

Black Hawk's Warpath

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**Fagan struck the ground with a prodigious
thud.**

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BLACK HAWK'S WARPATH

CHAPTER 1

A Frontier Duel

“HEY, TOM! there’s a big hubbub amongst the Injuns!” exclaimed Ben Gordon to his twin brother, as he rushed into an unpainted, frame shanty in the frontier hamlet of Chicago. The two schoolboys had arrived from the east only the day before, keenly eager for a summer of western adventure.

“You don’t say, Ben! What goes on?”

“Two young braves, both sons of chiefs, are dead set on fighting a duel!”

Tom looked up soberly from the breakfast table.

“Whew!” he said, “somebody may get hurt.”

“Righto, but they’re mighty bitter, I hear. Have sworn vengeance.”

“What’s the argument about?”

“An Injun girl, I guess. Prettiest young squaw in the whole Chippeway tribe.”

Tom Gordon hastily finished his dish of stewed prunes, bolted a fat doughnut, drained his cup of black tea, and then joined his brother on the long porch which extended across the entire

front of the low, rambling building. The two sixteen-year old lads were identical twins, both long of limb, freckle-faced and red-haired. Each wore cowhide boots, into which were tucked baggy trousers of gray wool. In their leather belts were sheath knives. Flannel shirts of a bright blue shade completed their simple attire.

Across the narrow Chicago River, directly facing them and clearly outlined in the morning sun, was the frontier outpost of Fort Dearborn. The stockaded fort stood on a promontory, around which the river swept to the southeast, joining Lake Michigan about a half-mile below. Above the fort, built some sixteen years before, in the year 1816, the rude cabins, shanties and other buildings of the village were strung haphazardly along both banks of the stream.

Around the village and bordering on the lake, almost the entire neighborhood was a low, boggy prairie. A man could scarcely walk across parts of it, even in the driest summer weather. And at this spring season—late April was the month—the place was well nigh impassable, except by a few devious footpaths.

During the past few days, a great throng of Indians had come pouring into the vicinity of the fort. There were, altogether, some two or three thousand savages of different tribes, but mainly of the Pottawattomee nation.

“The Injuns have summoned a grand council,” explained a soldier, “to talk over the matter of a certain treaty that the Great White Father at Washington wants ’em to sign.”

All of the leading sachems of the region had come in, with the notable exception of Black Hawk, foremost chieftain of the Sacs, and there was much speculation as to the reason for his absence. The Pottawattomees were represented by such chiefs as Alexander Robinson, the son of a Scotch father and Indian mother, Sauganauneebee (Sour Water), Shaubena, Chepoi (the Corpse), and various others of lesser note.

Then, too, all of the principal traders of the region were on hand to deal with the Indians. Their tents and trading booths dotted the landscape, and helped to give the scene almost the festive appearance of a fair.

Tom and Ben Gordon now left their lodging shanty and hurried upriver past the village.

"There's a big crowd of savages over that way," pointed out Ben presently.

"Must be the place," was Tom's reply.

The big council, composed of all the leading chiefs of the principal tribes was already in session. Whirling Thunder, a Sac chief, and Shaubena, whose sons were involved, had turned the matter over to the solemn assemblage. The young Indian maiden, cause of the quarrel, was standing at one side with her father, the giant "Wampum," a famous chief of the Chippeways, who had his village some three hundred miles to the north in the vast, somber "pineries."

Tom and Ben had hardly arrived, when a coppery warrior got to his feet and launched an oration that seemed to the attentive boys to be both stirring and forceful. He was a tall, strong

savage, of handsome mien; he knew all the tricks of good oratory; his voice was deep and full-toned; and he accompanied his words with graceful and telling gestures. To the boys' surprise, however, his eloquence seemed to carry little weight. His fellow savages appeared to have small regard for his utterances. Hardly a murmur arose from the stolid circle about him.

But now there arose a stubby, thickset Indian with a stern, rugged countenance, who had sat smoking in stony silence. His speech was quite short, and it was delivered in a blunt, almost awkward manner. As an orator, he could not compare with the other; for he had neither the style nor the smooth flow of words. Yet his crude utterances bore heavily on his hearers. Nods of approval ran around the red circle; muttered expressions of agreement could be heard on every hand.

"How do you figure it out, Ben?" puzzled Tom.

"It's got me in a fog, Tom. Why, that tall chief talked rings around him!"

"Sure did. He had a real gift of gab."

A big frontiersman, evidently a veteran woodcrafter, who stood nearby, volunteered an explanation. He pointed out that the superb orator of the high-sounding words had in his hair only a single eagle feather, while the other, the thickest savage, had eagle feathers all around his head and trailing down his back to touch the very ground at his heels.

“You mean,” inquired Ben incredulously, “that the chief who can sport the longest string of pretty feathers has the most say-so?”

