

CHAPTER 10

Star Elk had proved so thoroughly inadequate as a husband, during the short while he and Blue Bird lived together, that there was no reason to suppose he might have measured up any better as a father and that he would have brought to Waterlily the honors that came to her through her kindly stepfather, Rainbow. He had arranged the *hunka* for her when she was a child. Then, when she was fifteen years old, he sponsored for her the rare Buffalo Ceremony, which marked her turning point from childhood to adolescence. For both he bore much of the cost, which came high. But it ensured Waterlily lasting prestige such as only the beloved child enjoyed. It was only natural therefore that as she grew more thoughtful and observant she grew more appreciative of him, and that it was something of a personal triumph for her when Rainbow was bidden to the Kit Fox society.

The bid came as a complete surprise. On a beautiful autumn morning the herald, as usual, went around the camp circle proclaiming the news just released from the council tipi in the center; and as usual, everyone strained to catch his words as he came nearer. When he rode past Black Eagle's group of tipis the words were plain, though their meaning was at first obscure. He was saying, "I am few. Four of me have gone south [to death], and I am few. And so on this day I invite you, Gray Eagle, and you, Swift Hawk, and you, Resting Wind, and you, Rainbow, to meet me face to face."

The old and time-honored Kit Fox society was speaking; the herald was its mouthpiece. In such formal and cryptic language had the Kit Fox bidden new members since time immemorial. Of course the entire camp circle buzzed with the news, for this was one of the truly great and rare occasions. There would be generous feasts given by the relatives of the initiates, and there would be much to see. The Kit Foxes would first mourn ceremonially for their deceased members, and then elaborately welcome the new ones chosen to replace them. With spectacular pageantry they would stage their unique dance, which always drew crowds of onlookers. They would wear the distinctive Kit Fox attire and the one-sided haircut peculiar to them. It would be an exciting affair, and everyone, big and little, began at once to plan on it, wishing to look well in gala dress because of the many visitors that would surely be on hand.

The actual time and place of choosing new members was always private, though of course it was expected, eventually, after a member or members had died. The ones bidden were as surprised as everyone else, and quite understandably pleased by the very high compliment, for it was a fact that membership in the proud Kit Fox might in no way be bought or sought. A warrior was bidden who had achieved his four feathers designating four major war deeds; or a man of peace was bidden who was industrious and had some outstanding skill. In addition, every candidate must have a record of consistent hospitality and generosity, which were the qualities that marked a good citizen of the camp circle.

For Rainbow, it was a signal honor, he being the youngest of the four. The other three had long been prominent and articulate in tribal affairs, while he had always been content to remain quiet in the background. It was a surprise not that those three had been chosen now, but that they had been bypassed so long. Of Rainbow, people said, "To be sure, an excellent choice. He is just the type—quick, agile, ready to serve whenever necessary, as a Kit Fox must be."

"That is true. And though he never has much to say, he concerns himself in tribal activities. Look at the feasts he has given, honoring his daughter, who is not his real daughter ... A good man." Enough could not be said of him. He had general approval and the good wishes of all. No small thing it was to be bidden to the Kit Fox.

The bold heralding of the candidates' names without first warning or sounding them out was the haughty Kit Fox way of daring them to refuse the invitation. Should one do so, it would only mean he was unsure of himself, or of his worthiness, or that the Kit Fox had made a mistake.

But the Kit Fox did not make false choices. It picked its members wisely and could boast that no bid it made was ever turned down. This fact, this record, gave it enormous prestige, comparable to that of the other five ancient societies in the tribe. Spurious societies sprang up from time to time, flourished for a while, and then died out. Only those six had always been, their origin, their institution, lost in mythology.

The executive Chiefs' Society and the advisory Owl Headdress were composed of elderly, venerable worthies who did much sitting and deliberating. The remaining four, known as Badgers, Stout Hearts, Crow-keepers, and Kit Foxes, were military orders ever alert for action. It was not demanded of them, or of any man, to go to war unless he wanted to go. The military orders functioned rather as messengers, scouts, camp police, in short, as guardians of the camp circle and its people. They patrolled and regulated the communal hunt and in every way carried out the orders of the magistrates and council. These four societies went on duty by turns. When, for instance, it was the Kit Fox's turn, the members must be ready for any assignment and any emergency. The rest of the time they were a loosely organized social club and met occasionally for dancing and feasting, free to pursue their individual interests otherwise.

But winter was upon them now, and preparations could not be made hurriedly for the induction. They must wait until spring, when the people would be in the camp circle again. This gave the families of the candidates ample time to get ready to give feasts and generous gifts at the give-away that inevitably followed. The relatives in Black Eagle's camp bestirred themselves to make a creditable showing in honor of Rainbow, for although he was an outsider tied to them only through marriage, he was well liked by all because he was a good relative to all.

Through the constant visiting that always went on, the news had been carried far and wide, and many came from other camp circles to join in the festivities when they took place in mid-spring. Among those visitors was one who came from High Eagle's people, far to the east and south. The man brought a message for Rainbow that entailed a journey for him immediately. It was fortunate for him that the Kit Foxes had only recently gone off duty. He could go and return before it would be necessary for him to function in his new capacity.

The bearer of the message came to his tipi, upon his invitation, and Blue Bird immediately

set food before him. After he had eaten and the two men had smoked the pipe together, he said, "I come from far away to bring my nephew's message. He was very ill all winter but is now well, and this is what he said, 'When I lay at death's door I thought of my friend and longed for his companionship again. Tell him if he can to come to me for a few days' visit; I cannot go to him at this time.'"

"I will go at once, if my friend wants me," Rainbow replied. "Uncle, when you return I will accompany you." The man went away.

"I suppose that is the man you call Palani [Pawnee]," Blue Bird said. Palani was someone definitely placed in her mind from Rainbow's telling about him, but she had never met him.

"Who else?" Rainbow asked. "For him alone would I make a journey at this time. Get ready now, and get the children ready. We shall start very soon."

Blue Bird did not question his decision because she knew what fellowhood meant. A *kola* was someone special; his wishes and needs could not be ignored, for that was the basis of the relationship. Everyone knew that. Blue Bird knew the story of Rainbow and Palani's meeting. During those restless years following the death of Little Chief's mother, Rainbow sojourned in distant places. There he and Palani met and took an instant liking to each other, and before parting they entered into what was known as fellowhood, a solemn friendship pact that must endure forever. "Fellows" were men of comparable standing and ability who were drawn together by like tastes and by a mutual respect and admiration for each other's character and personal charm. "The best I have is for my fellow" was their code from the time they pledged eternal loyalty. In line with that, one's best horse automatically went to the other whenever they met after a prolonged separation. When possible, they went on the warpath together in order to protect each other. In every phase of life they must act without thought of self, in defense of and to the advantage of the other. One must give one's life to save the other. Fellowhood was a compelling association whose obligations were a pleasure.

Two men who became fellows, *kola*, immediately thereby placed themselves in the limelight, fully cognizant that others watched them, as if saying, "Well, so they think themselves worthy of so high a calling, do they? We shall see how they will measure up!" For men of doubtful stature who became *kola* without counting the cost soon petered out and became the butt of many jokes and the derision of men. It was no wonder that instances of fellowhood were not common, since much thought was needed before taking the step.

The demands on fellows were somewhat greater even than those on natural brothers, loyal and devoted as brothers were supposed to be. And automatically, like brothers, each fellow was son to the other's parents and father to his children. All other relatives were likewise shared. Each was brother-in-law to the other's wife, but with this difference: whereas an informality, marked by joking and taking one another in an offhand manner, was ordinarily permitted between brother-and sister-in-law, men in fellowhood must respect and venerate the other's wife like a sister.

They planned to travel together, for both safety and sociability, the uncle, his wife and their son, and Rainbow and his family and his mother, Gloku, making up the party. Prairie Flower, whom Waterlily had insisted on inviting, was also going. Her mother, Dream Woman, quickly packed her things, including a fancy gown for dress-up, and she was ready. Leaping Fawn was

a dutiful cousin to Waterlily, but, being older by a few years, she was used to friends her own age. Besides, so Waterlily told her mother one day, there was something stiff and formal about Leaping Fawn that kept her a little distant. "Not that she scares you, but it is not so easy to have fun with her as with Prairie Flower." The two girls going on the journey were excited over the prospect. They had never been far from the camp circle before.

It was a leisurely trip. To spare the horses, now that Palani was well again, there was no need of hurrying there. They stopped each day near some stream or pond and made camp in daylight. The men, who were ever on guard, rode out from the party from time to time to see that no enemy war party was about in the stretches of deserted country they must cross, and incidentally they were able to shoot a deer or other animal and supply fresh meat for the cooks when they made camp.

For Rainbow and his family the evenings around the camp-fire, where all the cooking was done and all the travelers sat together to eat, were especially exciting. Both the uncle and his wife had much to tell that was novel and fascinating about the place they were going. One evening the uncle turned to Rainbow and asked, "When you visited High Eagle's people, the time you and Palani made your pact, was the camp circle on the open prairie perhaps? Well, you will find that it is now permanently located on the bottomland near the Roiled Water [the Missouri]. It is near good water and there is plenty of firewood from the willow copses and the cottonwood trees along the bank. But that is not the only reason. Truth is that they want to be near the stockade where the Long Knife soldiers stay."

Everyone in Rainbow's party was agog, wishing to hear more about the American soldiers, their appearance, their possessions, their habits, and their families. Up there in their home territory, in the northwestern part of Dakota country, the white man was still a rarity. So the uncle was happy to talk and impress his audience. "Listen to this," he said. "Every single day their big-holy-iron booms out the most deafening blast at sunset. You cannot imagine the sound. Wait till you hear it! People out hunting far off claim they can hear it. I promise you it will hurt your ears until you think your hearing is killed, but you will get used to it in time." That was his description of a cannon salute.

But that was only the start. He told also about "rolling wood," by which he meant wagons. The wheel and its operating principle was especially difficult to explain and the man ended by saying, "Wait and you shall see for yourselves." He said rolling-wood carriers were hitched to mules or horses and that people sat in the carriers to be hauled about. Well, it was understandable that such a queer people would use their own queer vehicles. But when the uncle said that some of the Dakotas themselves, whose daughters lived within the stockade as wives of the soldiers, also rode about in them, that was too much. Blue Bird turned to the man's wife with an aside. "I am sure no one could ever coax me into one of those rolling-wood things. Have you ridden in one? *Ya!* I would die before I could step back out onto solid ground!"

The woman was talking next, telling of woven goods that lay in thick bolts on the traders' shelves, in all sorts of bright colors and designs and figures. To this Blue Bird said, "And you mean that people go in and buy pieces, any length and any color, as they want?" It was unbelievable. She would have to be shown. "Back home," she told the woman, in quiet tones

so as not to disturb the conversation on the men's side of the fire, "we see once in a while a shirt or a gown of that stuff, when visitors come for celebrations, and I have actually owned a piece of red goods, but they remain a curiosity. To think that I am going to see them in plenty, and actually buy what I want of them! I am really eager to get there now!"

The two girls whispered into each other's ear. "What kind will you buy?" "Some red stuff; I want a bright red gown to take home." That was Waterlily. "And you?" "I'd like a gown the color of the sky." That was Prairie Flower. To young girls used only to clothing of skin here was something they could hardly wait for.

But the woman was talking again to Blue Bird. "The traders' stores are full of everything. There are knives and ketties and things all made of *maza* [metal]; and also there are bowls and cups of a stuff like mussel shell"—the things she had to tell! Was there any end to the unheard-of items? The wonder of it all! As if the travelers were going straight into another world—which of course they were.

Rainbow was speaking. "What kind of people are the Long Knives, really? The only one I ever saw at close range I did not like. It was at Two Packs' winter camp up north where I was staying. He showed up one day hungry and ragged." He turned to Blue Bird, "I have told you of this before," then back to his companion, "The man was all hair. And his eyes were the color of clear ice, blue and cold. His hair was yellow as a sunflower on his head and over the lower half of his face. He undressed before everyone and you could see that his arms and neck and chest to the navel were black with hair, matted, ugly! That was as far as he was exposed. No one doubted his whole body was just as hairy. Glum and queer-acting as he was, he interested Two Packs, who planned to adopt him. 'I will have him as a son, for an oddity,' he declared. 'Perhaps in time he will learn our language and then we shall know what he is thinking.' But the fellow sneaked off at dawn one day," Rainbow chuckled, "taking Two Packs' best horse."

Little Chief and the son of the other family had been out tending the horses and Ohiya had tagged along. They had come in sometime during this conversation and were sitting quietly behind their fathers. Suddenly Ohiya asked, "Did they track him down and recover the horse?" Rainbow replied, "What do you think, son? Had he not been received as a guest?" and that seemed to answer Ohiya's question.

Long after the meal they sat talking, so long after that everyone was hungry again and glad of the lunch Blue Bird warmed up and served by the light of the lambent fire. Just when the conversation seemed to die down for the night, the uncle said, between puffs on his pipe, "To go back to your question, What are they like? Well, I would say that many of them seem very stern and hard. They are strangely dull toward those about them. They go along on their way without recognizing fellow humans as they pass, very unmannerly they seem, some of them at least. Of course, I only see a few. And their looks? Well, first of all, let me tell you about their eyes. Many have blue eyes, some have brown, some have yellow, and not a few have black eyes, as black as ours. And their hair? If it is not yellow, it is brown, or black, or a blazing red. Their skins are faded and pale—what of it you can see through the hair, that is. But—here's an odd thing—if they stay in the hot sun all day they do not turn a dark brown as we do, but actually a bright crimson!"

"Oh, unbelievable! Crimson faces!"

“Yes, and arms, too. I once saw several of them swimming in the hot sun, stripped to the waist. They were hairy and red, all right.”

Waterlily was aghast, so much so that she forgot she had been taught never to break into the conversation of her elders, especially of men. Her curiosity got the best of her and she asked, “Do their women have hair on their faces, too? And do they get crimson in the sun?”

“I think not,” the uncle tried to recall. “I think not. I never saw a woman with a red face, and I believe their faces are free of hair. But we do not see the women close because they stay inside the stockade most of the time.”

Blue Bird had listened to the incredible story with very little comment till now. But when she gained the woman’s ear she said to her in a low tone, “And their children—what about them?” Her interest always leaned toward children, her own first and then others.

“Ah, wife of my nephew, I was coming to that. And it will surprise and shock you.” She spoke with the air of one about to tell something too fabulous to believe. “Listen! those people actually detest their children! You should see them—slapping their little ones’ faces and lashing their poor little buttocks to make them cry! Why, almost any time of day if you walk near the stockade you can hear the soldiers’ wives screaming at their children. Yes, they thoroughly scold them. I have never seen children treated so ... Only if a woman is crazy might she turn on her own child, not knowing what she did.”

