



CATCHER-OF-THE-SUN RUNS HIGH

a short story
by Stephen Bly

In the seasons before the earth lay pocked by the urgency of men with picks and gold pans, when the great buffalo still swarmed the tall grass plains, I visited my father for the very first time and suckled in peace at my mother's breasts. Her beauty still burns legend in the

hearts and minds of the old warriors.

For my parents' sake and all those in our tribe, for fear that the season will come when no one living can remember our history, I have taken it as my solemn duty to inscribe this truthful account.

In the spring after the babies died we left our high camp for the last time. The elders determined that facing the The-People-Who-Roar-In-Battle would be more desirable than losing additional little warriors to the violence of high camp winters. The mothers and sisters ground out that judgment when they refused to ever climb the peaks again.

Our enemies did not steal or slaughter or count coup while we perched in solitude at high camp, but fourteen babies, including my brother, was too brutal a tragedy for one band to withstand. Some mothers mourned for several seasons.

And a few mourn still.

But the people, like the earth itself, renew their strength when the grass turns green and the buffalo return to the valley. With eyes red from crying we survived the death of our babies.

Rabbit Feet arrived with his mother, Yellow-Leaf, and three sisters to live in our camp because his father went to battle against the People-Who-Live-By-The-Lake and did not return. Yellow-Leaf was the daughter of Early-Hunter, whose wife's brother was my father.

Yellow-Leaf irritated me when she said, "You boys look alike." Rabbit Feet had a thin, round nose, dark brown eyes, straight white teeth and shoulder length, thick black

hair. He stood a hand taller than me and his feet were large. He was awkward when he walked, which he seldom did. I hated Rabbit Feet for one full week of days. . .and then we were friends for life.

My dislike began when he moved into the lodge of Early Hunter, which was by honor placed in the center of camp. Many strong warriors gathered at that lodge and Rabbit Feet sat with them as if he belonged and listened to their exploits of bravery. When I tried to squat next to him, he shoved me away. I scraped his nose in the earth.

As we battled, a very large hand gripped my bare shoulder and with only little effort I tumbled across the dirt striking several rocks with my back. Early Hunter had thrust us apart. No pleasure clenched his face.

"Deer-boy," he growled, "jealous warriors die young. Tomorrow, you two must run to the camp of Gray Storm. You are to tell them of the celebration and games and invite them to attend. You will run together, for I will tell you each only half of the message."

Pleased by the honor and challenge, I returned to my own tent. To be the messenger, even of a peaceful notice, was a very honorable position. And knowing my ability to outrun others, I rejoiced for a chance to quell my adversary. When the sun hit the fire of Early Hunter the next morning we were to run to the camp of Gray Storm, spend one night, then run back to our lodges.

Fear, joy and trouble keep one from sleeping and I lay awake most of the night. The thought of entering the camp of Gray Storm first, of delivering my part of the message, of viewing my adversary in defeat, kept me in continual excitement.

A fine spring wind had emptied the sky of its clouds. The sun on the western peaks told of a day for achieving great victories. I ate breakfast at the fire of my father and listened to the tender words of my mother. Knowing the high trail through the trees crested in the jagged granite rocks of the ridge, I lashed my moccasins to my belt, a fact I did not bother to explain to Rabbit Feet.

At the fire of Early Hunter, we received our instructions. Being slightly older and having spent more winters in camp, I was given the esteem of presenting the first part of the message. He took us aside and whispered in our youthful ears one at a time. Even after seventy-five years I have not forgotten.

"Greetings to the brave and courageous Gray Storm. May words of your exploits be told at the campfires of our people for a hundred seasons. Early Hunter, your good friend and partner in battle wishes for you to listen to these words."

The rest was to come from Rabbit Feet.

Three times Early Hunter made me repeat the message in his ear. He insisted that I echo each word exactly as he had spoken. "Failure to declare my words," he warned, "is to betray me. I will not tolerate betrayal."

