their foes began the preliminaries of battle. The experienced Sioux scouts read the situation at a glance. It was evident that the Crows had been overtaken and brought to a stand by the Blackfeet war party. The Crows had dismounted and taken shelter behind their ponies, and the Blackfeet were riding about them in a great circle, but keeping safely beyond bow range. There was much yelling and singing of war songs, but no real attempt at actual fighting.

"The Blackfeet are cautious," White Otter said, scornfully. "They are making a great noise, but I do not see them killing any Crows. If they rushed in there and frightened those ponies the Crows would have a hard time of it."

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"It is true," agreed Lean Wolf.

The Crows, however, appeared to be considerably stronger in numbers, and it was apparent that the Blackfeet were cautious about beginning the attack. The Sioux were surprised at the small size of the Blackfeet war party. They had expected to see a much larger force of those savage foes engaged against the Crows.

"I do not see many Blackfeet—it is bad," said White Otter. "They have left many warriors to guard the camp."

When Running Dog brought word of the impending battle, the Sioux had hoped that the Blackfeet would send a sufficient force against the Crows to weaken the defense of the Blackfeet camp considerably. White Otter realized, however, that the hope was false. It was evident that the crafty Blackfeet had left most of their fighting men at the village.

"Perhaps they are waiting for our people to come for those ponies," said Lean Wolf.

"Yes, I believe it is true," agreed White Otter.

He had barely ceased speaking when the Blackfeet suddenly began their attack. Whooping fiercely, they rushed upon their foes and made desperate attempts to frighten and stampede the Crow ponies. The Crows, however, had prepared for just such a maneuver, and the alarmed ponies were unable to break away. In the meantime the Crows sent a deadly volley of arrows against the Blackfeet, and the latter recoiled before the fierceness of the defense. A number of warriors had already toppled from their ponies, and it was evident that the loss somewhat discouraged their comrades. For a moment they wavered, and then a reckless war leader on a pinto pony rallied them and led them against their foes.

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They rode close up to the Crows, and fought with great bravery. The Crows, however, had the double advantage of numbers and shelter, and the Blackfeet soon realized that they were fighting a losing fight. The fearless war leader had already forfeited his life to his gallantry, and a number of his followers were either killed or wounded. In return, the Blackfeet had done little harm to the Crows, except for killing a few ponies, and wounding one reckless young Crow who had rushed from behind his horse to attack them. Thoroughly disheartened, they became demoralized and raced away in bad disorder.

"See, see, the fierce Blackfeet are running like rabbits!" laughed White Otter.

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"The Crows are too strong for them," declared Lean Wolf.

Encouraged by their success, many of the Crows leaped upon their ponies and set out after the fleeing Blackfeet. The maneuver threw the Blackfeet into a rage. They immediately wheeled about and raced back to meet their pursuers. Their boldness confused the Crows, and before they had recovered from their surprise the Blackfeet were upon them. As less than half of the Crow force had joined in the pursuit, the advantage had suddenly turned to the Blackfeet. Smarting with the humiliation of their recent repulse, the Blackfeet determined to take full vengeance upon the misguided company of Crows who had blundered into their power.

"They have fooled the Crows," White Otter cried, excitedly. "They will wipe out that war party before their friends can come to help them."

"The Blackfeet are sharp," laughed Lean Wolf.

The Sioux suddenly realized that the wild flight of the Blackfeet had been a clever bit of stratagem to deceive their foes. It was apparent that the trick had been entirely successful, as the Blackfeet seemed to have the Crows entirely at their mercy.

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"See, those poor Crows are calling their brothers to help them," White Otter told Lean Wolf.

Finding themselves completely overwhelmed by the ferocity and strength of their crafty foes, the Crows were thrown into a panic. They had lost all sense of order and discipline, and each man was fighting for himself. Their one idea appeared to be to escape from the relentless Blackfeet, who seemed determined to annihilate them. Aware that they were facing destruction, the Crows were making frantic appeals to their comrades to come to their assistance. The latter abandoned the pack ponies and the hard-earned supply of meat and rode wildly across the plain to assist their tribesmen.

"Now we will see a big fight," White Otter cried, enthusiastically.

"Yes, yes," agreed Lean Wolf, as his eyes flashed with excitement.

The Crows who had come to the aid of their tribesmen fought with great courage, but the Blackfeet were thoroughly aroused and they seemed invincible. The Sioux were amazed at the bravery and skill displayed by those hardy warriors from the north. Having duped their foes and gained the advantage, they appeared determined to follow it through to a complete victory.

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Although the Crows still outnumbered them, the Blackfeet pressed the attack with a reckless ferocity that completely demoralized their foes. Time after time the Crows tried to rally from their confusion, but each attempt was the signal for a still fiercer assault by the Blackfeet.

"Hi, the Blackfeet know how to fight!" White Otter whispered, tensely.

The fighting was at close range, and many riderless ponies gave evidence of the result. The Sioux witnessed many deeds of heroism. They saw a wounded Crow warrior on a white pony ride recklessly at three of his enemies, and overcome all three of them before a company of Blackfeet finally killed him. They saw a Blackfoot dash among a company of astounded Crows and rescue his comrade who had been desperately wounded. They saw many thrilling hand-to-hand encounters which were fought to the death. They saw dismounted warriors running boldly into the thick of the fight in the hope of killing an enemy and securing his horse. Most of them were killed. A few achieved the exploit, and galloped from the encounter in triumph.

Then as the light began to fade from the plain the Crows made a final, heroic effort, and broke through the circle of foes. They raced directly toward the spot where the Sioux were watching, and behind them thundered the Blackfeet.

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"Run to the ponies!" cried White Otter, as he realized the peril which threatened them.

They scrambled wildly down the ridge and called to Little Raven to bring the ponies. He had already guessed that something was wrong, and he lost little time in joining them.

"The Crows and the Blackfeet are almost here!" White Otter told him, as he sprang upon the piebald.

As the plain offered no hiding place in the vicinity of the ridge, White Otter realized that their only chance of escape lay in open flight. He also knew that to turn toward the north would arouse the suspicions of the crafty Blackfeet. He raced away toward the east.

"Keep low on your ponies, and perhaps our enemies will not know who we are," he advised his companions.

Crouching low upon the necks of their ponies, the Sioux rode furiously to gain a safe lead upon their foes. Night was almost at hand, and the dusky twilight shadows made it difficult for their enemies to identify them. When the Crows finally dashed recklessly over the top of the ridge the Dacotahs were many arrow flights away. At sight of the three racing ponies, however, the Crows apparently became suspicious, and fearful of being led into another trap. They immediately swerved from their course, and rode toward the north.

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"That is bad," cried White Otter, who had been risking his neck to glance back at his foes. "If they go that way they may find our people."

"I believe our friends will be watching sharp," Lean Wolf assured him.

Then they heard the wild, ringing whoops of the Blackfeet, and White Otter again turned his head to look back. The heavy shadows had almost wiped out the ridge, and it was difficult to see the company of riders who were racing recklessly down the steep grassy slope. He made them out, however, and was relieved to see them turn sharply and follow the Crows. The latter had entirely faded from sight in the dusk.

"The Blackfeet did not see us," White Otter told his companions. "See, it is almost dark! We will ride slower."

They could barely see an arrow flight before them, and they believed there was slight probability of being seen. In fact they had high hopes that the Blackfeet had entirely failed to notice them. Feeling quite safe, therefore, they reined in the ponies and rode at a slow canter. They heard the Blackfeet yelling savagely farther toward the north and had little doubt that they were still pursuing the demoralized Crows.

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"They are making a great noise—it is good," declared Lean Wolf. "Our people will hear them."

"Yes, it is——" began White Otter.

"Listen!" interrupted Little Raven.

They heard the sound of galloping ponies directly ahead of them, and they barely had time to turn aside before the unknown riders passed them in the darkness. Then the nervous little

piebald whinnied, and the strangers instantly stopped.

"Come!" cried White Otter, as he turned toward the north, and raced away at top speed.

"I believe those riders are the Blackfeet scouts that Feather Dog told us about," said Lean Wolf. "Little Raven, your ears are as sharp as the ears of Tokala, the fox."

They rode some distance before they finally stopped to listen for sounds from their foes. Night had fallen, and the great plain was cloaked in darkness. For a long time the stillness was unbroken. It seemed as if the Blackfeet had at last yelled themselves into silence. The Sioux wondered if the Crows had escaped.

"I do not believe the Blackfeet came up with them," Lean Wolf said, softly. "When it got dark I believe the Blackfeet turned back to round up those ponies that the Crows left behind."

"Then we must watch sharp," declared White Otter. "Perhaps they will ride over here and find us."

Then they heard the wail of a prairie wolf a short distance to the westward. There was something about it that made them suspicious. As a precaution against being betrayed to prowling foes, White Otter dismounted and seized the nose of the little piebald. The other ponies also showed signs of nervousness, and their riders quickly followed the example of the cautious Ogalala. Then the three anxious Sioux scouts stood beside their ponies and strained their ears to catch a warning of danger. Three times the dreary call of the prairie wolf sounded from the west, and each time the suspicions of the Sioux grew stronger. They felt almost certain that it was a signal from their enemies.

"That does not sound like Mayash, the prowler," White Otter declared suspiciously.

"It is different," agreed Lean Wolf.

At that moment they heard the cry repeated in the north. They knew at once that it was an answer to the signal from the west. It was evident that foes were on two sides of them, and the Sioux realized that they were in a serious predicament.

"It is bad," whispered White Otter. "I believe Blackfeet scouts are out there in the darkness. They are close. We must watch out."

"Do you believe they know us?" Little Raven inquired, anxiously.

"No," White Otter told him. "Lean Wolf, how do you feel about it?"

"I believe it is the Blackfeet," said Lean Wolf. "We must wait here until we see what they are going to do. If we hear them coming here then we will ride away before they find us."

"It is the best thing to do," White Otter told him.

They listened anxiously to learn if their foes were actually approaching. They heard nothing to give them a clue. The signals had ceased, and the calm, brooding night hush had fallen upon the plain. The ponies, however, were still uneasy, and their actions made the Sioux suspicious. They feared that other horses were close at hand, and the possibility kept them alert.

"Listen, my brothers," White Otter whispered, anxiously. "Something is moving over there."

The sound had come from the westward, and whatever had made it seemed to be well within bowshot. The piebald was shaking its head, and struggling to free its nose from the grasp of the Ogalala. The other ponies also showed signs of recognition, and the Sioux felt sure that a horse was moving slowly through the darkness. They listened with bated breath, ready to jump upon their ponies and flee into the protection of the night at the first hint that they had been discovered. They waited in trying suspense while the rider slowly passed them, and the short, quick footfalls of his pony died away in the distance.

"He has gone," whispered Little Raven.

"Sh!" cautioned Lean Wolf.

Another pony was approaching. Again the Sioux waited in breathless suspense, while the unseen rider moved cautiously through the darkness within bow range of them. This time, however, they were not so fortunate. For some reason the rider stopped directly opposite them. Was he suspicious? the Sioux wondered. The piebald tried to call, but White Otter strangled the cry in its throat. Then the strange horse winded the Sioux ponies, and whinnied its challenge. The next moment a voice questioned cautiously from the night. The Sioux remained silent. Each stood grasping the mane of his pony, ready to mount and race away on the instant of discovery. Then the horse which had already passed answered the challenge, and the suspicions of the second rider were allayed. A moment later the Sioux heard him riding on his way. They remained silent, however, listening anxiously to learn if a third rider was following after those who had passed.

"There are no more," Lean Wolf whispered, finally.

"It is good," replied White Otter.

They waited until they felt sure that their enemies had gone beyond hearing, and then they mounted and rode carefully toward the east. As the mysterious scouts had gone toward the north, the Sioux determined to make a wide detour to avoid an encounter. They walked the ponies until they had gone a safe distance, and then they urged them into a brisk canter, and began to circle back toward the north to reach the Minneconjoux war party.

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## CHAPTER IX

### ANXIOUS MOMENTS

After White Otter and his companions left them, the Minneconjoux war party rode cautiously toward the north to find the hiding place of which Dancing Rabbit had told. They realized the peril to which they were exposing themselves, and Sun Bird took every precaution to guard against blundering upon the Blackfeet. Running Dog and a companion scouted to the westward, Feather Dog and Proud Hawk again reconnoitered toward the east, and Sun Bird, Sitting Eagle and the lad, Dancing Rabbit, rode in advance.

"How far away is this place?" Sun Bird asked, anxiously.

"It begins over there where you see those little trees," replied Dancing Rabbit, as he pointed to a few stunted cottonwoods some distance ahead of them.

"Yes, I know about that place," declared Sitting Eagle. "I have been there. It is a good place to hide in."

Dancing Rabbit said that the shelter toward which they were moving was a deep ravine which formerly had been the bed of a good-sized stream. It extended directly across the plain from west to east, and went to the very foothills of the great mountains. The young Minneconjoux declared that, once in the bottom of that deep ravine, the war party would be invisible to their foes, and it would be possible to remain hidden until they reached the timbered ridges.

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"It is good," declared Sun Bird. "When we get to that place we will hide in the day, and travel toward the mountains when it gets dark."

Before they reached the ravine, however, they saw a horseman ride cautiously over the ridge to the westward. When he reached the bottom of the slope he rode rapidly to and fro, and appeared to be trying to attract the attention of Sun Bird and his companions. It was the danger signal, and the Minneconjoux watched him with grave attention. When he saw that he had attracted their notice, he stopped and raised his right hand above his head. Then he suddenly swept it downward and backward. It was the signal to approach. Although he was a considerable distance away, Sun Bird and Sitting Eagle agreed that it was Running Dog.

"He wants to tell us about something," said Sun Bird. "Go, Dancing Rabbit, and bring us his words."

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The lad immediately galloped away to meet the distant Minneconjoux scout. Sun Bird and Sitting Eagle decided to wait where they were until he returned. In a few moments they saw the war party riding toward them. The Minneconjoux had discovered Running Dog, and were watching Dancing Rabbit as he raced across the plain. When they reached Sun Bird, however, they concealed their curiosity and waited for the youthful war leader to tell them what had happened.

"My friends, that scout over there is Running Dog," said Sun Bird. "He has made the danger signal. Then he called us. Dancing Rabbit has gone to bring us his words. We will wait here until he comes back."

It was not long before they saw the eager lad racing toward them with the message from Running Dog. He was urging his pony to top speed, and the Sioux believed he brought word of great importance. Running Dog had already disappeared into the dusk.

"I have brought you the words of Running Dog," said Dancing Rabbit, as he stopped beside Sun Bird.

"Tell me what he says," replied Sun Bird.

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"Running Dog says that the Crows and the Blackfeet are fighting," declared Dancing Rabbit. "He says it is a big fight. He says the Crows are stronger than the Blackfeet. Running Dog says that is bad. He says there must be many Blackfeet at the village. He believes that a big war party may be coming this way. He says we must go to that gully and hide. He says he will come there when it gets dark. Those are the words of Running Dog."

"Come, lead us to that place," said Sun Bird.

The glow was fading from the western sky and the twilight shadows were gathering upon the plain when the Sioux finally reached the dry stream bed. It offered an ideal hiding place, and Sun Bird looked upon it with delight.

"See, my brothers, this great gully leads far over there toward the mountains," he said. "If we follow it, I do not believe our enemies will be able to find us."

"It is good," declared the Minneconjoux.

They picketed the ponies in the bottom of the ravine, and then most of the war party crawled up the steep bank to watch the plain. It was almost dark, and they wondered why Feather Dog and Proud Hawk had failed to join them. They looked anxiously toward the east in the hope of seeing the scouts. Then they suddenly heard a chorus of piercing yells and whoops far across the plain and they looked toward the sounds. The noise seemed to come from the vicinity of the ridge, and some distance to the southward.

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"Perhaps our enemies have crossed the ridge; we must watch sharp," Sun Bird cautioned them.

The light was almost gone, and it was difficult to see far across the plain. The wild commotion continued, however, and, guided by the sounds, the Sioux strained their eyes in an attempt to learn the cause of the disturbance. Then some of them discovered what appeared to be a company of horsemen racing along parallel with the ridge.

"It is the war party!" they cried. "It must be the Blackfeet. They are riding this way!"

"See, see, some one is chasing them!" said Sitting Eagle.

They made out another company of riders who were apparently pursuing the horsemen ahead of them. The discovery filled the Sioux with alarm. It appeared as if both the Blackfeet and the Crows were racing toward the ravine. In a few moments, however, darkness closed down and blotted them from sight. Then the wild tumult suddenly ceased, and the Sioux were left without a clue to the location of their foes.

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"It is bad," Sun Bird declared, uneasily. "Those riders were coming this way. Now we do not know what has become of them. Perhaps they are in this gully. Perhaps they will come here. We must watch and listen."

The Minneconjoux heard him in silence. They were bewildered by the sudden turn of fortune which shattered their fancied security and threatened to expose them to their foes. The possibilities were alarming. Thoroughly alive to their own peril, they were even more concerned for the safety of their absent comrades. They wondered what had happened to White Otter and his companions. Where were Feather Dog and Proud Hawk? Why had Running Dog failed to warn them of the approaching war parties? Had those brave scouts been trapped and destroyed by their foes? The Sioux weakened at the thought.

Sun Bird was particularly disturbed at the possibility of harm having come to his friend, White Otter, and his brother, Little Raven. The hot fighting blood surged to his brain as he pictured his tribesmen in the hands of his foes. He soon dismissed that possibility, however, for he knew that neither White Otter nor Lean Wolf would ever permit themselves to be taken alive. The thought suggested the still more alarming possibility that they had been killed. Sun Bird, however, refused even to consider it.

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"No, my friends, I do not believe anything bad has happened to those great scouts," he told his companions. "We will wait for them. They will come."

He had barely finished speaking when one of the Sioux ponies whinnied softly, and a moment afterward they heard a pony scramble up the side of the ravine a short distance to the eastward, and gallop off across the plain.

"Perhaps it is one of our friends," Sun Bird whispered, hopefully.

He crawled to the plain, and imitated the bark of the little gray fox. The Sioux listened anxiously. Many moments passed. There was no response. Then Sun Bird again sounded the familiar signal. Still there was no reply. The Sioux became suspicious. They feared that a hostile scout had blundered upon their hiding place. Sun Bird, however, felt more hopeful. He knew the wariness of the Dacotah scouts, and he still hoped that the mysterious rider was one of his friends. He repeated the sharp, quick bark of the little gray fox, and waited eagerly for a reply. This time he got it. It came from the direction where he had heard the hoofbeats of the retreating pony.

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"It is good," said Sun Bird. "That rider is a friend."

A few moments later they heard ponies approaching the ravine. Determined to be prepared for an emergency, the Sioux lay along the top of the ravine, with arrows fitted to their bows, ready to repulse an attack. The precaution proved to be unnecessary, however, as the riders were Feather Dog and Proud Hawk.

"My brothers, you have come—it is good," said Sun Bird.

The scouts who had returned from the eastward said that they had seen nothing of their foes, although they felt quite sure that they had heard several ponies pass them in the darkness. They knew nothing of the thrilling chase which their companions had witnessed from the ravine, and were much interested in the recital.

"Did you see anything of White Otter?" Sun Bird inquired, eagerly.

"No, we did not see any one," replied Feather Dog.

Sun Bird appeared serious. The continued absence of White Otter and his companions worried him. He began to fear that they really had met with some misfortune. The idea startled him.

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At that moment some of the Minneconjoux declared that they heard some one approaching the ravine. Sun Bird held his breath to listen, and his heart filled with hope. Perhaps White Otter and Little Raven had come. The possibility thrilled him. He waited in trying suspense for the signal which would verify his hopes.

"Perhaps it is an enemy," suggested a warrior who was lying beside him.