Blue Bird was speechless for a time, but at last she sighed, “It is hard to imagine that. Why do they do it?”

“I suppose,” the woman said, “when the children are naughty, that is the quaint way of training them to be good. By talking loudly and fast and by striking them, the people doubtless hope to scare them into good behavior. I know it sounds queer.”

“Truly,” Blue Bird said, “I can see but one effect, myself. It should only make them act worse, frightened so they cannot think. But I suppose the children are used to it, knowing no other way. Poor things!”

The woman went on from there in a happier vein as she described the fragile beauty of the American soldiers’ children. “Their chiseled faces, their flowerlike coloring would make you believe the Maker of Men fashioned each one by hand while studying carefully for the best effect.” But Blue Bird found little solace in that. After all, could one’s physical beauty compensate for so horrible a lot? She hugged Smiling One close, feeling sick with sympathy for the unknown children. Such were the impressions Rainbow’s party got from the things told them.

Next day they traveled only a short while and then made camp for the night, even though their destination was all but in plain sight and the day was young. Visitors should not straightway enter, without first letting it be known that they were about to arrive. The uncle rode on ahead to announce them and particularly to report to Palani that he had brought Rainbow with him and that the meeting of the two *kola* was very near. At once Palani and his *tiyospaye* got ready to receive them. And meantime, at their camp, Blue Bird unpacked the various articles she had brought for return gifts, knowing that they would be feasted and given presents and many women would be bringing courtesy food to her tipi.

Soon enough, for Palani had remained in readiness daily, he was seen coming out to welcome them and bring them in. He rode a black horse and led a handsome iron gray, and everyone knew that one was for Rainbow. But Rainbow was ready, too. He had kept a sorrel mare with blond tail and mane tied to a stake near his tipi, where she was grazing contentedly, unaware that very shortly she would be changing owners.

In those days, the ordinary run of horses were called “common horse,” a term that referred to the small animals derived from wild herds of mustangs that roamed the plains. From tribe to tribe they spread rapidly, by trade or as gifts exchanged during times of truce, but more often by a systematic horse stealing, which was a legitimate part of all intertribal warfare. Almost everyone could and did acquire common horses. The so-called white man’s horse, or American horse, was something else, and quite special. It was a larger animal, better in all respects but principally in its looks and power to endure. The American horse was rare. Only very able men here and there managed to acquire them and owned them with pride. Both Palani’s iron gray and Rainbow’s sorrel were American horses. Between men in fellowship, nothing common would do.

When Palani approached, Rainbow, who rode out to meet him, dismounted for their greeting, “*Hao, kola!*” (“Greetings, friend!”) As they spoke, they incidentally exchanged the ropes by which they had been leading their horses, without saying anything about them, so that when they walked back to the camp, Rainbow was leading the iron gray and Palani the sorrel. On this, their first meeting since ten years before, when they pledged abiding loyalty to each other, they thus quietly carried out the imperative of their code, “The best I have is for my *kola*.” It was neatly done.

“We will start at once for the camp circle,” Palani said, after greeting his new sister-in-law and the others. At once he began to address Gloku as mother, Rainbow’s children as daughters and sons, and Prairie Flower as niece, according to the system of relationships through which all social life was carried on. And when they arrived at Palani’s camp, the welcome accorded Rainbow’s family was no different from that to lifelong relatives returning home after a long absence. It was, in fact, a homecoming. The wives of the two brothers addressed each other as sisters, and all Palani’s relatives also became appropriately related to Rainbow’s family. Before long they were all associating together, even the children, as close relatives in a warm, intimate atmosphere. The visitors could not feel strange where everything made them belong.

They were feasted and honored in various ways, and as their acquaintance spread, it seemed as though they did nothing but go from one tipi to another, where they were bidden as guests. Amid all this social whirl, Palani invited his friend to stay long enough to enjoy the Sun Dance celebration in his company. “It is now only a few days off,” he said. “And the preparatory events are already under way. I should be sorry to have you leave now.” He had a plan, when he said this, that did not show up until later.

Thus it happened that the visitors from White Ghost’s camp circle decided to remain. That decision was to have great significance for the young girl Waterlily. A new, wholly exciting, and at the same time baffling experience lay just ahead, which, far more than the ritual of the Buffalo Ceremony, was to change her from a child to a woman.

Unaware of all this, Waterlily found it thrilling enough just to see the great crowds of

visitors arriving from faraway places whose names she had never even heard before. They were all Dakotas, but they were not all Tctons. Some spoke the familiar language in strange dialects that made her and her cousin giggle as they imitated them in private. For some were from the Yankton-speaking people across the Roiled Water, and some, a few, were from the Santee-speaking people still farther east. To one hearing their speech for the first time, it was startling to say the least.

“Isn’t it funny, cousin?” Prairie Flower asked. “I know what they are saying, and yet it sounds different.”

“Yes,” Waterlily tried to explain it, “It is as though they were talking beyond a curtain—it comes out all right, but not too plainly.”

The young girl felt vicariously honored to see how popular her father, Rainbow, was. Many men had known him before, and now, since he had been recognized by the local Kit Fox members by his one-sided haircut, he was being included in their meetings and activities. Such honors! How glad Waterlily was that they had come.

Each succeeding day was more interesting than the last, and now this—the Omahas were coming. They were coming to sing. Whatever that might mean, as the crier rode by announcing it, Waterlily did not understand. But it sounded intriguing, especially because the entire camp circle buzzed with the news.

“They have already arrived! Yonder you may see them putting up their camp. They are preparing to sing. We all know how they can sing! This is an event. You men who are *men*, you who can give away your best without your pulse quickening, get ready to give as becomes you. According to their custom, the visitors are coming to ‘sit down Omaha style.’ Be prepared to meet them worthily!” In such phrases the announcer rallied the people.

“It will be a great sight,” Palani told his guests. “Up there in the north your people have never seen anything like it. You will enjoy it. You must all go and look on.”

If the word “Omaha” and the term “to sit Omaha style” had any vague meaning to Blue Bird, they certainly were completely strange to the girls. Among White Ghost’s people, the names of distant tribes in the south and east were only names. But to Rainbow, the erstwhile roamer, the Omahas were known. He had heard tell of their record in war with the southern Tetons, and of their periodic meetings with them under truce, when they came with their families. Certainly they were welcome to the prayerful Sun Dance. Among the Dakotas all traditional enemies were received in friendship for that annual celebration, and the courtesy was reciprocated. There were no instances known of Dakotas’ being refused entree to the Sun Dance of another plains tribe.

The following morning was crisp and clear. The air was charged with expectancy. As the Omahas in the distance methodically arranged themselves for their approach, the more far-sighted of the Tetons announced their movements from time to time, not always agreeing in what they saw, however. “Now they are ready.” “Now they are moving.” “No, not yet; they are still marshaling themselves.” “Yes, so they are.” “Now! Now they are walking.” “Yes, they are walking.” “They are definitely on their way.”

During all this time the Dakotas too had been arranging themselves. The men who were *men*,

who prided themselves on being able to give their best unflinchingly, “without their pulse quickening,” were spanned out in a front rank, holding one or more gift horses by ropes, while the women and children and such men and youths as had not yet attained top status in the tribe followed them in a great crowd. The Dakota group was comparable in size to the Omaha group.

At the instant when it was clear that the Omahas were marching, the Dakotas shouted the usual signal cry, “*Hokahe!*” and started together. Steadily and determinedly the two peoples drew toward each other in ceremony, out on the open prairie. But they did not meet. When they were somewhat more than one hundred paces apart, both sides came to an abrupt halt and stood arrayed facing each other.

There was no denying it; the Omahas presented a magnificent picture. Waterlily and Prairie Flower whispered breathlessly that never had they seen anything like it before. Tall, stalwart, and self-assured in their gorgeous costumes of costly white buckskin heavily fringed and brilliantly ornamented, with war standards high and feathers flying, truly the Omahas were a breathtaking sight. And as they stood motionless there on the lush green grass, under an intensely blue sky with only a few sharply white clouds floating against it, the fresh morning breeze caught their colorful standards and flirted them about gracefully.

And so they stood without a word for a long moment before the Omaha men in front seated themselves on the ground in a long, straight row, facing the Dakotas, who continued to stand throughout the entire ceremony. In a solid background the other Omahas remained standing behind their men. All the Omaha faces were painted red, even the children’s.

Immediately then their singers stepped out in the open, in front of the seated men, placed their drum on the ground and gathered about it, and began to sing in clear voices, beating time with ornamented drumsticks. All the Omaha men took up the strain and swelled it, filling the air with indescribably sweet melody. The many and varied songs were extremely well sung. To many of them the women added a descant, something quite apart and yet related to the melody, coming in unexpectedly, in shrill voices at a piercing, high pitch.

Song followed song to regale the Dakotas. Occasionally an Omaha, no doubt one of their best singers, stood up to sing alone. Again the women added their peculiar accompaniment, but more softly so as not to drown out the solo voice. The Dakotas listened entranced and cheered each song at its close, whispering to one another as they applauded, “The Omahas *have* come to sing, indeed!”

Especially to the visitors from the north all this was gripping. There was so much here to tell back home on a winter’s evening, when callers would surely come in to hear tales of the south. They must observe every bit of it; they must not let any detail escape them. But the total effect—how could that ever be communicated adequately? For here was something one must see and feel for oneself, all this color and sound and action on this exquisitely beautiful day.

When the last song died away, it was the Dakotas’ turn to act. Nor did they hesitate. The ceremonial give-away was fundamental to all plains life. For the Dakotas, it was their particular pride and glory. And now here it was to be elevated to its sublime height, in one concerted act. Not from person to person, as usual, but from tribe to tribe. The men who were *men* were ready to give their horses. Their wives, standing behind them, could hardly be seen

for the great packs of other gifts that they proudly bore on their backs.

The Dakotas were all rather shabbily dressed. They had in fact come just as they were, in commonplace daily garb, for that was the custom: the host must be plainly dressed so as not to shame the guest by seeming competition. But the guest was free to be as elaborate as he could afford. It was expected of him.

After the vigorous give-away, when all Dakota gifts were in Omaha hands and the Omaha singers and cheerers had lauded the givers to the skies, then some of the Omahas stepped out into the open and briefly danced the characteristic social dance for which they were known, the Omaha, or Grass, Dance.

Suddenly it was over. The visiting tribe turned about and betook themselves to their own camp yonder, while the Dakotas broke ranks and walked home in informal groups, on the way discussing and admiring the sing. And as they began to head for their scattered tipis, men shouted to one another, "Tomorrow it will be our turn to sing. We will be wise to prepare at once. Tomorrow at this time we ourselves shall come out to sit 'Omaha style.'"

And so they did. The entire event was repeated in reverse, with the Omahas coming out as hosts and givers and the Dakotas as guests to sing for them. This time it was the Omahas who were simply dressed while the Dakotas wore their finery, which, if anything, was even more impressive than the Omahas', or so it was agreed by the two girl spectators. The taller Dakota men appeared even handsomer, their costumes more stunning, their stride more direct, their carriage more erect and regal. All the men forming the front rank had on their splendid eagle-feather warbonnets, some round, the long plumes drooping gracefully about the shoulders, others with the long feather trailers that gently brushed and bent the grass behind the men as they walked along. For this was the Dakotas' headdress, and it lent a certain majesty to its wearer. Prairie Flower was proud to say, "Every man is a chief."

The Dakota singers took their position in front, and as they sang, their songs after all proved an even match to the Omahas' in beauty and intricacy and style. The visiting tribe was delighted with them, to judge by the cheers and spirited applause after each song. It was always a treat to hear the songs of other tribes, for even though all plains singing might sound monotonously alike to an unaccustomed ear, the character of each tribe's songs and its style of delivery were distinctive enough for neighboring tribes to identify them and enjoy their novelty.

Truly the Omahas had come not only to receive but to give. With the same liberality and readiness of the Dakotas the day before, they gave their gifts, of many kinds and equally high quality. The result of this mass generosity back and forth was an increasing sense of friendship and camaraderie. Now at last the two tribes mingled freely and the visitors were invited to move in and be one with the Dakotas. All enmity was forgotten as they prepared to pray together in the great Sun Dance. "Any Omaha who has made a vow and cares to carry it out at this time is welcome to do so with us," the visitors were told. None was barred from this common prayer because of tribal differences.

For a time it was all Waterlily and her cousin could do to dodge the crowds returning homeward. But at last they were in the clear. Waterlily was thoughtful and disturbed and wished her enthusiastic young cousin would not go on and on talking about everything. For her

own thoughts were on a certain member of this Dakota group of singers who had drawn close to their immense drum and led the chorus.

And well she might, for he was at once the youngest and the handsomest of all the singers. His sweet voice continued to sing in her ear and a moving picture of him in action unreeled endlessly before her eyes, and she did not see the people about her. Such ability in leading the singers, all older than himself! Such personal charm—or so it seemed, by the way the others continually looked to him for direction and at the same time laughed and joked with him. Was he born singing and leading? You would think so by the fact he was completely at home in his role and unflustered by the hundreds of eyes on him in admiration. Who was he? What was his name? Where did he come from? The questions surged in Waterlily's brain, piling up on each other until she suddenly grew frightened, thinking she had actually asked them aloud. But Prairie Flower was quite unaware of her in her own excitement.

Here was the first man Waterlily had noticed. Since her turning point in the Buffalo Ceremony she had been eligible to be courted. But until she saw this altogether attractive youth she had taken no notice of men. She had deliberately stayed away from the courting hour, too diffident to go with the other young women when they went out near sunset for food or water, knowing that the young men of the camp, wrapped in their blankets, waited in hiding to catch them alone and declare their intentions.

From the instant he caught her eye, she had found it a struggle to keep from looking at him. And if in glancing about casually he happened to look in her direction, she had quickly looked elsewhere, frowning as though puzzling out something yonder that was not there at all. She was sure her finesse had been perfect. He could not have supposed on any account that he attracted her; that she, a total stranger, was boldly making up to him. No, that would never do. It was contrary to all the rules of maidenly behavior, rules that had never been any effort to keep. Perhaps tomorrow she might meet him again. If so, she would in every way be circumspect. Her cousin, Prairie Flower, who was always with her, must not suspect anything. Nobody must!

