Centennial by James Michener
Section of Chapter 4
"The Many Coups of Lame Beaver"

days. But this was the lucky blow, and the men howled with delight.

Nearly twelve thousand years later the articulated skeleton of this mammoth would be unearthed not far from Centennial, and wedged between two of the neck vertebrae would be found this projectile point, indisputable proof that man had lived in America not the mere three thousand years that some had assumed prior to this discovery, but for a very long time indeed. Thus the Clovis point produced that day by the conscientious knapper was not only a supreme work of art; it would also become a prime fact in our intellectual history.

It was from such men that the American Indian descended. Through the centuries the original stock from Asia, already varied because of the widely separated intervals at which their immigration occurred, underwent many mutations, depending upon where they settled and what luck they had with the natural resources they found. For example, one large tribe lived for some centuries in the Rocky Mountains just west of Rattlesnake Buttes, and there they divided into two, the more adventurous portion proceeding to Mexico, where they developed the dazzling Aztec culture; the less adventurous half remained behind to become one of the poorest Indian families on record, living on roots and barely able to sustain a civilization. We can be sure that the two groups at one time had an equal chance, because they spoke the same language and must have been part of the same tribe, the brilliant Aztecs of Mexico and the somber Utes of Colorado.

Or again, in California two branches of a tribe were offered a fateful choice. One turned a few miles to the east and found an easy highway of riches and good living all the way to Peru, where they built the mighty Inca civilization; the other turned a few miles to the west and found itself trapped on the arid peninsula of Baja California, where its members eked out the most miserable existence known to the world's humans, not even developing anything which could reasonably be called a civilization.

One attractive group of Indians, using a language that no one else could understand and referring to themselves only as Our People, branched off from the prehistoric men who had made the Clovis points and found a good life for themselves east of the Mississippi River. About A.D. 500 they

moved westward and took up residence in the forests of northern Minnesota. From there, sometime around A.D. 1100, they moved farther westward onto the northern plains and the Dakotas, and at some point in the latter part of the eighteenth century they wandered tentatively southward to the land along the Platte, taking up a seasonal and foraging residence in the vicinity of Rattlesnake Buttes.

Our People were a tall, slim tribe of Indians with traditions so old they seemed engraved in time. The men tattooed themselves with ashes driven into their skin by cactus needles, three designs across the chest, and when they designated themselves in councils with other tribes they were apt to say 'Our People' and then tap their breasts with their fingertips.

They placed their faith in Man-Above and their reliance in battle on Flat-Pipe, the sacred totem of the tribe. It was a flattened pipe, guarded at all times by its keeper and cherished in the way the ancient Israelites had cherished their Ark. Flat-Pipe was of crucial importance because Our People were surrounded by enemies, and without its consolation, would have long since been overwhelmed.

In the year 1756 a sliver group of Our People, holding tentatively to the land between the two Plattes, faced the latest in the long line of crises which had beset them since the tribe started storing memories. The Indians surrounding them had horses and would soon have guns, and they had neither.

On his ninth birthday Lame Beaver was taken aside by his father Gray Wolf—that is, his real father's oldest brother—and prepared for doleful news: 'You must always remember that Our People are surrounded by enemies. To the north'—and he faced the boy in that direction—'the Dakota, fearful warriors. To the west, the unspeakable Ute, those black evil ones who try to steal our women and our children so that they can become light like us. Never trust a Ute, no matter what presents they bring or how they speak. To the south, the Comanche—they have horses. And to the east . . .' Here he turned the boy toward Rattlesnake Buttes and the prairies beyond. 'Out there, always lurking, always clever, the tribe it is almost impossible to defeat in battle.' He spat. Biting his lower lip, he felt an anger so great that for a moment he could not speak. Then, brandishing his feathered spear toward the east, he snarled, 'The Pawnee.'

He sat the boy on a rock and told him, 'In the morning

when you rise. At night before you go to sleep. And especially when you are the lookout on the hill. Always look to the four directions and ask yourself, "Where is my enemy hiding?" '

He said, 'You must never be afraid of enemies . . . or meeting them in battle. The noblest act for a warrior is to touch an enemy in battle . . . to count coup. It would be shameful to die a coward . . . without ever having counted coup.'

Lame Beaver listened. He knew as much about counting coup as did his father. Young boys talked about it all the time, of how they were prepared to rush up to any Ute and touch him with their hand or with a spear and thus count coup. They would even be prepared to face a Comanche on his horse, and brave his lance, in hopes of counting coup, for a man who failed to count coup could have no respected place among Our People. Lame Beaver had boasted to his playmates, 'I would even run up to a Pawnee to gain coup,' but none of them believed this, for the Pawnee would probably have a horse and perhaps a black stick that spewed smoke and killed from a distance. 'I would,' he repeated.

His father Gray Wolf grew silent, and after a long pause, said, 'Only the rocks live forever. A warrior is born for his season and he fights as Man-Above allows. He respects Flat-Pipe and he gains what coups he can. And in the end, if he is lucky, he dies in battle, his hand against the enemy, gaining the greatest coup of all—death in victory.'