Sun Bird remained silent. For the moment the Blackfeet and the Crows had been crowded from his mind by the hope of seeing White Otter and Little Raven. He had entirely forgotten the peril which threatened the Sioux war party. The warning of his tribesman aroused him to his responsibility. He was the war leader. It was his duty to think first of the welfare and safety of the men who had entrusted themselves to his leadership. He at once dismissed White Otter and Little Raven from his thoughts, and again became the stern, impassive war leader.

"I do not hear anything," he told the man beside him. "What did you hear?"

"It sounded like ponies," replied the warrior.

"Were they running?" inquired Sun Bird.

"No, it sounded as if they were standing in one place, and stamping their feet," declared the Minneconjoux.

They listened a long time, but heard nothing. The warriors who had given the warning, however, felt certain that they had not been mistaken.

"Perhaps it was Tatanka, the buffalo, or Tatokadan, the antelope," said Sitting Eagle.

"No, no, it sounded like ponies," declared his friends.

Then as they continued to listen they heard the cry of a prairie wolf, far to the westward. The weird serenade lasted some moments, and then all was still. The call had sounded entirely natural, but the Sioux believed it was a clever imitation by their foes. They wondered if it had any connection with the sounds which had been heard near the ravine. They realized that Blackfeet scouts might have followed the stream bed in search of their foes, and that the wolf call was a signal for them to return to the war party. The Sioux listened anxiously for the sound of hoof beats going toward the west. When they failed to hear them they were completely baffled. Had the sharp-eared warriors who claimed to have heard the ponies been deceived? It seemed unlikely. Then what had become of the mysterious riders? The entire Minneconjoux war party was listening breathlessly, and it seemed impossible for the horsemen to steal away without being heard. Then a new possibility presented itself.

"Perhaps they are Crows," the Sioux told one another.

The thought threw them into a flurry of excitement. They realized that if Crow scouts had come that far to the eastward, the entire Crow force might follow them along the ravine. As a precaution against a sudden attack, two Sioux scouts moved cautiously along the stream bed on foot to watch for the approach of enemies. They had barely gone beyond bowshot, when the Sioux heard the bark of the little gray fox directly in front of them. It filled them with joy, and they lost little time in replying.

"Ho, my brothers, we have been waiting out here a long time," said Running Dog, as he rode into the ravine with Big Crow, his fellow scout.

"Did you see White Otter?" Sun Bird immediately inquired.

"I do not know," replied Running Dog. "We saw three riders racing over the ridge ahead of the Crows. They were far away. We could not tell about them. Perhaps they were our brothers."

"What became of them?" Sun Bird asked, eagerly.

"They went that way," said Running Dog, as he pointed toward the east. "The Crows did not follow them. They came this way. Then the Blackfeet came after them."

"Did you hear Mayash, the wolf?" inquired Sitting Eagle.

"Yes, we heard his call, but he did not make it," Running Dog told him. "It was the Blackfeet. I believe the Crows got away from them. Perhaps they have turned this way. That is why we stayed out there in the darkness. We did not know who was in this place."

"Did you hear us?" Sun Bird asked, anxiously.

"No, we did not hear you," said Running Dog. "Our ponies stopped and tried to call, and we knew that some one was in this place."

Running Dog told his tribesmen that he and Big Crow had seen the end of the fight, and the desperate race between the Crows and the Blackfeet. When the Crows turned toward the ravine the Sioux scouts had been greatly alarmed for the safety of the Minneconjoux war party. However, as they realized that they could not carry a warning to their friends, they had determined to follow their enemies, and learn the result of the wild chase across the plain. With the coming of darkness they had lost sight of both the Crows and the Blackfeet, but they were sure that both war parties had entered the ravine a considerable distance to the westward.

"Perhaps the Crows came this way—perhaps they crossed the gully and went straight ahead," said Running Dog. "Anyway, I believe they fooled the Blackfeet. We heard the Blackfeet scouts riding near us. I believe they were trying to find the Crows."

"If the Crows came this way they must be near us," said Sun Bird.

"We did not hear anything——"

Running Dog was interrupted by the sound of a familiar voice from the darkness.

"Ho, Dacotahs!"

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"It is White Otter!" cried Sun Bird.

"Yes, my brother, I am here," replied White Otter, as he suddenly appeared at the top of the ravine.

The Ogalala was alone and on foot, and Sun Bird feared that he had met with disaster. He was about to ask for Little Raven, and Lean Wolf, when White Otter turned toward the plain and called softly. A moment afterward his companions came forward with the ponies. Their appearance filled Sun Bird with joy. He found it difficult to conceal the emotion which welled up in his heart at the safe arrival of his beloved companions.

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"My brothers, you have come—I feel good again," he said feelingly.

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## CHAPTER X

### REBELLIOUS PONIES

The Minneconjoux were eager to learn how White Otter had been able to get so near them without being heard. They were equally curious to know how he had located them.

"I will tell you about it," said White Otter. "We were over there on that ridge watching the fight. Then the Crows ran away. They came right toward us. We rode away ahead of them. When it got dark we met some riders. Then we turned this way. We heard some one riding past us. Then we came on. We went over there near where the Blackfeet are, when we heard Running Dog and Big Crow. We did not know them. They were coming this way. We followed them. Then they stopped. We waited. Then we heard the call of the little gray fox. That made us feel good. But we were not sure about it. Then we heard those riders come into the gully. Then I crawled up to find out about it. That is how we found you."

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"White Otter, you are a great warrior," Sun Bird declared, enthusiastically.

Then as the war party was complete he called a council of war to decide what should be done. The Sioux were agreed that the wisest plan would be to remain where they were until daylight.

"It is the best thing to do," said Sun Bird. "We know that the Crows and the Blackfeet are somewhere along this gully. It would be foolish to move toward them. When it gets light we will try to find out where they are."

He posted scouts in and about the ravine to watch for the approach of foes, while the war party lay down to sleep. There was no water, and both the Sioux and their ponies suffered from thirst. The ponies were particularly restless, and spent most of the night pawing the dry earth in the bottom of the ravine. However, Dancing Rabbit assured his companions that there was a good pool a half day's journey to the westward, and Sitting Eagle confirmed his words.

"Perhaps the Blackfeet are at that place," suggested Sun Bird.

The night passed without incident, and at the first hint of dawn the scouts hurried in from the plain. They said that they had neither seen nor heard anything of their enemies. It seemed, therefore, that either the Crows and the Blackfeet had continued their mad race through the night, or else both had hidden themselves to wait for daylight.

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"Perhaps the Crows got away and the Blackfeet have gone back to their village," suggested one of the Minneconjoux.

His companions had serious doubts of it. As soon as it was light enough to see across the plain, they crawled up the side of the ravine and looked anxiously for signs of their foes. As they were nowhere in sight, the Minneconjoux began to hope that the cheerful prophecy of their comrade was correct. Still, they feared it would be dangerous to rely upon it.

"We must be cautious," said Lean Wolf. "There are some good hiding places over there. Perhaps the Blackfeet are waiting for the Crows to show themselves."

There were a number of scattered stands of cottonwoods dotting the plain to the westward, and the Sioux realized that one of them might shelter their foes. They were particularly suspicious of the little grove which Dancing Rabbit pointed out as the spot which sheltered the pool.

"We must watch that place," declared White Otter.

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"Yes, we will stay here and watch," said Sun Bird. "If our enemies are near us, pretty soon we will see their scouts."

As time passed, and they saw nothing to indicate that either the Crows or the Blackfeet were anywhere in the vicinity, the Sioux began to discuss the advisability of moving cautiously along the bottom of the ravine. The ponies were growing frantic from thirst and were raising

considerable dust by their wild pawing in the stream bed. Some were beginning to snort and whinny, and the Sioux feared that the unmanageable little beasts might betray them to their foes. Then, too, their own throats were parched and aching, and they were eager to reach the little pool as soon as possible.

"We will go," Sun Bird said, finally.

They believed that it would be folly to expose scouts upon the open plain, and they determined to keep to the shelter of the ravine until they were opposite the grove which sheltered the pool. The ponies appeared to understand that they were moving toward water, and the Sioux found it almost impossible to hold them in control. For some moments the fractious little beasts created the wildest sort of disorder, and the Minneconjoux looked anxiously upon the heavy dust cloud that rose above the ravine.

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"It is bad," Sun Bird declared, uneasily, as he watched White Otter struggling to subdue the hot-tempered piebald.

When the ponies had finally been brought under subjection, several warriors who rode quieter horses dismounted and crawled to the top of the ravine to search the plain. A heavy pall of dust hung over them, and they wondered if it had been seen by their foes. The latter, however, were nowhere in sight, and the Sioux knew that unless they were watching from one of the groves they must have ridden from the locality.

"We saw no one," said the scouts when they overtook their companions.

"It must be that our enemies went away while it was dark," said a young warrior named Painted Bird.

The Sioux, however, were suspicious. They determined to take nothing for granted. As they approached the first of the little groves they sent scouts along the ravine ahead of the war party to watch the plain and guard against blundering into their foes. They were riding at a fast pace, and they realized that they would arrive opposite the pool before the day was half gone.

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"It is bad," said White Otter. "We cannot go to that place until it grows dark. If we get near it, it will be hard to hold the ponies."

"It is true," agreed Sun Bird. "I am thinking about it."

He had planned to move along the ravine until he was opposite the pool, and then wait until he could send scouts to reconnoiter the grove under cover of the night. He, too, realized, however, that it might be impossible to control the ponies once they got that near to the water. The riders were already having considerable difficulty in restraining them, and Sun Bird feared that at any moment they might stampede and dash wildly up the side of the ravine.

"We are raising a great dust," Lean Wolf said, soberly. "If our enemies are watching they must see it."

"Yes, yes, it is bad," Sun Bird replied, impatiently. "We must stop."

He galloped to the head of the company and called upon the Minneconjoux to halt. Many of them found difficulty in obeying the command. The fiery, half-wild ponies had apparently scented the water and it seemed to have driven them mad. In spite of their expert horsemanship the Sioux were unable to control them. Although by sheer strength and skill they finally brought them to a stop, they found it impossible to quiet them. Crazed with their desire for water, the frantic beasts plunged and reared and kicked and squealed and raised such a wild commotion that the Sioux were thrown into a panic. They were certain that if enemies were lurking at the pool they must surely have seen the dust and heard the noise created by the unmanageable ponies.

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"It is useless to wait here," said some of the more impulsive warriors. "We may as well go ahead and see what comes of it."

"No, that would be foolish," declared Sun Bird. "If the Blackfeet are hiding in that place they will see the dust. Perhaps they cannot hear the noise. Anyway, if we stay in this gully they will not know who we are. They must send scouts over here to find out about us. They will not do that until it gets dark. Then it will be easy to fool them."

"Those are good words," White Otter agreed, heartily.

"Yes, that is the way I feel about it," declared Lean Wolf.

"It is the only thing to do," Sitting Eagle cried, angrily. "Are we like the women who are afraid of the war ponies! Are we like old men who have no strength in their arms? Does a Dacotah run to his enemy for water when he is thirsty? Come, my brothers, we are Dacotahs. We are men. Hold those horses. Throw them down. Kill them if you cannot overcome them. It is better to go against our enemies on foot than to let those foolish ponies carry us to our deaths. Sun Bird is a good war leader. You have heard his words. They are good. We will listen. We will stay here until it is safe to go ahead."

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The words of the famous Minneconjoux scout created a deep impression upon his comrades. He was a man whose daring achievements made him the idol of his people, and his counsel was seldom disputed. His daring challenge to their ability and manhood instantly roused the fighting blood of the Sioux, and they immediately accepted the task of bringing the fractious ponies under subjection. It was not easy, but the Minneconjoux were on their mettle, and, as White Otter had already won control over the piebald, they persevered until the ponies were finally quieted.

Order having been restored, many of the Sioux crept up the side of the ravine to watch the distant stand of cottonwoods which they hoped to reach at dark. They were suffering keenly from thirst, which had been greatly aggravated by their desperate struggle with the ponies. Some of them chewed mouthfuls of grass in an attempt to suck moisture into their burning throats. Others placed small pebbles beneath their tongues to increase the flow of saliva. All of them, however, bore their discomfort without complaint. It was a common occurrence for a warrior to endure both hunger and thirst, and they had been trained from infancy to suffer in silence.

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"See, the day is passing," Sun Bird said, cheerfully, as the sun sank slowly toward the west. "Pretty soon we will be under those trees, drinking that water."

"It is good," the Minneconjoux murmured, thickly.

Although they watched closely until the grove finally faded from sight in the evening shadows, they saw nothing of their foes. They were quite convinced that the Crows had eluded the Blackfeet, and that the latter had gone to their village to boast of their victory.

"We will go," Sun Bird said, as darkness at last fell upon the plain.

They moved eagerly along the ravine, and once more the parched ponies tried to bolt from the control of their riders. The latter were still smarting from the rebuke of Sitting Eagle, and they soon brought the unruly little beasts under subjection. However, it was impossible to quiet them. They snorted and squealed and whinnied, and the Sioux realized that it was hopeless to try to reach the grove without being heard.

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"Well, if our enemies are over there they know that we are coming," Sitting Eagle declared, irritably.

"It is true," agreed Sun Bird. "But they do not know who we are. If the Blackfeet are over there they will take us for Crows. If the Crows are over there they will take us for Blackfeet. It is good. When we get near that place we will stop. Then we will send scouts over there to find out about it. If our enemies are there we will find out who they are. Then we will run away before they find out about us."

"It is good," said Sitting Eagle.

When they finally came opposite the grove which contained the pool they again fought the desperate ponies into submission and made heroic efforts to keep them quiet. Then Sun Bird selected White Otter and Sitting Eagle to go forward on foot to reconnoiter the cottonwoods.

"Those great scouts will find out about it," he boasted, as the two famous Dacotahs slipped away as noiselessly as shadows.

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It seemed a long time to the anxious Sioux before White Otter finally returned and said that the grove was free from foes. The announcement filled them with joy. Throwing caution to the winds, they rode out of the ravine and raced recklessly toward the cottonwoods. Once at the pool it was impossible to restrain the ponies, and the riders were forced to wait until the frenzied animals had satisfied their thirst. Then the Sioux plunged their feverish faces into the roily water and drank as eagerly as the ponies.

"Ah," Sun Bird sighed, contentedly, as he finally rose to his feet.

Having drunk their fill, the ponies became quiet and turned to graze upon the scant growth of grass about the pool. The Sioux, however, remained alert. Their noisy arrival at the pool had made them uneasy. They had vague, disturbing premonitions of danger, and they feared to linger in the grove.

"If our enemies come and surround this place it will be hard to get away," Sun Bird said, anxiously. "Come, we will go."

At that moment one of the ponies whinnied, and the Sioux were astounded to hear it answered from the plain. Then they heard a horse galloping toward the west. They turned to one another in alarm.

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"Our enemies have caught us!" they cried.

"Wait," White Otter counseled, calmly. "I believe that rider is a scout. Perhaps he is alone. We will listen. If he is with a war party then we will hear signals. If he keeps quiet there is nothing to fear."

"It is good," agreed the Minneconjoux.

They listened in tense silence. Then, as the moments passed and they heard nothing to suggest the approach of their foes, they felt considerably relieved. Still they were somewhat fearful about leaving the timber. They realized that either the Crows or the Blackfeet might have surrounded the grove and sent the scout forward as a decoy to lure them upon the open plain.

"Well, my brothers, that rider knows that some one is at this pool," declared Sun Bird. "If he is a scout he will tell his people about it. I believe if we wait here something bad will come of it. If we go away our enemies will not know that the Dacotahs were here. If we expect to get to the great Blackfeet camp we must not let our enemies know about us."

The Sioux instantly saw the wisdom of his words and agreed that it would be safer to abandon the grove and continue toward the mountains. Dancing Rabbit told them that if they continued to ride through the night, daylight would find them close upon the foothills.

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"It is good—we will go," said Sun Bird.



They left the grove and moved slowly across the plain in the direction of the ravine. The ponies were quiet and docile, and it seemed as if the clever little beasts were attempting to make amends for the anxiety and effort they had caused their riders a short time before. As the war party drew near the ravine Sun Bird ordered a halt while he sent scouts forward to reconnoiter. They soon returned and declared that the way was clear.

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## CHAPTER XI

### AN UNUSUAL ADVENTURE

Upon reaching the ravine the Sioux turned toward the west and rode until daylight. Then they found themselves almost within the shadows of the great massive peaks which towered against the sky. The low timbered ridges of the foothills were still nearer at hand, and the air was scented with fragrance from the dense stand of pines.

"It is good," declared Sun Bird. "Pretty soon we will come to those great mountains. Then we can hide from our enemies until we find the Blackfeet camp."

Having failed to find any further evidence of their foes, they began to feel more secure. They gave little thought to the horseman who had blundered upon them at the pool, for it appeared certain that both the Crows and the Blackfeet had withdrawn from the vicinity. Encouraged by the thought, the Sioux determined to continue toward the mountains.

When they reached the first ridge of foothills, Sitting Eagle, who was familiar with the region, led the way along a game trail. It wound upward from the plain, and brought them to a grassy meadow with a cold bubbling spring in one corner of it. As it offered an attractive camp site, the Sioux determined to stop.

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After the ponies had been picketed and the camp established, several young warriors went into the woods with their bows to look for game. It was not long before they returned with a fat, young, white-tail deer.

As the camp site was a considerable height above the plain and well hidden by the heavy stand of timber, the Sioux determined to risk making a small fire. Then they broiled the deer meat and ate with keen enjoyment. They had suddenly relaxed. For the moment the hardships and perils of the war trail were forgotten. They talked and laughed and told stories, and became as carefree and happy as boys. The merry feast continued well into the night. When it finally ended, the sentinels took their positions about the camp while their companions wrapped themselves in their robes and lay down to sleep.

Shortly after daylight the Sioux descended to the plain and rode northward along the base of the ridge. They kept within bowshot of the timber so that they might conceal themselves if they found signs of their foes. Dancing Rabbit declared that the Blackfeet camp was a number of days' travel farther to the northward, and for the present at least the Sioux had little fear of blundering into those foes. However, they believed that the Crows might be somewhere in the vicinity and they determined to keep a sharp watch.

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"We will keep going ahead until we get near the Blackfeet camp," said Sun Bird. "Then we will stop. Then some of us will climb those great mountains and look for the Blackfeet lodges."

For two days they traveled cautiously along the edge of the foothills without seeing anything to arouse their suspicions. Game, however, was abundant. They saw countless numbers of buffaloes, great herds of elk, and many deer and antelope.

"This is a good place to live in," declared White Otter.

"Yes, there is plenty of game here," replied Sun Bird.

Then they again saw Huya, the war bird. The eagle was soaring high up near the snowclad peaks. The Sioux watched it with superstitious premonitions. They believed it was an omen—a warning that foes were near at hand.

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"See, Huya has come back to tell us about our enemies," said Sun Bird. "I believe we are near the Blackfeet. We must watch out."

Disturbed by the appearance of Huya, the war bird, and determined to run no risk of betraying themselves to their foes, the Sioux decided to seek shelter in the foothills while scouts climbed the ridges to look for the Blackfeet camp. While the war party moved cautiously along the edge of the plain, Sun Bird sent scouts into the timber to look for a suitable camp site. At the end of the day they found a sheltered grassy park high up near the summit of the ridge, and the Sioux determined to make it their rendezvous until they were ready to advance upon the Blackfeet.

The following day, at dawn, Sun Bird and White Otter left the war party and set out along the summit of the ridge to look for traces of the Blackfeet camp. Other scouts rode cautiously along the edge of the plain to watch for signs of the Crows or scouting parties of Blackfeet.