She was almost glad to be on her way home to safety. But then her cousin, still a child since she had not had a Buffalo Ceremony, shocked her by a too candid question: "Cousin, you know that youngest singer—the one who kept looking at you—he ..." Waterlily's interruption was casual-sounding, "I am sure I have no idea what singer you mean." But the question excited her all over again. To think that he too had been unable to keep from looking! And that Prairie Flower had noticed it!

They reached their tipi hot and tired from all they had seen. Waterlily wanted to get where she could think, where no one would upset her. And she felt impatient to find Smiling One digging right in the doorway while a small relative stood by with her first tooth in her hand, waiting to bury it. "Get out of the way," Waterlily said sharply. "Not where people must walk! Bury it to one side of the entrance. Do you want our cousin to sicken and die from people's walking over her tooth?" She said "die" callously. To her, dying was still no more than a word. One so young and so alive could mouth it without apprehension.

Blue Bird came in just then, eager to hear all about the sing, for she had offered to stay home with all the children of the relatives that the parents might have an opportunity to attend.

“Daughter,” she asked with unusual interest, “Was it wonderful again? Did our tribesmen look and sing as well as the Omahas yesterday? I hope so.”

Neither had caught the other’s mood. Waterlily was indifferent to the question, unable to see how much it meant to Blue Bird. Blue Bird failed to notice that there was a change in Waterlily, that something was preoccupying her. Never had she been offhand to a question from her mother before. The girl answered absently, “Oh, yes ... I guess so.” And then, seeing her mother expecting more details, she added, “It was about the same ... it was all, well, fair.” Already the “Omaha sitting” to which she had looked forward with high excitement was commonplace, in the light of what might happen tomorrow.

CHAPTER 11

The Dakota Sun Dance might vary in minor details from band to band, but in essentials it was all the same—in purpose, in mood, in character. And in importance it was rated higher than any other ceremonial. For there was brought together, into one great religious event, the fulfillment of all the vows that men in their distress had made during the preceding year; there also the corporate prayers for the tribe's well-being were offered, in tears.

Time was, so the ancient ones said, when each man fulfilled his pledge to the Great Spirit singly. Fasting and weeping and singing, and sometimes even scarifying himself, out alone on some distant peak, he did his praying solitarily. But long before Waterlily's time the Sun Dance had become an organized complex, made up of many small rites and elements accompanying the actual dancing while gazing at the sun.

Rainbow's party were about to witness the Sun Dance as Palani's people staged it. And now, some days after the arrival of the Omahas and of tribes coming in groups from many places far and near, they were ordered to move to the site that had been selected for the main ceremony. The traditional specification was observed, "A virgin spot apart, unpolluted by humankind."

No sooner had the crier completed his round, telling the people to get ready, than tipis began to come down and in an unbelievably short while the move began. The destination was not far; it could have been easily reached without the necessity of stopping to rest on the way. But this was a ceremonial move and it was essential to make the four ritual pauses along the way, in honor of the four sacred directions, the Four Winds.

At the new site the people placed their tipis in one vast circle that embraced hosts and visitors together as one. From then on, the events at hand were the subject of all conversation. One heard people saying, "Tomorrow is the day they bring home the tree for the sacred pole." "Already the scouts have located it ... very straight and tall it is, they say. The finest in the woods." "Did you know that tonight the holy men will sit in a special tipi and sing prayers the whole night through, asking for a clear day?" "It will be a clear day tomorrow ... You wait and see." "It never fails; that prayer is always granted." And it was a clear day with a sky unmarred by even one cloud.

The preliminary rites leading up to the Sun Dance itself always followed a certain progression. Already some of them had been finished at the old site. And now one more, perhaps the most significant, was at hand: the getting of the sacred pole. A solemn rite must first be performed in front of it as it stood in the woods, as though it were sentient and understood what was going on.

For some unexplained reason Palani was most insistent that Waterlily and Prairie Flower

attend this. He said it more than once to Blue Bird. "Sister-in-law, you must take the girls there. I want them to go." When he was leaving for the center, where the planning committee to which he belonged sat, he called back once again, "Don't fail now!"

Blue Bird was interested in going, anyway. The three hurried to be there on time. Already there was a great crowd milling about looking for a vantage ground from which to see. "It is quite hopeless," Blue Bird said. "We may as well go back. We don't have a chance here." But before the girls said anything either in agreement or in protest, a man came up to them.

"Palani wants me to look out for you and find places for you where you can see. This way," and he wedged through the crowd with Blue Bird and the girls following him, until they stood inside the ring of spectators.

An open space had been cleared around the tree by removing smaller trees and underbrush, so that only the victim-tree remained in solitary splendor, for a little while longer. Here and there the several men's societies sat grouped about their drums, by turns singing their own songs. In the Kit Fox group they saw Rainbow, sitting with his back to them. When all the singing ended, a holy man who had been engaged as officiating priest for all the rituals of the Sun Dance stepped out into the open and a silence fell on the crowd.

He carried a pipe of peace on his arm and wore a buffalo robe with the fur on the outside. On his head was perched a stuffed redheaded woodpecker looking real enough to be alive. The holy man made straight for the bowl of incense at the base of the tree and reached out, feigning to take some of it, and then withdrew his hand. Three times he did this, and only the fourth time he actually took a handful of the incense and sprinkled it on the fire burning nearby.

Almost at once the smoke rose thick and dark and very aromatic. The holy man waited a second and then held the pipe above it, letting the smoke play over it thoroughly. Then he raised the pipe high and performed the Peace Pipe rite. This was called "presenting the pipe." And rightly, for he first offered it ceremonially to the Four Winds—the west, the north, the east, and the south—in that precise order. Then he offered it skyward, and lastly earthward, murmuring appropriate ritual words of supplication. From time to time throughout the entire Sun Dance, this rite, like a *Gloria Patri*, was woven in.

After thus presenting the pipe to all that was holy, the officiant recited the "Apology to the Birds." It was a tremendous thing to dare to take another's home, just as it was a serious thing to cut down a kingly tree. This rite was in recognition of that fact, and a justification. The man held the pipe aloft once more and described a great circle overhead with it while he called out in a moving cry,

"You! You living ones, who wing the hillsides of the clouds,

"Give ear to me!

"You, called the red woodpecker,

"You, the flicker,

"You, the robin,

"You, the crested woodpecker:

"This is your tree; your home.

"Here you raise your young.

"Today a comely youth offers himself in sacrifice,

"And he needs your tree.

“He says, ‘I take your tree only that my people may learn of you

““The way to raise their young as you raise yours, with tender care.””

“He says, ‘Only so that my people may live!’”

And then as he ended and stepped to one side, the groups seated about began chanting together the song called “The Tree’s Lament.” The tree was speaking:

“Once at midday I stood holy,

“Greeting all people, I stood holy.

“In the midst of all, I stood holy.

“Once at midday I stood holy.”

The time had come to cut the tree. This cutting was an honor, too, and was performed by eight beloved young people, four youths and four maidens. When they were summoned to the fore, the youths stepped out of the crowd promptly enough, and then two girls, reluctant from shyness, emerged slowly and took their places. But where were the other two?

The crowd waited restlessly, looking around for them. It was at that moment that someone from behind caught Waterlily and Prairie Flower by their wrists, startling them. It was Palani. “Come girls,” he whispered, “it is my wish that you have a part in this.”

He had been planning it all the while, as still another way of complimenting his special friend, Rainbow, and was prepared to make the necessary gifts for the privilege of entering his daughter and niece. For them personally it was a conspicuous honor. Those who were caused by their relatives to cut the holy tree in their youth had something to recall with pride all their days. Old people would sit together, eyes blind and ears deaf, perhaps, and skin wrinkled and age bowing them down, and yet their faces would light up for an instant as they said, “Once I too cut the sacred tree!” Those who heard them must show them respect for it—not for the actual deed, but for what invariably accompanied it: the giving of feasts and gifts in their name by loving relatives. Only those in whose name the tribe benefited were worthy of respect; it was the people’s way.

Waterlily could not realize what was happening, much less its implications, so suddenly had the honor been thrust upon her and her cousin. But from habit she managed to retain her maidenly composure, with eyes demurely cast downward. When her turn came, the man in charge taught her what to do and she followed his instructions mechanically. She made as though to strike the tree once, twice, three times, but did not touch it with the light ax put into her hand. Only on the fourth did she actually strike. All eight beloveds did the same, hardly denting the bark, for this was only a token. Afterward, strong men with sharp axes quickly felled the tree. But it was not permitted to touch the ground. Ten men in pairs stood ready to catch it on the crosspoles they held between them. And so they bore it homeward, reverently, as though carrying a bier.

As for the crowds, they quickly decked themselves with leaves. Those on foot carried branches of heavy foliage in front of them, some as tall as they, and many persons managed to break off a stem of leaves from the sacred tree to wear for its beneficent effect. Those on horseback decorated not only themselves but also and even more their horses. Each horse wore

a huge collar of leaves and a fillet of the same across the forehead; festoons were intertwined with the bridle and reins and tail, and garlands were wound about the flanks and hoofs, until very little of the horse was visible. The riders carried great shields of leaves held by a string caught onto the left arm. They also wore fillets. The total effect of that much green moving toward the camp circle was grand. “A magnificent spectacle!” people said who watched at home.

By midmorning the affair was ended but still the onlookers continued to swarm about the tree being prepared for erecting. Blue Bird told the girls, whose excitement was beginning to get out of hand, “Let’s get out of the crowd. It is time to get home and rest. This has been a full morning and there is much more to follow.”

“What will they do now, Aunt?” Prairie Flower continued to look back, curiously. “The usual thing. They will put up the tree and then quickly build the Sun Dance lodge around it and the screen at the honor-place. Just as at home. You have both seen it before.”

“It will be bigger, Mother, much bigger,” Waterlily insisted. “I heard one man telling another, ‘Never was there a Sun Dance so great as this is going to be. I am told that there will be as many as six or seven groups of dancers this time, from the many people who have come as well as our own people here.’ So I know it will be bigger.”

“I expect so, but it will be the same—except for size,” Blue Bird assured them. They walked on saying no more until they stopped to rest midway, for the distance was considerable to any point in the camp circle from the center of activity.

“I should like to see everything, Mother,” Waterlily began. “Somehow everything about this Sun Dance seems new and more important than the Sun Dances at home.”

Blue Bird laughed. “You’re growing up, Waterlily,” she said. “You are thinking and seeing more in what goes on, and that is right.” A moment later she added, “I’ll promise you both this. When, just before sunset, the candidates are marched in to begin the dancing, we will be there to watch. That is something to see, for me too. It is a moving thing. The heart beats faster at the sight of men coming of their own free will to endure suffering in order to keep their word with the Great Spirit. I can never watch them enter the Sun Dance lodge without weeping.”

That promise was to the girls’ liking; it was something to look forward to. But all afternoon tension ran so high everywhere that the girls got restless and, in time, too excited to sit quietly in their tipi. And so in the general confusion they stole up to the center to see what was going on, and then immediately hurried back unmissed. In the stream of people coming and going nobody took notice of them. Because it was all so extraordinary, their own daring impressed and delighted them as much as what they saw. Most of their lives until now, both girls had stayed under the watchful eye of their women chaperones and been content.

The girls found the Sun Dance lodge completed and the sacred pole set up in the center, reaching far above the lodge. The beautiful tree they had helped to cut that morning now stood humbled, shorn of all ornamental green, a plain, lonesome pole, its nakedness hidden with only a film of red ceremonial paint. At the very top a bundle of things was tied fast, and from it some objects cut from rawhide dangled on a string. Waterlily made out the figures of a buffalo bull and a man. She was later told that they were symbols of things for which men prayed. To those who yearned for outstanding military success and glory, the man figure meant an enemy

worsted. To those who would be exceptional hunters, the buffalo figure meant food in plenty for them to bring to their people.

The Sun Dance lodge, so called, was not an enclosure but a great circular arbor supported by posts in a rude colonnade. This was for the onlookers who would overcrowd it, some sitting out in front, some standing behind them. The broad, open central area was for the dancing and for incidental activities. At the base of the pole was the sacred object, a buffalo skull. Opposite the entrance into this area, corresponding to the honor-place of a tipi, there were stalls for the dancers to rest in, and behind them was a screen of willows interlaced tightly. Thus all who had a part in the Sun Dance would be exposed to the sun, only the spectators enjoying a measure of comfort in the shade. Men were putting on the finishing touches. Otherwise the dancing space was empty.

At last the time to begin was at hand. All preliminary rites had been carefully finished and everything was in readiness. Already a crowd was there, and from everywhere more and more people, including Blue Bird and the girls, hurried to the scene.

Shortly before sunset all eyes were on several distant tipis set in a row within the circle of tipis. They were the places of preparation for the different groups of dancers. Any moment now the dancers would be emerging to line up and approach in single file toward their place of suffering, accompanied by their mentors, one for each group. At this moment a lone man—the officiating priest who was to direct this particular Sun Dance, who had painted and dedicated the sacred pole and the buffalo skull, who had only that morning apologized to the birds at the cutting ceremony, and who would perform all the remaining rites—that man now entered the dancing space unattended and quietly sat down to smoke and meditate. The mentors alone managed the dancers.

“Here they come now!” was heard on all sides in the waiting crowds. Waterlily and her cousin, with Blue Bird, were fortunate enough to be standing very close to the entrance, where the men must pass directly in front of them. “This is about the best place,” Blue Bird said. “We shall see the dancers very near.”

There were several groups of the men, from the several camp circles that had come together. They approached with their mentors always alongside their lines, directing them. But even when they were still far away their voices could be heard in what seemed to be a chant, growing louder as they came nearer. Suddenly Prairie Flower whispered to Blue Bird in surprise, “Aunt, it sounds as though they are crying. Imagine men crying!”

“Oh, but they are,” Blue Bird whispered back. “This is their ceremonial wailing. They always do it.”

Each man held a huge spray of the broadleafed sage in front of his face and wailed behind it. It sounded tragic, as though they felt genuinely bad and were not simply doing it out of formality as part of the ritual.

All of the men were dressed alike, with no attempt at adornment, for they were concerned only with praying intensely, and not with their appearance. Some were further concerned with the prospect of undergoing physical torture by their own volition, according to their particular vows. From the waist up they were naked; their legs, too, were bare. Only their feet were clothed, in moccasins, but those were not neatly tied about the ankles as was becoming and

proper. The wearers simply stood in them. About the loins they wore two very white and pliable deerskins, hitched to a belt and allowed to hang loose like two separate pieces of skin, one in front and one behind, and overlaid down the hips. The skins were left intact, not trimmed square, with the result that they hung unevenly down to the knees.