The path across the valley was wide and a delight to run. The rocks and stones of the ancient stream bed had long been sheltered by gentle earth that had tumbled down from the high mountains. Tall grass still covered most of the campsite and the trail was wide enough for us to run side by side. The firm spring mud didn't stick to my feet, but my toes sank into it.

On such a day. . .on such a surface. . .a warrior could run forever.

But the tender trail lasted only until the edge of the trees. There the dry forest floor with needles, big pine cones, little fir cones and branches cluttered the mountain. The dry, hard trail, clear of most debris, could hold only one runner at a time.

"I should run in the lead," I told Rabbit Feet. "I have the first part of the message." He did not argue with me.

I picked up the pace as we began the ascent, in order to put distance between us. I dared not look back and show concern with his progress, but I could hear him close behind me, breathing hard. *He is already getting short of wind*, I thought. *I will probably need to wait for him at the summit.*

That was one of several mistakes I made about Rabbit Feet. He would look tired and sound winded. But I learned to never doubt his ability to keep going.

Sharp pains shooting down the back of my thighs counseled me to bridle my speed, but arrogance knows no sympathy. My sides cramped like a fat boy, yet I determined not to slow down until the sounds of Rabbit Feet faded to silence.

He shadowed my every step. When we finally heaved our way past the timberline, I faced a severe test. My body cried to stop and put on my moccasins. Sharp granite rocks pricked my feet. But I could not forfeit my position and trail Rabbit Feet into the camp of Gray Storm.

A brave warrior can separate pain in his body from the thoughts of his mind. I practiced doing that. Instead of tormenting myself over the fire in my feet, I meditated on the fresh taste of the high mountain breeze. In the spring the air tastes sweet. The old ones say that babies can get plump from the smell of it alone.

Though I did not turn back at that moment, I had often done so before. I had learned that from this very point our lodges would be visible in the valley below. One could not distinguish an individual person, but activities could be observed. Signals could be given.

Red Petal once said, "I can tell when you are the one running on the mountain top by your long stride."

She had eyes that made a boy do strange and dangerous things. It brought me secret pleasure that Red Petal had not yet met Rabbit Feet. She and her family had left the valley to fish by the River-That-Hates-Itself. I felt I owned a secret that I had no intention of sharing.

As I crested the pass, I sensed motion in the trees below, so I slowed my pace only a little. In the distance a white-tailed doe bounced over a downed tree and fled to a grove of fir trees. It halted to stare my direction and remained still as I regained my speed.

The thought of dancing in my soft leather deerskin moccasins brought relief, until I realized I could not hear Rabbit Feet. He was no longer at my heels. I sprinted back up to the crest but could find no trace of him. The small rocks revealed that he had not followed my ascent.

Fear and joy gripped me with equal power. With great gladness I imagined that he had run his feet dead and might have returned to our lodges. But also a strange terror hit me that perhaps Rabbit Feet had discovered a quicker route through the mountains. The vision of him entering Gray Storm's camp ahead of me and forcing all to wait until I arrived drove me to tears. I crammed on my deerskins and took flight.

The doe had vanished and dark shadows blanketed the forest on the far side of Long Mountain, as yet untouched by the morning sun. The path through the forest widened as I descended toward the stream and Gray Morning's camp.

When I hit the high meadow on full stride, I signaled to the sentinel on the mountain and did not pause even to catch the return signal. I knew they had seen me way before then and there would be no hesitation to allow my dash into their camp.

When I finally broke through the last trees into sight of Gray Morning's lodges and the fires of his people, a small group of children and dogs scurried at my side. At the tent of Gray Morning, my legs collapsed and I threw myself to the ground in pain.

Gray Morning did not come out to greet me.

That was only right.

When I had regained my strength, I stood to my feet and announced, "Greetings from Early Hunter and his people."

That's when Gray Morning appeared to check on my health and receive my message.

