

The Triumph of Seha

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WHEN Seha had grown to be a tall youth, he said to the old men: "Now I am almost a man, what shall I do?" for being a youth he dreamed of great things. And the old men answered: "That Wakunda knows; therefore take yourself to a high hill; there fast and pray until sleep comes and with it a vision."

So Seha arose and laid aside his buffalo skins, and naked he went out on the prairies. When he had gone far, he climbed to the top of a lonely hill, bare of grass, strewn with flakes of stone, that made its summit white like the head of a warrior who had seen many battles.

Then he knelt upon the flinty summit, and raising his palms to the heavens, he cried: "O Wakunda, here needy stands Seha!" Four times he uttered the cry; yet there was no sound save that of the crow overhead and the wind in the short grass of the hillside. Then he fell into an agony of weeping, and wetting his palms with his tears, he smeared his face with mud. Then he cast his streaming eyes to the skies and again raised his hands and voice in supplication.

"O Wakunda, Seha is a young man; he would do great things like the old men; send him a vision."

The night came down and still he held his eyes upon the darkening heavens, crying for a vision. But only the coyote answered him. The wan stars looked out of the East and steadily climbed upward, gazing upon his tearful, upturned face. But when the gray of age began to grow upon the forehead of the Night, he grew so weary and weak with hunger that he fell forward upon his face and slept. And lo! the vision came. It seemed that the skies were black and fierce as the face of a brave with anger; the lightning flashed like the eyes of a hungry wolf in the darkness; and the thunder shouted like a warrior in the front of the battle. Then the clouds split and through them rushed a mighty eagle with the lightning playing on its wings, and its cry was like the shriek of a dying foe, and its eyes were bright with the vision that sees far. Its wings hovered above him, and it spoke:

"Seha shall be a seer of things far off; his thought shall be quick as the lightning, and his voice shall be thunder in the ears of men!"

Seha awoke, and he was shivering with the dews of morning.

Then he arose and walked back to his village, slowly, for his thoughts were great. Four days he went about the village, speaking to no one; and the people whispered: "Seha has had a vision; do you not see that his eyes are big with a strange light?"

One night when the four days had passed, Seha arose from his blankets and creeping stealthily out of his tepee, he went to the lodge of Ebahami, who was a great medicine man, for Seha wished to tell of his vision.

Pulling back the buffalo robe that hung across the entrance, he saw the great man sleeping by a low fire. Entering, he touched the shoulder of the sleeper, who awoke with a start, and sitting up, gazed at the young intruder. Then Ebahami spoke:

"Seha has come to tell his vision; I knew he would come; speak."

"You are a great man," began Seha, "and your eyes are like the sun's eyes to see into the shadow; hear me and teach me." Then he told of his vision on the lonely hill.

As Ebahami listened to the wonderful thing that had befallen the youth, his heart grew cold with envy; for certainly Wakunda had great things in store for Seha, and might it not come to pass that the youth should grow to be even greater in power than Ebahami himself? So when the youth, breathless with the wonder of the thing he told, ceased speaking, the old man said coldly: "Wakunda will teach Seha; let him go learn of the wind and the growing things."

Then the youth arose and left the lodge. But the big medicine man slept no more that night, for jealousy is sleepless.

At that time it happened that the winds were hot from the Southwest, and the maize grew yellow as the sun that smote it, and the rainless air curled its blades. And the old men cried to Wakunda for rain; but the skies smote

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back a baking glare for answer. Then a great moan went up before the lodge of the big medicine man: "Ebahami speaks with the thunder spirits; let him pray to them that we may have food for our children."

And Ebahami shut himself in his tepee four days, fasting, crying to the thunder spirits and performing strange rites. But every morning the sun rose glaring like the eye of a strong man who dies of fever, and the hot wind sweltered up from the southwest, moaning hoarsely like one who moans with thirst, and the maize heard the moan and wilted.

Then when the people grew clamorous before the lodge of Ebahami, he came forth and said: "The thunder spirits are sleeping; they are weary and drowsy with the heat." And the hooting of his people drove him back into his lodge.