Each man wore a strip of rabbitskin around wrists and ankles, and a rawhide disk “the size of a newborn baby’s head” suspended about the neck by a thong so that it rested over the heart. The disk was painted with blue earth and notched around the rim. A single downy feather, pure white, dangled from its center. Each dancer also wore a wreath of sage about the head, and four highly decorated sticks were pinned into his hair, one straight up, one down, the other two horizontal like the arms of a cross, and this was in deference to the four sacred directions.

Waterlily counted the men as they passed her—forty in all, excluding the mentors. Forty men who in some desperate hour had cried out for supernatural aid, “If you help me, I will dance for you while gazing at the sun!” or, “I will hang by my living flesh from the sacred pole,” or, “You shall have so many pieces of my body for a sacrifice.”

Such were some of the vows about to be fulfilled. Because the men were dressed uniformly and their faces were hidden behind the sprays of sage it was impossible to distinguish one from another. But at least one could tell which were pledged to hang, for they brought their own ropes of braided thong, painted white and carried in a coiled loop suspended from the left arm.

There was so much to see at once that before Waterlily realized it, the various groups had been arranged in lines facing the sun, now low in the west, and the singers had arrived and were seated around their drum, their fancy drumsticks poised for the first beat. They immediately began to beat time softly. Then suddenly they began to sing and at the same instant they beat loudly and decisively on the drum. With the very first beat, as the dancing began, each dancer inserted a Sun Dance whistle between his lips and blew in sharp, shrill staccatos. The whistles were made from the bone of an eagle’s wing, and whatever their individual ornamentation, one thing was the same on all of them: a beautiful downy plume, pure white, was attached to the outer end. The plume moved in rhythm with the drumbeats. With each expulsion of breath the plumes flew straight out and with each slight intake they fell. Forty plumes from forty mouths, operating in relentless unison, were a fascination to watch.

Meanwhile the sun had set imperceptibly and twilight was deepening; then it was night. But the moon, full as always for the Sun Dance, cast an eerie glow that threw everything below into half-shadow. The dancing, so begun, continued at the same pace—the throbbing drum, the incessant whistling, and the singing of the musicians—all night long. And so it would continue with hardly a break until the ceremony was completed.

Blue Bird was all too aware that under cover of night many young men were out for a lark and she must keep an eagle eye on the girls. When two youths came and stood very near, she thought it was time to leave. “It is getting late now; we must go home,” she said. “Tomorrow you may watch as much as you like.” “May we come by ourselves?” Prairie Flower asked. “Yes, as long as it is daylight you may.” With that prospect the girls left willingly enough. It had been quite a day and they were tired.

On the way home Prairie Flower talked eagerly of many things but Waterlily was strangely

silent as she turned over a problem in her mind. Finally she said, "Mother, when we stood there in the dark I heard two young women arguing whether or not to take water to one of the dancers tonight. Isn't that against the rules?"

Blue Bird admitted that it was. "But sometimes an engaged girl thinks she cannot bear it for her sweetheart to suffer so much, especially if he has undergone torture, and feels she must get a little water to him at any cost. It is rather early to think of that yet, though ... It is not approved, of course, but the mentors generally manage not to be looking." And then, sensing Waterlily's disturbance, she hastened to add, "It very seldom happens, I think."

"Oh, but that spoils it for me," Waterlily said. "I like to think the dancers keep all the rules ... What's the use of rules then?" "It spoils it for me, too, cousin," Prairie Flower said. And they talked of it further, the idealistic young girls a bit disillusioned, the mother more tolerant, as they went home to bed.

Several times throughout the next day the girls went to look on and then returned, and each time the scene was changed somewhat, for more elements were introduced as they fell due. People came and went constantly, and at night those with young children were obliged to remain home. But the dance went right on, nor did it want for spectators at any time. The ever changing crowd watched, and assisted with their presence. They spoke only when necessary, and then in hushed tones and briefly. Joking and laughter were entirely displaced with reverence, for this was a prayer.

At the evening meal, as the two friends sat talking, Palani spoke thus: "*Kola*, I wonder if you have noticed one of the dancers; a mere boy he is. There is quite a story about him." Waterlily and Prairie Flower were also eating in the tipi, and they listened quietly to the men's talk.

Palani gave the high points of the story. "The father of this boy had been ailing all year, it seems, and finally died at dawn one day. Thereupon the boy ran away to the hills and prayed and wailed all day, "Great Spirit, you alone have the power to give my father back to me. Give him back, and you shall have one hundred pieces of my living flesh." At sundown he returned home and found his father just coming back to life. And so because he bargained with the Great Spirit for what he wanted most, his father's life, he is now here to pay that vow. Sometime today, I understand, he is to give one hundred pieces of flesh for a sacrifice."

The two men agreed that the boy's vow had been a reckless one, the vow of impetuous youth. "A maturer man," Rainbow said, "would first consider, even in his despair, whether he would be able to keep his promise to the full."

"Such a vow," Palani observed, "is not unheard of, certainly. You and I know of men who have given comparable sacrifices. But in every case, at least as far as I know, they were fighting men, men who had tried and proved themselves many times over. They were seasoned warriors, with great fortitude, who nevertheless knew from many battle wounds how it would hurt."

"Yes, you are right." Palani said. "I do not know the boy or his real name, but everybody calls him Lowanla, the Singer. And, you know, he has a beautiful voice, a remarkable skill as a singer. If he were not dancing now, he would most certainly be leading the singers. He is in great demand as a leader."

Prairie Flower at least had the good sense to keep still. But as soon as the girls were alone, she said, with more eagerness than tact, "Cousin, do you suppose that is the one who sang at the Omaha sitting?" Waterlily affected indifference. "The dancers are all so alike; how can we tell which one is youngest or oldest? And they are all skinny from hunger, and with those fillets falling low on their foreheads and their hair hanging over their faces and their heads upturned toward the sun—how can we tell one from another? Me, I think they all look terrible." "But they aren't trying to look handsome," Prairie Flower defended them, a little amazed at her cousin's unexpected hardness.

When she said nothing more, Waterlily spoke more like herself, "I often wonder why people taking part in a ceremony always leave their hair hanging loose." This was in an effort to change the subject. Prairie Flower took to wondering, too, and soon forgot her original question: Was this Lowanla the same as the singer at the Omaha sitting? Waterlily had neatly sidetracked her cousin. But her own thoughts continued chaotic and dubious, and she felt unaccountably irritated at the girl, though she knew she had meant no harm.

After the morning meal at sunrise—everybody rose early—Blue Bird and the girls went to the center again. The affair was moving steadily toward the climax now; this was the final day. Tomorrow at dawn it would all be over. They found the scene changed and with more variety. During the night more new elements had been introduced and the tortures begun.

The vows of various dancers involving serious physical mutilation had been carried out and their women relatives were wailing for them in low tones. The whole enclosure was filled with suffering. There was something to see wherever you looked. Yesterday it had been more placid and slower paced. Only the dancing while gazing at the sun had gone on, with an occasional rite out to the side, like an ear piercing and naming of some important baby, or the healing rites, when all who were suffering some ailment were called out and placed near the pole to let the sun's curative rays rest on them with accompanying prayer.

But today! Yonder stood a dancer fastened to four posts (which had not been there before), by means of ropes tied to wooden pins skewered through incisions in his body, two on the chest and two below the shoulderblades. And as he continued to dance he threw himself violently away from one post to another in a frantic effort to tear himself free. That man had vowed to "stand corraled." Near him was his favorite horse, tied to one of the posts. He stood quiet and patient, and was fasting too. All day he would go without food and water, in sympathy with his owner. Only after sundown would he be led away to water and grass. But he was not injured; after all, he had made no vow.

Some of the men were not scarified, for they had only promised to dance fasting and gazing at the sun. Not all Sun Dancers had to undergo torture but only those so pledged. No man could compel another to be cut or pierced, nor could anyone try, even out of pity, to dissuade another from keeping a vow once made, however drastic it might be. To promise something to the Great Spirit and then fail to fulfill it was a fearsome thing.

Certain men who were attached to the sacred pole itself, by cuts on the chest, danced on, intermittently jerking away, sometimes pulling back so far that their flesh stood out as though its elasticity were unlimited. When finally one broke away, tearing out the flesh, he fell headlong, amid the cries of anguish from the women spectators, as attendants rushed in to help

him to his couch in front of the willow screen. When he had recovered sufficiently, he staggered to his feet and got back in line to dance some more.

But the worst sight of all was that of a man who actually hung from the pole by means of a white-painted thong rope pinned into his back muscles slightly above the waist. It was hard to believe that the weight of his body should not put enough strain on the flesh to tear it out immediately, and yet it was so. With his feet he “danced” in time with the others and all the while he continued to pole himself away as far as possible with the staff in his hand. His feet were less than the width of three fingers above the ground, just enough to make futile his struggles to get a toehold to brace himself. To watch him trying was sheer agony.

Would he ever work himself free? Or would he give up and die hanging? Suddenly a woman broke from the crowd and screamed out in despair while she hurled out a red stick. “I can bear it no longer for my brother to suffer! There goes a horse for the needy!” A few old people in shabby dress and several small boys scrambled for the stick as it fell, knowing that whoever got it got the horse.

So she would ransom her brother; she would buy him back from paying his vow in full, that while the poor were being benefited in his name his suffering might be shortened, justifiably. His mentor hurried to him and cut away the quivering flesh, whereupon he fell limp to the ground and was borne off to rest.

It was all horrible—and fascinating—but the individual sufferers were like sideshows while the main event swept on relentlessly, the singing, whistling, and drumming continuing always at the same tempo. All day long the mentors maneuvered their groups with such skill that they faced the sun constantly as long as it was in the sky. At sunrise they faced east, at sundown, west, having swung around with a movement so smooth that the spectators were unaware of it.

The Sun Dance priest, as intercessor, stayed within the enclosure all the time, but he had nothing to do with the dancers or the sufferers. Unnoticed and free, he moved about quietly. Sometimes you realized that he was sitting near the painted buffalo skull, and at another time at the base of the sacred pole or off to one side; always alone, speaking to no one, he smoked his pipe now and then in deep meditation. But his presence was essential; it validated the religious rites. His time to pontificate would mark the climax and the close.

It was midafternoon when, in a scene more dramatic and unusual than the others, the youthful Lowanla made his sacrifice. Pitying his tender age, the mentors had agreed to postpone his ordeal until the last so that afterward he would not have to dance so long.

An elderly man walked into the dancing groups and tapped the youth on the shoulder from behind and led him away. There in the open space between the pole and the entrance he made him sit down. Then he began to speak. Few could catch the import of his words against the singing, but everyone knew that he was giving his credentials, in the customary way. He was no doubt saying, in effect, “I should not presume to cut the living flesh of another man. I should not feel myself fit to have a part in so great an offering but that I myself know what it is; on my body I carry one hundred scars.” Such a statement was a prerequisite in such instances. Never was it allowed for one who had not himself endured hardship to require it of another.

The old man rubbed cold water over Lowanla’s shoulders and down his arms. Then, using a

strong cactus spike, he pricked the skin and pulled it out while with the sharp knife he quickly snipped off a tiny piece and laid it on the hide spread out to receive it. Starting near the neck and alternating from one side to the other, he made a line of cuts along the shoulders. Blood trickled down in parallel streams, but the youth only bit his lip and frowned and did not flinch nor utter a sound.

The grieving people watched in silence, knowing that this was something that must be done and that any protesting in his behalf would be out of order. But after the man had taken ten pieces from each side, with eighty to go, two elderly women who were the youth's aunts rushed out, frantically tearing away their gowns and baring their shoulders as they went, and demanded that the remaining cuts be made on them instead. This was extraordinary. Nothing like it had ever been known before. Perhaps it should not be permitted, since there was no precedent for it. A man must and did keep his own pledge by himself. But even then Lowanla had fallen backward in a faint. The several mentors went into a hurried conference and decided, "We will allow it this once. The boy is still so tender. It is right that his aunts should come to his rescue. It is admirable of sisters to honor a brother by being good to his child. We will allow it this time."

The aunts were very brave. Haughtily they looked on as the man cut their flesh, leaving a line of tiny wounds evenly spaced and extending well down their arms, fifteen on each side. The two women had given sixty pieces and would have given more, but that at that instant the cutting was interrupted when Lowanla's two elder sisters came up and quietly offered to give the remaining twenty. So the man took ten from each, and the one hundred pieces, so recklessly pledged, were paid. The cutter tied them into a small bundle, painted the bundle red, and delivered it to the intercessor, who sat at a distance. After seeming to reject it three times, as a ritualistic gesture, he accepted it the fourth time and buried it at the foot of the sacred pole, where all sacrificial elements belonged.

Lowanla had made Sun Dance history. Never before had one so young made so extravagant a pledge. Never before had one been rescued in this manner—by women relatives coming boldly in to assume part of his agony. The camp circle was in an uproar over it. "Surely," the people said, "This day will never be forgotten. For on this day we have seen the loftiest expression of kinship affection."

It happened that Waterlily was at home taking care of Smiling One and Ohiya at the time and did not see what had taken place. But since everyone was discussing it, she knew of it almost at once, and at the early evening meal around the outdoor fire she heard all the details.

The sun was still high; it was all right for her and Prairie Flower to go up alone to look on until dusk. Arriving, they found that they could not penetrate the crowds under the arbor and that the only space was in back of the screen against which the dancers rested when they broke away from their torture. They pushed aside the leaves that covered the screen and looked in between the willow uprights.

The dancers were facing due west now, for the sun was on its way to setting very soon. They looked ready to drop but they still danced on, determined to see it through. Suddenly Prairie Flower grasped Waterlily by the arm. "Look there, cousin," she said very excitedly. "Isn't that the young man everyone is talking about? It must be—see the fresh wounds on his shoulders!"

It was indeed. Watching him dancing, the girls were choked up with both pity and admiration. “Isn’t he wonderful?” they asked each other. “Think how much he must love his father, else he would not have vowed a vow too big for him, forgetting himself.” “How reckless, how daring!”

His appearance shocked them. Could this be that carefree and personable singer at the Omaha sitting only a few days ago? Surely he knew what was ahead, even then, and yet how cool he had been as he led the singers, even exchanging jokes with them. And now look at him—so gaunt and weary! It was plain he had not eaten for days; everyone knew that the candidates for the Sun Dance fasted a good while even before the actual dancing—five or six, or maybe ten days. “How hungry he must be now!” Prairie Flower cried. “Yes,” said Waterlily, “Hungry—and thirsty. Oh, the poor thing!” She almost wept for him.