Although Sun Bird and White Otter had a splendid view of the plain they failed to discover any evidence of the Blackfeet camp. When they finally saw a large herd of buffaloes grazing contentedly a considerable distance to the northward, they became convinced that the hostile camp was far beyond their view.

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"It is useless to look any more," declared White Otter. "The Blackfeet camp is a long ways off."

"Yes, it must be so," said Sun Bird. "We will go back and tell our friends about it."

"Wait," White Otter cried, eagerly. "Here is the trail of great Matohota."

Sun Bird hastened to his side and saw the fresh tracks of a grizzly bear. The trail led down into the timber. The footprints were of unusual size, and the Sioux studied them with flashing eyes. The Dacotahs considered killing great Matohota an exploit worthy of the bravest warrior, and only second in importance to killing an enemy. A necklace of bear claws was accepted as positive proof of the hunting ability and courage of the wearer. Although both Sun Bird and White Otter had killed several of those fierce beasts, they became enthusiastic at the idea of securing the great claws of the bear which had recently passed.

"If we kill Matohota we will have something to show our friends," said White Otter.

"He cannot be far away," Sun Bird declared, hopefully. "Come, we will follow him."

They followed the trail down through the timber, and about half way down the ridge it brought them within sight of another open grassy park. Aware that those places were favorite feeding places for elk and deer, the expert young hunters realized that the grizzly might have gone there to feast upon the carcass of one of those animals.

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"We must be careful," White Otter warned, softly.

They approached the spot with great caution, peering anxiously between the trees to discover the grizzly. As the wind favored them, they hoped to get within bow range without alarming their game. However, when they finally came in full view of the park the bear was nowhere in sight. They were keenly disappointed.

"Matohota has gone on," said Sun Bird.

"We will see," replied White Otter.

They stole to the edge of the timber and looked anxiously across the grassy meadow. The trail of the bear was plainly visible through the high grass. As they followed it with their eyes they suddenly discovered something lying in the far corner of the park. One glance told them that it was dead, but it was some time before they could make sure what it was. Then they looked at each other in astonishment. They had suddenly identified the object as a dead pony. The discovery made them cautious, and they sank noiselessly into the bushes to watch.

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"It is mysterious," whispered Sun Bird. "How did that pony come here?"

"We will try to find out about it, but first we must watch," replied White Otter.

They watched a long time, searching the borders of the meadow with great care. It was difficult to learn much about the dead pony from where they were, but they saw that the carcass had been partly eaten, and they believed it had been there for some time.

"It is good," said White Otter. "Matohota comes here to eat that pony. If we wait here we will see him."

"Perhaps he is sleeping over there in those bushes," suggested Sun Bird.

They knew that after gorging itself with meat, a bear often would lie down to sleep near the carcass, so that it would find a meal close at hand when it again became hungry. It seemed probable, therefore, that the great creature which they sought might be concealed somewhere within bow range of them. They looked carefully along the edge of the woods, hoping to discover a sign which would tell them where the bear had entered the timber. The undergrowth appeared undisturbed, and, as the trail faded out at the spot where the grass had been trampled down about the carcass, there seemed little chance of learning what they wished to know unless they made their way to the dead pony.

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"We must go over there and find out about it," Sun Bird proposed, finally.

"Come," said White Otter.

They moved through the timber as stealthily as wolves, and when they drew near the carcass they again stopped to watch and listen. Then they circled to find the trail of the bear. They came upon a wide game trail leading down from the park, and as they stooped to study it they discovered many tracks. Among them were the footprints of the great gray timber wolves, and the clumsy round paw-marks of a mountain lion. The latter track was fresh, and it was evident that the great cat had passed over the trail since daylight. The tracks of the bear, however, were missing.

"Matohota did not come this way," said Sun Bird.

"Perhaps he is close by," White Otter said, cautiously. "We will try to find out where he is. Then we will go and look at that pony. It came along this trail. See, here is a track."

He showed Sun Bird a faint and indistinct impression of a hoof at one side of the trail. It was some days old, and offered them little information.

"Come, we will find out what has become of Matohota, and then we will come back here and find out about this thing," said White Otter.

They soon came upon the trail of the bear. As White Otter had guessed, it circled around the edge of the park, and led back toward the top of the ridge. It was plain, therefore, that the bear had its den somewhere up there among the ledges, and came to the park to feed during the night or at daylight.

"Now we know what to do," declared White Otter. "First we will go and look at that pony. Then we will go down that trail and try to find some more tracks. Then we will come back to this place and wait for Matohota."

"It is good," said Sun Bird.

When they reached the dead pony they were surprised to see the shaft of an arrow protruding from behind its shoulder. For a moment or so they studied it in silence. Then White Otter knelt, and drew his knife.

"Perhaps we will find out what we want to know," he said.

He extracted the arrow and examined it with great care, and then he passed it to Sun Bird. The latter studied it a long time. He noted that the shaft was of willow and feathered along the sides for almost a hand-width. The arrow was considerably longer than those used by the Dacotahs, and the point was made of an unusual red flint. It was the deeply notched model of the war arrows.

"Well, what do you make of it?" White Otter inquired, as Sun Bird finished examining it.

"It is not a Dacotah arrow," replied Sun Bird. "It is not a Crow arrow. It was not made by the Blackfeet. I do not know who made it."

"I cannot tell you about it," said White Otter, as Sun Bird returned the mysterious arrow. "I do not know about the people who live in this country. I know the Crow arrows. I have seen the Blackfeet arrows. I do not know the others."

"I will show it to Sitting Eagle and Lean Wolf," said Sun Bird. "Perhaps they will know about it."

As there seemed to be no other way of learning its identity, they dismissed the arrow from their minds and turned their attention upon the dead pony. It was a pinto, and appeared to have been dead a number of days. They had little doubt that, having been wounded on the plain, it had followed the game trail to the spot where it died.

"Perhaps the man who owned that pony rode up here to get away from his enemies," suggested Sun Bird.

"Perhaps," said White Otter.

Then, as the day had almost ended, they realized that if they intended to remain and watch for Matohota it was time to find a hiding place. As there was not sufficient breeze to stir the leaves, White Otter held a moistened finger above his head to learn the direction of the air current. What there was seemed to come from the north side of the park. As the bear was expected to approach from the west, and the bait was on the east side of the park, the Sioux decided to hide themselves to the southward of the dead pony. Then if the uncertain breeze should suddenly shift to another quarter they would still be to the leeward of the bear.

"Matohota is strong," cautioned White Otter. "We must drive our arrows deep into his body. We must not go too far away."

They concealed themselves in the undergrowth within easy bowshot of the bait and determined to watch until the bear appeared. The light was already fading from the park, and the heavy evening shadows were forming at the edge of the woods. Then, as darkness settled down, the moon flooded the little park with its silvery light.

"It is good," whispered Sun Bird. "Wakantunka has sent Hanyetuwi, the night sun, to give us light."

"It is good," replied White Otter.

They had little hope that Matohota would appear before daylight, and still they realized that he might come to feed under cover of the night. It was not long, however, before they heard other prowlers approaching the bait. The crackling of brush, and soft, stealthy footfalls caused them to watch expectantly. A lithe, shadowy form moved swiftly into the moonlight. It stopped a moment and raised a long pointed snout into the air. Then it trotted gracefully to the bait. The Sioux recognized it as Huhasapedan, the fox. They watched with great interest as the suspicious creature circled warily about the carcass, stopping in alarm at the slightest sound, and peering nervously into the shadows. It had barely begun to eat, when a second woods prowler entered the park and moved slowly toward the bait. The fox crouched behind the pony and watched uneasily.

"Wolf," whispered White Otter.

The wolf had discovered the fox and was bristling and growling, as it walked stiffly toward the pony. Awed by the threats of its formidable rival, the fox slunk to the edge of the timber and sat upon its haunches to watch until the wolf left the carcass. The wolf feasted ravenously, tearing large pieces of flesh from the bait and growling savagely as it ate. It was one of the great gaunt

timber wolves, and the Sioux longed to pierce it with their arrows. They resisted the temptation, however, for they knew that Matohota might become suspicious at the scent of fresh blood.

"It would be foolish," said White Otter.

The wolf refused to leave until it had gorged itself with meat, and then it moved threateningly toward the fox. The latter immediately retreated across the park and failed to show itself until the wolf had slunk into the shadows.

The fox had barely returned to the bait when it was again interrupted by another nocturnal prowler. A short, catlike snarl sounded from the direction of the game trail, and as the fox paused to listen, a long, crouching form appeared at the edge of the moonlight. Two glowing eyes blazed defiance, and the fox bounded into the woods.

"It is fierce Imutanka," breathed Sun Bird.

They had instantly recognized the stealthy prowler as a mountain lion. They watched with bated breath as the great cat moved cautiously toward the carcass. In spite of its size and strength it seemed as wary and fearful as Huhasapedan, the fox. It would slink forward a few paces and then stop and look furtively about the park. Once it sniffed suspiciously, and parted its lips in a silent snarl. Had it caught the wolf scent? Was great Matohota approaching? The Sioux grew tense at the thought. As the lion drew nearer the pony it crouched close to the ground, growling and nervously lashing its tail. It appeared to be preparing to spring upon the carcass. It was an unusually large specimen, and the Sioux were eager to secure so noble a trophy.

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"Come, we will kill Imutanka," suggested Sun Bird.

"Wait," cautioned White Otter.

A moment afterward a great bulky form appeared at the opposite side of the park. The Sioux recognized it at once. It was great Matohota, the grizzly. His sudden appearance caused their hearts to beat wildly against their ribs, while their eyes flashed with the light of battle. He was a foe worthy of the bravest warrior, and the young Dacotahs longed for the chance to engage him in battle.

A slight breeze was stirring from the eastward, and Matohota had evidently caught the scent of the mountain lion. He had raised his head and was staring across the park. The Sioux looked toward the lion. It, too, had discovered the bear, and was crouching behind the pony, and grumbling threateningly.

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"Imutanka will run away," whispered Sun Bird.

"Watch!" cautioned White Otter.

The bear had ambled clumsily into the open, and was following its trail across the park. The Sioux turned their eyes upon the lion. They expected to see it slinking away. Imutanka, however, showed no such intention. His blazing eyes and ugly snarls made it plain that he had no idea of running away. Still, the Sioux could not believe he would dare to oppose the mighty Matohota.

"Imutanka looks brave, but he will run away," insisted Sun Bird.

"We will see," said White Otter.

As the bear came closer the Sioux saw that it was even larger than they had guessed it to be. Matohota looked more than a match for sinewy Imutanka, but the latter still held his ground. It was apparent that having secured possession of the carcass he had no thought of surrendering it without a fight. The Sioux thrilled at the possibility.

"If Imutanka stays there we will see something to talk about," Sun Bird whispered, eagerly.

"Yes, yes, it will be a great fight," replied White Otter.

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The bold defiance of the lion seemed to have made Matohota realize the need of caution. He had stopped and was shaking his great head from side to side and growling fiercely. Imutanka replied to his challenge with short, throaty snarls. Then for some moments each gazed into the blazing eyes of the other and appeared to be estimating the strength and courage of its adversary. The Sioux were fascinated by the unusual spectacle. For the moment their desire to kill was overcome by their curiosity to learn the outcome of the fight.

It was some time, however, before the huge Matohota made up his mind to attack his rival. Then, having determined to gain possession of the bait, he rushed furiously upon the lion. The great sinewy cat had little difficulty in avoiding him. Then, as Matohota whirled about with amazing agility, the lion made its spring. Matohota reared upon his hind legs and struck the lion to earth with his huge paw. Imutanka uttered a sharp whine of pain and sprang aside. It was evident that Matohota had drawn first blood. He dropped to all fours and turned quickly about as the lion circled him. The Sioux saw that Imutanka was bleeding freely from a deep gash in the neck. However, the wound only seemed to rouse the lion to greater fury. Spitting, snarling, and growling, it glided stealthily about its adversary, watching for an opening. Matohota, however, was equally alert, and in spite of his great bulk he was sufficiently quick to baffle his foe. Each time Imutanka crouched to spring, Matohota rose upon his hind legs and held his great forepaws ready to deal another deadly blow. Then the lion would immediately relax and attempt to glide behind him, and Matohota would drop down and whirl about in time to prevent the attack.

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"Matohota is a great fighter," Sun Bird told White Otter.

"Imutanka is quick, he will fool Matohota," replied White Otter.

A moment later his prophecy was fulfilled. The lion had crouched to spring, and Matohota reared to protect himself. Then Imutanka sprang far to one side, and as Matohota dropped Imutanka was directly behind him. Before Matohota could turn the lion was upon his back. Its great claws tore down through the thick, shaggy coat, and ripped great gashes in his flesh and its flashing fangs sank deep into the back of his neck. Quick to understand his peril, Matohota threw himself and attempted to roll over upon his back. Failing in his efforts to dislodge the lion, Matohota rose upon his hind legs and fell over backward to crush the lion beneath his great bulk. Imutanka was too cunning to be caught. Releasing his hold he sprang away, and as Matohota crashed to the ground the lion jumped for his throat. Matohota caught him in a crushing embrace, and the fight became deadly. Rolling wildly over the ground the ferocious beasts bit and tore each other until it seemed that neither could survive the encounter.

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The Sioux looked on with glistening eyes. The savage duel had roused their own hot fighting blood and they were eager to enter the fray.

"Come, we will kill both of them," cried Sun Bird, as he fitted an arrow to his bow.

"Wait, wait," urged White Otter. "We will see who is the greatest warrior."

They watched, therefore, while the fight raged with unabated fury. At last the superior strength of the great Matohota gave him the victory. The lion broke free and sprang from the range of his deadly paws. It crouched and faced him for a moment, and then as he reared to defend himself, Imutanka weakened and turned to slink away into the night.

"Come!" cried Sun Bird, as he rose to his feet.

Two arrows pierced the heart of fierce Imutanka and he fell dead in his tracks. Matohota whirled about at the sharp twang of the bowstrings, and roared defiance at the two figures on the edge of the moonlight. Then as he rushed forward to destroy them in his wrath, he, too, collapsed from the shock of two burning arrows in his great hairy chest. The next moment he rose to his feet and reared unsteadily to repeat the tactics which had proved successful against fierce Imutanka. This time, however, it was a fatal error, for the Sioux drove their arrows through his heart and great Matohota crashed headlong into the grass and followed Imutanka on the Long Trail.

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"Hi, we have done a big thing," Sun Bird cried, excitedly, as he rushed into the park to examine the trophies.

"We will have something to tell about," laughed White Otter.

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## CHAPTER XII

### AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE FLATHEADS

The elated young Sioux lost little time in removing the great claws from Matohota and the cruel, sharp talons from fierce Imutanka. They longed to take the pelts as well, but they realized that it would be folly to burden themselves with them. They spent some time, however, examining the wounds which the savage creatures had inflicted upon each other. The lion had bitten deeply into the back of Matohota's neck and ripped terrible gashes in his back. Matohota had taken full revenge. His great claws had torn gaping wounds in the chest and shoulders of Imutanka and it was evident that the lion would have expired from loss of blood if the Sioux had not ended its agony with their arrows. They decided, therefore, that great Matohota should be credited with victory.

"Imutanka was very brave, but Matohota was too strong for him," declared Sun Bird.

"Yes, Matohota won the fight," agreed White Otter.

As the night was far advanced they determined to wait until daylight before setting out to rejoin their companions. They spent some time dancing solemnly about their victims, and chanting their war songs. Then they opened the carcasses of the bear and the lion and removed the hearts. They cut them into two parts and ate them with superstitious zeal. It was an ancient custom of the Dacotahs, who believed that by consuming the heart of a particularly strong and courageous bear or lion they would absorb the strength and courage of the animal itself.

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At dawn the Sioux determined to follow the game trail to the plain, in the hope of encountering some of the war party. They had thoughtfully cut the arrows from the bodies of Matohota and Imutanka so that if either the Blackfeet or the Crows chanced to visit the spot they would be unable to guess who had ventured upon their hunting grounds.

"Perhaps we will find out something about that pony," suggested Sun Bird, as they moved

slowly down the game trail.

"See, here are the tracks of Imutanka," said White Otter.

The trail of the lion was plainly visible. The Sioux gave little attention to it. Their interest in fierce Imutanka had ended with his death. They were curious, however, to learn more about the unfortunate pony. They watched closely to find its tracks. They were faint and far apart, and although Sun Bird and White Otter were expert trailers they could gain little information from the unsatisfactory trail.

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Then the game trail suddenly led them to an open plateau which offered an extended view of the plain. They saw a small company of horsemen riding toward the ridge. They studied them closely. There were eight.

"Perhaps our friends are looking for us," said Sun Bird.

White Otter remained silent. His whole attention was concentrated upon the approaching horsemen. They were a considerable distance below him and some distance from the base of the ridge. It was difficult to identify them, but the Ogalala was straining his eyes in the attempt. He was particularly noting the ponies, as he had become thoroughly familiar with the color and type of every animal in the Minneconjoux war party. He failed to recognize any of the ponies which were approaching the timber. One was a buckskin, and there were two pintos. There were several such animals in the Sioux war party, but they differed in type from the ponies on the plain. White Otter was suspicious of the approaching horsemen. Sun Bird, too, was becoming uneasy about them.

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"Who are they?" he asked, anxiously.

"They are not our people," White Otter assured him. "I do not know who they are. Do you know them?"

"No," replied Sun Bird.

They watched anxiously while the riders drew nearer the base of the ridge. As they finally came within bow range of the timber, they stopped and began to watch the ridge. For a moment the Sioux wondered if the horsemen had discovered them. It seemed impossible, as they had hidden themselves in the undergrowth the moment they discovered the riders.

"No, they did not see us," White Otter declared, confidently. "I believe they are scouts. Perhaps they are Blackfeet."

"No, they are not Blackfeet," said Sun Bird. "I know those people a long ways off."

"Well, they do not look like Crows," White Otter told him.

"No, they are not Crows," replied Sun Bird.

"Who are they?" demanded White Otter.

"I cannot tell you that until they come closer," Sun Bird told him.

In the meantime one of the horsemen had left his companions and was riding cautiously toward the ridge. His friends were watching him closely and seemed ready to rush to his assistance at the first warning of danger. As the scout drew steadily nearer, the Sioux studied him with great care. Sun Bird was positive that he was not a Blackfoot, and both of them were equally certain that he was not a Crow. The Crows allowed their hair to grow to great length, and wore it in two massive braids which often fell below their knees. The man who was approaching the ridge, however, had a great abundance of rather short, unbraided hair, which fell loosely about his shoulders. As Sun Bird noted it, and the high, peculiar shape of the warrior's head he suddenly identified him.

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"Now I know about him," he told White Otter. "He is a Flathead. It is bad. They are enemies of my people. We must watch out."

"I have heard my grandfather tell about those people," said White Otter.

He recalled the stories which old Wolf Robe had told about how the Flatheads flattened the heads of their children by tightly binding the skulls of the babies between stiff slabs of bark, and keeping them in the vise until the skulls were pressed into the desired shape. Those strange people considered a high, flat skull a great mark of beauty. As they were a northern tribe, hovering about the mountains, it was the first time White Otter had encountered them. He studied the approaching rider with curious interest.

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"They are great hunters," Sun Bird told him. "I believe these riders are coming to this ridge to hunt."

"Perhaps they will follow this trail," suggested White Otter. "Perhaps they will go up there where we killed Matohota, to watch for game."

Sun Bird started at the suggestion. It appeared to have offered an interesting possibility. He drew the mysterious arrow from his bowcase, and smiled significantly at White Otter.

"Now I know about this thing," he said. "This arrow came from the Flatheads."

White Otter nodded understandingly.

In the meantime the Flathead scout had reached the base of the ridge and disappeared from their sight. They turned their attention to the company of horsemen who were waiting on the plain. They seemed to be watching for the signal to advance.