"I cannot speak without the presence of Rabbit Feet. I have only half of the message." I laughed inside when I found that he had not arrived, but I hid my pleasure from everyone.

"Come sit at my fire," said Gray Morning.

I had just taken my place with the warriors when a boy entered camp. "Another runner is on the trail," he called.

Rabbit Feet! So, he did not get lost or return home.

To watch him trot into camp was no surprise, but I was amazed that he packed a doe on his shoulders. He tossed the fresh meat by Gray Morning's fire.

"I did not think it proper to come into the camp of Gray Morning for the first time without a gift of respect," he said.

Gray Morning nodded approval.

My previous dislike of Rabbit Feet was of no consequence compared to the hatred I now felt. I gazed at the dead deer, then studied the pride in the eyes of my adversary. A vision came to my mind of Rabbit Feet being pierced by a rattlesnake and shaking with a tortuous death. Even the bravest warrior agonizes with terror at such a time.

For a moment, I wished we were lodged at a lower camp.

But in a flash I decided that kind of end was too good for Rabbit Feet. I would devise something more excruciating for him than a mere snake bite.

Gray Morning's people rejoiced in the gift offered. Rabbit Feet beamed in triumph. A thought hit me that I must act swiftly or forever be one step behind him.

Gray Morning came to my rescue when he suggested, "We will have a shooting contest."

A great relief fell over me. I knew that there was no young warrior in our camp who could defeat me with a bow. Perhaps only the men of this camp could come close to my skills.

Soon the whole tribe hurried about to prepare for the event. It was in the Spring. The snow was almost gone from the deep valleys of the high mountains, with green, tall grass and swift, strong waters. A time when men's hearts are lifted and young boys dream of victory. And young girls think only of young boys.

Gray Morning called upon two of his young warriors to compete against Rabbit Feet and myself. But first, a feast.

The mothers prepared the meal. Young girls braided flowers in their hair. The old men placed wagers on their champion. Soon, the deer that had recently jumped across a mountain meadow now roasted over Gray Morning's fire. Boiled roots, soaked dried berries and flat bread baked beneath the rocks completed the meal.

Rabbit Feet and I rested by a large lodge near Gray Morning's tent. "Would you like to practice before the contest?" he asked.

"I need no practice," I replied.

I was hungry but ate little except the berries and bread because I do not like the taste of roots and I could not bear to eat of Rabbit Feet's trophy. After the meal we sat and waited.

Finally, Gray Morning rose and announced, "It is time for the shooting contest."

He selected a piece of bark about one foot by two feet from a giant yellow pine log. The bark held a knothole the size of a field mouse. He set the target fifty steps from his fire as the people lined up to watch.

"The winner will be allowed to sit at my fire in the evening, a position reserved for only the strongest and bravest of warriors," he told them.

I rejoiced because I fully believed no one could outshoot me. And I knew that a contest like this would be treasured and remembered as a great delight by all this

throng of people forever. Part of the pleasure was the preparation. This great celebration was a time of play. A good time for everyone.

Sometimes I fear that my people no longer know how to play. Let the young boys compete and the young girls laugh and tease.

We drew stones from the hand of Gray Morning and I won the honor to shoot first. After me would be Gray Morning's two young warriors. Rabbit Feet was last.

I know now in my heart that some of the old women and men may not have come out to watch the shooting match. But at the time it seemed the whole world witnessed our actions and buzzed like a bee with talk about me and the others.

Gray Morning gave a speech before the contest began.

In those days the old ones could talk well. They inspired by their words, bravery, and deeds. Some words are spoken that are meant to be forgotten. Other words should have never been said. But the words of Gray Morning were recalled always because he talked not only of the delight of a contest, but of the fight and skills needed to preserve all peoples from their enemies.

"We do not live in a world where men need not fight," he told us. "We live in a land where only brave, sure men see their grandchildren. What we practice today will insure the grandchildren of another day."