As the sun momentarily rested on the horizon, just before commencing to go under, all the dancers extended their arms toward it and moved open palms from side to side while holding their arms stiff, the usual gesture to attract the attention of someone in the distance. This was a final entreaty, or perhaps a farewell, as much as to say, “We have done our best.”

At that moment both girls saw the tiny shape of a woman attached to the little finger of the young Lowanla’s left hand. Some of the other dancers had similar tokens of rawhide representing their private desires. It could be that Lowanla had been imploring for the recovery of some sick woman relative—a sister, say—and then again it might be that he was praying for a charm to capture an elusive girl. Men prayed for all manner of things in their hearts.

The girls said nothing of the figurine, each hoping the other had not seen it. And for a while they stood there, whispering of this and that. Though nothing interested them in the least, they tried to be very casual as they looked over the scene. Suddenly the whole exciting affair went dead.

“Let’s go now, while it is still light,” Waterlily suggested. On the way she confessed, “I’m tired of visiting. I hope we go home right after this is over.”

“Me too,” her cousin agreed, and added tactlessly, “Sometimes I wish I hadn’t come, when I ache to see my mother. I’ll be glad when we start back.” Then she remembered she had come on Waterlily’s invitation and had honestly enjoyed everything. So she hastened to add, “But I am glad I came. We have seen so many new things to tell about. I think the best part was our visit in the stockade where the American soldiers live. What did you like best?” For Palani had taken the two girls to visit the trading post and watch the soldiers drill on horseback. The tour had been full of surprises.

As they neared their tipi, Waterlily remarked, “I am tired of the Sun Dance and the crowds. After all we are young yet. It is the old people who think so highly of it. I’ll be glad to stay home tonight.”

“Me too.”

They occupied a tipi with their grandmother and the two children Smiling One and Ohiya. Only Little Chief slept in his parents’ tipi and came in occasionally for meals, being gone somewhere with other young men on horseback most of the time. The girls hardly saw him. The children were sound asleep but Gloku was still out, no doubt sitting in a friend’s tipi for a

while. She was an insatiable visitor and made friends without trying.

The sounds of the dancing reached them and the two girls lay awake listening for a time. The insistent drumming and the endless staccatos of the dancers' whistles were clear enough at night, but the singing was remote. "Just think," Waterlily observed, "even while we sleep and dream that goes on without stopping ... and each whistle means the tired dancers are still blowing and those white plumes are still shooting out and then falling, as if they were alive." Prairie Flower was not so impressed with the dancers' endurance, being too sleepy to comment.

"Wouldn't you imagine they'd give up from weariness?" Waterlily asked after a while.

"It is because they are praying," Prairie Flower explained vaguely, yawning. A moment later she was asleep.

Waterlily lay very still but wide awake. At last she sat up and as quietly as possible began putting on the moccasins she had pulled off a short time before, fearful all the while that her grandmother might return and ask her what she was doing. But there was no sound of her approach though the girl strained to hear. She would be coughing a little as she came; she always did, from habit.

All reasoning stopped for Waterlily. Mechanically she located the tiny tin bucket that Palani had bought for her at the trader's because she admired it so much, and now she poured water into it and fitted the lid on tight.

She stole outside, holding the bucket under her wrap, and stood studying the stars and the moon absently. There was still time for retreat. She stood immobile, as though her feet were pegged to the ground. If her grandmother came now and saw her standing there, she would suppose Waterlily had been waiting for her. But there was no sound of her returning. Waterlily began to walk away from her tipi, experimentally, a step or two at a time. And then first thing she knew she was running—straight toward the center, unaware of the people who passed her, for many people were about, coming and going.

She stopped behind the screen in the rear of the lodge where she and Prairie Flower had watched earlier. Some young women were there, waiting. When the dancers came to their sagebrush couches to rest, the women quickly passed small bowls of water to their sweethearts, who as quickly received them, half knowing they would be offered. How skillfully it was done! Waterlily coveted the young women's coolness; would that she could be so cool.

After sunset the rest periods allowed by the mentors came at reasonable intervals though they did not last long. Soon enough the mentors called their men into line again. It seemed as though they had hardly stopped dancing, especially since the singing went on all the time.

The young women left immediately and Waterlily remained there all alone. And now the dancers were seating themselves again, but in the half-shadow she could hardly tell one from another at first. Compared with the young women who had expertly given a drink to waiting hands, she felt very insignificant and naïve. And she felt ashamed, too, knowing she had no right to be here, that no one was expecting her. Nevertheless, she crept along the base of the screen, occasionally pushing the elm leaves apart and peering into the stalls to find the youth

named Lowanla. If only she could see the marks along his shoulders! If only the drying leaves did not crackle loud as thunder each time she touched them! After nearly three days in the hot sun they had curled around the edges and were brittle. It frightened her so that she had to wait a moment to regain her courage. There! That was he! She was sure of it. The shape and pose of his head was unmistakable.

Now was the moment; it was now or not at all. Working the willow uprights wide enough apart with sudden strength in her fragile fingers, she managed to force the little bucket inside. Then with a stick she began pushing it cautiously along, bit by bit, until it sat almost touching the dancer's left hand, flat on the ground behind him as he braced himself in a sitting position.

Suddenly he moved and brought his hand back down again, squarely on the water. But he did not take it. He only stared at it for what seemed ages. Then, unexpectedly and with amazing agility for one who had known torture that day, he sprang back against the screen and tore away the leaves savagely to see who had brought a secret drink to him.

But Waterlily was already running as hard as she could toward her tipi, her wrap pulled up over her head to hide her face. He could not have pursued her if he would. It was not allowed for a Sun Dancer to leave the scene on a whim; he must stay and see it to the end. And the screen was too firm for a man to break through, even if it had been allowed. Even so, Waterlily ran every step of the way as though wild beasts were at her heels.

Expecting the worst, she stole into her tipi. Miraculously, Gloku was still out. So she crawled in next to Prairie Flower, who slept innocently on, and lay down, utterly exhausted in body and spirit. Her heart pounded in her ears and jarred her frame, and even the ground, it seemed. Shortly after, the grandmother came in and prepared for bed. Then, as was her custom, she made a quick bed check, asking, "Is everybody asleep?" The silence she took for an answer in the affirmative. Satisfied that all was well with her grandchildren, Gloku lay down and was promptly asleep too.

"Why did I? Oh, why did I?" the question repeated itself in Waterlily's mind, over and over again. She could not find any answer. But she made a vow: "Even if I should live to be a very old woman, never, never will I tell anyone what I did tonight! Never!" She felt very bad and was very tired. She was all mixed up inside. Even the terrible pity that drove her to such an astonishing performance no longer seemed to explain it satisfactorily. And suddenly she felt she never wanted to see that singer Lowanla again.

It had been a long, full day, confusing and wearying. Gradually the sense of guilt was overpowered by physical need and she slept. Before dawn everyone was up, hurrying about to be on hand for the closing rite. Gloku woke the girls and they went drowsily along beside her. "Come, nobody should miss this who is old enough to understand," she told them, but they scarcely heard.

The Sun Dance lodge stood wilted and silent, a little shabby, like any deserted stage. All movement had ceased. The last relay of singers had withdrawn. Only the dancers, having kept their long vigil and survived their ordeal, were there, sitting far back on their sagebrush couches, in separate stalls. Numb and forspent, they looked devoid of any strength or will ever to stir again.

The spectators' circular arbor was still as death. The throng waited in a universal hush for

what was about to follow. Indeed, the very world itself was hushed with expectancy in the predawn air so fresh and bracing. In the west the night was dying. The lacy, fading moon hung low against the dark sky. But the east was aglow with the promise that just below the horizon the sun was waiting to begin its daily ritual.

This was the intercessor's moment. Out of the shadow he emerged and walked swiftly to the sacred pole. He stood by it for a moment or two and then, with startling suddenness, he flung wide his arms and clasped them about the pole with all his might while his limp body hung inert from it, his head almost straight upside down, nearly touching the ground.

Breaking his many hours of complete silence, he lifted up his voice and wailed as he hung thus. He wailed a great corporate petition—that all the needs and hopes of the people, for which the dancers had paid in full by fasting and vigil, even by physical pain, might be granted. He wailed with an importunacy that would not be denied.

This was the unspeakably holy moment, the climactic event towards which the whole colorful drama had been moving since the first simple preliminary rites days ago. It was the holiest moment in the life of the people, for it had to do with their very existence. Here and there were those with desperate needs and they softly wept with the priest.

At last he stopped and sat down at the foot of the pole, beside the buffalo skull, to wait for the sun. Meanwhile he filled his pipe and smoked leisurely, his eyes on the east. The people, too, gazed toward the east, that they might see the first sight of the miracle. And as they waited, the dazzling, powerful sun began to appear, unhurried but sure, in its own time. Instantly it sought and touched with blessing everyone there, young and old, rich and poor alike, wrapping them in new life and warmth.

When it was well up, and not before, the crowd dispersed and began to thin out. Avoiding common talk, the people radiated from the Sun Dance lodge toward their own tipis, confident, because they had faithfully kept all vows, that for the ensuing year misfortune would skirt their borders. Last to leave were the dancers and their mentors and the priest, each man going alone and without ceremony. The lodge, with its sacred pole pointing skyward far above it, would remain until demolished by the elements. None would presume to take the wood for secular use, for it was holy.

Everything had been done with punctilious care and order, and, especially, with one mind and one heart. Therein lay the power of the Dakota Sun Dance. "Surely, surely now the people will live."

CHAPTER 12

After the thoroughly gratifying visit of the two men in fellowship, Rainbow brought his family home. They came laden with many pieces of woven goods, flannels and calicoes, in brilliant reds, blues, yellows and greens, and these were the special desire of all the women and girls. They brought various other manufactured articles, and these, too, were avidly admired by their people. When, as was customary, her friends brought courtesy foods to Blue Bird and she gave them return gifts, those gifts were novel indeed: dress-length material, or a bowl of china or metal, a dipper, a kettle, or perhaps an ingeniously made water keg.

The red flannel was particularly prized and used in ceremony. Where a piece of deerskin touched up with soft red earth paint had answered before, and well enough, now flannel strips were tied to a stick and planted wherever people prayed, and these were left to flutter there until they rotted. In rites involving a buffalo skull, streamers or neat bows on the horns were a new adornment as well as a symbol of consecration of it, a novel touch indeed, combining ancient custom and new material.

Seeing the new, fine things that were brought back, many families of White Ghost's village, who had been content to stay there for all time, now began planning trips to the settlements along the Roiled Water, where, as Rainbow and the others said, the traders' stores were crammed with treasures carried upstream by the fireboats that plied the river. And then in a short while such things as knives and axes and utensils of metal, not to say firearms, were familiar articles.

But the introduction of white man's goods, exciting as it was, could not overshadow a recent scandal in the camp circle that was creating a great to-do as the travelers returned. A young woman from a good family had eloped with a philanderer who, after keeping her with him in the hills for several days, had left her to return home. That was a tragedy for her, for her reputation would always suffer because of it. There was no real forgiving such a step.

Blue Bird, who was concerned that Waterlily should never make that kind of mistake, took the occasion to talk to her, using the unhappy young woman as an object lesson. As they walked along to the river to wash, Blue Bird said, "My daughter, you are growing into a very attractive young woman. I want you to see what happens to a girl who is not careful of herself. She did not think in time, and now she must pay for her carelessness.

"I want you to remember certain things: When a man talks to you, do not commit yourself at once. Do not be hasty to consent, no matter how charming you think he is. He may be only playing at courtship. Many do, to try a woman out. If she is too easy, they do not want her for life, knowing they cannot trust her.

"Above all, remember this: *he* must see you and decide he is interested—not you, him. If by

your actions you force him to notice you, you take a big risk. Forced attention is not lasting; in time he will resent your having tricked him. Even if you are greatly attracted to a man, you must not go after him. That is a man's part; a woman's is to be pursued."

It was a good thing that it was twilight. Waterlily was hot with shame and dared not speak lest her voice betray her embarrassment. Maybe she had tried, just a little, to attract that singer at the Omaha sitting. Maybe he would not have noticed her at all if she had not been so conscious of him. Maybe he saw her look at him first, from the corner of his eye.

"Let a man show he wants to know you; it is unbecoming for you to seek him out or get in his way, and it is never safe. For if you do, you will pay for it." The same thing over and over, in almost the same words. But there was no need of that. Waterlily knew all too well. Hadn't she sent water secretly into the Sun Dance, for a strange boy whose very features she could hardly recall now? What if her mother knew that!

"Never let a man take you anywhere alone, either with sweet words or by force. Some rough men will try that last. But only if a girl is foolish enough to get in their way. Remember this: your purity is without price; guard it well. Then your husband will be happy to think, 'I am of all men most fortunate, for I have married a virgin.' Men do not like a discarded woman any more than you like a discarded gown."

Blue Bird admonished her daughter with deep earnestness, for she remembered well her own foolish risk in eloping with Star Elk when she was very young. Only because he took her straight home as his wife did he save her from lasting shame and censure. She had that one reason to feel kindly toward him, or at least grateful.

Waterlily could not sleep from thinking things over in the light of her mother's words. She decided that she would forget everything relating to that youthful singer. After all, he didn't try to find her. He might at least have ridden past her tipi or gone where he could capture her attention. Yet he had disappeared completely, though Rainbow's family had remained with Palani several days after the festivities and he had had time.

She was able to examine herself sanely at last. Yes, she had been a little fool; she had been false all the while her mother believed her to be so docile and exemplary, and that was very bad. Well, starting tomorrow, why not be what her mother thought her to be? After all, she had done nothing really wrong, had she? It would be quite simple to act maidenly from now on. She would never allow herself to be so enchanted again, by anyone.

She guessed she would never marry. Of all the local boys, the handsomest were her relatives, anyway. She would be a perpetual virgin—a true one, like White Dawn, not a sham, like Night Walker. Then, as she grew older, everyone would respect her character. She knew what people said, in a snide way, of Night Walker, and what they thought of White Dawn.

She had always admired the exquisite White Dawn. Though no longer young, she was still beautiful and commanding. Unlike Night Walker, who was continually announcing herself a virgin, White Dawn needed no reason to talk of her status; she was one with it. In her family group, which was large and influential, she was actually its central figure. She was respected and nearly worshiped there, and looked to for her wise judgments in all knotty family problems. It was said of her—Rainbow had once said it in Waterlily's hearing—"There's a real woman, one whom no man could besmirch with false accusations. Let anyone try!" She

was poised and happy and kindly, too. Many men had tried to marry her in her youth, as everyone knew, but this was the life she had chosen. It was her vocation and she was content.