“Jest that,” smiled the affable stranger.

“But why?” questioned the doubting lad.

“Listen, younker! them purty feathers ain’t worn fer decoration mainly. Each one means a scalp that the chief has took in battle.”

“Oh, I think I see,” put in Tom thoughtfully. “A few words from this chief, who has taken many scalps, carries more weight than all the flowery oratory of a man who has no such fighting record to back up his talk.”

“You hit the bull’s-eye, boy. That’s jest it.”

The Indian council dragged along, and soon the listening twins began to tire of the seemingly endless round of speeches, not a word of which could they understand.

“They’re getting nowhere fast,” complained Ben.

“Oh, the big chiefs ’ll chew this thing over fer hours,” remarked the friendly frontiersman. “That’s Injun naitcher. Ther ain’t bigger wind-bags in the world than some o’ these here Injun chiefs. They run off at the mouth by the hour.”

“Well, Ben, if that’s the case,” declared Tom, “let’s drop back to the village for a bite to eat, and then return later.”

Accordingly, the boys left the savage chieftains to their long-winded harangues, and went down river to the fort. About mid-

afternoon, they heard that the youths had finally been brought before the wise men and informed that they would be permitted to fight as proposed, the winner to take the maiden as his intended wife.

“The duel is set for an hour before sundown,” a soldier told Ben and Tom.

As the fatal hour approached, the two brothers headed inland toward the designated scene of encounter. They found a turbulent concourse of several hundred Indians and whites banked around the place, a sandy flat dotted with a few clumps of hazel brush, about a mile beyond the swamps that rimmed the lake.

There wasn't long to wait.

“Here they come!” sang out Tom excitedly, some five minutes after their own arrival.

The two young gladiators cantered out, astride nimble Indian ponies, one black and the other a spotted little beast. Their leather saddles were gayly decked in beads, silver brooches, colored quills, and gaudy trinkets such as the traders bartered with the savages. Bright ribbons streamed from the ponies' manes.

“Say! that one on the spotted pony is a mighty trim-looking young brave,” spoke up Ben, in open admiration.

“That's Bright Star, son of Shaubena,” a bystander advised them.

Young Bright Star was, indeed, a lad of handsome face and lithe, graceful figure. He had a gay kerchief on his head; and further sported a shirt of lemon-colored calico, decked with many glistening ornaments. The deerskin leggings, which came up to his thighs, were very fancy, one legging being of blue and the other of deep scarlet.

“But zowie! look at the other Injun, on the black pony!” cried Tom.

“Sure is a tough-looking cookie!” Ben replied, with a low whistle of consternation.

“That must be the Prairie Wolf, Ben.”

“Wouldn’t doubt it, Tom. He really has the face to go with his name.”

The young savage was a big, raw-boned, ugly-looking Indian, with a sinister, bloated face. He had a striped kerchief of silk wrapped around his long black hair. Otherwise, he was naked to the waist. A pair of soiled skin leggings completed his dress.

“It’ll be murder!” groaned Tom. “Prairie Wolf looks strong as a bull.”

“He’ll be a wicked opponent,” agreed Ben, with a solemn shake of the head.

Crude flags had been stuck in the sand roundabout, marking out an arena; and gruff Indian guards now cleared this ring. Heading these guards, and likewise acting as seconds, were the great chiefs, Chepoi and Blue Jacket. A little outside the ring, all alone, was the dusky Indian princess. She stood erect and

motionless, with arms akimbo, seemingly indifferent to the fierce combat soon to ensue.

Preparations were now complete, and the two duelists headed their horses to opposite ends of the arena. Each youth had a long, sharp-pointed spear under his right arm, while on his left he carried a shield which appeared to be made of some sort of hide or skin.

“Those shields don’t look like much protection,” observed Tom dubiously. “Whew! see the keen points on those spears!”

“You’re wrong, boy,” asserted a grizzled trader, who stood at his side. “Them shields is so tough that lots o’ times they’ll turn back a musket ball. They’re made o’ buffalo sinews j’ined together.”

It was a nervous sight to behold the two resolute Indian youths, sitting erect in their saddles with muscles tensed, while their fractious little ponies neighed and pawed the ground in impatience.

Finally, however, a stalwart redskin uttered a piercing yell that rolled out across the flat like thunder.

“The starting signal!” cried Tom Gordon, his voice fairly throbbing with excitement.

A wild, barbaric shout arose from the crowd as he spoke. The spears of the rival duelists were at once leveled. Their moccasin heels dug sharply into the ponies’ flanks, and the high-strung little animals darted forward like arrows from the bow.

“They’re off!” Ben yelled hoarsely.

Across the hard, sandy flat came the flying hoofs, the fleet ponies traveling at express speed. The intrepid young warriors were rushing upon each other at full gallop. The intervening space narrowed with lightning swiftness, and in a trice the pair met full-tilt in the middle of the ring with a shock the sound of which was plainly heard in the distant village.