Early Hunter, the leader of my band, and Gray Morning, his friend, always made us proud and fearless when they spoke. It is sad when no one arises who can change spirits with a word and incite hearers to excellence with the power of speech.

When Gray Morning finished, he raised his bow and strung an arrow. With his white hair, he looked old. His face revealed wrinkles of many years. His eyes hung dark with tales of sadness. But when he pulled the string on the bow, his arms seemed like that of a strong, young man. With the ease of a warrior playing with a child's toy, he pulled the string to his ear. His hands did not shake. His muscles did not faint.

It came to my mind that those very arms had shot arrows at buffalo, at deer, at antelope, at big yellow bear, as well as against The-People-Who-Live-By-The-Lake and The-Tin-Warriors-With-Horses-And-Guns and The-People-Who-Roar-In-Battle. Never once did Gray Morning's brawn fail or his boldness falter.

Gray Morning's arrow sailed through the knothole. A roar exploded from the people. Then he called to me, "Deer-boy, when you can shoot that straight at my age, you will be the chief man of your people." Then, he stepped aside and the game began.

It was not my first rivalry with a bow.

Since I was very small, I challenged all in camp to shoot the bow. But I was very nervous this time. Looking back, the cause of my anxiety was my anger at Rabbit Feet for bringing the deer and surpassing me in prestige in the eyes of Gray Morning's people. I was enraged because I had to prove my valor, my ability, my superiority over such an awkward boy.

Other times I had also shot the bow with wrath in my heart. When that happened, I would miss every target one thumb to the left. So, this time I aimed one thumb to the right. The people got very quiet. Even the girls ceased their soft, constant laughter. The old men held their breath. I let go of the string.

This arrow, like Gray Morning's, soared straight through the middle of the knothole. A howl leaped out of the crowd.

Someone shouted, "Deer-boy is a fine warrior."

And another, "Deer-boy is just like his father."

One of the old men cheered, "Deer-boy is like his grandfather."

I felt myself almost glow with delight. I was so proud to represent my people, to be my father's son, to be the grandson of a brave warrior whom I never knew, and to be the friend of Gray Morning.

The first young warrior from Gray Morning's band appeared grim and shook some as he stood to shoot. When he drew his bow his stiff arm locked tight. I worried that he could not let the arrow fly at all. Imagine my astonishment when the swift arrow also pierced the center of the knothole. Again, the crowd erupted in cheer.

I noticed right away that the next warrior was left-handed.

A mystery surrounds those who shoot from the left side. Some say, "They learned that trick from the angels of heaven." Others claim, "The demons of hell teach such things."

I did not know many who shot well from that perspective. But this warrior could. His confidence certainly exceeded my own. He did not hesitate. He yanked back and released the bow without a sign of trying to aim. The arrow sped away so swift that I

said to myself: *Someday I will fight alongside of this warrior, for he is quick to act and a straight shooter.*

That arrow, too, passed through the hole. Again, the crowd rejoiced.

Everyone now turned to Rabbit Feet. To my amazement, he had lost his brave and arrogant face. I wondered if the pressure had built up so that he knew he would lose. I did not care. It still rankled me the scene of him bringing the deer to Gray Morning. *Perhaps Rabbit Feet is truly afraid. He knows he cannot win against such splendid warriors.*

Rabbit Feet asked many questions of Gray Morning.

"Where do I stand?"

"Can I jump?"

"Must I stand still?"

"May I run and shoot?"

Many in the crowd began to whisper. A few complained.

Gray Morning frowned. "Stand on the line like the others. . .or go stand with the women."

He stretched the bowstring to his ear, then lowered the bow. I was shocked. *Will he quit the contest in shame?* That did not please me too much because I wanted very much to defeat him. And the desire to not bring dishonor to our people overcame my anger.

He took a deep breath, then drew back the bow again. He shot the arrow. It hit the side of the knothole but bounced through. Rabbit Feet turned to smile at the young girls, a kind of infectious smile that all warriors wished they possessed. The small valleys of his cheeks made his lips always seem close to a grin. His eyes danced with mischief. Everyone seemed relieved and yelled happy shouts.