Was Waterlily so worthy? Yes. After all, what had she done but give water to a thirsty man? She too could be a perpetual virgin and then she too would have first right at all Virgins' Fires, rituals at which women swore oaths to their purity, publicly daring men who knew otherwise to expose pretenders. And always the planners of ceremonials would beseech her to carry the sacred pipe ahead of the religious processions, that her indisputable purity might add a blessing to them. She too would be able to move with ease and serenity, and to look any man in the face without flinching. Yes, she could still do all that. And so she would remain all her life—a perpetual virgin, carrying the sacred pipe, wearing a spotless gown.

As it turned out, it was her elder cousin, Leaping Fawn, who became a perpetual virgin. From the beginning she had been a serious-minded, dependable girl. In courtship she was always too wary to become involved in even a simple conversation with a would-be suitor, lest by ingenious twisting of her words he might extract from her a consent to marry him. If a girl unwittingly said yes to some commonplace question, a certain type of man took it arbitrarily for an answer to a proposal of marriage.

Most suitors could tell well enough when a girl was only acting hard to get and when she really wanted to be let alone. Since Leaping Fawn wanted to be let alone, she considered it beneath her to engage in finessing, in scheming and designing more or less plausible excuses to be available. From the beginning she avoided men who wanted to court her. In all respects she had the makings of a contented lifelong virgin.

And so it was a deathblow to her when some stupid fellow confused another girl with Leaping Fawn because they happened to wear similarly ornamented wraps, and released the boast that the elder niece of Rainbow had consented to marry him. The story was on everyone's tongue. Some women, who admired Leaping Fawn's sweet and dependable ways, were genuinely dismayed at this gossip about her. Others, who were nervous over their own flirtatious daughters, were glad enough to hear it. "Well, she is a woman, isn't she? Women are weak sometimes. Why not she?" they said insinuatingly, eager to interpret the story in its worst light. "No longer may she pose as a pure girl. She must have been out with him or he would not have said that about her."

Leaping Fawn was completely crushed by all the talk and wept in secret until Blue Bird, as her aunt, offered to arrange a Virgin's Fire for her—if she wanted it. "Oh, yes, Aunt," Leaping Fawn sat up eagerly at the suggestion. She had been stabbed by her two mothers' silence, as though they believed the story. But they were only dubious and would not speak at once either to defend or to accuse her. They seemed to be saying, "Maybe, after all, our training was not enough. Maybe the young man's claim is sound. The best of girls sometimes make a slip. Mothers can only tell them; they cannot follow them everywhere. We must wait for Leaping Fawn to speak." Did they have so little confidence in her? That was what hurt Leaping Fawn.

But now, as soon as Blue Bird told them what Leaping Fawn had decided, they went into action, much relieved that she dared to hold the ceremony to clear her name. An exclusive feast was planned, with only virgins as guests. When all was ready, the old grandfather proudly walked around the camp circle bidding them to come. A little grandson of his led him about,

holding onto the further end of his cane.

“Here ye! Hear ye! There is to be a Virgin’s Fire,” he proclaimed. “My grandchild is calling in her peers. All true virgins, come ye and feast together with her in the open. So shall you vindicate yourselves again from the idle tongue of covetous men. Come! She whom we call Leaping Fawn is about to kindle her Fire.”

The Virgin’s Fire was not a religious practice but a social event, and it was held irregularly, as the need arose, to protect the reputation of the unmarried girl from unfounded rumors. Except for the formality of handling the tokens of purity, which lasted but a moment, there was no set procedure.

From many quarters the rightful guests set out, dressed in their best and looking festive indeed. Most of them were girls and young unmarried women. Only a very few were elderly, for perpetual virgins were a rarity, since it was the normal and accepted thing for women to marry. They began drifting toward Leaping Fawn’s home. They alone would feast, but many married people came to look on and brought their children along. Behind them, watching from a distance but no less attentively, were the curious men of courting age. These stationed themselves as an unofficial jury to decide the claims of purity implicit in taking part.

The fire, kindled by Leaping Fawn as was proper, was burning beside a huge rock painted red. Next to it were an arrow and a knife stuck into the ground and standing vertical. The guests first reached into a hole in the ground and next grasped the arrow lightly near the base with forefinger and thumb and stroked it gently upward. They did the same with the knife, all the while resting the left hand on the rock. That was the formality. After that they took their places in a circle and chatted informally until everyone was through and ready for Leaping Fawn’s entrance. It was said that touching the arrow meant “If I am unworthy, may I be shot with one like this!” and the knife, “If any man accuses me falsely, may he be stabbed!” The fire, the rock, and the hole in the ground were the elemental witnesses to this act.

While Waterlily and Prairie Flower sat waiting after they had gone through with the formality, they observed the girls still crowding about for their turn. There was nothing solemn or timid about them, though they were never hilarious in public. They whispered and jostled one another, joking in mock deference—“You go first!” “No; you!” “But I am afraid! I might be challenged!”—only pretending to hold back because they were sure of themselves. Among them was one strikingly handsome girl, very tall and slim and gowned even more elaborately than the others, but who acted diffident and nervous. Waterlily remarked on this to her cousin, who observed it, too.

In due time all the virgins were seated and all talking stopped. The high point was here. Leaping Fawn stepped quickly from her tipi and walked directly to her Fire. There she stood motionless for one lingering moment while all eyes rested on her. She was allowing ample time for the one who had tarnished her reputation to step forward and challenge her. But he was not even there, having already seen his mistake. At last Leaping Fawn bent reedlike over the symbols of chastity and almost caressed the arrow and the knife as she stroked them, so sure of herself was she.

Then she joined her guests, and amid laughter and pleasant chatter they feasted on the special foods prepared for them. Suddenly all conversation stopped abruptly, and while

Waterlily looked around to see what was the matter, a young man grabbed the beautiful strange girl and pulled her out of the circle, saying, "You have no rights here. Come away." The confusion obscured what happened next. Waterlily was afraid to see. But when again she dared look, the girl was sitting back of the circle with her wrap pulled over her head in shame and the man was gone. The virgins resumed their talking and feasting but did not allude to their disgraced member. When they got up and left the scene she went also, losing herself as best she could among them.

It was frightening to Waterlily and Prairie Flower. "Poor girl!" Waterlily said. "And she was so beautiful, too. I am sorry for her." Prairie Flower was not so sure. "Well, she asked for it," she said callously, unable to sympathize one whit. "She will never be able to live this down. People will talk about her the way they talk about Night Walker, won't they?"

White Dawn was chief guest and as always she gave strength and dignity to the ancient ceremony. But Night Walker was conspicuously absent, on the plea that she was called to another camp circle. No one was fooled by that. Eyebrows were raised and cynical smiles suppressed.

This proved to be Waterlily's only participation in a Virgin's Fire, for she was no longer eligible when next someone found it needful to defend her honor. But as an onlooker she had no cause for shame, since she was married properly, and according to the highest form. Waterlily was bought.

Not long after Leaping Fawn's successful vindication, Gloku, the beloved grandmother, died after a short illness and was mourned by the entire community. Surely it would not be enough simply to lay her body away and distribute her belongings and give away some horses in her name. She deserved something more, for she had been a potent personality, known for her good works through which she won everyone's heart. She had comforted the bereaved regardless of their station, and many had come to her for advice. Now that she was gone, hardly anyone but could remember that at some time or other she had reached him by her hospitality. Such a public benefactor left a void. Realizing this, the family could not let her go so completely and irrevocably at once. They must hold her back a while longer. They would keep her ghost.

Ghostkeeping was a long, sustained, laborious ceremony. Until the family was ready to give the ghost feast, accompanied by the redistribution of property at the close of the period, the ghost bundle must be guarded with relentless care in accordance with a ritual that might not be neglected even once. A slipshod ghostkeeping was worse than none. It brought nothing but dishonor to the dead and discredit on the family. For this reason, unless there was a woman relative who felt herself equal to the duty of custodian, it was better not attempted. And that duty was a grueling one.

While the woman lay dying, friends and relatives, and even strangers who had partaken of her many public feasts, waited anxiously around her tipi. They waited in quiet groups on the grass, intending to do her honor by helping with the initial wailing when she should die. The end came at dawn when, without gaining consciousness, she breathed her last. Immediately, as if on signal, a universal keening rent the air, lasting a long time. Just when it seemed to end, others arrived and began to wail. No one was expected to restrain himself; there was no virtue in control of grief over death as there was in control of all other emotions.

When things had quieted down at last, and while close women relatives dressed the body to lay it out in a special tipi, the blind husband of the dead woman called his children to him. He smoked in silence and they waited, knowing he had something to say. In his own good time he spoke to Rainbow. "Son, doubtless you are remembering how your mother loved you. How she gave full devotion to you, and to your two wives, and especially to your children, and spared nothing of herself or her means that they might be creditably reared. Now then, if you entertain any plans for honoring your mother, this is the time to say ..."

Rainbow sat as though he had not heard. He smoked for some time before he spoke: "Father, you are right. I am remembering everything my mother did for me. And I am thinking this: my mother shall not be gone from me all in a day. She shall linger here a while yet, residing in her own tipi."

The old man almost smiled in satisfaction. "*Haye! Haye!* Thanks be! Thanks be! That you should say that! It is what I was hoping. Your mother deserves nothing less."

Then he turned toward the sisters of Rainbow, "My daughters, it is easy enough to give things away. Property comes and goes and comes again. And it matters not that it goes, since it cannot endure but must decay, even were one to hold onto it with both hands. Who then would balance things that will not last, against one's parent? I know you are all equal to parting with your possessions to honor your mother. Yet there is a far more difficult part to ghostkeeping.

"Which of you is ready and able to take the part of custodian? For that is the heart of the matter. Think carefully, my daughters. Remember your daily obligations. Could you assume more duty? For it is better not to keep a ghost than to keep it poorly."

But before either woman could reply, it was Leaping Fawn who broke in. "Grandfather, some will say I am too young. But I want to keep my grandmother. I want to guard her ghost against abuse from any quarter, night and day, until she leaves us forever."

If ever a young girl gave promise that she could do this work, it was the dependable Leaping Fawn. Nevertheless, she was of courting age. Guarding a ghost was a settled woman's role. After all, it was only natural for girls to be courted and to marry. During the year Leaping Fawn could fall in love and be distracted from her duty. Then people would laugh at the family. "Weren't they foolish, entrusting an adult role to a mere girl? Now the ceremony is a failure, without a proper custodian." It would be a travesty indeed, for which the adults and not Leaping Fawn would be blamed.

But she had spoken out loud. The Great Spirit had heard. There was no recanting now. Dream Woman, realizing this, said: "She wants to do it and has said so audibly. Let her. I will stand by her, as will her aunt." She knew Blue Bird would never fail her niece.

At once White Hand, the holy man in league with the ghosts and known as a ghost dreamer, was engaged to cut a lock from the dead woman's hair. This was a solemn rite and must be done in private, before only the immediate family.

The women and girls sat on the right side of the tipi and the men on the left. The dead woman lay in their midst, with feet toward the entryway. While they waited for the ghost dreamer, the old widower remained outside, wailing and singing a dirge. The little children walked in and out and nobody sent them away. "Is grandmother sleeping so long?" one small

boy asked, and his mother whispered in his ear, "No. She is not sleeping. She is dead." "Oh," said the child, and dismissed the matter, satisfied with the answer. "Dead" was a meaningless word to him now. He would grow up hearing and seeing it and in time would understand it.

At last the old man entered with the ghost dreamer, who walked directly to the head and sat down. The old man, after feeling the ground, found his wife's feet and sat holding them. They were encased in handsome moccasins, worked all over, like a bride's or a child-beloved's. Sitting there, he addressed the dead: "My true, my special friend, harken! Your only son, your two daughters, your grandchildren, and me, you have left behind to go away from us. But we cannot let you go. We will hold you here yet a while at least.

"Harken! Your granddaughter, a mere child still, has taken upon herself the great task on your behalf. She says, 'I will supply food on behalf of my grandmother.' Pity her, for she makes herself worthy of pity." By "pity" was meant loving compassion, in the kinship sense.

"Harken! In this our undertaking may the heart of the entire camp circle be kindly disposed toward us. May a ring of sympathy narrow down to a point here.

"And now, pity me, too, for I am worthy of your pity ... That is all." He let go of the feet and never touched the body again.

The ghost dreamer separated a lock of hair from the dead woman's head and cut it off close to the scalp with a very sharp blade. He wrapped it in a small piece of skin painted blue, loosely so that the hair could be seen. Then he hung it on the center rear pole above the reach of children. Those who came in to look at the dead lowered their voices to a low whisper and moved reverently, always. But when they saw a "ghost" present in the room, they did so even more. When the body was taken away for burial, the ghost dreamer "buried" the hair in its loose wrapping inside a larger bundle that contained in addition certain essential articles. They were four pipes, four knives, four awls, and four disks of abalone shell like enormous buttons, such as holy men wore at the throat by a string around the neck.

Indoors every night and during overcast days, this bundle hung from a low tripod set up in the honor-place, behind the altar. (The altar was a small square where the earth had been pulverized and its four corners were marked with tobacco bundles on sticks. Over the ground was scattered scarlet down that remained in motion all the time.) On sunny days the bundle was hung on a taller tripod outside the tipi. By it everyone knew this was a ghost lodge, and if they had to walk past it they maintained silence and went by reverently.

In a sense the ghost was both resident and hostess. Acting for it was Leaping Fawn, who lived on the women's side of the tipi while her grandfather lived on the opposite side, which was for men. They were the caretakers for the ghost. Sometimes Dream Woman or Blue Bird spent the night with Leaping Fawn. During the day either her sister, Prairie Flower, or her cousin Waterlily sat with her for a time.

Every day Leaping Fawn must fill the ghost's hospitality bowl with the best food possible and set it below the tripod on which the bundle was hanging, whether it was inside or outside the tipi. Anyone who wished was at liberty to come there quietly, eat the food, and go away again. The bowl must never stand empty; that was one of Leaping Fawn's responsibilities, although she did not have to cook the food. The women of the *tayošpaye* saw to that.

Sometimes men came to sit with the blind old widower. They smoked with him and talked in low tones, of commonplace matters sometimes, to entertain him. Even so, the etiquette in a ghost lodge was regulated by the presence of the ghost. All talk, conduct, and even thought must be controlled with reference to that. It was wrong to indulge in gaiety, to laugh loudly, to lose control of one's temper, or to talk slanderously of someone. It was wrong to act in an indifferent, essentially selfish manner. A constant awareness of the place and a subordination of self to it was required of all.