He spoke so gravely that Lame Beaver stopped thinking about counting coup in the battles that lay ahead and looked at him. Gray Wolf's face was deeply lined and dust stood in the crevices. His eyes were sorrowful, and in that moment of silent communication Lame Beaver apprehended that his real father, Sun-at-Noon, had been killed. Averting his gaze, he asked, 'Did he die in battle?' and Gray Wolf answered, 'He was trying to count coup on a Pawnee.'

'Did he?' Lame Beaver asked.

'No,' Gray Wolf replied. It would be futile to lie about such a thing, because that night when the warriors gathered at the campfire and reviewed the day's battle, there would be harsh and honest decision as to who counted coup and who did not, and not even the death of a warrior known to be brave, like Sun-at-Noon, would warrant lying about whether he had made coup.

With Our People it was permitted that four warriors count coup on an enemy. The first to touch him shouted for all to hear 'I first,' and the second, 'I second,' and so on, but when the battle ended these warriors and their witnesses convened, and confirmation was sought, and a warrior might claim, 'I gained first coup on the Pawnee chieftain,' but until someone confirmed this and said, 'I saw him touch the Pawnee and he is first,' the award was not allowed.

Killing the enemy? That amounted to nothing. If it had to be done, it was done, but it did not count beyond whatever coup that might have been involved. Collecting a scalp? That also was nothing, an act some warriors performed when they wanted decorations for their tipi or their saddle. A warrior might kill an enemy and scalp him and still gain no credit if four other warriors had counted coup on him first.

'Sun-at-Noon failed?' the boy asked.

'He tried. The Pawnee had a horse and came too fast.'

'Did you bring his body home?'

'Only the rocks live forever,' Gray Wolf said. 'The Pawnee took his body and scalped him and he is dead.'

The boy sighed, for he knew that if his father had no scalp he could not enter the hunting grounds.

The following stories explain how Lame Beaver gained his own coups and became a great leader of Our People, but never chief.

1. Old Man Staked Out

In the spring of 1764, when Lame Beaver was seventeen years old, Our People met in conclave and decided it was humiliating to exist any longer without horses when the Comanche, the Pawnee and even the Ute had them. It was a situation requiring remedy, for it impeded the tribe in all ways. Not only was it a serious disadvantage in war; Our People also went hungry when the bison wandered too far to be located on foot. Even in moving from camp to camp the lack of horses distressed them, for they had to pack their goods on the backs of women or haul them on dog-travois—the A-shaped wooden frames whose rear legs dragged in dust—whereas the Pawnee, let alone the Ute, could haul theirs on horse-travois.

Therefore a thrill ran through the camp when Cold Ears,

with coups to his credit, announced, 'I am an old man. My teeth are breaking. My son is dead and I have no further desire to live. We must raid the Pawnee to capture horses, and when we do I shall stake myself out.'

Our People knew that it was the prerogative of a warrior to die in this manner, and all agreed that Cold Ears should be accorded the privilege. So when the war party was assembled, Cold Ears was awarded a prominent place and he took a public oath which resounded through the camp: 'Three days from now Our People will have horses, for I shall stake myself out and not retreat until we get them.'

Lame Beaver was so inspired by this pledge that he begged for permission to go along, and it was granted, for he was known as a courageous youth. That night, as they set forth, stealthily lest the ever-watchful Pawnee detect them, he felt the excitement of his first expedition against a most devious foe. Stars shone, a good omen, and by their frail light he studied the route against the day when he might have to lead a war party eastward.

To his right ran the Platte, studded with islands, its course marked always by cottonwood trees. He marked each island in memory, and where the stream debouched, and where the beaver had their lodges. He listened to birds and studied how the river looked in that precious hour before dawn. It was his initiation into the precautions observed by Our People when approaching an enemy.

For three days the war party traveled eastward, covering large distances. During the heat of the day they slept in secluded areas, but as twilight approached, they started running at a brisk pace, which they maintained until dark. Then they moved stealthily through the night, after which they ran again, repeating the cycle till well after dawn. Cold Ears, who was past fifty, had no apparent difficulty keeping up and appeared stronger at the end of the third day than he had been at the beginning. He was ready for battle.

Shortly after sunset on the third day Lame Beaver and an older brave were sent forward to see if they could locate the Pawnee camp, which must be at hand, and they crept among the cottonwoods with such skill that they succeeded in evading Pawnee outlooks and approaching to within a quarter mile of the camp. It was located at the spot where the two Plattes began to move together and was in a sense disappointing, for it was not by any means a main camp.

Lame Beaver whispered, 'It's only a hunting party. Not a real camp.'

His companion replied, 'They have horses. Look.'

There were horses, and Lame Beaver noticed with satisfaction that they were tethered at the west end of camp. 'That means, when they move out they'll come this way.'