Four arrows fired.

Four arrows found the target.

Gray Morning marched over to the target and moved it back twenty-five steps. He returned to his fire circle and fired an arrow again through the knothole, then nodded that it was my turn.

The further distance pleased me. That length suited my abilities even better. This time I welled with peace. No longer did I fill myself with fury. So I did not shoot one

thumb to the right. I took aim at the nothing in the middle. My arrow whistled into the center. Not one feather touched the bark.

The crowd gasped. I hugged the joy inside me. The crowd of people waved and shouted with excitement. Some of the old men traded goods on their wagers.

Then, the stiff warrior walked forward. More timid than before, he still pierced the sky of the knothole. When the throng finished their celebration, the third warrior stood. He seemed taller, straighter than before. His massive chest and bulging arms shined in the sunlight. His neck could measure like a buffalo's. He jerked back the string and fired the arrow.

The crowd groaned. He struck the bark about two thumbs to the left of the target. In great humiliation, he slinked away.

Rabbit Feet waited a moment for the tension to ease, then took his turn. He shifted his weight back and forth from left foot to right. I almost expected him to race off at any moment. But why? Then, I recalled something I heard him say not long before, "To make me stand still is to force me to dishonor my feet."

He drew with care, his hands steady. His release sprang quick and smooth. But again the people moaned. His arrow hit one finger lower than the hole.

I at long last got up the nerve to peek directly at the young girls. They glanced down at their feet. My heart smiled. My soul laughed. My spirit jumped with such glory. But I was very careful that my eyes and face concealed that fact.

Gray Morning moved the target back twenty-five more steps. This time when he raised his own bow for the opening shot, he used great care. He measured every action. His third arrow also hit the target. He turned to me.

"Deer-boy, you did well with a boy's prey. Now try a man's aim. Can you do it?"

My sureness overcame me. "I will imagine that it is the heart of an elk and that my good friends at Gray Morning's camp are very hungry."

Gray Morning nodded and waited for me to deliver on my boast.

For that nod, I would do anything. There need be no other prize or reward given. No pony or hatchet. No knife nor company of his daughter. Only the slight incline of the head of a great warrior like Gray Morning.

The moment swelled with greatness. I knew I could do it. I could already hear the praise of the people.

Meanwhile, an old man shouted, "Do not disgrace your father."

An elderly woman hollared, "Deer-boy, do not make your mother cry."

I pulled back my bow. As it released my heart puffed with pride. I was so glad for my skills. And I knew how happy I would be to win this competition. For the first time, I indulged in musing about what the young girls would think.

Before I loosed the arrow, I reviewed my condition, that I was full of myself. I tend to veer one thumb high. So, I pointed the head one thumb low, then let it fly.

The tune of the string when an arrow is well thrust is a melody that tickles the heart, caresses the soul. A brief victory song plays before the finale that only the warrior hears. My bow string sang like a champion.

Every man has days of joy.

Every man experiences days that lift his being, makes him want to shout to the heavens. When my third arrow glided through the opening, my heart. . .oh, my heart. I almost came out of myself, to climb to the top of the highest mountain, to cry out to all the living, to awake all the dead.

I stole a look at Gray Morning. He did not smile. Or frown. Or speak. But he did a quick nod as if to say, "Deer-boy, you will fight alongside me."

The young ones today don't understand. Those who sit at my fire stay closed to the vision when one's survival depended on the bravado of young men, on the inspiration of the old ones.

A boy becomes a man when a warrior like Gray Morning nods his head. *You will do. You will do, indeed.*

Sometimes young men mourn with anger the loss of brave battles they never fought. But they don't understand when we with wrinkled eyes and tired bones shed lonesome tears for sights and sounds that have been driven out of all but the loneliest canyons. Our games in the old days made us brave, subdued our fears. Life between the mountains has always culled the weak and the timid.