There were rules for carrying the bundle from one resting place to the other, and those rules were inviolable. Leaping Fawn observed them loyally from first to last, until as time went on the original skeptics began to marvel at her constancy.

But there was more to Leaping Fawn's duties than merely moving the ghost bundle according to rule and keeping the hospitality bowl filled at all times. With her two mothers, her aunt Blue Bird, and the other women relatives she worked in all her spare time, turning out many pieces of fancywork for the redistribution feast to come. Outsiders who had themselves successfully kept a ghost in the past were eligible to bring gifts and add them to the rapidly growing pile being accumulated. They were proud to help, because implicit in their right to do so was an honor to be prized.

But the privilege of helping was not restricted. Anyone who revered the dead woman and wanted to help also did so, coming into the ghost lodge and quietly leaving a suitable gift on the pile. It was all very gratifying. The old man called his children's attention to it. "See? This is what I prayed for when I said, 'May the heart of the entire circle be kindly disposed toward us; may a ring of sympathy narrow down to a point here.' It is as I prayed, and I am thankful."

Thus it became a camp-circle affair, because everybody had been touched by the dead woman's kindness and longed to reciprocate it in some way. Surely, judging from the countless proffered gifts, this redistribution was going to be the greatest that the people had ever seen. Everyone looked forward to it. Many went further by bringing more than one gift. If they brought one in the beginning of the period, they brought another, and another, as suitable articles came into their possession during the year through the constant flow of exchange.

Yet, sacrosanct as a ghost lodge was, camp moves must still be made for the common weal, and at such times the ghost must travel with the people. So it was that whenever the camp circle had to be moved to a new site, a fine horse belonging to Black Eagle, which he had dedicated to this burden, carried the ghost lodge and its contents. It was led by Leaping Fawn or some other woman relative, who walked or rode ahead of it. When the new site was reached, the first tipi that went up was the ghost lodge, where a new altar was at once prepared and the tripods set up. The hospitality bowl was filled and stood ready for the next guest.

Whoever sat down there to eat behaved as one should in a holy place, and when he finished he stole away, carrying away good thoughts about the remarkable woman whose deeds persisted even after her death. And thus did a feeling of goodwill spread throughout the circle. Yet just because the food was always ready and available to them, people did not hasten there to eat it. A nice restraint was becoming. Many of the guests were old people, who could always be counted upon to crave a good meal. But even they, if they took the food once or so during the period, thought that was enough. It was a holy feast. Only an unreasonable person, a fool,

would be seen eating there often.

Time did not stand still in the *tiyošpaye*; the daily life did not differ from the normal. That would be both unnecessary and impossible. Only the ghost lodge remained set apart. Secular life went on around it still, though nothing very boisterous was considered proper for any but small children, who naturally did not understand. It would be silly to restrain them. Visitors came and went, and the kindred families also came and went on their own business, such as it was. Courtship and marriage, birth and death, warpath and hunting, home-keeping and child-rearing—such things never altered. It was even permissible for the members of a *tiyošpaye* keeping a ghost to look on at community events, though of their own accord grownups generally preferred to limit themselves there, too, or not attend at all.

Underneath all that went on, the *tiyošpaye* never lost sight of that final event for which they were all responsible. They wanted to do things creditably, to give the best feast possible and to distribute many presents and fine horses. Thus they would truly honor their loved one and could let her go from their midst for good, without regrets, at the end of the ghostkeeping period.

CHAPTER 13

Gloku's death had occurred in late summer. All winter long Leaping Fawn had kept steadily to her task. Young as she was, she had sustained it like a stable, mature woman and for this she won the admiration of all. And now it was spring. The annual Sun Dance was only a little more than a moon cycle away.

Since the families were ready for the final ceremony, it was decided to hold it just before the move to the Sun Dance site, during those preliminary days that were always spent in greeting new arrivals and holding family ceremonies and rites all around the circle. It was Rainbow's idea. When he talked with his brother-in-law Black Eagle about it, he said, "It does not seem right for my niece to carry an adult burden any longer. So why not cut the mourning period a little short? Are we not ready even now to hold the ghost feast and redistribution? Why prolong the time?"

Black Eagle was in accord with that. "You are very right; we are well prepared. I have known of cases wherein families required two whole winters. Fortunately, ours is a big family and all the relatives are loyal and helpful. Then, too, we have countless friends who have helped." Both men agreed that it was largely the dead woman's own knack of friendship that had brought that response in her behalf.

The relatives all bestirred themselves and the plans were going well, when the two very handsome American horses that Black Eagle intended to give away in his mother-in-law's name, as a final, impressive honor to her, were found dead. The boys who tended the horses came in with the report. Some vicious or jealous person had stabbed them in the night.

It was useless to blame it on Crows or Mandans or other lurking enemies. They would never injure Dakota horses; they wanted them alive too much. No, this was the work of a spiteful tribesman.

Black Eagle felt his loss keenly. He had named those two extra-fine animals to be the chief gifts at the distribution. He had meant to start off by giving them away in his mother-in-law's name. It was to have been his last princely gesture to her. "If only I could know who did this," he said to his friends sitting with him. "If I could learn that it was not a responsible man of standing, but a natural fool, then I should be consoled. I should say, 'well, after all, he did not know any better; it was the same as an accident.' And then I could overlook it."

"Why don't you consult a diviner, my friend?" one man suggested. Black Eagle thought that a good idea; he might act on it later. But first he must find two horses at least as good, to give away. That was his immediate problem. It did not free him that through no fault of his own, the ones he had set aside for his mother-in-law to give away posthumously had been lost. He was still obligated.

This problem was preoccupying him while the womenfolk were toiling feverishly to get things ready and the ghost dreamer White Hand, who had been in charge since the start, was fasting and purifying himself in the sweatbath for his final duties. And then, at high noon, while all this was going on, Waterlily was bought.

Two strange women approached from the opposite side of the circle, each leading a very handsome horse laden with presents. The women were attractively gowned and they walked with purpose, heading directly for Black Eagle's group. They tied the horses outside Rainbow's tipi and then withdrew, saying nothing to anyone. All who saw them knew what it meant. Nor did it take long to learn who the women were. The go-between they had sent on ahead had found visiting relatives on the way and had stopped to see them. Belatedly he reached Rainbow's tipi with the necessary facts.

"Far to the south of here, Bear Soldier's people move regularly about the Black Hills region. From there comes a man of renown called Good Hunter to attend our festivities. He brings two of his three wives. And it is they who offer gifts for your daughter, that she may become the wife of their son, Sacred Horse."

He explained that Good Hunter was an uncanny marksman. Because of that, he was a very influential, well-provisioned man. He was able not only to take care of his three wives and their families, but also to maintain a large retinue of kinsmen besides. The son Sacred Horse was a child-beloved, and all three mothers set great store by him. His every whim they strove to satisfy. Their chief aim in life was to see him happy. Consequently, when he had chanced to say, that morning, that at last he had seen the girl he wanted, they quickly set out to bring fine presents for her, hoping to take her back to him when he returned from riding with his friends.

It was considered a high compliment to have such an offer. Old women sometimes recalled with obvious pride, "I was bought." But Waterlily was only stunned to have this happen to her, and without warning. She did not want to marry just now, and this was not the way she fancied it would be—without any romance. And worst of all, she had no idea what sort this Sacred Horse might be. He might be quite ugly, mean, stupid, stingy, or old; he might have mannerisms that would disgust her. Why, he might not really want her. Maybe he was joking when he spoke of her. His mothers need not have taken matters into their own hands. Maybe when he found out what they had done he would call the whole thing off—and would not people laugh at her!

Waterlily had long since forgotten she was going to be a perpetual virgin. Life was getting more exciting all the time. If she and some of her girl friends went to the woodgathering place at sunset, just for the fun of skillfully dodging the eager young men who would try to court them, it was she who had to dodge the largest number of suitors, for she was a popular girl. Last night, now. Some who tried to speak with her had been total strangers, visitors from far away. Could this Sacred Horse be one of them? It quite bewildered her—so many unanswered questions! So many eyes upon her suddenly!

She was worried on another score, too. Ought she to accept so that her devoted brother Little Chief could have those handsome horses? That would be one big way of showing her high regard for him. "Well, for him I would, I should." At the same time she wished there were some other equally impressive gesture she could make that would not be so final and decisive for her.

She sat thinking in the tipi while the gift horses waited outside for her answer. And then Prairie Flower came in and told her, "What do you think cousin Ohiya said? He said he wished you would marry so he could have the bay!" Waterlily smiled wanly. Then Prairie Flower added, "But Little Chief overheard him and gave him a real going-over. 'What are you saying? We can get our own horses if we are men. Our sister does not have to marry against her will for our sake!' You should see the little boy hanging his head in shame." Waterlily smiled more brightly. That at least was settled; she need not marry to please her brother. She found her voice and began to talk naturally with Prairie Flower.

And so the horses stood untouched still. But later in the afternoon, Waterlily heard something else that made her start worrying over again. In the tipi of Dream Woman, her two aunts were talking as she approached. "Are they not handsome? They look as fine as those other horses," Dream Woman observed.

And her sister, First Woman, the outspoken one, said, "Yes—and it is too bad that our niece seems disinclined to marry the stranger. Those two horses might well have been the answer. He is having a hard time in finding replacement horses as good as the ones he lost. He is very particular and critical. He seeks only the best." She was of course referring to her husband, Black Eagle. The married usually referred to one another in that impersonal manner.

Dream Woman spoke up, "We do not yet know how our niece will decide, of course. But if she says no, we must accept it. That is as it should be. Some families, who set greater store by things than by kinship, might force their girls to marry. But ours is not that kind. In our family, Father says, no girl need marry unless she wishes. And he is right."

Waterlily turned away in confusion. Never before had she heard her aunts discussing either herself or her mother. Always they had been loyalty itself. But now, quite accidentally, they revealed that they rather wished the horses offered for her could be part of the give-away—if only she would see fit to accept.

"Well, why not?" Waterlily asked herself, recalling vividly how her grandmother had always treated her, with what love and tenderness. "From the first she cared for me at all times as one of her very own grandchildren. How good, unselfish, and long-suffering she invariably was!" Suddenly Waterlily was seized with a great obligation to honor the dead woman, a personal obligation. But was it also a kinship obligation? She would go to her mother to learn if she had a duty here which the tribe would expect her to fulfill. Blue Bird was the one to advise her; she had always done so, dispassionately, and had always been right.

The girl entered the tipi where her mother was at work and sank down beside her with a deep sigh. Blue Bird was very busy sorting out moccasins and tying the mates together face to face by their strings. These many moccasins she and the other women had made in wholesale fashion, without bothering to match them up at the time. Waterlily started to help. They must match in size and texture as well as in ornamentation. The mother and daughter worked intently in silence for a time.

Waterlily wished her mother would say something. At last she herself broke the silence. "Mother, my cousin tells me that she heard my elder brother say he did not want those horses ... he did not want me to marry unless I wished to. He thinks that highly of my happiness. He said men should get their own horses and not depend on the marriage of a *hakata*." (Waterlily

used the general term for a respect relative of one's own generation.)

Blue Bird smiled, a little sadly, as she said, "That is just like him. He has always been good to you, ever since he came to our tipi and began taking care of you. If he had been your real brother, he could not have been more devoted." Waterlily went on to repeat Prairie Flower's account of how Little Chief had reprimanded Ohiya for coveting the bay horse. Again Blue Bird smiled—but not as if the matter could be settled that simply.

Waterlily had to go all the way now. "Mother, tell me straight. Do you think I should agree to this marriage so that the horses can be used in the redistribution rites?" There, it was out. She held her breath for the answer. Surely her mother must say, "Certainly not, my child. We don't do things that way in this *tiyošpaye*. You do not have to marry unless you wish to!"

But Blue Bird remained silent for many moments. Then she spoke, choosing her words carefully. "Daughter, it is in the nature of things that women marry ... And some men, who seemed so appealing before marriage, turn out badly, and some, whose fine traits do not show up before marriage, turn out well ... It is like guessing in the moccasin game. One does not know till later."

Waterlily worked very rapidly, with a concentration out of all proportion to the simple task, and said nothing. Her mother spoke again: "As if from the dead, you and I and our old grandmother Killed-by-Tree came back here because this was where I was born. Our kinsman, my cousin and your uncle, made us welcome at once. He provided for us. His relatives through marriage had never seen us before, yet they did not act distant, but warmly took us into their life. Your new grandmother lavished as much love and compassion on you as on her own grandchildren. And she took constant care of you and kept you happy. I can truly say that you grew up on her back. For your ceremonies she always gave of her best, in your name. Thus she bought a great deal of social prestige for you.

"Now your uncle is worried because he cannot find horses good enough to replace the ones killed. He does not want just any horses. He wants the best, worthy of his mother-in-law.

"You are now of woman's stature and have come to woman's estate. You are no longer a child. You know how these kinship matters run. If you are able to do your own thinking, you will see what a good relative would want to do ... but that you have to decide."

So that was it. Blue Bird had first implied the crisscross of kinship obligations that held the people together, impelling them to sacrifice for one another. Then she washed her hands of the matter. Now it was up to Waterlily, having those facts before her, to make up her own mind.

Suddenly she felt elated, carried away with the nobility of kinship loyalty, until nothing else seemed important. Yes, she would marry the stranger. After all, she must marry sometime. And so she would be helping her uncle to honor his mother-in-law. He wanted to honor her—and that was noble of him. And he had always been good to Waterlily and Blue Bird. And the grandmother had loved and taken care of Waterlily from the beginning of their relationship. Waterlily was completely involved; she could not step aside. By enabling her uncle to use the horses for the give-away, she would be reciprocating the kindness and loyalty of both Black Eagle and the grandmother. To do this, she must sacrifice herself. The network of deserved loyalties seemed endless. It left her dizzy. But she knew now where she stood and saw clearly what she must do.

Going swiftly to the lodge of Black Eagle, she stood partway in the entrance and looked in. “Uncle, have the horses watered—for my grandmother.”

The men who sat with him spoke their approval. “How she loved her grandmother!” But Black Eagle said, “Thank you, my niece. But be very sure it is what you really want to do.”

“I *am* sure, uncle.”

Her aunt First Woman was plainly relieved. “How fitting! It shows what my niece thinks of her grandmother’s memory.”

When she said that, she had no idea how a chance remark of hers, overheard by Waterlily, had started the chain of reasoning that ended in her decision.