His friend said, 'Cold Ears should stake himself out there,' and Lame Beaver saw that this would place the old man in direct line with the Pawnee march.

They crept back to camp, and the older man allowed Lame Beaver to speak first: 'Not many Pawnee there.' Then he added, 'But many horses. And they will come our way.'

With that reassuring news Our People did a reckless thing. They went to sleep. They posted a watch, of course, but they had been traveling for three days and were tired. Lame Beaver was much too excited to sleep, and he moved watchfully among the sleeping braves, listening to the night sounds with which he was so familiar: a coyote over there, a deer passing, a beaver slapping his tail, a night owl hooting in the far distance, a soft brush of wings closer at hand. He heard a rustle within the camp and moved to see what had caused it. Cold Ears could not sleep, either. He, too, was listening to the soft symphony of night, the last that he would probably ever hear.

'I'm afraid,' Cold Ears said. This seemed so unlikely that Lame Beaver gasped slightly, and Cold Ears laughed. Pulling the young warrior down beside him, he confided, 'I am always afraid when we fight the Pawnee, because they are so clever. They think up tricks we would never think of, and there is no way to counter them.'

In the darkness he recalled his many confrontations with this wily foe, and whatever he said testified to the superior brilliance of the Pawnee. 'Why were they the first to catch horses?' he demanded, but before he could say more he saw in the faint light along the horizon what looked to be a large boulder. 'Is that lookout asleep?' he asked in dismay. Together they studied the rock; then one shoulder moved and Cold Ears was satisfied that the lookout was alert.

'What happened was that the Pawnee realized they couldn't go down and just steal horses from the Comanche. No better horsemen on the plains than Comanche, and they guard their horses. So what the Pawnee did is what we have to do . . .' He rambled on, reconstructing the ruse by which the Pawnee deceived the Comanche and captured

their first horses. 'They not only knew how to get them,' he said with grudging admiration. 'When they got them home they knew how to breed them and make more. They're clever people, but tomorrow we'll take their horses from them.'

'Will they have some new way of defending themselves?' Lame Beaver asked.

The old man understood such apprehension and said reassuringly, 'When I was young I wasn't nervous before my first fight. I was terrified. It was against the Ute, and I shivered all night thinking they'd capture me and drag me back to their camp and make me marry one of their black daughters and raise dark children who would be Ute. But when the fight begins, the fear goes.'

Before dawn Cold Ears moved among the sleeping warriors and whispered to each, 'This is the day we capture horses.' Our People prepared themselves, then crept close to the Pawnee camp, evading sentries with ancient skill, and when all was ready, Cold Ears bade his fellow braves farewell and moved silently forward, stopping behind a hillock on the fringe of the Pawnee camp.

'Man-Above,' Lame Beaver prayed, 'make them come in his direction.'

For some reason the Pawnee were tardy in sending out that day's scouting party, and a warrior standing close to Lame Beaver said with some concern, as if he were a Pawnee depending on bison for food, 'If they do not leave soon, their hunting will not be good.'

With casual indifference, as if they had endless time, Pawnee scouts on the hill to the north started sending signals back to camp that bison were in sight, and activity began. Hunters began assembling at the western edge of camp and prepared to move out from between the low tipis. When they had moved clear of the camp, so that immediate retreat was impractical, Cold Ears disclosed himself and waved his arms to frighten the horses. They saw that he had tied himself to a stake and realized that he was the outpost of a major assault.

A Pawnee chief spurred his horse savagely, lowered his lance and drove directly at the self-tethered enemy, but with great dexterity Cold Ears evaded the lance, caught the shaft with his right hand and with a sudden twist tossed the Pawnee from his horse, slapping him with his left hand as he fell. It was a brilliant coup, one of the bravest in the annals of Our People.

'Get that horse!' Cold Ears shouted, but an alert group of Pawnee braves, aware that the riderless horse might be captured, surged after it, leaving Cold Ears tethered to the ground, and quickly surrounded the runaway, bringing it back safely to their side.

The battle was now engaged, and Cold Ears remained self-pinioned, directing his companions how to proceed, and many coups were counted. But finally the superior speed and widsom of the Pawnee began to assert itself, and Our People had no choice but to retreat. With bitterness the signal was given.

At this point Cold Ears was required by his own pledge to stay where he was, held to the ground by bison thongs, and fight the enemy so long as his strength lasted. He could be released, but only if some head chief doubled back to untie the thongs with his own hands. When, as in this case, all were preoccupied elsewhere, he was forbidden to release himself.

None of these chiefs could come back to save him; they had enough to do to try to save Our People from a complete rout, so Cold Ears was left alone. Girding himself with the lance he had wrested in the first moments of battle, and with tears of failure in his old eyes, he watched Our People retreat—with no horses. Then he waited.

Three Pawnee urged on their horses and rode straight at him. By some miracle he avoided their lances and succeeded in laming one of the horses with his. The Pawnee stopped to attend their horse, much more important to them than any elderly staked-out brave, and when they turned to resume their attack against him, they saw a remarkable sight.