"Those people are very cautious," said White Otter.

"Perhaps they are afraid of the Blackfeet," Sun Bird told him.

Then they heard a shout from the base of the ridge, and the horsemen cantered briskly toward the timber. The Sioux realized that it was time to move from the plateau. They believed it would be easy to return to the top of the ridge and escape from their enemies. Sun Bird, however, showed a desire to linger.

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"Those look like good ponies," he told White Otter, as his eyes twinkled mischievously. "The Flatheads are our enemies. They have killed some of my people. I feel like taking away some of those ponies."

"You are the leader, I will follow you," White Otter said, quietly.

"It is good," Sun Bird declared, enthusiastically.

Their first thought, however, was to conceal themselves sufficiently near the game trail to see the Flatheads if they passed. It was a bold resolve, and the eyes of the daring young Sioux flashed with excitement. They had been taught from infancy that the noblest aim of a warrior was to inflict punishment upon his enemies, and they determined to make the most of their opportunity. They concealed themselves within easy bowshot of the trail, and waited anxiously for the Flatheads to appear. It was not long before the Sioux heard them approaching.

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"They are coming," whispered Sun Bird.

They watched in breathless suspense, and in a few moments they saw the first horseman appear at the edge of the plateau. His companions followed closely behind him. The Sioux were greatly surprised when the Flatheads stopped their ponies in the center of the open park and began to dismount. Then the ponies were left with two warriors and the other members of the company passed up the game trail on foot. The Sioux had a splendid view of them at close range. They were tall, muscular men, whose high, flattened skulls gave them a weird and sinister expression. As they were not painted for war, the Sioux believed they were hunters.

"Perhaps they will find our tracks," Sun Bird whispered, uneasily, after they had passed.

White Otter looked serious. The possibility had already flashed through his mind, and he was troubled about it. He knew that even one indistinct impression of a fresh moccasin track would arouse the suspicions of the Flatheads, and send them hurrying to the plateau to investigate. Then it would be impossible to capture the ponies, and difficult to get away.

"The ground is hard," Sun Bird said, hopefully. "We did not make many tracks."

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"The eyes of a hunter are sharp," White Otter cautioned him.

Realizing that there was nothing to be gained by worrying over the possibility of the Flatheads discovering their tracks, the Sioux dismissed the thought from their minds and turned their attention upon the warriors with the ponies. The latter had incautiously turned loose the ponies to graze in the center of the park and had stationed themselves on opposite sides of the plateau to watch them. The Sioux instantly saw their opportunity.

"Those warriors are very foolish," Sun Bird said, excitedly. "Now we can creep up and get two of those ponies."

"We must be quick," White Otter told him. "Those other warriors may come back."

"I will take that yellow pony, it looks fast," said Sun Bird.

"I will take the spotted pony with the white tail," said White Otter.

Having made their selection, the Sioux realized that they must attempt their daring coup without a moment's delay. They moved through the undergrowth with the alert, silent stealth of Huhapedan, the fox. When they were almost at the edge of the park they stopped to plan their reckless dash upon the ponies. The animals which they hoped to secure were grazing near the edge of the timber and the Flathead who guarded them was picking berries a short distance away. The Sioux crawled a bowlength nearer. Then as one of the ponies suddenly raised its head, they stopped and waited with thumping hearts to learn if they had been discovered. The unsuspecting animal resumed its feeding, however, and the Sioux breathed more easily. Again they moved carefully toward the border of the park. Their eyes were fixed upon the ponies, and their ears were open to catch the first warning that the Flatheads had found their tracks.

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When they finally reached the edge of the timber, the ponies which they had selected were almost within reach of them. They were grazing quietly, and the long rawhide lariats were trailing between their feet. The Flathead had turned his back upon them and was stooped over searching for berries in the long grass. The warrior on the opposite side of the park was lying in the shade of a tree. The Sioux realized that their opportunity was at hand. Each fastened his eyes upon the animal he planned to capture and prepared to rush into the park. At that moment, however, they heard a signal from the upper end of the game trail. The truth instantly flashed through their minds. The Flathead hunters had discovered their trail.

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"Come!" cried White Otter.

They jumped to their feet and rushed recklessly into the park. Then as the startled ponies turned in panic, the Sioux sprang forward and seized the lariats. The next moment they had mounted and were riding furiously down the game trail. They chuckled with boyish glee as they heard the alarmed Flathead guards yelling frantically for their companions.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### A CLEVER STRATAGEM

At the time that Sun Bird and White Otter set out to climb the ridge to search for the Blackfeet camp, Lean Wolf and Sitting Eagle rode northward along the edge of the timber to look for signs of their enemies. They were particularly anxious to locate the Crows, who, they feared, were somewhere in the vicinity. They rode until the day was half gone, and then, having seen nothing of their foes, determined to return to their companions. As they were cantering slowly toward a deep ravine which they had crossed earlier in the day, their ponies suddenly began to raise their ears and whinny. The Sioux instantly stopped in alarm.

"Watch out!" cautioned Lean Wolf.

He had barely given the warning when a great company of horsemen rode out of the ravine and raced toward the astounded Sioux. The latter instantly recognized the riders as Crows. They were almost upon them and the Sioux wheeled their ponies and rode madly across the plain.

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"This way! This way!" cried Sitting Eagle, as he turned toward the north.

The Crows were within bowshot and their arrows were falling all about the crouching Sioux. The latter urged their ponies to a frantic burst of speed to escape from the fierce attack. Stride by stride they distanced their pursuers until they were beyond arrow range. Then the Crows withheld their arrows and began to lash their ponies in an attempt to again get within bow range.

"Keep low on your pony," cautioned Lean Wolf. "Perhaps they do not know who we are."

"Yes, yes, we will try to fool them," replied Sitting Eagle.

Then as the two ponies raced along side by side he told Lean Wolf about a narrow, shut-in cañon which extended back into the foothills. He said it was only a short distance ahead of them.

"If we run into that place the Crows cannot get us," Sitting Eagle declared, confidently.

"It is good, we will go there," agreed Lean Wolf.

The Crows were trying desperately to come within arrow range, but the gallant Sioux ponies were holding their lead and their riders had little fear of being overtaken. They believed that the Crow ponies had reached the limit of their speed and that further urging would cause them to collapse.

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The Sioux finally reached the cañon a safe distance ahead of their pursuers. After they had ridden through the narrow entrance, they dismounted and sought safety behind two great boulders which guarded the pass.

"Now we can hold off our enemies," Sitting Eagle said, with evident relief.

"Yes, it will be hard for them to come through here," declared Lean Wolf.

The Crows, however, showed no disposition to make the attempt. They seemed to realize the strength of the Sioux position and appeared reluctant to make an attack. They gathered in a compact group well beyond arrow range, and held a council of war.

"They will wait until it gets dark," declared Sitting Eagle. "Then they will try to get into this place."

"We will be ready," Lean Wolf said, doggedly. "But perhaps the Crows will keep us here a long time. We have no water. It is bad."

"There is a little pool a short ways behind us, and there is plenty of grass for the ponies," Sitting Eagle assured him.

"It is good," Lean Wolf declared, heartily. "We can stay here until the Crows get tired and go away."

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When the day finally ended and twilight fell upon the plain, the Sioux became more alert. They feared that the crafty Crows would make an attempt to creep into the cañon under cover of the darkness, and they determined to be prepared. Crouching behind the boulders, they peered anxiously into the night, listening for the sound of stealthy footfalls at the entrance to the cañon. Then, as time passed and the stillness was unbroken, they began to wonder. Had the Crows suddenly departed? The Sioux had grave doubts.

"No, they have not gone away," Lean Wolf told Sitting Eagle. "I believe they took us for Blackfeet. They are very mad at those people. I believe they will try hard to kill us."



"Listen!" cautioned Sitting Eagle.

They heard something moving cautiously near the entrance to the pass. Fearing that the Crows were about to make an attack, the Sioux fitted arrows to their bows and prepared to offer desperate resistance. Then they again heard some one creeping stealthily toward them through the night.

"It is a scout," whispered Lean Wolf.

Sitting Eagle rose to his knees, and shot his arrow toward the sounds. There was a noisy scramble from the pass, and they knew that the invaders had been driven off. Then for a long time they heard nothing further from their foes. Shortly before daylight, however, a small company of reckless young warriors rushed boldly into the narrow defile and made a valiant attempt to overcome the Sioux. The latter fought furiously, and the Crows were forced to withdraw. Their foolhardy display of bravery had cost the lives of several of them.

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The Sioux were greatly encouraged by their success in holding the pass. They believed that the Crows would be slow to renew the attack. They had withdrawn beyond arrow range, and as dawn lighted the plain the Sioux saw them gathered in earnest discussion some distance from the cañon.

"Perhaps they will go away," Sitting Eagle said, hopefully.

"No, I do not believe it," replied Lean Wolf. "Listen, they are singing their war songs. We must be ready."

A few moments afterward the entire Crow war party galloped toward the cañon. As they came within arrow range, however, they dropped behind their ponies and raced past yelling fiercely.

"Save your arrows!" shouted Lean Wolf.

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"Yes, yes, I see what they are trying to do," Sitting Eagle told him.

They realized at once that their wily foes were attempting to make them waste their arrows. When the Crows saw that the trick had failed, they immediately withdrew beyond arrow range. This time, however, they disappeared from sight over a rise of the plain. The Sioux looked at one another in surprise. The unexpected maneuver made them suspicious.

"They are trying to fool us," said Sitting Eagle.

"Yes, they are trying to make us come out so that they can catch us," declared Lean Wolf.

Then their suspicions were confirmed as they saw several warriors peeping over the crest of the rise. The Sioux laughed and jeered at them, and the Crows instantly withdrew from sight. They remained hidden for the rest of the day, but the Sioux had little doubt that sharp-eyed scouts were constantly watching the pass.

"If they do not come when it gets dark, we will know that they have gone away," said Sitting Eagle.

They watched in weary suspense as the long day finally drew to a close. The Crows, however, failed to appear. It seemed as if they really had abandoned the siege, and still the Sioux feared to believe it. Experience had taught them that the Crows were crafty and treacherous foes, and they feared that they were planning some clever ruse to gain admission to the cañon.

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"We must keep watching," Lean Wolf said, suspiciously.

The night was well advanced before they heard anything to arouse their fears. Then they again caught the sound of some one moving toward the cañon.

"Watch out, they have come!" whispered Sitting Eagle.

"I hear them," Lean Wolf replied.

The next moment a wild chorus of yells warned them that the entire Crow force was crowding into the narrow pass. The Sioux knew that the critical moment was at hand. The Crows had left their ponies out on the plain and had crept toward the cañon on foot. It was evident that they were determined to kill their foes at any cost, and the Sioux realized that unless they could stop the first fierce rush there was no hope for them.

"Come, we are Dacotahs, we will show these people how to fight!" Lean Wolf cried, savagely.

They rose behind the bowlders and delivered a deadly volley of arrows that threw the Crows into confusion. For a moment they hesitated, and the Sioux took hope. Then the Crows rallied and rushed recklessly upon their foes. The Sioux took shelter behind the bowlders and fought with the fury of despair. They realized that it was only a matter of moments before they would be overcome, and they determined to make the Crows pay dearly for the victory.

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At that instant, however, the great war cry of the Dacotahs echoed through the night, and a moment afterward the thunderous hoof beats of running ponies reverberated across the plain. The Sioux could scarcely believe their ears. The Crows turned in panic.

"The Blackfeet! The Blackfeet!" they cried hysterically. "They have run off our ponies!"

They believed that they had been led into a trap by the treacherous Blackfeet, and the thought demoralized them. Their one thought was to escape from the cañon before their foes barred the way. They scrambled wildly through the narrow pass and fled into the darkness.

"Come!" cried Lean Wolf, as he sprang upon his pony.

The Sioux galloped from the pass, and raced across the plain to join the Minneconjoux war party. They heard the Sioux war cry directly ahead of them, and they raised their voices in reply. Several riderless ponies crossed their path, but they made no attempt to capture them. Their one thought was to join their comrades in an attack upon the bewildered Crows. Then they heard some one galloping toward them and shouting their names. A moment later White Otter raced the fiery piebald beside them.

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"You are alive—it is good," he said. "Come, we will run away before the Crows find out about it."

"Where are our brothers?" Lean Wolf inquired, anxiously.

"Little Raven and Running Dog are waiting over there," White Otter told him.

"Yes, yes, but where are the others?" inquired Lean Wolf.

"They did not come," laughed White Otter. "We made all that noise to frighten the Crow ponies and bring the Crows out on the plain. I did it a long time ago. Now I have done it again. The Crows are very foolish."

"White Otter, you are a great chief!" Lean Wolf said, warmly. "You have given us our lives. We will tell our people about it."

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## CHAPTER XIV

### THE BLACKFEET CAMP

They soon found Little Raven and Running Dog, and then they set out to join the war party. As they rode swiftly through the night Lean Wolf asked White Otter to tell about his daring stratagem against the Crows.

"How did you come to find us?" Lean Wolf asked him.

"When we came back from the ridge, Sun Bird asked our friends about you," said White Otter. "They told us that you went away and did not come back. We felt bad about it. Sun Bird sent us to look for you. Pretty soon we found the tracks of your ponies. We followed them to that gully. Then we saw what had happened. We thought the Blackfeet had caught you. It was easy to follow all those pony tracks. Then we came in sight of the place where you were hiding. We lay down behind a ridge to watch. We saw a war party of Crows. Then I told Running Dog and Little Raven how I fooled those people. I said, 'I will fool them again.' Then we frightened away the ponies and made the Crows run out. That is all I have to say about it."

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Soon afterward they encountered the Minneconjoux war party advancing carefully along the edge of the timber. However, when Sun Bird learned that the Crows were only a short distance ahead of him, he immediately ordered a halt.

"If we keep going ahead we will run into those people," he told his companions. "That would be foolish. We have set out to fight the Blackfeet. We must keep ourselves strong until we meet them."

"Yes, it would be foolish to risk our lives until we have done what we set out to do," the Minneconjoux told one another.

They made a wide detour, therefore, and circled far out on the plain to avoid meeting their enemies. Daylight was close at hand when they finally returned to the foothills. Having passed safely by the cañon without hearing anything of the Crows, the Sioux believed that there was little further danger of again encountering those hated foes.

"We are getting close to the Blackfeet camp, the Crows will not come this way," said Sun Bird.

"They have gone to tell their people how the Blackfeet fooled them," Lean Wolf said, jokingly.

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"White Otter can tell them about it," laughed the Minneconjoux.

As the last lingering night shadows lifted from the plain, the Sioux entered the timber to avoid being seen by prowling companies of Blackfeet. Although the danger of meeting the Crows appeared to have passed, they knew that they would be in constant peril from the Blackfeet. Dancing Rabbit said that they were within a day's journey of the great camp, and the announcement roused them to their danger. They moved carefully along the base of the ridge until they found a sheltered hiding place.

"Now, my friends, I will tell you what I propose to do," said Sun Bird. "You have heard the words of Dancing Rabbit. He says that we are getting near the great Blackfeet camp. It is good. That is what we set out to do. But we must be cautious. We must not let the Blackfeet see us until

we run off those ponies. We must hide in the timber until we are ready to fight. But first we must find the Blackfeet camp. I believe we can see it from the top of this ridge. Pretty soon I am going to climb up there and look around. You must wait here until I come back. Then when it grows dark we will go ahead. I have finished."

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Soon afterward he set out with White Otter and Dancing Rabbit. They climbed to the top of the ridge and looked anxiously toward the north. It was some time before Dancing Rabbit spoke. Then he pointed eagerly toward a low, sage-grown ridge.

"Do you see that long hill?" he asked excitedly.

"Yes, I see it," replied Sun Bird.

"Well, there is a river on the other side of it," Dancing Rabbit told them. "Many trees grow along that river. The Blackfeet camp is between that river and that long hill. I hid on top of that hill when I ran away from the camp."

Sun Bird and White Otter heard him in silence. Now that the goal was almost in sight they showed little emotion. Only the sudden flash of their eyes betokened their interest. They were intently studying the low, sage-grown sweep of the plain which Dancing Rabbit declared concealed the Blackfeet camp.

"See, see, there is the smoke from the village!" cried Dancing Rabbit, as he pointed to a thin column of smoke which was rising above the ridge.

"I have been watching it a long time," Sun Bird told him.

"Yes, I saw it," said White Otter, as Sun Bird looked inquiringly at him.

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"See, there is a high place over there," said Sun Bird, as he pointed toward a great ledge some distance to the northward. "If we climb up on those rocks we can see the Blackfeet lodges."

"Yes, I believe you can see the camp from that place," Dancing Rabbit declared, eagerly.

They made their way slowly along the ridge until they reached the base of the great ledge. It rose many bow lengths above them and was so bare and conspicuous that the Sioux were somewhat fearful of being seen if they climbed it. They knew that when enemies were expected, every great camp was protected by sentinels posted on elevations of the plain to watch for the approach of their foes. As the Blackfeet had every reason to expect an attack from both the Minneconjoux and the Crows, the Sioux felt quite certain that they had taken the usual precautions to guard their village. Still, the possibility of seeing the great Blackfeet camp was a strong temptation, and the Sioux finally decided to climb the ledge.

They had barely made the decision, however, when they saw something which instantly changed their plans. A small company of horsemen had suddenly appeared on the summit of the ridge which hid the camp. The Sioux knew at once that they were Blackfeet, and they watched anxiously to see which way they would go. They were considerably relieved when the riders reached the foot of the slope and turned toward the east. They rode off at a smart canter and soon disappeared into a dip of the plain.

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"I believe they are hunters," said White Otter.

"Well, they have gone away," Sun Bird told him. "Come, we will climb up there and look around."

"No, it would be foolish," White Otter declared. "I see some one down there watching this place."

Sun Bird and Dancing Rabbit started in amazement. Both had unusually sharp vision, and they had kept their eyes steadily on the ridge, but neither of them had seen any one except the horsemen.

"Where is that person?" Sun Bird inquired, curiously.

"Look sharp at that twisted tree, near the top of the ridge," said White Otter.

His companions looked in vain. They could find no evidence of any one either in or about the tree which White Otter had designated. They feared that he had been mistaken.

"I do not see any one," declared Sun Bird.

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"Well, there is a warrior sitting up there among the branches," White Otter told him. "If you look sharp along that crooked limb you will see him. He is far away, but my eyes tell me that he is looking this way. We must be cautious."

"Yes, yes, I see him!" Sun Bird said, excitedly.

"He must be a scout. Perhaps those riders left him there to watch for enemies. Perhaps it is a war party."

"We will wait and see what he is going to do," said White Otter.

As they were high up, and well sheltered in the timber, the Sioux had little fear of being discovered. They were curious to know what the warrior in the tree was watching for, and they determined to wait until they learned. Then they suddenly discovered a horseman near the spot where the Blackfeet had disappeared. The Sioux felt sure that he was one of the company. He was facing toward the ridge where the warrior was watching from the tree. Apparently aware that the latter had seen him, he dismounted and began to signal with his robe. First he held it directly in front of him between his outstretched arms. The Sioux recognized the signal as the

sign for buffaloes. Then he waved the robe up and down several times before his body. It was the signal for many.

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"Those men are Blackfeet hunters," declared White Otter. "They have found some buffaloes. That man is telling about it."

In the meantime the warrior had descended from the tree and hurried to the top of the ridge. Then he stooped and raised his robe from the ground. He faced toward the north, and repeated the signals which he had just received. Then both warriors disappeared.

"That man has told the people in the village about the buffaloes," said White Otter. "I do not believe it is a big hunt. Perhaps some buffaloes came near the camp and some young men went out to kill them."

