



# THE BOY WHO HUNTED GRASSHOPPERS

IT WAS SAID THAT HE WAS A QUIET ONE, PICKED ON BY OTHER LAKOTA BOYS FOR HIS CURLY BROWN HAIR AND FAIR COMPLEXION. IN THOSE DAYS, HE HAD NOT TAKEN THE NAME HE WOULD CARRY INTO BATTLE, THE NAME HISTORY WOULD REMEMBER HIM BY: CRAZY HORSE. IN THOSE DAYS, HE WAS CALLED THE LIGHT-HAIRED ONE.

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He stepped out of the tepee that bright summer morning, swinging the quiver of arrows over his shoulder, and gripping the ash bow tighter as the taunts were hurled like stones.

“Light-Haired One!” Slow Bear called out. “Will you hunt grasshoppers today?”

“How do grasshoppers taste, Light Hair?” another boy shouted.

“Think of us,” said yet another, “while you hunt bugs. We will be hunting rabbits, like true Lakota boys.”

Although the words stung, Light Hair refused to let the boys see how much they hurt. He had heard such insults often, tried to ignore them. Tried to ... but it proved so hard.

Light Hair stopped when he reached High Back Bone but could not look his mentor in the eye. Instead, he stared at his moccasins as Slow Bear let out a shrill cry before thundering

out of camp with his friends.

“Come,” High Back Bone said at last. “We have much to learn today.”

Light Hair never knew what a man like High Back Bone saw in him, why he had entered his father’s lodge the previous summer, why he had been teaching Light Hair the ways of the Lakota.

Most boys practiced shooting arrows through rolling hoops, and when they could easily do that, they went after rabbits, plentiful on the prairie. Yet the previous summer, High Back Bone had suggested that Light Hair shoot grasshoppers.

“Grasshoppers?” Light Hair had asked. “To eat?”

“I would not eat a grasshopper,” High Back Bone had conceded,

“but grasshoppers eat the grass, which the buffalo need.”

This was true. The Lakota followed the buffalo, used its meat for food, its hides for clothing and tepees.

On that first morning more than a year ago, Slow Bear had decided to follow the grasshopper hunters. Light Hair had walked into the tall grass, searching for an insect, and when one finally had buzzed, Light Hair had been so startled, he had not even set his arrow before the grasshopper had landed. When the next grasshopper shot skyward, Light Hair’s arrow missed by yards, and Slow Bear had laughed.

Over the next week, others had followed the light-haired boy and his mentor, howling at his futile hunts — until the boys lost interest.

**Light Hair loosened his arrow as the musket roared, then heard Three Hawks’ loud voice: “Did I hit it? I could not see for all of this smoke. Who hit it?”**



Light Hair fetched his arrow from the grass and returned it to the quiver. The sun shone directly overhead, and High Back Bone suggested that they return to the camp. Camp would mean more teasing, for Slow Bear and his friends were sure to have returned from their adventures.

He dreaded returning home but knew he had to, and when they reached camp, Light Hair was surprised at the excitement.

Three Hawks had come to visit and brag about himself — something the Cheyenne warrior was always doing. The 16-year-old waved a musket over his head. “With it I can shoot farther and better than any of you with your bows and arrows,” he yelled.

“Is this a challenge?” High Back Bone asked calmly. “Anyone?”

Three Hawks stepped closer. “Do you challenge me?”

“I could not beat you, my friend,” High Back Bone said. “You are too quick, and your eyes are much younger than mine.”

Grinning, Three Hawks stood straighter, but the smile vanished when High Back Bone pointed at Light Hair. “He is the one who can beat you. He is the best in our camp.”

Light Hair’s heart raced. He wet his lips, staring at his mentor, wondering if High Back Bone had turned crazy.

“Aii-yi-heeee!” Slow Bear, standing across from Light Hair, buried his face in his hands. “You mock us in front of our friends.”

But High Back Bone had spoken. “Are you ready?”

Light Hair’s head bobbed slightly, although he felt anything but ready.

High Back Bone passed out the shiny coins he had found in an abandoned campsite used by the white travelers. Three Hawks and Light Hair would walk down a path, and a man would toss one of the pieces into the air. The first boy to hit three coins in flight, before the other, would win the game.

Light Hair’s throat turned dry, and the bow slipped in his wet hands. He did not want to embarrass himself but felt even stronger

the desire not to shame his people. Suddenly, a medicine man sent a piece of gold into the blue sky. Light Hair saw the flash, quickly sent an arrow flying and grimaced, knowing he had missed.

Slow Bear groaned.

Yet Three Hawks had not even fired his musket, had barely brought the stock to his shoulder before the gold fell too low to fire safely. The Cheyenne had not been ready, as Light Hair had not been ready on his first grasshopper hunt.

They moved on.

Another coin shot skyward, and Light Hair fired his arrow, saw the flint strike the coin, which spiraled to the ground. Slow Bear gasped.

All that summer — and all the previous summer before the weather cooled and grasshoppers no longer flew — Light Hair had patiently hunted grasshoppers. At first, Light Hair could not hit those unpredictable insects, but he had never stopped trying, had learned by watching them, had learned through practice, through hours with High Back Bone, through hours alone on the prairie.

Now, his arrows consistently hit flying grasshoppers. A shiny coin, which flew in a straight line, proved a much easier target than any insect. So Light Hair was ready when his father tossed up the next piece.

He hit it, too, knocking the gold to the ground before Three Hawks had fired his musket. Three Hawks wiped sweaty hands on his breechcloth.

Light Hair took a deep breath, slowly exhaled and set an arrow in his bow. As he walked with Three Hawks, he heard nothing but his opponent’s heavy breathing.

A blur of gold flashed into the air. Both Light Hair and Three Hawks whirled, aiming. Light Hair loosed his arrow as the musket roared, then heard Three Hawks’ loud voice: “Did I hit it? I could not see for all of this smoke. Who hit it?”

Light Hair knew, but he remained quiet, said nothing even as High Back Bone walked up and lifted Light Hair’s right hand over his head. He said nothing as the men cheered for him. He said nothing when Three



Hawks angrily threw the musket on the ground and stormed off.

It was said that The Light-Haired One stood humbly as others bragged of his skills and slapped his back. Someone said they would sing songs in his honor that night, but Light Hair did not smile until Slow Bear came to him, shuffling his feet, and muttered:

“Is it possible that ... perhaps in the morning ... you can ... will you ... please ... show me ... how to ... hunt ... grasshoppers?”

## WHO WAS CRAZY HORSE?

“The Boy Who Hunted Grasshoppers” is a make-believe story based on the early years of Crazy Horse. The real Crazy Horse was born around 1842, was indeed fair-skinned with light, curly hair, did hunt grasshoppers with his mentor, High Back Bone, and was teased by childhood companions. Yet he grew into one of the bravest warriors among the Lakota Sioux, leading his people to victories in battles near Fort Fetterman, Wyo., in 1866, and at the Little Bighorn in Montana 10 years later. Crazy Horse was forced to surrender to the U.S. Army in 1877. On Sept. 5, 1877, he was stabbed in the back with a bayonet by a soldier at Fort Robinson, Neb., and died that night.

More than a century after his death, Crazy Horse remains a symbol of Native American spirit, respected for his bravery, values and his fight to preserve a vanishing way of life.