From the main body of the retreating enemy one young warrior had detached himself and now came running back to make a stand alongside the old man. It was Lame Beaver, and he reached Cold Ears before the Pawnee horsemen did. He ripped away the thongs and stood defiantly beside Cold Ears.

With courage and simple skill the two warriors held off the enemy, knocking aside their lances and fending off the blows with their warclubs. Step by step they retreated, and on the Pawnee's fourth charge Lame Beaver reached up and actually touched one, counting a clear and unchallengeable coup.

This feat inspirited Our People, and they made a rush to surround Cold Ears and his savior, and when the Pawnee

saw how determined these men on foot were, they withdrew their horses and terminated the action.

In this famous battle, which was cherished in the history of each tribe and told to white men a century later, eleven of Our People participated against nineteen Pawnee. Three of Our People were wounded and two Pawnee. No one was killed, of course, but if Cold Ears had not been set free by Lame Beaver, he would have been.

The battle was remembered by Our People not because of Cold Ears' bravery, for old men had staked themselves out before, but because it marked the first public display of courage by Lame Beaver. The Pawnee never forgot it, because it was the opening blow of Lame Beaver's forty-year war against them.

When the war party returned to Rattlesnake Buttes, there was lamenting. Once again Our People had failed to obtain horses. Nor did Lame Beaver garner any praise for having liberated Cold Ears, for that was a prerogative sacred to chieftains, and for him to have taken this upon himself was presumptuous.

He was rebuked in public, and it was this injustice which rankled and forever deterred him from seeking acclaim or office. The tribe did not declare him ineligible because of his youthful folly; his subsequent behavior more than erased this first error. It was rather that he discovered for himself the inherent undesirability of becoming a leader; it was an act of pomp engaged in by lesser men who enjoyed bedecking themselves in feathers. He would let others use office to proclaim their feats. He would concentrate on the feat itself, doing what had to be done . . . in silence.

2. *Three Against Three Hundred*

In 1768, when Lame Beaver was twenty-one years old, he had one of those insights of extreme simplicity which mark superior men. He reasoned, 'If we want horses, let's go where the horses are.' And it was this that led him on his daring foray against the Comanche.

The vision came to him, as most good ones do, when he was preoccupied with hard work in a seemingly unrelated field. It was early autumn and Our People at Rattlesnake Buttes knew that for a safe winter they must lay away much more bison meat than they had so far been able to

take. Here again it was that persistent matter of horses. The Pawnee and the Comanche could fan out over vast distances and track down the bison where they were, and even the miserable Ute, when they came down out of their mountain strongholds, had horses for this purpose. But Our People had to track bison in the old way, the way Indians on the northern plains had been doing for a thousand years.

One morning a scout ran in with exciting news. A large herd had been sighted to the northwest and appeared to be moving in the right direction, although one could never tell for sure. Bison rarely moved in a discernible pattern; they milled about like a tornado which could set off on any heading. Still, one had to hope that they would move into a position from which they could be maneuvered toward the chalk cliff. Our People had no alternative but to act upon the supposition that this might happen.

Accordingly, the whole tribe left Rattlesnake Buttes for the laborious trek westward to intercept bison; on the second day scouts brought exhilarating news that the bison were heading southeast. With luck they might be diverted toward the chalk cliff.

As they walked, Lame Beaver became increasingly aware of a tall and lovely girl fourteen years old called Blue Leaf, daughter of Cold Ears, whom he had saved at the stake-out. He had received no thanks for his heroic action, for the old warrior had wanted to die and now his life was needlessly prolonged; many held it against Lame Beaver that he had interfered, because Cold Ears now had to be looked after by his daughter. She, on the other hand, was grateful to Lame Beaver for extending her father's life a few more years and did not complain about the extra work of providing food for him.

It was time that Lame Beaver took a wife, and his father —that is, his real father's second oldest brother—had several times broached the subject, but the young warrior had evaded it. His father offered to arrange a marriage, if necessary, but said that Lame Beaver could also look around for himself. In a desultory sort of way he had been doing that, but up to now he had overlooked Blue Leaf. On the trail in an elk-skin dress she was a handsome girl.

Our People moved a considerable distance westward, three days from camp, and in late afternoon of the third day they spotted the bison. It was a large herd, at least sev-

eral thousand, and was barely moving. The trick would be to urge it gently toward the cliff in such a way that the bison would not be aware of what was happening. One had to be gentle, yes, but one also had to move with a certain dispatch, for there was always danger that those Ute with their horses might come screaming out of the mountains, cut off a few bison and force the rest to scatter. It required good judgment.

The chiefs decided that the larger body of Our People would swing westward in a great arc and come quietly up behind the herd, not alerting it but maintaining a ready position if the bison tried to retreat over the ground they had just traversed. On the right flank fifteen or twenty braves would operate to keep the herd from moving into the low hills; theirs would be the easy task. It was the men assigned to the left flank who would have the crucial job, for they must keep the herd from heading toward the open plains, which it would want to do if frightened. The best men would be assigned this job.