"Well, we must not show ourselves," Sun Bird said, with a tinge of disappointment. "I would like to look at that camp, but I believe it would be foolish to climb up there."

"Yes, my brother, it would be foolish," White Otter warned him. "The Blackfeet are moving around. Their eyes are sharp. We must watch out."

"I will tell you how I feel about it," said Sun Bird.

"I am listening," replied White Otter.

"I am going to ask Dancing Rabbit to go back to our brothers," explained Sun Bird. "I am going to ask him to tell them to come ahead when it grows dark. Sitting Eagle knows this place. He must be the leader. When it gets light they must hide in the timber and wait for us. Dancing Rabbit, you must come back here and tell us where they are. Then we will go to them and tell them what we saw. White Otter, I will ask you to stay here with me. When it gets dark we will climb up on that high place and hide. When the light comes we will see the Blackfeet camp."

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"It is the best thing to do," White Otter told him.

Shortly after Dancing Rabbit left them, they saw a great company of Blackfeet riding slowly over the ridge. There were both men and women, and many of the ponies were dragging the pole *travois* upon which burdens were transported across the plains.

"Those hunters have killed some buffaloes," said White Otter. "These people are going to bring in the meat."

They watched the interesting cavalcade move slowly across the plain and disappear on the trail of the hunters. The Blackfeet were sending their women to bring in the meat. It was apparent, therefore, that they had little fear of either the Minneconjoux or the Crows retaliating for the recent attacks which they had made upon them. The reckless boldness of their arrogant foes caused the eyes of the Sioux to flash with anger.

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"We will fool those boastful people," Sun Bird said, fiercely.

"They feel safe—it is good," White Otter replied, quietly.

They saw nothing more of the Blackfeet until the end of the day and then the hunters returned. A short way behind them came the women and a few men, leading the pack ponies laden with meat. After the Blackfeet had passed over the ridge, the Sioux listened anxiously for sounds from the camp. When they failed to hear anything they began to wonder if the camp was farther away than they supposed.

"I do not believe it is far beyond that ridge," declared White Otter. "The wind has carried away the noise."

"Yes, that may be true," agreed Sun Bird.

They waited impatiently for darkness, and when it finally came they immediately began to climb the ledge. It was hard, perilous work, as the night was unusually black, and the ledge was high and steep. There were places where a false step would have meant severe injury, or even death, and the Sioux realized the necessity for caution.

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"Well, we have had a hard time," Sun Bird panted, as they finally reached the top.

"Yes, it is a hard place to get to," agreed White Otter.

They went as far as possible along the top of the ledge, hoping at daylight to be able to see over the ridge which hid the camp. Then they concealed themselves behind two high pinnacles of rock which rose some distance above the ledge and waited anxiously for the night to pass.

"See, the light is coming," Sun Bird said, eagerly, as the first faint trace of dawn appeared in the east. "Pretty soon we will see the great Blackfeet camp."

"It is good," replied White Otter.

They waited impatiently for darkness to leave the plain. Dawn seemed a long time coming. However, the pale narrow streak across the eastern sky gradually widened, the stars grew dim, and a bird note sounded from the timber. Day was close at hand. The Sioux stirred restlessly. Their long vigil was almost over. Would they see the Blackfeet camp? they wondered. They longed to sweep aside the heavy black mantle which hid the plain. Then, after some moments of trying suspense, they saw the night shadows slowly retreating. The stars had disappeared. A soft gray twilight was creeping out of the east. Like a great hand, it spread slowly over the plain and wiped away the darkness. Dim, shadowy shapes appeared in its wake. It passed over the ridge and drove the shadows into the north. The Sioux followed it with eager eyes. Slowly, almost

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imperceptibly, it extended across the plain and laid bare the secrets of the night.

"Look, look, there are the lodges!" Sun Bird cried, eagerly.

They seemed suddenly to have sprung from the plain—like pale, ghostly phantoms on the trail of dawn. One after the other, they appeared from the gloom in great sweeping circles that extended far out on the plain until the entire camp was exposed before the fascinated eyes of the Sioux. It was ideally situated beside the waters of a wide, willow-lined stream. The Sioux marveled at its size. For a long time they studied it in silence. Trained from infancy in the art of observation, they noted every detail. They counted the lodges, estimated the number of persons each would accommodate, determined the nearest and easiest approach to the camp, noted the distance from the ridge, the distance from the water, and many other details which skillful scouts were expected to know.

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Then they turned their attention to the ponies. There was a great herd of them grazing some distance to the eastward of the lodges. The Sioux watched them with covetous eyes. They knew that many of those animals had come from the Minneconjoux camp. They intended to take them back, and many Blackfeet ponies besides. Near the edge of the camp was a smaller herd of ponies confined in a strong pole corral. The Sioux knew that those were the more valuable animals, the fleet-footed war and hunting ponies. White Otter studied them with great interest. He was trying to identify the famous black war pony of Many Buffaloes, the Blackfeet chief. However, he was unable to convince himself that any of the ponies in the corral was that animal. He had little doubt that it was securely guarded somewhere near the lodge of the chief.

"There are many lodges," Sun Bird said, finally.

"Yes, it is a great camp," replied White Otter.

The Blackfeet were beginning to stir. The Sioux saw them moving about between the lodges. They looked like dwarfs at the distance. Then smoke began to rise above the camp. Some people were running toward the river. The Sioux believed they were boys. The splashes were distinctly visible as they threw themselves into the water. The faint, far-away sound of their voices came up from the plain. Then a shadow swept across the ledge. The Sioux looked into the sky. Huya, the great war bird, was soaring out over the Blackfeet camp.

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"Hi, there is our brother, Huya!" said Sun Bird. "He has come to bring our people to the Blackfeet camp."

"It is a good sign," declared White Otter.

They watched until the day was well advanced, and then they crept carefully over the top of the ledge and descended to the summit of the ridge. They found Dancing Rabbit waiting for them.

"Well, my brother, have you brought our friends here?" inquired Sun Bird.

"They are hiding down there in the timber," replied Dancing Rabbit.

"Come, we will go to them," said Sun Bird.

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## CHAPTER XV

### A PERILOUS RECONNAISSANCE

They found the war party camped in a secluded ravine which led far back into the foothills. Having ridden throughout the night, most of the Minneconjoux were sleeping when Sun Bird and White Otter arrived at the rendezvous. The spot was strongly guarded by sentinels, however, who took turns at keeping watch. Sun Bird and White Otter immediately asked for water, and Dancing Rabbit led them to a splendid spring on the side of the ravine. Then they supplied themselves with generous rations of dried meat and ate heartily. In the meantime their arrival had awakened most of the war party, and they gathered about the famous young scouts and waited anxiously for them to speak.

"Well, my friends, I have something good to tell you," Sun Bird said, at last. "We saw the Blackfeet camp. It is close by. There are many lodges. There must be many people to live in them. We saw many ponies. Some belong to our people. We have come to take them away. We will take them. Then we saw the fast ponies. They are near the lodges. We will try to take some of those. But, my friends, I must tell you that it will be a hard thing to do. There are many warriors in that camp. They are brave. Perhaps we will have to fight hard to get those ponies."

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"My brothers, I have listened to your words," said Sitting Eagle. "You say that the Blackfeet are brave. It is true. I have fought many battles against them. They are braver than the Pawnees. They are braver than the Kiowas. They are braver than the Crows. Now you know that they are

very brave. Well, my friends, the Dacotahs are braver than the Blackfeet. Yes, the Dacotahs are the bravest of all. We will go to that great camp, and take away those ponies. Sun Bird is a good leader. Our brother, White Otter, is a great chief. I see many brave warriors sitting here. We are very strong. Yes, my brothers, we will take away those ponies."

The boastful assurance of Sitting Eagle roused the Minneconjoux to a great pitch of enthusiasm. For the moment their ardor overcame their caution, and they began to talk loudly and utter wild threats against their foes.

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"Come! come!" Lean Wolf cried, impatiently. "We are making too much noise. Are we like old women who cackle like foolish Magasapa, the goose?"

The Minneconjoux instantly subsided into silence. They knew that it was not the part of warriors to give way to their emotions, and they felt guilty and ashamed. As Sun Bird showed no inclination to tell them anything more about the Blackfeet camp, most of them threw themselves upon the ground and resumed their slumbers. The three young scouts who had just returned from the top of the ridge followed their example, and it was not long before all except the vigilant sentinels about the edge of the camp were sleeping soundly.

The day had ended and twilight had fallen upon the plain when Sun Bird and White Otter finally awakened. They felt rested and refreshed, and were eager to begin the great adventure which lay before them. As the entire company was awake, Sun Bird prepared to carry out his plans for advancing upon the Blackfeet camp. He called the sentinels who had watched through the night, and asked if they had seen or heard anything of their foes. They assured him that the night had passed without alarm.

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"It is good," said Sun Bird. "Now, my friends, I will tell you what I propose to do. See! the light has almost gone. When it gets dark I am going away to find out about that great camp. I am going to creep up close. Then I will find out what we want to know. Then we will know how to get those ponies. Now I am going to ask White Otter to go with me. He is a great scout. He has been to the Pawnee camp. He has been to the Crow camp. He has crawled up to the lodges of the Kiowas. Now I will ask this great scout to go to the Blackfeet camp with me."

"I will go," White Otter told him.

There were many others who were anxious to risk their lives for a peep into the great Blackfeet camp, but Sun Bird refused them. He knew that numbers increased the chances of discovery, and he determined to run no unnecessary risks. Besides, there were few, if any, warriors among the Minneconjoux who could match the scouting abilities of the Ogalala. As Sun Bird realized that the success of the undertaking might depend upon the thoroughness of the reconnaissance which he planned to make, he determined to rely solely upon White Otter and himself to carry it through.

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It was barely dark when they left the war party and set out for the Blackfeet camp. Their companions watched them depart, in silence, for they knew the danger to which they were about to expose themselves, and many alarming possibilities flashed through their minds.

"They are very brave," said Sitting Eagle, as Sun Bird and White Otter disappeared into the shadows.

Believing that it would be easier to accomplish their purpose if they traveled on foot, they left their ponies with their companions. Once at the edge of the plain, they hurried away in the direction of the low sage-grown ridge. When they finally saw it looming up before them, they realized that they must advance with more caution. If the Blackfeet expected an attack it was probable that they had posted sentinels at that spot, and the Sioux determined to take every precaution. The discovery of the warrior in the tree led them to believe that the ridge was a favorite watching place of their foes.

Once at the base of the slope, the Sioux stopped and spent some time listening for the sound of voices. Then as they heard nothing to rouse their fears, they moved cautiously up the side of the ridge. When they reached the top they instantly located the camp by the glow from the fires. For a moment or so they watched silently. Then they descended through the sage, and moved out across the grim, black plain.

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"Now we must watch out," warned Sun Bird.

Side by side, they sped through the night as swiftly and noiselessly as wolves on the trail of their prey. Their eyes were fixed on the alluring glow from the Blackfeet fires, they relied upon their ears to warn them of danger. The plain, however, was steeped in silence. They heard nothing but their own soft footfalls, and the gentle rustling of the grass against their buckskin leggings.

"It is good," whispered Sun Bird. "The Blackfeet are in the camp eating buffalo meat. There is no one to stop us."

"We must not be too sure about it," White Otter cautioned him.

Then they heard something which brought them to a sudden stop. The dogs were barking furiously in the Blackfeet camp. The Sioux listened uneasily. Several disturbing possibilities entered their minds. Had the dogs caught their scent? It seemed impossible. White Otter raised a moistened finger to test the breeze. It blew from the camp. They felt relieved. Then another thought presented itself. Perhaps the Crows had moved against the Blackfeet camp. The Sioux listened for sounds of an attack. They heard only the savage baying of the dogs.

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"I believe the dogs are fighting for meat," said Sun Bird.

"It is bad," White Otter replied, seriously. "If those dogs keep moving around, it will be hard to get near the camp."

The thought troubled them. They knew that if one of those gaunt, wolf-like creatures caught their scent it would instantly skulk out upon the plain to investigate. Once it found them it would set up a racket that would soon draw the rest of the pack upon them, and the Blackfeet would be quick to realize the significance of the commotion.

"There is only one thing to do," said White Otter. "We will wait here until the dogs quiet down. Then we will wait until they lie down to sleep. Then we will creep up to the camp. If we go ahead now, those dogs will find out about us."

"Yes, I see that it is the only thing to do," agreed Sun Bird.

It seemed a very long time to the impatient Sioux before the dogs finally became silent. However, as they had heard nothing to indicate alarm in the Blackfeet camp, they decided that the uproar had been caused by the dogs fighting over the scraps of buffalo meat which the Blackfeet had thrown them from their feast. In spite of the stillness, however, the Sioux feared to approach the camp until they had allowed the dogs time to gorge themselves and settle down to sleep. They waited, therefore, watching the twinkle of the camp fires, and listening for sounds from their foes.

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"Come," Sun Bird said, suddenly. "Everything is still. I believe the dogs have gone to sleep. We will creep up to the camp."

"I am ready," White Otter assured him.

Again they moved cautiously through the night until they were actually within bowshot of the lodges. Then they suddenly heard the solemn booming of the war drums, and the sound of singing. For a moment they turned to one another in alarm. Were the Blackfeet preparing for war? Then they guessed the truth.

"It is the hunters," whispered White Otter, "They are dancing the Buffalo Dance."

"It is good," Sun Bird told him. "All the people will be around the dancers. We can get close to the lodges."

"Watch out for the dogs," cautioned White Otter.

They advanced within half a bowshot of the camp, and then they dropped to the plain to watch. The camp was brightly illuminated by the light from the fires, and the Blackfeet were clearly visible as they passed between the lodges. The booming of the war drums and the singing continued, and the Sioux could hear even the short, sharp exclamations of the dancers as they kept time with the music. Still they were unable to see into the camp, and they determined to advance still closer.

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Slowly, a bow length at a time, they crept toward the nearest lodges. They moved with great caution, and stopped many times to make sure that the way was clear. They were in constant fear of the dogs. Although they had seen nothing of them, they realized that at any moment they might encounter them prowling about the borders of the camp.

The Sioux had almost reached the lodges when they suddenly heard something moving directly behind them. They turned in alarm. Had a dog circled about them, and caught their scent? Their hearts beat wildly at the thought. Each moment they expected to hear the first savage yelp which would announce their approach to the Blackfeet. Then, as they listened, they heard footsteps. Some one was walking directly toward them. They were seized with panic. Discovery seemed certain. There was not a moment to spare. Pressing themselves close against the ground, they prepared to drive their arrows through their foe before he could utter an outcry. At that moment he turned from his course and passed without seeing them. His bent form, and slow, faltering gait convinced the Sioux that he was an old man. As he emerged into the firelight at the edge of the camp they saw that their guess was correct. A moment afterward he disappeared behind a lodge.

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"I believe he is a Medicine Man," whispered Sun Bird. "Perhaps he was out there making Medicine."

"Perhaps," replied White Otter.

Having recovered from their alarm, they crawled to the edge of the camp, and hid in the shadow of a lodge. Then they looked upon their enemies. The Blackfeet were gathered in the center of the camp. They were watching the wild antics of a company of dancers who were circling about the fire. The Sioux studied the assemblage with great care. White Otter was particularly curious, as it was the first time he had seen those people.

The Blackfeet presented an interesting spectacle, as they celebrated the success of their hunters. The latter were especially picturesque. They had painted their faces and bodies and decorated themselves in a most weird and grotesque manner. Many wore the entire skin of a buffalo bull, including the head and horns. Others had fastened buffalo feet to their ankles so that they rattled and clacked at each stride of the dancer. Thus arrayed, they cavorted wildly about the fire, imitating the antics of the buffaloes. They pranced, and reared, and kicked, and roared. Some pawed the ground, and then lay down and wallowed as the buffaloes would do to rid themselves of flies. Others imitated the fierce encounter between two great rival bulls, pushing and jostling each other, and butting their heads together until the spectators shrieked with delight. It was a clever exhibition of mimicry, and more than once the Sioux were forced to smile.

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Then they turned their attention upon the spectators. Men, women and children had assembled in a great circle about the dancers. The Sioux made special note of the men. They were dark and tall, and powerful, with deep, broad chests, and wide sloping shoulders. They compared favorably in physique and bearing with the gallant Dacotah fighting men, and the two young scouts realized that they had come upon worthy foes. Closer to the dancers were the musicians, six old men, who thumped the war drums and sang the Buffalo Song in high, cracked tones. The Sioux gave little attention to them. Their eyes were focused on a small group of men who stood together some distance to the right of the singers. Their dress and manner proclaimed them men of importance, and the Sioux knew that they were the chiefs and counselors of the tribe.

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"That warrior who wears the bear robe is Many Buffaloes," Sun Bird whispered, excitedly.

White Otter nodded understandingly, as he concentrated his attention upon the man whom Sun Bird had designated. The great Blackfeet war chief was a man slightly past the prime of life, whose massive frame, and bold, fearless features well confirmed the stories of his marvelous exploits on the war trail. He wore a great trailing war bonnet of eagle plumes, and carried a long coupstick decorated with the trophies which he had taken from his enemies. He carried himself with the dignity and hauteur of a great leader, and the Ogalala looked upon him with respect.

"He looks like a warrior," White Otter told Sun Bird.

"He is a great chief," declared Sun Bird.

Many Buffaloes took no part in the ceremony. He stood apart with several of his associates and showed little interest in the wild capers of the dancers. His keen eyes, however, noted every action, and it was evident that his apparent indifference was largely assumed. He appeared to consider it beneath the dignity of a great war chief to show emotion upon so trivial an occasion.

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"Where is his black pony?" White Otter asked, eagerly.

"I cannot tell you," said Sun Bird.

"Come, we will try to find it," White Otter told him.

Sun Bird looked uneasily into the eyes of his friend. White Otter's bold resolve filled him with alarm. A disturbing possibility swept through us mind. Did the daring Ogalala plan to enter the Blackfeet camp in search of the famous war pony? Sun Bird feared that it would be a fatal blunder to make the attempt at that time. Even if White Otter should succeed in leading away the pony without being seen, the loss would rouse the entire Blackfeet nation. They would immediately send strong war parties to search the plain, and the long, perilous journey of the Minneconjoux would have been in vain. Sun Bird appeared reluctant to agree to the proposal. White Otter instantly guessed the reason.

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"I see that you do not feel good about it," White Otter said, quietly. "I am a war leader. I am not going to do anything foolish. I am not going to try to take away that pony. I am going to find out where it is. Then I will wait until our brothers have run off the other ponies. Then perhaps I will try to take away that black pony."

"It is good," Sun Bird said, with evident relief.

They began to circle cautiously about the camp. It was perilous work. Bow in hand, they crept stealthily along in the shadows from the lodges, stopping every bow length to watch and listen. Where were the dogs? They would have given much to know. They knew that at any moment they might stumble upon them. They had gone about an arrow flight when they suddenly discovered one of the dogs lying beside a lodge. Was it asleep? they wondered. It was lying with its back toward them, and was only five or six bow lengths away. The Sioux watched it with bated breath. They realized that the slightest sound might rouse it. They feared to move. Still, it seemed equally perilous to loiter.

"Come," breathed White Otter.

For an instant Sun Bird hesitated. It was caution, not fear which held him back. It seemed folly to risk discovery when they had already learned so much about their foes. White Otter, however, was already creeping noiselessly into the shadows, and Sun Bird determined to follow him. Inch by inch they dragged themselves forward until they were opposite the dog. Then for a moment they hesitated. It had every appearance of being asleep, and the Sioux passed on.