The young man from Gray Morning's camp looked at me, his face smoother and more relaxed than before. I thought, *perhaps he, too, shoots better at longer stretches.*

He prepared his aim. A woman called out encouragement, "Night Hunter, it is only a small owl to bring home to your mother."

Night Hunter seemed pleased with those words. He smiled as his arrow flew. His chest expanded. His muscles tightened. I said to myself, *He shot one thumb high.*

A great sigh of sadness rose up from the crowd.

The young boys threw themselves on the ground.

The mothers cried.

But I had won the contest as I knew I would.

I wished Rabbit Feet would come grab me, so we could boast of my greatness. But instead, he stood up, strolled over to Gray Morning and said, "I would like a turn at the far target, but I need to jump when I shoot."

Gray Morning shook his head. "I do not understand," he said. "The contest is over. Deer-boy won."

"But I like to run," Rabbit Feet pleaded, "and I like to shoot. I have taught myself to shoot best when I run and jump."

Gray Morning laughed.

We shared a quiet chuckle that grew to loud mirth, like a shared joke.

What a strange idea. . .to run and jump and shoot.

A voice from among the old men rumbled toward us. "Let the boy do this. Perhaps he has some magic."

Gray Morning assented by a wave of his hand in the direction of Rabbit Feet.

We all stared with wondering eyes as Rabbit Feet rushed twenty steps west of the fire circle. He paused before he maneuvered an arrow into his bow. He motioned for the crowd to stand back, to give him more room. Some snickered. Others mused aloud about "his trick." Someone mentioned, "This has never been done before among our people."

I wondered why Rabbit Feet would want to fail again. *Or perhaps he does know some magic or has a cunning trick that could fool us. Could it be he expects heaven to help him?*

He rushed toward us, then leaped in the air from his left foot. He spun toward the target and released the arrow at the top of the jump. We gaped. We marveled. I was stunned, silent as my heart crushed. His arrow sailed in and out of the gap.

Only God above determines which days are good and which are bad. He alone can distinguish between what's an old ability or what's entirely new. But many esteemed

that as their best day, when they witnessed what had never been done before. Such skill existed in the old days. None like it now. Who can shoot an elk at one hundred steps with an arrow? Perhaps a few. But no one can hit a squirrel at the same span. In those times, arrows zinged straighter. Courage poured out purer.

"Again!" Gray Morning crowed. "Do it again!"

Rabbit Feet sprinted east. Once more, he motioned to clear away the people. Again, he strung his bow. Then, he rushed toward us, spun around, and hit through the target.

Everyone cheered, slapped their knees, laughed aloud.

But I cried inside. I knew I could not outshine that shot. I was very grateful to Gray Morning that he did not ask me to do the same. I did notice that he now gave Rabbit Feet the nod.

The contest ended with a tie, not a victory.

That night at Gray Morning's campfire, Rabbit Feet and I sat side by side with all the brave warriors. I still hated him at that moment and imagined anew the poison of a rattlesnake.

But then Gray Morning made an amazing announcement. "Rabbit Feet, you will no longer be called by that name. From this day forward you are to be known as . . .Catcher-Of-The-Sun."

My heart melted on the edges. Now that this young man would no longer be Rabbit Feet, he was a new person. We could start all over again. I could be the friend of a very special warrior, the one named Catcher-Of-The-Sun. This began to make me happy.

Later, we lay under the stars next to Gray Morning's lodge, but we did not sleep much. Nor did we speak to each other. Young girls hovered around to tell us of our wonderful ability. Of course, we already knew that.

That's when I first noticed Blue Flower. In an instant, I determined she would one day be my wife. That amazing idea helped me a little bit to get over my deep disappointment. I dreamed about her later that night. In the dream I came home from battle with tired bones and many scars. Blue Flower was there with warm water for my feet and a soft robe for my head. However, I did not dream of her again for a very long time.