Lame Beaver was nominated one of the seven wolves. These were braves who tied recently tanned wolf skins about them so that their bodies were completely masked; in this guise they crept up to the herd, almost touching the animals, which saw the wolves and shied away from them. There was little chance that the herd might stampede because of the wolves, for the bison knew that in a group they could protect themselves.

For two long waterless days Our People trailed the bison, the Indians in back maintaining a steady pressure, the ones towards the mountains constantly edging the great beasts toward the cliff. Lame Beaver and his six wolf men operated along the left flank to keep the bison from heading for the plains.

On the third day it became obvious that Our People had a good chance of driving the bison over the cliff, and great excitement manifested itself. The seven wolf men were now handed the best bows and arrows the tribe possessed, so that if the grand tactic failed, they could at least salvage something by shooting down some of the animals and thus ensure a meager supply of pemmican for the winter.

The fateful decision of when to stampede the herd was left in the hands of a council, to which Cold Ears, sagest bison hunter of them all, belonged. He said, 'The worst error is to start too soon. The second error is to have men

who are afraid at the points. I remember when we had the drive at Red Hills . . .' The council did not wish to hear again about Red Hills; an uncle of one of the present council had failed in courage and the herd had escaped.

'I will take the left point,' Cold Ears said, and everyone knew that this was the crucial one, because if the bison stampeded in that direction and got onto the plains, all was lost. 'Who will take the right point?' This was the one that kept the bison from scattering into the hills and was less dangerous and much less critical, but it nevertheless required a good man. An older chief volunteered for this post, and Cold Ears was satisfied.

So the trap was set. Two elderly chiefs, survivors of many such hunts, were given responsibility for launching the stampede, and they requested that most of the tribe and the dogs be moved into position along the crucial left flank to scare the bison with their noise if the animals tried to head for the plains. Lame Beaver and his wolf men were told what the signal would be, and all was ready.

With a wild cry the two chiefs lunged at the front rank of the bison. At the same instant those in back ran forward screaming and throwing rocks at the rear of the herd. And Lame Beaver and his wolf men fired arrows as fast as they could into the largest bison.

The herd panicked, and for a precarious moment—which terrified the Indians, for their lives depended upon the successful outcome of this hunt—it looked as if the beasts might simply mill in confusion and not run toward the cliff. But the chiefs had anticipated this, and a team of strong-armed young men started throwing large rocks at the lead animals, and after a desperate moment of hesitation, when every Indian prayed to Man-Above for assistance, the great herd began its gallop toward the cliff.

But unexplainedly it started to veer away, toward the plains, and it looked as if all was lost. Our People would garner only the few bison shot down by the wolf men. All the rest of that needed food, those blankets for survival, would escape.

'No! No!' Lame Beaver cried in despair.

Then, from the left point where he had stationed himself, Cold Ears ran forward to confront the bison. With arms waving and thin voice screaming above the thundering of the hoofs, he threw himself directly in front of the escaping beasts and turned them slightly to the west. The

animals that followed pounded the fallen man so that his body would not again be recognizable. But the herd had been prevented from escaping to the plains.

Like the tremendous wave of water that thunders out of the mountain when an ice dam breaks, the horde of bison ran down the intended channel, with Our People waving and shouting to keep them in formation. The beasts came roaring down the slight incline, when suddenly those in front tried to stop, furiously grinding their forefeet into the dust and bellowing in fear, but to no avail. The bison coming behind stormed into them and pushed them over the cliff. Then those that had done the pushing were hurled over by those behind. Thus the great herd committed suicide, animals weighing almost a ton crashing down on those heaped up below, breaking necks and legs and backbones, and all marked by billows of dust and pitiful bellowing.

It had become inconsequential how many bison the arrows of the wolf men had killed. Four hundred animals lay at the foot of the cliff, either dead or so injured that they could be killed at leisure by the butcher women. The stampede had been successful beyond hopes; the unneeded carcasses would be left for the Ute, which was about as generous as Our People could be toward them.

Only the very best animals, the tender young cows, were completely butchered. From the others the tongues were taken for ceremonial purposes, and some of the softer cuts about the hump. One had to be careful to collect enough of the guts for making pemmican, and in order to give that winter ration good taste, some proportion of stronger-flavored meat from older animals was advisable, so men who had supervised butchering of such kills before moved among the women and gave advice.

Lame Beaver, watching the wild confusion and appreciating the fact that only the sacrificial bravery of Cold Ears had enabled the drive to succeed, said to himself, 'It is not good to hunt bison this way. The animals at the bottom of the pile are so covered by those on top that even vultures won't be able to get them. It should be done with horses.' Then: 'If you want horses, you go where the horses are.' There would be no more toying with Pawnee, who owned a few horses. He would invade Comanche country, where there were hundreds.