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Then they discovered what they were risking their lives to see. Beside a great decorated lodge was a strongly made log corral, and above it appeared the long slender head and graceful neck of the famous black war pony. It was watching the glow in the center of the camp, and nervously twitching its ears at the noise. White Otter gazed upon it with eager, fascinated eyes. It was a noble trophy, and he longed to possess it. The opportunity seemed before him. Impulse urged him to act. He paused to consider. Loyalty held him back. He realized that his own ambition must be sacrificed to insure the success of the Minneconjoux. They had suffered a great loss at the hands of the Blackfeet. They had made a long and perilous journey to recover the stolen ponies. Their success depended upon keeping the Blackfeet in ignorance of their approach until they were at the camp. White Otter made a quick, and final decision.

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"Come," he whispered. "I have found out what I wanted to know. We will go."

"It is good," said Sun Bird.

They crept slowly from the edge of the camp. Then when they were a safe distance from the lodges they rose to their feet and sped away into the night.



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## CHAPTER XVI

### OFF WITH THE PONIES

The following night the Minneconjoux set out to make their attack upon the Blackfeet. Long before it was dark Sitting Eagle and Lean Wolf and Running Dog left the ravine and rode away to watch from the ridge to the southward of the camp. Then as the twilight faded from the plain the war party followed swiftly on the trail of the scouts. Riding in pairs, the Sioux passed on their way in grim silence. When they finally saw the low ridge directly before them, they stopped and listened anxiously for word from the scouts.

"Ho, my brothers, the way is clear, but the fires are still burning in the Blackfeet camp," said Lean Wolf, as he suddenly rode out of the night.

"We must wait," Sun Bird told him.

In a few moments they heard the sharp bark of the little gray fox, a short distance to the eastward. Sun Bird waited until he heard it three times, and then he replied. Soon afterward Running Dog appeared.

"I have been a long ways over there," he said, indicating the east. "I saw nothing of our enemies. Their fires are burning. We must wait." [Pg 198]

"Yes, my brother, we will wait," Sun Bird assured him.

It was some time before Sitting Eagle finally arrived. Then he too suddenly rode out of the darkness.

"I have been close to the Blackfeet camp," said the famous scout. "I saw the light of many fires. It is bad. We must wait."

"We will wait," said Sun Bird.

Then, as the stern Minneconjoux fighting men gathered about the youthful war leader, Sun Bird announced his plans for running off the ponies.

"My brothers, we are in sight of the great Blackfeet camp," he said, softly. "It is not far beyond this ridge. We have come a long ways. We have come to do a big thing. We must go through with it. We will wait here until the fires die down. Then we will know that the Blackfeet have gone to the lodges. Then we will ride over there and run off the ponies. Now I will tell you how to do it. There are many ponies out there on the plain. There are other ponies near the lodges. When we cross over this ridge I will show you where to find the ponies. When we get near the camp we must separate. Some must go out on the plain to get those ponies, and some must go to get the ponies that are near the camp. White Otter is a great war chief. I will ask him to be the leader of those who go to get the ponies that are near the camp. Sitting Eagle is a great war leader. I will ask him to be the leader of those who go to run off the ponies on the plain. Many of us must wait near the camp to fight back the Blackfeet. I will be the leader. Now I have told you the way to do this thing." [Pg 199]

"It is good," agreed the Minneconjoux.

While they waited impatiently for the Blackfeet fires to die down, many of the war party left their ponies with their friends and crawled to the top of the ridge to watch the camp. Others dismounted and threw themselves upon the plain to rest. There was little talking. The Sioux realized that they were about to match themselves against a strong and wily foe who greatly outnumbered them, and the thought made them serious. They knew that the time for boasting had passed, and the time for action was at hand. There was not one of the company, however, who had the slightest fear. They believed that Dacotah courage would more than offset the superior strength of the Blackfeet, and they felt confident of success.

The night was more than half gone when the watchers returned from the ridge and reported that the last flickering glow had faded from the Blackfeet camp. The announcement roused the Sioux to action. Springing upon their ponies, they waited eagerly for the word to advance. [Pg 200]

"My brothers, the Blackfeet have gone to their lodges," said Sun Bird. "Pretty soon they will be asleep. It is good. They will not know about us until they hear us running off the ponies. Come, Dacotahs, we will go."

The summons stirred their fighting blood. They longed to send the Dacotah war cry ringing across the plain as a challenge to their foes. They stifled the temptation, however, and crossed the ridge in silence. All evidence of the Blackfeet camp had vanished into the night, and Sun Bird chose the north star to guide him on his way.

The preliminary reconnaissance which Sun Bird and White Otter had made the previous night

proved of great value. At that time they had carefully noted the contour of the plain between the ridge and the camp, and had estimated distances between certain prominent landmarks which they had retained in their memory. Now, as they found them, they were able to guess how closely they were approaching the Blackfeet camp. When he believed that they had gone half way, Sun Bird ordered a halt, and proceeded to divide the war party. The younger, less experienced warriors were assigned to the companies who were to run off the ponies, while the renowned fighters and famous scouts were chosen as a rear guard to fight back the Blackfeet. Then Sun Bird carefully explained the location of the ponies.

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"Now we are ready to go ahead with this thing," he said. "But before we begin I will tell you something. When you are ready to ride off the ponies that are on the plain you must make many quick barks of the little gray fox. Then you must wait. When White Otter and his brothers hear it they will know that you are ready. Then when they are ready they must make that signal. When it stops you must go ahead to run off the ponies. Then if the Blackfeet hear you we will be ready to hold them back. Keep these words. Do not go ahead until you hear the signal. I have finished."

A short distance farther on the Sioux separated to make their raid against the Blackfeet. Sitting Eagle and his companions turned aside to approach the spot where the loose ponies were pastured. White Otter and his company continued toward the camp, and Sun Bird and the fighting men followed close behind him.

When they were within several bowshots of the camp they stopped, and White Otter and three companions went forward. He had asked Little Raven to accompany him, and the young Minneconjoux rode at his side.

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"If the ponies begin to call we must make the signal, and be ready to rush ahead," said the Ogalala.

When they finally saw the black, indistinct outlines of the corral, they stopped to listen. They knew that the lodges at the end of the camp were less than half a bowshot away. The slightest sound, therefore, might arouse the Blackfeet. White Otter turned to Little Raven.

"Get down from your pony," he whispered.

They dismounted and left their ponies with the two warriors who accompanied them. Then they moved swiftly toward the corral. They were within bow length of it when they heard the quick barks of the little gray fox some distance toward the east. Their hearts bounded at the sound. Sitting Eagle and his companions were ready to run off the ponies. White Otter rushed to the corral. He turned in dismay. The corral was empty.

At that instant a horse whinnied in the Blackfeet camp. The Sioux ponies replied. A dog barked. Voices sounded close at hand. The Blackfeet were alarmed. Realizing that further caution was useless, White Otter sounded the signal.

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"Run to the ponies!" he cried to Little Raven.

They heard their comrades riding forward to meet them. They also heard the thunder of many hoofs, and the wild yells of the Blackfeet. Springing upon his pony, White Otter raced recklessly toward the camp. Little Raven followed him. They found the village in wild disorder. The Blackfeet had been completely surprised.

Out on the plain Sitting Eagle and his companions were driving away the captured ponies. The raid had been entirely successful, and the elated Sioux were already many arrow flights beyond the camp. Behind them Sun Bird and his force of fighting men were loitering within bowshot of the village, watching for White Otter with the other bunch of ponies. When he failed to appear, Sun Bird rode toward the corral to find him. He encountered the two warriors who had accompanied the Ogalala on his perilous mission.

"Where are the ponies? Where is White Otter? Where is Little Raven?" Sun Bird asked, excitedly.

"That place was empty," they told him. "White Otter and Little Raven rode away toward the Blackfeet camp."

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Sun Bird stared wildly into the face of the speaker. He could scarcely believe him. Then the truth suddenly flashed across his mind. He understood why White Otter had risked himself.

"Yes, yes, I know about it," he said.

He called the two riders to follow him and galloped away to lead his valiant company against the Blackfeet. The latter had rallied from their confusion and were riding from the camp.

In the meantime White Otter and Little Raven had ridden boldly along the edge of the camp until they reached the spot where the famous black war pony was kept. Then White Otter dismounted, and left his pony with Little Raven. Taking advantage of the darkness and the confusion in the Blackfeet camp, the daring Ogalala moved swiftly between the lodges. It was only a moment or so before he encountered his foes. A frightened old woman took him for one of her people and ran to him for protection. He grumbled fiercely at her and sprang away before she recognized him. The next instant two excited warriors dashed past within bow length, and called him to follow them. Then the way seemed clear, and he hurried toward the corral. His heart beat wildly as he suddenly saw the log inclosure before him. When he reached it, however, he saw that it, too, was empty. The famous black pony had been taken away.

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For some moments the disappointed young Sioux lingered beside the corral. He was blaming himself for having refused the opportunity which had presented itself the night before. At that

time the great trophy had been almost within his grasp. Now he believed it was forever beyond his reach. He told himself that he had been foolish to surrender his chance. Then he suddenly thrilled with the pride of sacrifice. He was a Dacotah, and the Dacotahs had relied upon him to help them against their foes. He had nobly performed his duty to the tribesmen who had given him their confidence. His act had brought success to the Minneconjoux. The thought roused him. His own loss was forgotten as he rejoiced in the victory of his people.

"I have done a good thing," he said, joyfully.

Then as he saw fires beginning to gleam in various parts of the camp, he realized that it was time to go. As he ran toward the edge of the camp a dog suddenly appeared before him. It faced him with bared fangs and flashing eyes, and its deep, ugly growls gave warning of an intention to fight.

"Hi, you foolish Blackfeet dog," cried White Otter, as he drove his arrow through it. "Now your people will know that I have been in their village." [Pg 206]

He bounded past the struggling dog, and ran from the camp. Little Raven was waiting with the ponies.

"Come," cried White Otter, as he sprang upon the piebald. "The Blackfeet have ridden away on the war ponies. Some one took away that black pony. Now we must go to help our brothers. Listen! I hear them making a big fight."

Sounds of battle came from directly ahead of them, and White Otter knew that Sun Bird and his companions were fighting back the Blackfeet. Calling Little Raven to follow him, the daring young war chief raised his voice in the war cry, and raced away to engage in the fight.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### HOTLY PURSUED

Once aware of what had happened, the enraged Blackfeet rushed from the camp like a swarm of angry bees. Led by their great war chief, Many Buffaloes, they rode recklessly out upon the plain to overtake the daring foes who had run off their ponies. They had not gone an arrow flight, however, before they collided with the Sioux.

"Come, my brothers, it is time to fight!" cried Sun Bird.

The resolute band of Sioux fighting men charged furiously upon their foes. They were outnumbered three to one, but the fierceness of their attack deceived the Blackfeet and threw them into confusion. Having recognized the Dacotahs, the Blackfeet knew from experience what sort of resistance to expect from those powerful and courageous foes.

"The Sioux! The Sioux!" they cried, fiercely.

Then, as Sitting Eagle and his companions raced the captured ponies through the night, Sun Bird and his company of warriors fought desperately to hold back the Blackfeet. The latter, however, soon became aware of their superiority in numbers, and the discovery gave them confidence. Recovering from their momentary disorder, they made a desperate attempt to break through their enemies. [Pg 208]

The Sioux, however, held their ground, and the fighting was at close quarters. There were many thrilling encounters. Lean Wolf fought three Blackfeet warriors and overcame all of them. Sun Bird had his pony killed beneath him, and then killed his foe and took his horse. Feather Dog became separated from his companions and was compelled to fight off an entire company of Blackfeet until some of his friends discovered his plight and rushed to his assistance.

In spite of their bravery, however, the Sioux were unable to overcome the odds against them. It was not long before they realized that it would be folly to sacrifice themselves in attempting to match strength with their foes. The Blackfeet were too strong to be held back. The Sioux saw that their only chance of success was in making a running fight.

"We must follow after the ponies," said Sun Bird. [Pg 209]

The moment they gave way the Blackfeet interpreted it as a sign of defeat. Feeling sure of victory, they charged recklessly forward, and attempted to throw the Sioux into a rout. Instantly alert to his peril, Sun Bird brought his company to a stand, and fought with a grim ferocity that soon convinced the Blackfeet of their mistake. They realized that victory was far from being won, and they became somewhat more cautious. After several costly and futile attempts to make the Sioux give ground, they suddenly divided their forces, and a strong company swept around the Sioux flank.

"They are passing! They are passing!" the Minneconjoux cried in alarm.

At that moment White Otter and Little Raven joined the war party. They had fought their way through the very midst of their foes, and reached their companions in safety. The presence of the famous young war chief greatly encouraged the Minneconjoux.

"There is only one thing to do," White Otter said, hurriedly, as Sun Bird turned to consult him. "We must keep ahead of those Blackfeet."

Acting upon his advice, the Sioux suddenly gave way and raced across the plain in pursuit of Sitting Eagle and the band of ponies. Behind them thundered the main force of Blackfeet, and at their right rode the company that had succeeded in getting past them. [Pg 210]

"When we come to the ponies we must make a big fight," White Otter declared, grimly, as he rode beside Sun Bird.

"Yes, yes," agreed Sun Bird.

The Blackfeet kept close behind them, and the Sioux were in constant peril from their arrows. Whenever the Blackfeet came too near, however, the Sioux turned upon them and fought them off. Thus they made their way across the plain until they overtook Sitting Eagle and his companions. The latter had heard them approaching, and had rounded up the ponies and prepared to fight.

"Keep going! Keep going!" shouted Sun Bird. "We will hold back the Blackfeet."

"Yes, keep going!" cried White Otter. "Run the ponies until you come to that big gully. Then wait for us."

Sitting Eagle and his company barely got the ponies under way before the Blackfeet were upon them. Sun Bird and the war party fought savagely to hold them off, but the company of Blackfeet who had ridden along the Sioux flank circled under cover of the darkness and reached the herd. [Pg 211]

"Hold the ponies! Hold the ponies!" shouted Sitting Eagle, as the wily Blackfeet attempted to stampede them.

Yelling fiercely, they charged close up to the alarmed ponies, and threw them into wild disorder. Frightened into a panic by the noisy tumult, the bewildered animals tried to break from their captors and flee across the plain. Sitting Eagle and his companions made valiant efforts to hold them under control, but the Blackfeet were riding furiously about the herd, and making desperate efforts to kill the men who guarded it.

In the meantime Sun Bird and the Minneconjoux war party were fighting a thrilling battle with the main force of their foes. The latter had again rushed to close quarters, and the Sioux were in desperate straits. Greatly outnumbered, they fought with a reckless courage that astounded their enemies. Try as they might, the Blackfeet were unable to break through the heroic company that confronted them. Led by Many Buffaloes himself, the bravest warriors in the Blackfeet nation hurled themselves against the Sioux with a daring abandon that would have speedily routed less valiant foes. The Sioux, however, repulsed each savage attack with a dogged ferocity that gradually shattered the confidence of their foes. [Pg 212]

Sitting Eagle and his gallant band were less successful. They found it impossible to keep the ponies under control, and at the same time defend themselves against the Blackfeet. They were threatened with disaster and began to lose heart.

"Come, Dacotahs, show these people how to fight!" cried Sitting Eagle.

At that moment White Otter led a company of Minneconjoux against the Blackfeet who had attacked the herd. Roused by the courage of the young Ogalala war chief, the Minneconjoux warriors charged furiously upon the surprised Blackfeet and completely overwhelmed them with the fierceness of their attack. For a moment only the Blackfeet opposed them, and then as White Otter drove his arrow through the leader of the company the others lost courage and retreated into the night.

"Come," shouted the Ogalala. "Drive away the ponies!"

Sitting Eagle and his comrades instantly got the ponies in motion. Then the determined Blackfeet again charged forward to gain possession of the herd. This time, however, they were met by White Otter and his gallant band of fighters. They fought with a fiery zeal that soon threw fear into the hearts of their foes. Riding boldly at the head of his companions, White Otter dashed recklessly among the Blackfeet, and threw them into confusion. Then as they wavered he raised the piercing Dacotah war cry, and led his tribesmen in a furious assault that caused the astounded Blackfeet to flee wildly before him. He followed them a long distance across the plain, and exacted heavy toll from the laggards. Then he suddenly heard Sun Bird and the rest of the war party riding toward the south. [Pg 213]

"Come," he cried. "Our brothers are running ahead of the Blackfeet. We must find out about it."

Having subdued his foes, he turned and led his comrades to join the Minneconjoux. When he finally overtook them he found Sun Bird in high spirits. The skillful young war leader had completely defeated his foes.

"The Blackfeet are getting cautious," said Sun Bird. "See, they are keeping far behind. I believe they are afraid of us."

The Blackfeet appeared to have lost much of their confidence. Having lost heavily in the desperate fighting with the Sioux, they seemed unwilling to risk coming again to close quarters

with those indomitable foes. Although they still continued to follow them, they were content to remain safely beyond arrow range. The Sioux hoped that they would soon abandon the pursuit.

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"Pretty soon they will turn back," declared Sun Bird. "Then they will go to the village, and tell their people what a great fight they made."

"Well, they will not bring back those ponies," laughed Little Raven.

Daylight was breaking when the Sioux again overtook their comrades with the captured ponies. Sitting Eagle had stopped in the bottom of a deep ravine through which trickled a tiny stream. The Sioux saw at once that it offered them splendid protection against their foes.

"It is good," Sun Bird said, heartily. "Now we will see what the Blackfeet will do."

The latter had already stopped, and were apparently discussing the advisability of attempting to drive the Sioux from their shelter. For a long time they seemed unwilling to make the effort. The Sioux had left the ponies in the bottom of the ravine, and were lying along the top of the bank watching their foes with great interest. They had no intention of leaving the ravine until the Blackfeet had either made an attack or withdrawn from the vicinity.

"Perhaps they will wait until it gets dark," suggested Little Raven.

"No, I do not believe it," Sun Bird told him. "I believe they will do something pretty soon."

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"Yes, my brother, that is how I feel about it," said White Otter.

The three young warriors were lying beside one another at the top of the ravine. On each side of them were the other members of the war party, except a few young warriors who had been left in charge of the ponies. White Otter noted, however, that some of the Minneconjoux were missing. Among them were Proud Hawk and Painted Bird, the two young warriors who had served as scouts for the war party. The eyes of the Ogalala flashed threateningly as he realized that they and their absent companions had been killed by the Blackfeet.

"It is bad," Sun Bird said, solemnly. "Those brave warriors were my friends. I saw Proud Hawk fall from his pony. I was close beside him. I tried to carry him off, but the Blackfeet killed him. I saw Painted Bird making a great fight. The Blackfeet were all around him. They must have killed him. I tried to get near him, but some Blackfeet rushed upon me and killed my horse. I had a hard time to get away."

"Well, we must not think about it," said White Otter. "A warrior must always be ready to die. Those men were very brave. It is enough. We will tell our people about them."

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"Yes, we will call out their names when we ride through the camp," replied Sun Bird. "We will tell our people that we sent many Blackfeet to walk behind our brothers on the Long Trail."

Then their thoughts were diverted by the sudden activity of the Blackfeet. They were advancing slowly across the plain, singing their war songs, and shouting boastful threats against the Sioux. The latter watched them with little fear. They realized that the possession of the ravine had turned the odds in their favor. Besides, they strongly doubted that the Blackfeet would actually venture within bowshot.

"They will keep away," Sun Bird said, confidently.

It was not many moments before his words were verified. The Blackfeet had suddenly stopped beyond arrow range. They were still chanting the war songs, and shouting threateningly, but they showed no inclination to approach nearer the ravine. The Sioux, however, watched them closely. They knew that at any moment their wily foes might throw aside their caution and sweep forward in a furious attack.

"See, that great chief, Many Buffaloes, is giving them strong words," Sun Bird said, eagerly, as he seized White Otter by the arm.