The next morning we ate with the warriors, then we returned to our own camp at the lodge of Early Hunter. We took a message from Gray Morning. I received the first part and Catcher-Of-The-Sun the second.

Gray Morning recognized the jealousy in our hearts. Perhaps he had gone through that too. He knew what it was like to be young and hopeful and so wishing to be brave and admired. "Young warriors," he said, "You should run together. That way you will live to see many victories. If you fight each other, the survivor will know many defeats."

We carried with us small presents. Catcher-Of-The-Sun brought a little pouch with beads of purple and red. I handed to Early Hunter an arrow from Gray Morning's quiver that bore three carved marks. This signified Gray Morning would join us for another celebration in three days.

The most amazing thing to me was that I lost all the rest of my hate for the boy formerly called Rabbit Feet, somewhere on the trail back to our camp. It happened in the warmth of the sun. The blue sky and round clouds moved in peace above us. The tall, green grasses and deep sage full of spring rain soothed my tattered soul.

When we reached the edge of the forest, the trail narrowed as before. Only one runner could lead. I was pleased that Catcher-Of-The-Sun dropped back and allowed me to advance. That proved to be one of the last days I ever ran a step ahead of him.

We both raced toward the sun.

When we escaped the trees, I wanted to stop to put on my moccasins, but feared that Catcher-Of-The-Sun would race past me and I would never catch up. It was then that I threw down the last of my foolish pride to announce, "I will put on my moccasins now."

"I will stay with you," he replied. And he did.

While I laced my moccasins, he laid in the sun on a huge rock. When I finished, I sprawled beside him. We enjoyed the cool breeze on our shirtless chests.

"The girls in Gray Morning's camp have nice smiles," he said as his brown eyes closed. "But they are not for me."

"You are selecting a woman so soon?" I teased.

He laughed. "Oh, no. I am choosing your woman."

"My woman?" I complained. "I will get my own woman."

"We will see." His eyes shined.

Many full moons passed. Catcher-Of-The-Sun now wore a horsehair and beaded headband with two eagle feathers down on his right ear. We wore full buckskins in winter, loin cloth in summer or when running. We prided ourselves on our strong arms and powerful legs, though Catcher-Of-The-Sun was stronger because he rarely rode horseback except when he caught up with a horse in the wild.

Early Hunter lay dead at the door of his lodge and dogs licked the blood from his chest. Shouts and screams spun my mind in dizzy confusion. My father, who led the counter-attack, had commanded me to protect my mother. Yet she would not be protected nor comforted as she wailed over the body of my youngest sister who had been trampled by the hooves of frightened horses.

I believed that I would die in battle. I prayed that I would fight bravely and my soul join that of Early Hunter and the others. A proverb of the elders tore through my mind: *To die in warfare for your people is not the worst of all fates.*

I refused to lose my arrows with shots too distant to kill, so I ran circles around my kneeling, grieving mother like a child playing a game in the meadow.

However, this game had turned deadly.

Only one tribe would win.

The-People-Who-Roar-In-Battle had more warriors, more weapons, better position. . .and surprise on their side. We had only a distant hope that a people who had existed from eternity would somehow find a way to keep fighting.

And somewhere on the mountain, we hoped in Catcher-Of-The-Sun.

Unless he had been unable to slip through the enemy's camp.

Unless he had been killed before he left the little valley.

Unless he injured himself on the jagged rocks of the mountain.

Over the mountain along Wolf's Creek spread the lodges of Gray Storm. If his warriors hurried to our assistance, we would press the enemy between us and forever end their menacing assaults. We had no way of knowing whether they had received our desperate plea for help.

So, we fought on, but our spirits and bodies were dying.

Blue-Dawn dove from his horse on four of the enemy who set fire to his lodge. He killed three of them before the last one cut him open. I shot his slayer in the back with an arrowhead. I can still hear his scream and see the panic in his eyes. He whirled toward me, then staggered back to the safety of his people in the forest.