Then Seha raised his voice above the despairing murmur of the village, saying: "Seha is a young man; yet the thunder spirits will hear him, be they ever so drowsy. Seha will call down the rain."

The murmur of the people ceased, for so strange a light was in the eye of the youth that they believed. "Let Seha give us rain," they cried, "and he shall be a great man among us."

Then Seha strode out of the village and disappeared in the hills. His heart was loud within him as he walked, for would he not be a great man among his people? He believed in his power with that belief which is the power. All day he walked, and when the red sun glared across the western hills like an eye bloodshot with pain he came to a clump of pines that sang upon the summit of a bluff.

The thunder spirits love the pines, for they rise sternly from the rocks, reaching their long hands into the clouds, and they cry back at the storm with a loud voice. Where the pine trees sing, there the thunder spirits sleep, and the thunder birds, the hawk and the eagle, watch with keen eyes.

Under the trees Seha stood, and raising his hands and eyes to the heavens, he cried: "Hear Seha, for he is a thunder man; send the big clouds boiling before the wind; send the rains that my people may have food for their children!"

The pines only tossed their branches above him while they sang softly in the wind.

"O Thunder Spirits," he cried again, "you are not asleep; I hear you whispering together in the tree tops. Hear my cry, for am I not a thunder man?"

Then a dead calm grew; the pines were still. Suddenly they groaned with a cool gust from the East. The groan was like a waking man's groan when he arises stretching and yawning from his couch.

Then Seha lay down to sleep, for were not the thunder spirits awake?

When the night was late he was awakened by the howl of the thunder. He saw the quick lightning pierce the boiling darkness in the East; then the rain drops danced on the dry hills with a noise like the patter of many happy voices.

Seha was glad, and he answered the shout of the thunder. His people in the village were glad, and their tongues were loud with the name of Seha. The maize was glad, and it looked up to the kind skies, tossing its arms in exultation.

When Seha returned to the village he was a great man among his people. And when they asked whence he had such strange power, he said: "I caught it from the growing of the maize; I heard it in the blowing of the wind."

But there was one who did not greet the mysterious youth. Ebahami shut himself in his tepee, for had he not failed to awaken the spirits, when a youth had succeeded?

Ebahami sat sullenly in his tepee, thinking great and fierce thoughts; and after many days of fasting his magic came back to him. Then he summoned to his lodge, one by one, the men of his band, and he said to each: "Behold, Seha speaks with evil spirits; may he not destroy his people? Then let us perform the rite of Wazhinade against him that he may be forsaken by man and animal, and so die."

The men of his band believed Ebahami, for his magic was great, and he forced them to believe.

So each man went to his tepee, and shutting himself in, fasted, thinking strongly against Seha. This is the manner of the rite of Wazhinade.

Then after his enemies had thought strongly for many days against him, Seha was seized with a strange weakness; his eyes lost their brightness and he could not see far as before. All through the days and nights he went about the village crying for his lost power, and the people said: "The coyotes are barking in the hills;" they could not see him for the mist cast about him by the terrible rite.

Then Seha wandered out on the prairies wailing as ever for his lost power; and after many days he lay himself

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down by a stream to die. But he did not die; he slept and the vision came again. When he awoke he was strong again, and his eyes could see far as before. Then he said, "I will cleanse myself in the stream and go back to my people, for I am strong again."

But lo! as he leaned over the clear stream, he beheld the reflected image of an eagle soaring far above him.

Now a medicine man can change himself into any form that flies or walks or crawls or is still, and as Seha watched the image he knew that the eagle was Ebahami. So gliding into the stream, he quickly changed himself into a great fish, flaunting himself temptingly upon the surface. The eagle, which was Ebahami, being hungry, swooped down upon the fish with wide beak and open talons. But just before the eagle alighted on the prey, Seha changed himself into a huge boulder, against which the swooping bird dashed furiously, crushing its beak and talons; then it arose and with bloody wings fluttered across the prairie.

Seha stepped out of the rock and laughed a long laugh; and the eagle that was Ebahami heard and knew.

So Seha returned to his people and was a great man among them.

But Ebahami hid himself in his tepee, and a rumor ran that his arms were broken and his face crushed.

And all the people wondered!