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The Ogalala made no reply. His eyes were following every move of the famous Blackfeet war chief. The latter had ridden out in front of his tribesmen and was making a fiery address. Several times he wheeled his pony and swept his arm toward the Sioux. They felt certain that he was rousing his warriors for a final attempt to recapture the ponies. It was evident that his words were accomplishing the desired effect. The Blackfeet were becoming greatly excited. The Sioux grew serious. They had great respect for the courage and ability of the renowned Blackfeet leader, and they feared that he was preparing to carry through some bold stroke which might still bring victory to the Blackfeet.

"Many Buffaloes is going to do something big," Sun Bird told White Otter. "He is very brave. We must watch out."

White Otter took little notice of the warning. His entire attention was concentrated upon the spirited black pony, and its famous rider. Everything else had passed from his mind. Even the great company of jeering Blackfeet had suddenly faded from his vision. He saw nothing but the Blackfeet war chief, and his prancing black pony. He watched them with flashing, fascinated eyes. Then Many Buffaloes dramatically passed his bow, quiver and arrows to one of his tribesmen, and turned toward the Sioux with his war club raised. White Otter uttered a short, fierce exclamation of satisfaction. He had instantly interpreted the maneuver, and his heart bounded with hope.

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As the Blackfeet chief rode slowly toward the ravine, singing his war song and flourishing his war club, White Otter passed his bow and arrow-case to Sun Bird and scrambled wildly down the steep side of the ravine.

"That man is very brave," he cried, excitedly. "Tell your people that they must not try to kill him when he comes close. I am going to ride out there to meet him."

"No, no, that would be foolish!" Sun Bird shouted in alarm. "He is riding that great Medicine Horse. You cannot catch him. He will lead you over there to the Blackfeet, and they will kill you."

"We will see," White Otter replied, lightly, as he ran to the piebald.

In the meantime the Blackfeet chief was fearlessly approaching the ravine. He was already well within bow range, but the Sioux withheld their arrows. There were two reasons. In the first place Sun Bird had called out and warned them against killing Many Buffaloes, and in the second place his bold defiance insured his safety. The Sioux understood his reckless maneuver as a challenge to their manhood, an invitation for one of their leaders to come out and meet him in personal combat. To have killed him from shelter, under those circumstances, would have made them weaklings and cowards in the eyes of their foes. The Sioux felt compelled to respect the code of honor which prevailed even between the most bitter enemies. They realized, therefore, that one of their number must accept the defiant challenge of the Blackfeet chief, or else the latter must be permitted to return to his tribesmen in safety. Nevertheless, the Minneconjoux knew that if any one went forth to meet him the wily war leader would rely upon the phenomenal speed of his pony to carry him to safety, and decoy his enemy within bow shot of his warriors. For that reason they made great efforts to dissuade White Otter from his purpose.

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"Many Buffaloes has done this thing many times, but we have no ponies that can come up with him," the Minneconjoux told White Otter. "If you follow him the Blackfeet will surely kill you."

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"I am going," White Otter replied, firmly.

A moment afterward he rode out upon the plain. The Blackfeet greeted his appearance with savage yells of derision. The Sioux raised the great Dacotah war cry to give him courage. Many Buffaloes stopped and waited for him to approach.

"White Otter is a great warrior; he is very brave; that pony is very fast, but I believe he will be killed," Sun Bird said, fearfully.

The solemn faces of the Minneconjoux gave endorsement to his fears. They, too, believed that the reckless Ogalala was going to his death. Having witnessed the speed of the famous black war pony, they felt certain that White Otter would never get within striking distance of the Blackfeet chief. Their only hope was that the Ogalala would discover his peril in time to turn back and save himself from the treacherous Blackfeet.

"Then we must be ready to rush out and help him," said Sun Bird.

At that instant White Otter raised the war cry, and raced toward the Blackfeet chief. The latter waited until the Ogalala was almost upon him, and then he turned his pony and rode furiously toward his yelling tribesmen. A moment afterward he twisted about and laughed shrilly, as he shook his war club at the Sioux. Enraged by the taunt, White Otter struck his pony with the heavy rawhide quirt. The piebald bounded forward at a speed which caused the Minneconjoux and the Blackfeet to stare in silent amazement. With each stroke of the lash the wonderful little beast ran faster. The famous Blackfeet pony was a full length in the lead, but the piebald was actually gaining. The Minneconjoux could not believe it possible.

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"Many Buffaloes is holding back," they told one another. "He is trying to draw White Otter near his people."

"No, no, it is not so!" Sun Bird shouted, excitedly. "See, the Dacotah pony is running faster!"

It was true. Sioux and Blackfeet both realized it. Many Buffaloes looked over his shoulder and was equally astounded. The piebald had cut his lead in half and was still gaining. Alarmed at the discovery, Many Buffaloes lashed the black pony to its best speed. It ran as no other horse in the great Blackfeet nation had ever run before, but the piebald ran even faster. White Otter was within less than half a pony-length of the Blackfeet chief. The latter, however, was almost within bow shot of his tribesmen. The Minneconjoux realized that unless White Otter overtook the black pony within the next few strides he would be at the mercy of his foes. The thought drove them into a frenzy of excitement.

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"See, see, he has caught Many Buffaloes!" Sun Bird shouted, wildly.

The piebald had closed the gap, and was drawing abreast of the Blackfeet pony. Enraged by the glorious achievement of the Sioux pony, the Blackfeet raced forward to save their chief from defeat. At that moment, however, White Otter drew even with his foe. Yelling defiantly, Many Buffaloes swung his war club at the head of the Ogalala. White Otter crouched and barely escaped the deadly blow. Then before the Blackfeet chief could regain his balance the agile young Sioux swung his own weapon and knocked Many Buffaloes from his horse. The next moment he secured control of the famous black war pony. Turning the ponies in their tracks, he raced toward the ravine with the entire company of Blackfeet close behind him.

Leaving a few warriors in the ravine to guard the ponies, the Sioux galloped madly across the plain to rescue White Otter. Once he got the ponies under way, however, there was slight chance of the Blackfeet overtaking him. Stride by stride he drew away from his pursuers, who were too busily engaged lashing their ponies to think of shooting their arrows. When they finally did make use of their bows they found themselves already within range of the Minneconjoux. The latter shot their arrows with deadly effect, and the disheartened Blackfeet wavered before the attack. Then, as White Otter dashed among them, the Sioux flashed about and raced back to the ravine without losing a man.

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"Well, my brothers, I have showed you that the Dacotah ponies can run," White Otter said, quietly as he dismounted in the midst of his enthusiastic tribesmen.

"White Otter, I believe the pony that Curly Horse gave you is a Medicine Pony," Sun Bird declared, seriously. "Perhaps that is why it was so fierce when you began to ride it. I believe my father had something to do with it. He is a great Medicine Person."

"It may be true," White Otter told him, as he stroked the neck of the little piebald.

"Yes, yes, Rain Crow must have had something to do with it," declared the superstitious Minneconjoux.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE STAMPEDE

The Blackfeet made no attempt to follow the Sioux to the ravine. Instead, they turned about, and rode far from arrow range. They carried off their chief and several warriors who had fallen in the skirmish, and the Sioux were in doubt whether the famous war leader had been killed, or only wounded, by the blow from White Otter. It was plain, however, that the Blackfeet had finished the fight. They stopped for a few moments to shout idle threats against the Sioux and then rode slowly toward the north.

"Well, my brothers, the Blackfeet have gone," said Sun Bird. "It is good. We have done what we came here to do. We have taken away these ponies. We have made a big fight. We have sent the boastful Blackfeet back to their lodges. My friends, those are big things to talk about. Well, I will tell you that White Otter has done the biggest thing of all. You all know about it. Look at that black pony. You all know how it came here. It is something to tell about. Now, my brothers, I must tell you something different. We must not feel too big about these things. We are a long ways from our people. We have many ponies. We cannot travel fast. The Crows and the Flatheads are still ahead of us. Perhaps we shall meet them. We must keep thinking about it. Yes, my brothers, we must be cautious."

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"My friends, those are good words," declared Lean Wolf. "What Sun Bird says is true. We have fought back the Blackfeet, but other enemies may be waiting for us. We have many good ponies. We must take them to our village. Perhaps it will be a hard thing to do. The Crows would like to get those ponies. Yes, I believe the Flatheads would like to get them. We would feel foolish if we lost them. We must be cautious."

The Minneconjoux found it difficult to restrain their enthusiasm. The younger warriors, especially, were eager to celebrate their victory over the Blackfeet. They rushed to the bottom of the ravine, and crowded forward to count coup upon the Blackfeet pony by striking it with their hands. The act was a substitute for striking an enemy, and gave them the privilege of reciting the details of some daring exploit which they had performed in the fight with their foes. Besides, the Minneconjoux still looked upon the black war pony as something mysterious, a strange Medicine Creature possessing superior powers of speed and endurance. They hoped that in laying their hands upon it they might in some way absorb some of its mystical powers.

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In the meantime Sun Bird had sent scouts to follow the Blackfeet, to make sure that they were actually going to their village. Other riders had crossed the plain to the southward to learn if it would be safe to travel in that direction with the ponies. The day was well advanced when the scouts returned to the war party. The Minneconjoux gathered eagerly about them to learn what they had seen.

"The Blackfeet are still going ahead," said Running Dog, who had followed them. "I believe they are going to their village."

"Did you see anything of Many Buffaloes?" Sun Bird asked, anxiously.

"Yes, I saw him sitting on a pony," declared Running Dog. "He was between two riders. I believe they were holding him up. I saw some other warriors lying across the backs of ponies. I believe they were tied there. Perhaps they were dead. The Blackfeet are traveling slow."

"Well, we know that Many Buffaloes is alive," said Sun Bird. "No one can harm him. He must be very strong. Perhaps he is a Medicine Person."

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"My brother, I will tell you something different," said Sitting Eagle. "Perhaps the Blackfeet expected us to follow them. Perhaps they were holding Many Buffaloes on that horse to fool us. Perhaps he was dead."

"Yes, that may be true," declared the Minneconjoux.

Still, as they could not be sure, they were unable to reach a definite conclusion regarding the fate of the Blackfeet chief. While they were discussing it the scouts from the southward returned. They declared that the plain was free from foes.

"It is good," said Sun Bird. "Now we will go ahead."

The cautious young war leader planned his advance with the care and skill of a veteran. He realized that one blunder might undo all that had been accomplished, and turn the splendid victory into a staggering defeat. The Minneconjoux were fatigued, and their ponies were jaded, and Sun Bird knew that it might be difficult to overcome a strong force of foes if they were fresh and eager for battle. He determined, therefore, to use every safeguard against encountering his enemies.

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When the Sioux were ready to leave the ravine, scouts moved across the plain in advance and on both sides of them, and a small detail of warriors were left behind to make certain that the Blackfeet did not return. Then the war party was divided. White Otter and half of the force rode ahead. Behind them followed Sitting Eagle and the warriors in charge of the ponies. Sun Bird and the balance of the company brought up the rear.

The day was far spent, and the Sioux hoped to reach water by the time night came upon them. Sun Bird planned to stop when it grew dark, and allow the ponies to rest until daylight. Then he decided to travel in the early morning and after nightfall, and to stop in some suitable shelter during the heated hours of the day.

"We must keep the ponies fresh," he told his companions.

Shortly before dark they came upon a large shallow pool on the open plain. As there was a heavy stand of grass for the ponies, Sun Bird determined to stop there for the night. The ponies were immediately turned loose to feed, and guards were appointed to watch them until daylight.

It was not long, however, before the Sioux heard something which caused them considerable uneasiness. Low, rumbling peals of thunder sounded from the west. The Sioux looked anxiously into the heavens. The stars shone brightly overhead, but the distant sky appeared black and threatening. As they watched, a quick, darting flash of light zigzagged across the western sky. A dull, thudding crash of thunder boomed in the distance.

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"The Thunder Birds are talking—it is bad," Sun Bird said soberly, as he seated himself beside White Otter.

"Yes, my brother, it is bad," agreed White Otter.

Then for some time they sat in gloomy silence, watching the sky. A great mass of ominous black clouds rose steadily out of the west and blotted out the stars. Sharp, jagged streaks of lightning cut through the night. A fresh breeze stirred across the plain. The thunder sounded louder. It was evident that the storm was approaching.

The possibility filled the Sioux with alarm. They looked anxiously toward the herd of ponies. They knew that it would be difficult to hold them under control when the storm broke upon them. Once thoroughly alarmed they might stampede, and race wildly across the plain. Then it would be necessary for the Sioux to ride recklessly through the night in an attempt to keep possession of the herd. It was a perilous task, in which many brave riders might lose their lives.

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"My brothers, the Thunder Birds are coming—it is bad," cried Sitting Eagle, as he came to find Sun Bird. "The ponies are sniffing the wind. They are uneasy. Some of them are running around."

"We must hold them," said Sun Bird. "Every one must go out there and keep riding around them."

"It is good," replied Sitting Eagle, as he galloped away.

The war ponies had been either picketed or hobbled and left to feed, while the riders threw themselves upon the plain to rest from their exertions. Now, as the storm approached, there was great confusion as each warrior rushed to find his pony. Those who had picketed their ponies had little difficulty, but the hobbled animals had wandered some distance away, and their owners spent many anxious moments searching for them. White Otter and Sun Bird had picketed their ponies and they found them at once.

"White Otter, you have done some big things—it is enough," said Sun Bird. "You must stay out of this. You have taken away the great black war pony. You must not lose it. When the Thunder Birds fly over us you must hold fast to that pony. Do not try to do anything else. I am your brother. Listen to my words."

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"I will do as you tell me to do," agreed White Otter.

"It is good," cried Sun Bird, as he galloped toward the ponies.

The riders had already stationed themselves about the herd and Sitting Eagle was racing about shouting instructions. The Sioux were in a high tension of excitement. The great storms which swept across the plains always filled them with superstitious awe. They believed that they were caused by the Thunder Birds, which they imagined to be two giant birdlike monsters that lived high up in the most inaccessible peaks of the loftiest mountains. The Sioux believed that these weird creatures possessed all sorts of mysterious powers and that at certain intervals they flew across the country to destroy those unfortunate people who had incurred their displeasure.

"Some one has made the Thunder Birds mad—they are coming to drive away the ponies," the Minneconjoux told one another, in alarmed whispers.



Their hearts filled with gloomy premonitions of impending disaster, as the storm rushed upon them. The breeze had freshened to a gale, the stars above them had vanished, the plain was smothered in darkness. Vivid flashes of light flickered across the sky. Loud, crashing peals of thunder rolled through the night. The ponies showed signs of terror. They crowded nervously together, with heads raised, snorting and whinnying. The Sioux rode anxiously around them, fearful that each startling flash would cause them to run.

Then the storm suddenly broke upon them. A dazzling flare of light was followed by a terrifying crash of thunder and the ponies leaped forward in blind panic. The Sioux made desperate efforts to hold them in the herd, but the panic had spread to the riding ponies, and they were rearing and plunging in a manner that demanded the entire attention of the riders. Some of the more fiery animals bolted from control and raced wildly through the night. A moment afterward the herd broke through the gap in the circle and thundered across the plain. The fears of the Sioux were realized—the stampede had begun.

Having witnessed the first break of the startled ponies, Sun Bird rode recklessly after the leaders in the hope of guiding them across the plain. Beside him rode Little Raven. Allowing their ponies to run at will, the Minneconjoux soon found themselves at the front of the herd. Then they suddenly realized their peril. Their lives depended upon the agility of their ponies. A fall meant instant destruction beneath the hoofs of the panic-stricken beasts behind them. However, there was little time to think of the danger. The foremost ponies had swerved toward the west and Sun Bird and Little Raven tried to turn them back.

"We must not let them go that way!" Sun Bird shouted, anxiously. "The Crows and the Flatheads are over there."

Lashing vigorously with their heavy riding quirts, they forced the ponies from their course and kept them running toward the south. Thus they rode through the height of the storm, risking their lives to redeem their pledge to return the ponies which the Blackfeet had driven away.

Then, as the storm finally spent its fury, and passed across the plain, the wild stampede suddenly came to an end. Having run themselves into exhaustion, the ponies were glad to stop. A third of the herd, however, were missing. Sun Bird was dismayed by the discovery.

"Come, my brothers, tell me how those ponies got away from you," he said, sharply.

"We could not hold them all together," said Sitting Eagle. "I saw some ponies breaking away and when I rode after them some more ponies got away."

"Yes, that is how it happened," declared Lean Wolf. "I saw two ponies turning away, and I chased them. When I was driving them back, I saw a big bunch of ponies turning around. Then I rode after them and brought some of them back. Then I stayed close by the herd. I saw it was the best thing to do."

"Well, my friends, it is bad, but I see that you did the best you could," Sun Bird told them. "We had a hard time getting those ponies. We must not leave them for our enemies. There is only one thing to do. Sitting Eagle, you must keep going ahead with these ponies. When you get near our village you must stop and wait for us. Do not let our people see you until we come. My brothers, most of you must go with Sitting Eagle to help him fight our enemies. Some of us must stay here until it gets light. Then we will go out and look for the ponies that got away. I believe we will find them close by. Now I will call out the names of the men who must go with me to find the ponies. Listen, my brothers, I am going to call those names: Lean Wolf, Little Raven, Feather Dog, Running Dog, Falling Eagle, Brave Bear, Two Elks. These men will go with me. The rest of you must go with Sitting Eagle."

As he finished speaking they heard two ponies galloping toward them. A few moments afterward White Otter appeared. The piebald and the Blackfeet pony were lathered with sweat. Neither, however, showed the slightest trace of exhaustion.

"I have been a long ways," said the Ogalala. "These foolish ponies ran the wrong way. It was a long time before I could turn them around. Then I came very fast."

"Now White Otter is here," said Sun Bird. "It is good. I am going to ask him to be the leader of the men who go with Sitting Eagle."

Then the Sioux separated. Sitting Eagle and his escort of warriors rode away toward the south with the ponies while Sun Bird and his company of scouts remained behind to search for the missing horses.

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## CHAPTER XIX

### TRAILING THE RUNAWAYS

Sun Bird and his companions were greatly encouraged when they looked across the plain at daylight and saw several of the stray ponies feeding a short distance to the northward. They hoped that others might be concealed behind some of the low hummocks which broke the level of the plain.

"See, there are some of the ponies!" said Sun Bird. "We will go and get them. Then we will ride up on those little hills and look around. I believe we will see some more ponies."

They cantered slowly toward the grazing ponies. There were five and they were feeding close together. They raised their heads and watched curiously as the horsemen approached, but they showed little fear. The Sioux, however, determined to take no chance of frightening them into another exhausting dash across the plain. As they rode within bow range they separated and circled carefully about the ponies. Then they gradually closed the net, and the ponies made little effort to escape. [Pg 237]

"Now I will tell you what to do," said Sun Bird, when they had secured the horses. "Some of you must keep these ponies. The rest of us will ride up on those high places and look around. I will ask Falling Eagle and Brave Bear and Two Elks to keep these ponies. Leave them where they are until we come back. Then we will drive them away."

The three warriors who had been selected stationed themselves about the ponies and their comrades turned toward a low grassy slope to the westward. They had gone less than an arrow flight when their ponies suddenly raised their heads and looked toward the north. A moment afterward one of the ponies behind them whinnied. "There is something over there behind that hill," said Sun Bird as he turned about.

At that instant a horseman appeared. They recognized him as Many Feathers, one of the warriors who had been left in the ravine to watch for the return of the Blackfeet. Having recognized his friends, Many Feathers returned their signal, and then disappeared behind the ridge.

"Where has he gone?" Little Raven asked, anxiously.

"We must watch," Sun Bird told him.

Then Many Feathers and two comrades rode over the rise of the plain, driving four of the stray ponies before them. They came directly toward Sun Bird and his companions. [Pg 238]

"It is good," said Lean Wolf. "Our brothers are bringing some more ponies. Pretty soon we will find all that got away."