He laid his plans carefully. He would take with him only two companions, but they must be young men he trusted

and who would not be afraid to die. For some days, as the tribe lugged huge burdens of bison meat and robes back to Rattlesnake Buttes, with all dogs laden, he studied his companions, and one after another he dismissed them as unlikely to stand the strain of what he had in mind.

Gradually he began to focus on a young brave named Red Nose, stolid, unimaginative, of unquestioned bravery. He saw in him the kind of young man who decides early that he will one day be a chief; from that moment all his actions become subordinate to that desire. He begins to speak gravely, nods cautiously when older men put forth proposals, and deports himself with decorum. Lame Beaver did not like Red Nose; he found him quite pompous. But never had he seen him do a wrong thing, neither an impetuous act nor a foolish one. He was already a sub-chief, a man to be trusted to the death, because his own vanity would not permit him to fail.

One night he went to Red Nose and asked, 'Are you willing to join me in a great feat . . .' He hesitated for the right word. 'Something that would bring horses to our tribe?' Red Nose deliberated for some time, as Lame Beaver knew he would, then said, 'To get horses I would do anything.' They grasped each other's shoulders.

Lame Beaver then directed his attention to an unlikely man called Cottonwood Knee, named after that strange accident which sometimes occurs along the riverbank when a root of a tree which should grow underground takes it upon itself to grow upward for a while, then scampers hurriedly back beneath the earth. He had none of the characteristics of Red Nose: he was plumpish, whereas the would-be chief was lean; he talked a lot, whereas the future sage was taciturn; and his face was an open smile, generous and marked with handsome white teeth, whereas Red Nose preserved the somber countenance of a leader. But Cottonwood Knee had a quality that was priceless for a dangerous mission: he had absolute loyalty to any commitment. He was reliable; just as the Platte River ran year after year, sometimes sprawled out and sometimes a well-defined river, so Cottonwood Knee ambled his fat and amiable way through life. When the Platte was in flood, it seemed to have no central direction whatever, but slowly it pulled itself together and not even Man-Above could restrain it from its course for long.

'Would you be willing to undertake a major adventure?' Lame Beaver asked the chubby man one afternoon.

'Yes,' Cottonwood Knee responded. He did not even ask what it was.

The day came when the three volunteers had to present their plan to the tribal council, and Lame Beaver prudently assigned this task to Red Nose, who discharged it with skill: 'If the whole tribe moved south to make war against the Comanche, they will know about it. They will be prepared. We will lose many braves and not catch many horses. But if we three go down in stealth, if we fail, only three are lost. And if we succeed, we shall have horses.'

After much discussion, permission was granted, but Lame Beaver's father was directed to counsel with the inexperienced warriors, and he said, 'You know, of course, that the Comanche practice terrible tortures on the enemies they capture. They love their horses above all else, and if you are caught tampering with them, you will die horribly. It is said that when a man is taken by the Comanche, he dies eleven times. Their women have cruel ways of torturing a man, yet keeping him alive.

'If your mission fails, wait till the last moment. Then kill yourselves. And if one of you finds himself in a position in which he cannot take his own life, you survivors must promise to kill him before you depart. Is this agreed?'

The three companions looked at each other; they had known of the Comanche reputation for hideous death but they had not wanted to speak openly of it. Now they had to face the prospect, and Red Nose addressed his two comrades: 'If I falter you must kill me.'

Cottonwood Knee said, 'Don't leave me with the Comanche.'

It was Lame Beaver who said it the other way: 'If you are helpless, I promise to kill you.'

Then Lame Beaver's father took him aside and said, 'I have noticed you watching Blue Leaf. Your eye seems to have fallen upon her.' Lame Beaver assented by his silence, and his father continued, 'While you are gone I will speak to her brother and find out how many bison robes.' To this, Lame Beaver made a response which would be long repeated in the tribe: 'Tell her brother that for Blue Leaf, I will give a horse.'

It was a long trek south to the land of the Comanche, with a likelihood at every step that these swift-riding scourges of the plains would spot them, but the three braves were also skilled plainsmen, and they left no tracks, betrayed no presence. Twice, in the later days, they saw

Comanche riding along the crests of hills, but even an eagle would have had difficulty detecting the intruders as they hid among the grasses.

They had been away from Rattlesnake Buttes many nights when they came upon signs of a Comanche village, but when they inspected it—with extreme caution—they found to their bitter disappointment that it was a miserable collection of poor tipis with only a few horses; by no means was it a worthy target. The true villages must lie farther south.

Their persistence was rewarded when they came to a swift-moving stream—later to be called the Arkansas—carrying much water and with two islands in the middle. They saw at once that the islands might be of advantage to them, for on the far bank stood a sizable village marked by a sight which gladdened their hearts: a compound hemmed in by woven brush and holding at least ninety horses.

For two days Our People stayed hidden on the north bank of the Arkansas, surveying every action that took place on the south, and Lame Beaver wondered why the Comanche permitted this surveillance. 'Where are their scouts?' he asked several times. It was apparent that the Comanche, having recently driven the Apache from this territory, had grown careless.