Crash! the two contestants were violently dismounted by the fearful impact.

“They’re both done for!” said Tom, in a low, tense whisper.

“No!” Ben shook his head in quick denial. “Look! one is getting up! he seems unhurt!”

“It’s Bright Star!” arose the cry among the straining onlookers.

True enough! young Bright Star sprang briskly to his feet, untouched by the deadly lance. The hulking Prairie Wolf, however, lay inert among the sand and dry leaves, knocked senseless by the fall, and with a spear wound in his shoulder.

The doughty young victor now whistled to his pony, leaped gracefully to the animal’s back, and then swooped down toward the Indian girl who still stood like a statue, at the outskirts of the circle of spectators. As the boy chief neared the maiden, he leaned from the saddle with practiced skill, passed his sinewy arm around the girl’s waist, and deftly lifted her to a place on the pony’s back before him. Then, with a fling of his arm and a last, exultant whoop toward the onlookers, he shot

away across the barren plain toward the wigwams of his tribesmen.

CHAPTER 2

Bill Brown, Border Scout

AFTER the finish of the Indian duel, Tom and Ben Gordon started back toward the village by the fort. The fresh, perfumed air of early spring was blowing out of the west, sweeping in from the hundreds of miles of wide, clean prairie lands that stretched away to the distant Mississippi and beyond. Redbud trees were putting forth their first pink blossoms, and the butter-colored dandelions were here and there beginning to fleck the grass. A sunset of an extraordinary brilliance made the western sky glorious.

“Well, if it ain’t my young friends, the twins!” suddenly boomed a cheery voice from behind them.

The two boys turned abruptly. What with the soft earth path they were following, they had not noticed the approach of anyone, but now they quickly saw that the newcomer was the tall frontiersman whom they had talked with briefly at the Indian council that morning.

They beheld a man not only of six-foot height, but also uncommonly big of bone and evidently very powerful. He had brown, curly hair, rosy cheeks and a superb set of even, white teeth. His dress was all of deerskin, except that on his head was a raccoon skin cap, with the short tail hanging down behind. A

knife was in his belt and he was plainly a man of resolute character, but he had a smile of such wonderful friendliness, and his tone of voice was so cordial, that the hearts of the two eastern lads warmed to him at once.

“An’ what did you think o’ the Injun duel?” he continued.

“Quite a fight,” acknowledged Ben.

“And the right fellow came out on top,” added Tom, with evident satisfaction.

“I kinda think so,” the frontiersman agreed. “From what I hear, that Prairie Wolf is a nasty one, ’bout the wust young ruffian in the hull Sac tribe.”

“Do you suppose this duel will make bad blood between the Sacs and Pottawattomees?” questioned Ben.

“It no doubt will, as they is pizen enemies to start with. The tribal lands o’ the two touch each other, an’ ther’s alus a ruckus goin’ on over who’s gittin’ on whose territory.”

“Bright Star will have to watch his step,” Tom observed sagely. “The Wolf looks like the type who will plot his vengeance.”

“I wouldn’t put it past him to knife the Pottawattomee in the back, some dark night,” Ben put in.

“Well, jest ’member, lads, that ther wouldn’t be anythin’ wrong with that, ’cordin’ to Injun law. They believe strickly in an eye fer an eye, an’ a tooth fer a tooth. The white man’s code is beyond the understandin’ of a feathered savage.”

“Do you think,—err—?” Tom began.

“Oh, I’m beggin’ yer pardon,” broke in the frontiersman genially. “I’m Bill Brown, an’ I came ’rig’nally from Kentucky, but I’ve been a hunter an’ trapper an’ scout up this way fer the last ten years.”

“Well, I’m Tom Gordon,” responded Tom, “and my brother’s name is Ben.”

“Tom and Ben, h-m! Good short, honest names, an’ easy like to ’member.”

“We’re glad you like them,” went on Tom smiling. “But as I started to ask, do you think there’ll ever be any trouble again, between the Injuns and the whites in these parts?”

“You mean the fightin’ kind o’ trouble, I s’pose,” answered Bill Brown slowly. “Well, yer askin’ me a straight question, an’ I’m givin’ you a straight answer. I reckon ther’ll be more bloodshed betwixt the reds an’ whites, an’ mebbe soon.”

“And maybe soon, you say, Mr. Brown?” exclaimed Ben, his eyes kindling with excitement.

Bill Brown suddenly stopped and frowned.

“What did you call me?” he asked.

“Why, Mr. Brown, of course.”

“Now listen, lad, I’m Mr. Brown only to them as don’t like me, an’ that I don’t like. But I was sorta figgerin’ that we was goin’ to be friends.”

“We’ll surely be friends, Bill,” chorused the two boys, with one voice.

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