"Well, my brothers, I see that you found some ponies," said Sun Bird, as Many Feathers and his comrades rode up.

"Yes, we found them back there on the plain," said Many Feathers.

The young warrior appeared to know about the stampede. He said that he and his companions had read the story from the tracks which they had followed from the pool.

"Did you see anything of the Blackfeet?" inquired Sun Bird.

"No," replied Many Feathers. "We waited a long time but they did not come back."

"Did you see any more ponies?" Lean Wolf asked him.

"No, we did not see any more," said Many Feathers.

"My brothers, it is good you came here," Sun Bird told them. "Now I am going to ask you to take these ponies over there where you see Falling Eagle and Brave Bear and Two Elks. You must stay with them and help them watch the ponies until we come back." [Pg 239]

"We will go," said Many Feathers.

Then Sun Bird and his companions rode to the top of the low ridge to the westward. They saw the rest of the ponies gathered in a small herd some distance out on the open plain. The sight filled them with joy. As they were about to go after them, however, they suddenly discovered two riders watching from a ridge beyond the ponies.

"Hi, hi," Sun Bird cried, excitedly. "Someone has found the ponies. Now they are watching us."

"It is bad," said Lean Wolf.

Feeling certain that they had already been seen, the Sioux made no attempt to hide. They remained in open sight and tried to identify the distant horsemen. The latter were too far away to be recognized. The Sioux took hope at the thought. They knew that if they could not identify their foes, the latter would find it impossible to recognize them.

"They must be Crows or Flatheads," said Sun Bird. "Anyway, I believe they are scouts."

"It is bad," said Running Dog. "They will bring their people here to get those ponies."

The Sioux were greatly disturbed by the possibility. As their little company numbered only eleven, they knew that they would be powerless before a strong force of their enemies. Aware that the unexpected emergency demanded quick action, they held a hurried council to decide what should be done. They saw many difficulties. In the first place they realized that if they rode directly toward the ponies they might drive them toward their foes. Still, to circle around behind the herd it would be necessary to approach close to their enemies. Then, too, the Sioux knew that if they succeeded in running off the ponies they would probably be followed by a strong force of [Pg 240]

their foes. As the ponies were already fatigued from their strenuous exertions, another long race might cause them to collapse.

"It will be hard to get them away if our enemies try to stop us," Running Dog said, gloomily.

As he spoke the horsemen suddenly disappeared from the ridge. The Sioux looked at one another in alarm. They felt certain that one of the scouts had gone to warn his people, while the other concealed himself to watch. Sun Bird realized that it was time to act. Delay might prove fatal.

"Come, my brothers, we must do something," cried the bold young war leader. "I am going to circle around behind those ponies. I will ask Lean Wolf to go with me. The rest of you must hide behind this hill until we drive the ponies to you. If our enemies come after us do not wait to help us. Go to our brothers and help them drive away those ponies. Send some one ahead of you to bring back the war party. Come, Lean Wolf, we will go."

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They were gone before their friends found time to reply. Moving boldly down the ridge, the daring scouts turned sharply toward the north and rode away at top speed. Their companions concealed themselves below the crest of the slope and watched them with anxious eyes. They believed that they were rushing into great peril and they had grave fears for their safety.

"I do not feel good about this thing," Little Raven said, uneasily. "Perhaps those people over there are trying to fool us. Perhaps they are waiting until our brothers come close. Then they will come over the top of that hill and kill them."

"Sun Bird is a good war leader. Lean Wolf is a great scout. They are sharp. Their ponies are fast. I do not believe they will let those people catch them," Feather Dog replied, reassuringly.

Sun Bird and Lean Wolf rode many arrow flights toward the north before they finally swerved to the west. Some of the ponies were watching them, but as yet showed no inclination to run. The Sioux felt much relieved. They had feared that the nervous beasts might take fright at sight of them and flee toward the distant ridge.

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"If they keep still we will soon get behind them," Sun Bird said, hopefully.

"Watch that hill," Lean Wolf cautioned him.

"Do you see any one up there?" Sun Bird asked him.

"No, I do not see any one, but we must be cautious," replied Lean Wolf.

When they had passed the ponies they began to circle to come up on the other side of them. They were almost within arrow range of the ridge and they kept a sharp watch for foes. Then, as they turned to approach the ponies they heard a shout behind them. Glancing back they saw four Crow warriors racing down the slope at breakneck speed.

"Come, get the ponies running!" shouted Sun Bird as he lashed his pony into a furious sprint.

They rode madly toward the startled ponies, shouting and waving their arms to get the animals in motion. Once started, the ponies needed little urging. They had not entirely recovered from their wild panic of the previous night and the fierce shouts behind them sent them racing across the plain at their best speed.

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"Keep after the ponies, I will fight the Crows," Sun Bird cried, impulsively.

"No, no, you must keep going ahead!" Lean Wolf shouted, fiercely. "If the Crows come close we will fight them back. Pretty soon we will reach our brothers. Then these warriors will turn back."

He had barely ceased speaking before Little Raven and Feather Dog and Many Feathers and Running Dog swept over the ridge some distance to the northward of the ponies. Yelling savagely, they raced to the assistance of their tribesmen and at sight of them the Crows stopped in confusion. The odds had suddenly turned against them and they lost courage. They turned and raced away before the Sioux got within bowshot of them. The Sioux made no attempt to overtake them. Their one thought was to get away with the ponies before a stronger force of their foes came upon them.

"We have driven away our enemies, now we must run off the ponies," cried Sun Bird.

"Yes, we must keep going," said Lean Wolf.

They drove the ponies over the ridges and ran them toward Falling Eagle and the warriors who were waiting with the other horses. Then Little Raven and Many Feathers hid below the top of the ridge to watch for the Crows.

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The Sioux knew that the Crow village was somewhere in the vicinity and they had little doubt that a strong force of those foes would soon set out in pursuit of them. However, they hoped to gain a sufficient lead to make it impossible for the Crows to overtake them before nightfall. Then they believed the Crows would abandon the chase.

When they reached Falling Eagle and his companions the Sioux turned directly toward the south and drove the ponies across the plain at top speed. They hoped to reach the deep ravine in which they had hidden from the Crows and the Blackfeet.

"Perhaps the Crows took us for Blackfeet," suggested Running Dog. "Perhaps they will go the other way to find us."

"No, I do not believe it," said Lean Wolf. "Those warriors came close. I believe they know we are Dacotahs."

For some time they kept the ponies running at their best speed and then as they saw nothing of their foes they gradually slackened the pace. For the balance of the day they rode over the plain at an easy canter and shortly before dark they came in sight of the abandoned stream bed. Their spirits revived at sight of it. They believed that even if the Crows should overtake them it would be possible to hold them off until scouts found White Otter and the war party and brought them to the ravine.

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"I do not believe the Crows can catch us now," said Sun Bird, as they drove the tired ponies into the ravine.

"We can make a big fight in this place," Lean Wolf told him.

As night fell Feather Dog followed the ravine toward the west to listen for the approach of the Crows. Soon after he had gone Little Raven and Many Feathers arrived. Their ponies showed the effects of fast riding.

"Tell us what you have seen," said Sun Bird.

"The Crows are coming," declared Little Raven. "It is a big war party. Those scouts tried to follow you, but we drove them back. We did that many times. Then the war party came and we ran away. The Crows are coming straight ahead. We rode fast to keep ahead of them. Pretty soon they will be here."

"Well, there will be many against us, but we must get ready to fight," Lean Wolf said, fearlessly.

"No, my brother, I believe that would be foolish," Sun Bird told him. "The Crows are too strong for us. I am going to fool them. I will tell you how to do it. I am going to ask Running Dog and Falling Eagle and Brave Bear and Two Elks and Many Feathers and Broken Hand and Mad Bull to ride away with the ponies. I will make Running Dog the leader. At first you must turn toward the-place-where-day-begins. Then you must circle back and go toward our village. Pretty soon you will find our brothers. Then you must stop. When you go away the rest of us will stay here to fool the Crows. When they come close we will ride out and make a great noise. Then we will ride toward the mountains. We will keep shouting as if we are driving ponies. The Crows will follow us. Then we will circle around and fool them. I will ask Lean Wolf and Little Raven and Feather Dog to help me do this thing. Come, my brothers, drive away the ponies."

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"Hi, that is a great thing to do," Lean Wolf said enthusiastically. "Yes, I believe we will fool the Crows."

As there was little time to spare, Running Dog and his companions immediately drove the ponies from the ravine and disappeared into the night. Sun Bird listened anxiously until the sounds of the hoofbeats had died away and then he turned to his comrades.

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"Well, my brothers, pretty soon the Crows will come, we must be ready," he said.

A moment later Feather Dog appeared. He said that he had heard the sound of galloping ponies and had come to investigate.

"It was our brothers taking away the ponies," explained Sun Bird.

Then he acquainted Feather Dog with the details of the wily trick to fool the Crows. The famous Minneconjoux scout immediately endorsed the plan.

"It is good," he said, as his eyes twinkled merrily.

"Listen," cried Little Raven.

The Sioux immediately became silent. The hoofbeats of many ponies echoed across the plain. The Crows were galloping boldly toward the ravine. The thought filled Sun Bird with anxiety. He realized that if the bold stratagem failed, the warriors with the ponies were doomed. Once overtaken on the open plain, he felt sure they would be speedily surrounded and annihilated by the great Crow war party. He grew weak at the possibility. Then his pony called and his thoughts were diverted. The hoofbeats suddenly ceased. Having located their enemies the Crows had become cautious. The Sioux pony called again and Sun Bird made no attempt to stop it.

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"It is good," he said. "The Crows will think the ponies are here. Come, ride around and make a noise."

They rode rapidly to and fro to make it appear that there were a number of ponies in the ravine. Then they suddenly swept up the side of the gully and raced across the plain. As they rode they snapped their riding quirts and yelled excitedly at imaginary ponies. Then they listened anxiously for sounds from the Crows. When they failed to hear them they gave way to despair. Sun Bird grew sick at heart. He feared that he had sent his comrades to their death.

"Perhaps the Crows are keeping quiet until they get across that gully," suggested Lean Wolf. "Perhaps they believe that some of us are waiting there to fight them back."

At that instant a shrill yell of triumph rang through the night, and a moment afterward the Sioux heard the quick, sharp hoofbeats of galloping ponies directly behind them. The Crows had been deceived. They were following blindly on the false trail. The Sioux were wild with joy. Unmindful of their own peril, they were satisfied to know that their comrades and the ponies were safe.

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"It is good! It is good!" Sun Bird cried, joyfully. "We have fooled the Crows. Now our brothers will get away with the ponies."

They continued to make a great noise, lest the Crows should suddenly discover their blunder.

They rode furiously toward the west, and rejoiced in the thought that each stride of the ponies was luring their foes farther from those whom they wished to overtake. It was not long, however, before the Sioux realized that the Crows were gaining upon them. The discovery aroused them to their peril. They knew that if the Crows came up with them there would be little chance of escape.

"Come, we must ride faster," Sun Bird cried, anxiously.

They lashed the ponies into a terrific burst of speed and slowly drew away from their enemies. They knew, however, that it would be impossible to maintain the pace. They also realized that each moment was taking them farther from their course.

"Now we must try to circle around," Sun Bird told them. "Do not make any more noise."

They suddenly subsided into silence and turned sharply toward the south. Then their hearts bounded with joy as they heard the Crows blunder from the trail and continue toward the west. Having once lost them in the night, it seemed doubtful if the Crows would be able to find them before daylight.

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"We have got away," Sun Bird said, confidently. "The Crows cannot find us. Pretty soon they will go back."

"Yes, I believe we are safe," replied Lean Wolf.

"Sun Bird, you have done a big thing," declared Feather Dog. "You are a great war leader. I will tell our people about it."

The Sioux laughed gleefully as they heard the Crows signaling far away toward the west. Then they turned toward the east to find their tribesmen. They rode steadily through the night and at daylight came upon the entire Minneconjoux war party at the waterhole which marked the boundary of the Minneconjoux hunting grounds. They were within a short day's travel of the great Sioux camp. The long war journey was almost at an end. Success seemed assured. The Sioux were elated.

"My brothers, we have come together again," said Sun Bird. "I see you have kept the ponies. Now we are close to our village. Pretty soon we will be with our people. It is good."

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## CHAPTER XX

### SAFE AT LAST

The Sioux waited until the ponies had recovered somewhat from their fatigue and then they set out for the Minneconjoux camp. They rode gayly across the plain, talking and laughing and singing their war songs. Their task had been accomplished. Their fears had vanished. The wearying suspense was at an end. They were eager to reach their people, for they knew that a royal welcome awaited them. The day had almost ended, however, when they finally came in sight of the Minneconjoux village.

"See, there are the lodges of our people," said Sun Bird. "Pretty soon some one will see us. We must get ready to ride into the camp."

"You are the leader, you must go ahead," said Feather Dog.

"Yes, Sun Bird must go ahead," cried the others.

"Well, I will ask Dancing Rabbit to ride with me; it will make old Spotted Face feel good to see him," Sun Bird told them. "Then White Otter must follow close behind me. He has done the biggest thing of all."

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"It is good," cried the Minneconjoux.

They advanced slowly toward the camp. Sun Bird and Dancing Rabbit rode in front. White Otter followed, leading the famous black war pony, and Little Raven rode beside him. Then came Lean Wolf and Feather Dog and Sitting Eagle and Running Dog and all the famous scouts. Behind them followed the great herd of ponies, surrounded by the balance of the war party.

The Minneconjoux soon discovered the approaching horsemen and rushed from the camp in great excitement. As they recognized the riders and saw the great herd of ponies they were thrown into an ecstasy of joy. They gathered at the edge of the camp, singing and dancing and calling out the names of the warriors who had gone to fight the Blackfeet.

"See, see, the great war party is coming!" they cried. "They are bringing many ponies."

The war party raised their voices in the piercing Dacotah war cry. It echoed triumphantly

across the plain and threw the camp into a tumult. Then the Minneconjoux suddenly recognized Dancing Rabbit. Men, women and children began to call his name.

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"Our brothers have brought back Dancing Rabbit!" they shouted. "See, Dancing Rabbit has come back to us! Look, Spotted Face, your grandson is alive! He is coming to your lodge."

The aged warrior shaded his eyes with his hand and looked eagerly across the plain. He was trembling with anxiety. The Minneconjoux waited for him to speak.

"Yes, my friends, it is Dancing Rabbit," he said, finally. "Wakantunka, the Great Mystery, has sent him back to me. It is good."

A moment afterward the Minneconjoux discovered the black war pony. The sight of it astonished them into silence. They looked upon it with wild, inquiring eyes. Had they been mistaken? Could it really be the famous war pony of the great chief Many Buffaloes?

"Yes, yes, it is the great black war pony!" Rain Crow cried, excitedly. "White Otter, my son, has brought it to our camp."

When the war party came within bow range they stopped and waited while a delegation of noted warriors rode out to escort them to the camp. At the same time a company of youths raced eagerly across the plain to take charge of the ponies.

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Then the war party rode triumphantly into the village, singing their war songs and calling the names of the warriors who had been killed by the Blackfeet. As each missing warrior was mentioned his people began to mourn and cry out dismally in their grief. However, as his companions extolled his bravery the mourners stifled their sobs and thrilled with pride at his noble sacrifice.

"A warrior must be ready to die," said Pretty Star, the mother of Proud Hawk. "My son was very brave. They are calling his name. He did a great thing for his people. It is enough."

As the victorious warriors paraded through the village the people gathered eagerly about White Otter and the famous black war pony. Many of the old men and boys ran forward and struck the Blackfeet pony with their hands to count a coup against their foes. When he reached the center of the camp White Otter stopped and tied the Blackfeet pony before the lodge of Curly Horse, the Minneconjoux war chief.

"See, White Otter has given the black war pony to Curly Horse," said the Minneconjoux. "It is a great thing to do."

Curly Horse and the great men of the tribe had assembled before the medicine lodge to greet the war party. When the warriors lined up before him the famous chief stepped forward to address them.

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"I will call Sun Bird and White Otter to come and stand before me," said Curly Horse. "My brothers, both of you are young men, but you have done big things. Sun Bird, you are the leader of this war party. You have done what you set out to do. You have brought back the ponies that the Blackfeet took away. It was a hard thing to do. White Otter, you are a great chief. You have done many big things. Now you have done the biggest thing of all. I see that you have tied that great pony in front of my lodge. It makes me feel good. But I will not take it. You must take it to your people. Now I will speak to those brave warriors who went with you. My brothers, you have done a big thing. You were very brave. Now I will ask Rain Crow to give you some words."

"My friends, you have done a great thing for your people," said Rain Crow, the Medicine Man. "Now we have many ponies. Some of them were Blackfeet ponies. It is good. Sun Bird, you are my son. Little Raven, you are my son. White Otter, I have called you my son. All three of you were very brave. It makes me feel big. White Otter, you have done the biggest thing of all. Our people will talk about it a long time. I have finished."

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When Rain Crow ceased speaking the Minneconjoux cried out for Sun Bird to talk to them.

"Well, my people, you have asked me to give you some words," said Sun Bird. "First I will tell you about White Otter. He was very brave. He went into the Blackfeet camp. He fought back many Blackfeet. He rode after the great chief Many Buffaloes and caught up with him. Then he knocked him on the head and ran off with his pony. He has brought it here. Now I will tell you about Little Raven. He was very brave. He went with White Otter to the Blackfeet camp. He fought many Blackfeet. Now I will tell you about all these great warriors that you see standing here. They were very brave. Lean Wolf fought four Blackfeet warriors and killed all of them. Sitting Eagle ran off the ponies. Feather Dog did some great things. Running Dog found our enemies. All of these brave warriors fought hard to bring the ponies here. Now I have told you about it."

"White Otter! White Otter!" shouted the Minneconjoux. "Come, White Otter, give us some words."

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The Ogalala received a stirring ovation. It was some time before he was able to speak.

"My brothers, I have not many words to give you," he said, modestly. "I will tell you that Sun Bird is a great war leader. He told us what to do. I will tell you that the Minneconjoux are very brave. I will tell my people about them. I will tell you that the Dacotah ponies can run. Curly Horse gave me that great pony that I rode to the Blackfeet camp. It is very fast. That is how I caught Many Buffaloes. I believe Rain Crow must have had something to do with it. He is a great Medicine Person. I believe he helped me to do this thing. Now I will speak to your great chief Curly Horse. Curly Horse, I have tied that black pony in front of your lodge. It must stay there."

You gave me a great pony to ride to the Blackfeet camp. I will keep it. Now I will give you that great Blackfeet pony. You must keep it. Rain Crow, you have called me your son. Well, my father, I have brought you a fast spotted pony. I took it from the Flatheads. Now I will not talk anymore."

"White Otter, I see that you have a good heart," said Curly Horse. "I will listen to your words, I will keep that great war pony. I feel big to own that pony."

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When it grew dark the Minneconjoux lighted a great fire and assembled about it to celebrate the success of the war party. They spent the entire night dancing and singing and telling of the great exploits performed by the men who had gone to the Blackfeet camp.

## THE END

### Transcriber's Note

Typographical errors corrected in the text:

|          |            |                       |
|----------|------------|-----------------------|
| TOC      | Runways    | changed to Runaways   |
| Page 27  | murmered   | changed to murmured   |
| Page 33  | murmered   | changed to murmured   |
| Page 59  | susspense  | changed to suspense   |
| Page 96  | unkown     | changed to unknown    |
| Page 164 | Siting     | changed to Sitting    |
| Page 211 | desperated | changed to desperate  |
| Page 253 | Wakantanka | changed to Wakantunka |

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