So it was settled. Some of the men of the *tiyospaye* untied the horses and led them away. Almost at once the news of acceptance was known round the circle. But Waterlily made one condition. “I will marry only after my grandmother’s ghostkeeping rites are finished. Till then, she comes first.” When that was reported to the family of Sacred Horse, they found it reasonable. After all, they would not be leaving until the Sun Dance was over, anyway. And then they would have a pretty new daughter-in-law to take with them on their journey southward. They were content to wait.

Very soon the girl friends of Waterlily began coming to see her, to find out how she felt about being bought. They were curious, sympathetic and romantic: Did Waterlily like the idea? If not, what a shame she felt she must accept! If so, how exciting to be sought out, and bought! They did not know whether they would care themselves to be bought. It was a great honor—in retrospect; older women admired the bought woman. Young girls were dubious.

“But don’t you know the boy even by sight? Haven’t you ever seen him, if only at a distance?” It was the inquisitive Alila who was most forthright, avid to know all the details.

“No,” Waterlily said, “and that was what bothered me so at first, but now I don’t mind very much. After all,” she went on, “it has happened before. I am not the only woman to be bought by a stranger. All I want is for my grandmother to be properly honored at the redistribution. Never mind about me.” She spoke this a bit tragically, enjoying her martyrdom for kinship’s sake in the zealous spirit often peculiar to young relatives.

“But really you are a bit worried, aren’t you? To be marrying someone you might not even like?” one girl asked earnestly.

Alila, who always took things lightly, came up with a solution. “Look, there *is* a way, you know. Why, you don’t have to go clear through with it. Just go to his home and let the family make a fuss over you. Accept that as if you liked the whole idea. But then,” she was very emphatic here, “but then, just before bed time, you can run away. If you don’t like the man, who could blame you for that? I knew of a girl once ...”

It was true that the rejection of a husband in a purchase marriage was not unheard of. To be sure, it was not in the noblest tradition to repudiate a promise, but it was condoned under certain circumstances. If a girl had been persuaded to accept, against her inclinations, because someone in her family wanted the gift horse, and if, before the marriage was consummated, she ran away, unable to accept the man, then the marriage was annulled. In such a case, the gifts were returned or not, depending on the character of the disappointed wife-buyer, who might or

might not be too proud to recover them.

But Waterlily knew that Alila's airy solution was not for her. The gifts had already been publicly accepted—because she had given her word. It would not be right to recant now. “A woman who once gives her word and then withdraws it is not honorable,” as Blue Bird's old grandmother had once told Blue Bird. The saying was often repeated to girls of marriageable age.

The day for the final ghostkeeping rites arrived. First there was the symbolic feast, which would be private, with only four girl guests partaking of the dead woman's last food. They had been selected by the old widower: Leaping Fawn, Waterlily, Prairie Flower, and Smiling One. However, that morning Smiling One was not feeling well, and Soft Little Breeze, another grandchild of the dead woman, was chosen in her place, though she was only six years old.

When Dream Woman and Blue Bird had finished dressing the girls it was First Woman who, with unaccustomed gentleness, spread their faces and the center part of their hair with an even film of red paint. Then she gave Leaping Fawn and Waterlily their rightful markings as child-beloveds. This was the third time Waterlily had worn them for occasions of great importance.

As soon as Leaping Fawn was ready, she was called out to hand over the ghost bundle. She entered the ghost lodge and brought it out to the man waiting at the entrance. It was by this time so large and heavy that she could hardly carry it, even with the broad shoulder strap that took some of the weight from her arms. All year long, whenever something exceptionally rare and beautiful and worthy was given by friends, it had been wrapped into the bundle, until the accreted load was the size of two very large pillows. With her surrender of the bundle, Leaping Fawn was finished with her self-appointed duty. At no time had she relaxed her vigil or neglected her exacting task. And now that it was out of her hands forever, she felt a little sad. The end of anything is a little sad. Already the ghost lodge without its unseen resident seemed very empty.

At the right instant, a woman who had herself kept a ghost (which fact qualified her) came for the girls, bearing in her hand a bowl of powdered incense. They followed her out and stopped at the outer end of the “Path of Beauty,” which extended about twenty paces from the ceremonial tipi. It had been made earlier, a carpeting of white deer and calf skins, with symbolic painting, laid end to end. Along either side, in matched patterns to please the eye, were placed such things as decorated pipes, awls, knives, tobacco bags, and moccasins, examples of the best in all-over work with quills of bright hues. The Path of Beauty was all new and very colorful.

While the girls stood waiting for the signal to walk, the crowd of visitors craned to see them. In slender white doeskin gowns long enough to brush the grass, they appeared very tall and slim. Their shiny black hair hung in two braids in front, adding to their appearance of height. The waists of their gowns were heavy with solid work extending to the ends of the loose open sleeves bordered with fringe. All their accessories were in harmony; the artistry of Dream Woman was never more evident. “Guests should wear their best, to honor their hostess.” The rule was here observed extravagantly.

Spaced somewhat apart, they began walking slowly over the Path of Beauty, the escort going before them and sprinkling their way with the sweet-smelling contents of her bowl. Here and

there in the crowd, women exclaimed in low voices at their striking appearance. Nor did the significant markings on the faces of Leaping Fawn and Waterlily escape them. “What pretty girls this *tiyošpaye* is raising!” “Did you ever see more perfect workmanship than there is on those gowns?” “See! The two tallest girls are beloved—note the *hunka* markings.” Such admiring comments were heard all about.

But this was a mournful hour for the family. To the visitors, it was as though they had come to witness a second dying of the good woman. Surely it was no time for levity; one ought not to look about for something to be amused at. All the same, it was needful to suppress an occasional smile over Soft Little Breeze. Last in line, she had taken much too literally the order to walk v-e-r-y slowly, until at times she was nearly stationary. Even so, she advanced with an exaggerated dignity that was comical, though she had to abandon it now and then to regain her position whenever the gap between her and Prairie Flower grew too wide. Then, with a hop and a skip, she would move forward, giving a swift kick to her too-long skirt (which had been made for Smiling One) if it tangled about her feet. Undaunted, Soft Little Breeze managed to enter the ceremonial tipi without tripping. Everyone was glad when she made it.

Inside, White Hand, the ghost dreamer, was in full command. He caused the four girls to be seated in the honor-place back of the altar, which had been decorated with quivering red down scattered over it. The constant motion of the down was a symbol of life, of spirit. There a large blue square of calfskin lay spread out, and each girl held a corner of it. In the middle of it was the holy food, a cake of pemmican.

The only spectators were the girls’ parents, their grandfather, who followed by ear only, and several outsiders whose previous record as faithful ghostkeepers was their right of entry. White Hand presented the pipe and, as the girls entered, he unwrapped the ghost bundle and hung the hair again on the pole in the center rear. There it hung as at the beginning, pitiful and alone, bereft of all the material things it had been accumulating all year—only to give away, as an expression of the precept “Be generous, for you cannot take material things beyond the grave.”

White Hand invoked the Earth, the universal Mother, the final source of all food, and thus of hospitality, in the following prayer:

Thou Earth, our Mother, esteemed by mankind,
Thou Earth, our Mother, compassionate toward all that move—

On this day, this perfect day of cloudless sky, On this day, have thou compassion on me, too,
That I may live, a long life, a good life. I believe it may be so; I have faith in thee; I rely on thee,
And so I attempt this rite.

Thou Earth, our Mother, esteemed by mankind!
Thou Earth, our Mother, compassionate toward all that move—
On this day, this perfect day of cloudless sky,
On this day, have thou compassion on me, too,
That I may live, a long life, a good life.
I believe it may be so; I have faith in thee; I rely on thee,
And so I attempt this rite.
Thou Earth, our Mother, esteemed by mankind!

Thou Earth, our Mother, esteemed by the Sun!

Thus he chanted the prayer, in behalf of the four guests. Next he took the cake of pemmican, which had been made with prescribed ingredients, and broke off a piece. He held it over the fire to incense it. As he laid it on Leaping Fawn's tongue, he said to her: "This food I deliver to you. This food, mixed with perfume leaf and redolent with incense, you shall hold in your mouth. And thereby you shall know that, in future, no matter who it is enters your tipi and sits him down, he shall be your concern. And for him you shall break in two what you might have eaten alone. So shall you share." In fact, the extending of hospitality was sometimes referred to as a "sweet-smelling deed."

To each of the others he gave the food, with these words. The ghost feast was calculated to touch impressionable girls. Overcome by the low weeping of their elders and the solemnity of the words, like a parting admonition from the dead grandmother's ghost, they felt that nothing on earth could be more important than the continuance of her spirit of hospitality. And now the responsibility would fall on them. Should her good deeds die with her? Never—if they could help it.

The ritual was over. Outside, the spectators, seated on the grass, were served a general feast of good food in superabundance. The women had come properly prepared, with a sack or other container for the food they could not consume there. It was the custom to do this; it was rude to leave anything that had been served. Guests must take it home for future enjoyment.

The redistribution followed. The average guest received some small gift, perhaps only a knife case or a pair of moccasins, but the special gifts were given for special reasons. The two fine horses made possible by Waterlily were given to White Hand in recognition of his devoted services all year.

The finest articles, which had been added to the ghost bundle from time to time, went to guests who had themselves once kept a ghost. And the symbolic articles, which were wrapped in with the hair at the beginning, were specially awarded, as was the custom. The four knives went to the four outside women who had come to assist in the preparations and had laid the Path of Beauty. The four awls were given to the four girls who, at the private feast, had eaten the ghost's perfumed food. They were a symbol of the womanly arts that the girls were expected to acquire.

The four pipes would be carried thereafter by White Hand and three other holy men selected by him; and the disks of abalone shell, known as "holy men's property" and permitted only to dreamers, would be worn by them. Sometime during the day, unnoticed, those four holy men took the "ghost" away. But where and how they buried it was their secret for all time. They were under religious compulsion never to reveal it.

Unlike the usual give-aways, always loud with praises and cheering, a redistribution was solemn and slow. In a sense it was no different in quality from the regular give-away custom of honoring one another with single gifts. But here in the redistribution it was epitomized, heightened, and crystallized in one magnified act of giving. The gifts given to friends were the things given by friends throughout the year to be added to the pile of goods the related families were amassing. In the redistribution, then, property was once more leveled. The blessing lay

not so much in giving or getting as in having a part in this, the dramatizing of corporate generosity.

That evening, after the last guests had left, the many relatives gathered around a common outdoor fire, weary but happy once more. They were grateful that all their friends had rallied to their undertaking. They were satisfied that they had done their utmost for their dead. Each with his own thoughts, they sat in quiet until the old man spoke a kind of valediction to close the year-long effort.

“Now at last it is enough; now at last we are satisfied.

“Now let her good spirit go freely hence to the land where spirits abide.

“We have caused it to linger with us for a spell; we have detained our loved one some seasons longer amid honor and reverence.

“We have enabled her to prolong yet a little longer that hospitality which was her chief delight.

“She has set one last example of generosity for the people.

“Now let her go in peace.”

The great encampment of a Sun Dance, so impressive and so full of life and activity during the days of celebration, always became a dismal sight at the close. The visiting groups began early to dismantle their camps and continued to do so, each at its own pace, all day long. As more and more departed, they left wide gaps in the circle—skeletal camps with only poles, posts, stakes, and the willow withes used in the construction of temporary shelters to take care of the overflow, all standing at crazy angles. Instead of the cheery open fireplaces that nightly glowed with welcome, only a continuous ring of ashes and dead embers remained.

By evening only the large section occupied by White Ghost’s camp circle stood intact. They had been the hosts; this was the center of their territory. At their own convenience they, too, would break camp and be on their way—but not until all the guests had departed. The last group to leave was that from the Black Hills region, and when they left, they took Waterlily with them.

Whatever her feelings, she was quietly ready when the two mothers of Sacred Horse came for her. Her womenfolk kissed her tenderly, while the men took her hand in farewell. Blue Bird held her to her breast for a moment and kissed her—but there were no tears. Tears should be controlled, except at a death. It was a bad omen if someone broke down over a mere parting. It meant that death would come to one or the other of those taking leave of each other before they could meet again.

When they were well on their way, Sacred Horse rode up and took the rope by which his mothers were leading the horse Waterlily rode. They surrendered it without comment. Only then did Waterlily recognize him. She had, after all, seen him before. Of course! He was that very well dressed young man at the courting hour the evening before the wife-buyers came with gifts.

Waterlily recalled that Alila had cried impulsively, “Will you look at that stranger! I hope he is headed my way!” And the other girls had said, “Why Alila, you shouldn’t say such things. It is not becoming,” but perhaps they were all hoping the same thing. At any rate, it was toward

Waterlily that he had walked, smiling and silent. But she had eluded him, as was the way of Dakota girls who had been properly trained, acting on the advice of their sex: “If he really likes you, he will try again and again—let that be the proof. Do not consent to him at once.”

Perhaps he would have tried again and again, but his indulgent mothers had got ahead of him. Anyway, here he was, riding beside Waterlily. She said nothing, and he did not try to make her talk. Thus they traveled, walking their horses so slowly that after a while they lost sight of the others ahead. It seemed as if they were all alone in the whole world, so vast and empty was the land. They would travel alone all the way home. As she thought of her own people, Waterlily felt so homesick that she pulled her wrap over her head and cried softly as she rode. After all, she was still only eighteen winters old and had never been alone with total strangers before. She could not adjust herself to the new situation without a few tears. But Sacred Horse must not see them. He must think she was just bashful of him.

Suddenly he spoke, almost stern in his haste, “Here, hold these,” and thrust the reins of both horses roughly toward her. It startled her so that while she fumbled for them, her blanket slipped down. She quickly raised it over her head again.

Already he was running off to one side, crouching low and setting an arrow to his bow as he ran. Near a cluster of wild plum bushes up the ravine he fell on one knee and let the arrow fly. Then he went around the bushes. The next instant he came back with a young deer slung over his shoulder. While he worked at tying it fast on his horse, he remarked casually, “There! Now we can have some fresh meat to broil our first evening.”

Waterlily said nothing, though she was no longer crying. She did not even feel lonesome, so busy she was admiring the expert way he had gotten the deer. But she continued to hide her face, not wanting the tear traces down her cheeks to show.

They rode on again in silence. After they had climbed the ridge and were going along over the uplands, he said, as though he were talking to a third person about her, “You know, she must be some relation to the deer; she cried because I killed it.” It was an indirect compliment, for in myth and belief the deer was the embodiment of feminine allure.

Waterlily laughed outright and he laughed with her. And then she began to feel more cheerful. It seemed to her that everything was going to be all right. He had been very kind and considerate of her, and very patient. She thought she would like him.