The plan they devised was a good one. They would cross to the south bank before midnight, before the next watch took over. They would remain hidden through the darkness, and just before dawn they would assault the corral in this manner: Lame Beaver would knock out the first guard nearest the camp. Red Nose would knock out the other guard nearest the river. And Cottonwood Knee would break down the fencing and drive as many horses as possible toward the north.

Then they would cross to the first island, regroup there, mount three horses and drive the rest with them. To succeed, Lame Beaver and Red Nose would have to scatter the remaining horses so that the Comanche could not quickly follow.

It was Cottonwood Knee who asked the embarrassing question 'How do you know we can ride the horses?' and Lame Beaver replied, 'If a Ute can ride, I can.'

They reached the south bank, and with deepening anxiety, waited for the night to pass. Comanche guards moved about the camp in desultory fashion, not really attending their work. Two watchmen reported to the corral, but to

the amazement of Our People, soon departed to spend the night inside their tipis. Lame Beaver wanted to signal Red Nose that there would be no guards at the corral, but Red Nose had already noted this and was signaling Cottonwood Knee. It was agreed that Lame Beaver would divert his attack to the lone guard at the camp, leaving Red Nose free to help Cottonwood Knee round up the horses to be taken and to set the rest loose. But as daylight approached, even the lone guard went in to his tipi. The road north lay for the moment defenseless.

Working slowly and with precision, Our People took advantage of a situation they could not have hoped for. They tore away a large portion of the fence, selected twenty-nine horses and sent the others quietly scattering. They drove the horses into the river, reached the island, and departed before the Comanche village was aware of what had happened.

It was the cleverest raid Our People ever engineered, for the twenty-nine horses were far to the north of the Arkansas, headed safely for Rattlesnake Buttes, before the first Comanche warrior crossed the river, and he without a horse.

The three braves were laughing among themselves, overjoyed with the success of their adventure, when Cottonwood Knee reined up with a look of anxiety and said, 'Suppose we got all males!' The three dismounted and satisfied themselves that they had a good mix, and it was in this way that Our People got the horse.

3. Visit to the Sun

The arrival of the horse among Our People changed many things. To take one example, it was now more pleasant to be a woman, for when the tribe moved she no longer had to haul the travois that were too heavy for the dogs. For another, the whole system of wealth was altered, and a man did not have to wait years to accumulate enough bison robes to procure the things he wanted; a horse was not only more acceptable as exchange but also more easily delivered when a transaction was agreed upon.

Hunting the bison changed, too. Three men could search out the herd, covering immense distances, and when they found it, the whole tribe did not have to trudge in pursuit; sixteen swift-riding hunters could trail it and with arrows

shoot off the animals needed, then truss up the good parts and haul them back by travois.

The change was greatest for the dogs. They no longer had to haul huge loads on small travois. One horse could haul ten times as much on a big one, and dogs could be kept as pets until the time came for eating them.

Our People, in bringing the horse to Rattlesnake Buttes, unwittingly returned it to the point of its genesis, and there it flourished. A gentler tribe than their neighbors, Our People had an innate appreciation of the horse, attending more carefully to its feeding and care. The saddles Our People devised were an improvement over the heavy affairs used by the Pawnee or the crude wooden efforts of the Ute. The bridles were simpler, too, with a decoration more restrained and utilitarian. Our People adopted the horse as a member of their family, and it proved a most useful friend, for it permitted them to conquer the plains, which they had already occupied but not really explored.

On no Indian did the horse exert a more profound influence than on Lame Beaver. In 1769, when he was twenty-two, one of his fathers approached him again about marrying Blue Leaf but found him far more concerned about a horse than a wife. After the raid on the Comanche camp, the captured horses were allotted according to a sensible plan: the best-trained mounts went to the older chiefs, who needed them for ceremonial purposes; the acceptable ones went to the middle chiefs, who did the scouting for bison; and the unbroken horses went to the young warriors, who had the time to train them.

Despite the fact that Lame Beaver had masterminded the raid, he was given a nervous, unbroken pinto mare, and when he first tried to ride her she tossed him viciously into the middle of a prairie-dog town. The little animals peeked out of their holes in chattering wonder as he limped after the pinto, failing to catch her on his first tries.

Again and again he sweated with the stubborn pony, not much bigger than he was, and repeatedly she pitched him over her head. Others volunteered to show him how to master her, and they went flying too. Finally an old man said, 'I heard once that the Comanche do it by taking their horses into the river.'

This was such a novel idea that Lame Beaver could not at first grasp its significance, but, after his pinto had resisted all other efforts, he and his friends tied her and dragged her by main strength down to the Platte. She shied away from

the water, but they plunged in, keeping hold of the thongs, got a good footing, and pulled and jerked until it looked as if her neck might come off before her stubborn feet touched water. Finally, with a mighty jerk, they got her off the bank and into the stream.