With Early Hunter's lodge now in flames, it seemed that we had lost most of the tepees on the northern side of camp. I tried to get my mother to flee with me to the southern hills, but she refused to move. Her eyes told me she would rather die at her campfire lodge, by the bloody body of her daughter, than be like a wounded coyote in the brush of the mountain, too weak to protect herself.

She pushed me away. "Run, Deer-boy," she growled.

But I chose to die at her side. I did not have the strength of heart to desert my mother nor stamina of will to disgrace the command of my father. I only left her for a moment, to grab Red Petal and her younger brother, so that I could protect them in place of my friend who was gone. I wondered if I'd ever see Blue Flower again.

Then we heard a faint murmur that turned to a low rumble. At first it sounded like a death chant from my people and I trembled. But it grew to a chorus of a single roar, one united shout.

All heads peered at the high granite peaks. The mid-morning's light reflected the movements of a young man's silhouette with flaming torch racing through the pass. He had outrun the enemy. He would reach the camp of Gray Storm.

"Catcher-of-the-Sun runs high!"

"Catcher-of-the-Sun runs high!"

"Catcher-of-the-Sun runs high!"

Though smeared with dirt and tears and blood, my mother's deep voice bellowed above all the others, "Catcher-of-the-Sun runs high!"

Over and over again, like a great wind that blows fierceness into a storm. The chant infused renewed strength and valor into my people.

Those who had fled for their lives to the southern hills charged back to camp to rejoin the battle. Even if we all perished, Gray Storm would not rest until he destroyed our attackers. Even more, the stories of our people would live on. . . through Catcher-of-the-Sun.

The chant continued for a long time.

The spirits of our bloodied ambushers weakened. If you kill a man's spirit, he is half-dead. And it is easy to attack and defeat half-dead warriors, even if they are The People-Who-Roar-In-Battle.

Though the battle lasted two more days, the victory happened the moment the silhouette of a brave warrior appeared among the peaks of Long Mountain.

Some will question why I speak of these events so long after they happened. Others challenge an old man's ability to remember, to separate fact from false. And even more will be suspicious of my heart.

But my heart knows the truth.

Many visions and souls have been forgotten. The horses that stumbled. The babies that died. The arrows that missed their marks. The brave warriors who risked their lives and lost. Other memories live deathless in lives of those they forever changed.

I am a very old man.

Gravel roads extend where deer trails once laced the earth.

Villages and cities cover ground good for digging roots or grazing horses.

Tall buildings block the sunrise. People live in shadows.

Trains lead to worlds that I do not choose to visit.

Wagons and coaches rumble beside the forest and frighten away the game.

In the cities of tall buildings and short minds, a lantern turns on with a switch.

Telephones steal your voice and trouble your heart.

I have seen these things. But I still delight to hike through valleys where nothing exists made by men, only what was created by the hand of God.

I know that men with narrow memories will question my eyes which have gazed on both the slaughter and salvation of our people. But hear me out. To complain about the confusion of the present only muddies the past and distorts the future. None can question my sense of smell, for the aroma of death permeates this valley still. And none dare question my tongue, for I can taste to this day the salty tears on my mother's sweet face, as I tried to kiss them away.

Nor shall any question my ears. For they heard the cry, "Catcher-Of-The-Sun runs high," a song that has never faded in my spirit. Not even the shadows of age can conquer the thunder of the people's shouts and what it meant that day. The force of

that cry has pushed me through the changes of the land and protected me from the corruption of men without good wisdom.

But very few in the camps of my and Blue Flower's grandchildren have heard a victory chant that instills the fiber of courage. If purpose is not found in war, the tribal custom, then is there any meaning to life? If only they would pursue excellence in every venture. Instead, they fight with themselves and no man can heal. A deep sickness has settled that no medicine can treat.

That's why I tell the stories. Maybe they will hear and take heart.

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