She was very frightened, but they kept tugging at her until her beautiful white-and-black-and-brown body was mostly submerged. Then Lame Beaver swam close to her, so that his face was almost touching hers. He began to talk with her, slowly and with a reassuring tone: 'For years and years you and I will be friends. We will ride after the bison together. You will know the feel of my knees on your flanks and turn as I bid you. We shall be friends for all the years and I will see that you get grass.'

When he had spoken with her thus, and quieted somewhat the fear in her eyes, he took off the thongs and left her in the middle of the river. Without looking at her further, he swam to the bank and climbed out. She watched him go, made a half-hearted start for the opposite bank, then followed him, but when she was again safe on land she refused to let him approach.

Daily for two weeks Lame Beaver dragged his pinto into the river, and on the fifteenth day, there in the water, she allowed him to mount her, and when she felt the security of his strong legs about her, she responded and finally ran boldly onto the land and off toward the Rattlesnake Buttes.

From that moment she was his companion, and she liked nothing more than to chase after bison. Since he required both hands to manipulate his bow, she learned to respond to his knee movements, and they formed a team. She was so sure-footed that he did not try to guide her, satisfied that she would find the best course, whatever the terrain. And sometimes, when he saw her running free with a group of other horses, he would catch sight of her straight back and its white patches and he would experience an emotion that could only be called love.

He was therefore disturbed when his father came to him and said, 'The brother of Blue Leaf is willing that you should marry his sister, but he demands that you fulfill your promise and give him your horse.'

Lame Beaver snapped, 'He has his horse . . .'

'True, but he argues that that horse was given him by the council, not by you. For Blue Leaf, he demands your horse.'

This outrageous request Lame Beaver refused. He still

wanted Blue Leaf; certainly he had seen no other girl so attractive, but not at the price of his horse. Obstinately he declined even to discuss the matter.

But now the council intervened: 'Lame Beaver promised to give a horse for Blue Leaf. Many heard how he made that vow. He cannot now change his mind and refuse to deliver the horse. It belongs to the brother of Blue Leaf.'

When Lame Beaver heard this decision he was enraged, and might have done something unwise had not Red Nose come to him to speak in low, judicious tones: 'There seems no escape, old friend.'

'I won't surrender that pinto.'

'There will be other horses.'

'None like mine.'

'She is no longer yours, dear friend. Tonight they will take her away.'

Such a verdict seemed so unjust that Lame Beaver went before the council and cried, 'I will not give up my horse. Her brother doesn't even care for the one you gave him.'

'It is proper,' said the elderly chief, 'that men should marry in an orderly way, and we have always given presents to the brothers of our brides. A horse is a suitable gift on such an occasion. Yours must be surrendered to the brother of Blue Leaf.'

On hearing this final judgment, Lame Beaver sped from the council tipi, leaped upon the pinto and dashed from the village, heading southward toward the river. He was followed by Cottonwood Knee, riding a brown pony, and as Lame Beaver was about to spur his pinto into the river, his pursuer caught up with him.

'Come back!' Cottonwood Knee called in the voice of friendship. 'You and I can catch many more horses.'

'Never like this one,' Lame Beaver said bitterly, but in the end he dismounted and allowed Cottonwood Knee to lead the pinto back to its new owner. As Lame Beaver stood by the river, watching his horse disappear, a feeling of inconsolable grief came over him, and for five days he wandered alone. In the end he returned to camp, and Cottonwood Knee and Red Nose took him before the council, and they said, 'We have ordered Blue Leaf's brother to give her to you. She is now your wife.' There was a hush, then Blue Leaf's brother appeared, leading his beautiful shy sister. She stood awkwardly before the chiefs, then saw Lame Beaver standing between his friends. Slowly she came to him, extending her hands and offering herself to him. Few

young husbands had ever accepted with such turbulent emotions so lovely a wife.

Lame Beaver now entered a strange world, that of the married man, in which each item of behavior was strictly defined. He could not, for example, ever speak to his wife's mother; that was totally forbidden until such time as he had presented her with some significant present. In moon periods his wife had to live in a special hut along with other women so afflicted, and while residing there, she might not speak to any man or child, lest she bring curses upon them. The consoling compensation was that with marriage he entered upon the warm and infinitely extended companionship of the Indian village, in which a man had three or four fathers and an equal number of mothers, in which all children belonged to all, and where the raising and education of the young was a common responsibility and punishment and harsh words were unknown.

It was a community in which each member did pretty much as he chose and where men who were called chiefs held that office not by heredity but by consent of their neighbors. There was no king, neither in this village nor in the tribe as a whole, only the council of older men, to which any well-comported brave might be elected by acclamation. It was one of the freest societies ever devised, hemmed in only by belief in Man-Above, reliance on Flat-Pipe and the inherited customs of Our People. It was communal without the restraints of communism and extremely libertarian without the excesses of libertinism. It was a way of life ideally fitted to the nomads of the plains, where space was endless and the supply of bison inexhaustible.

It was galling to Lame Beaver to realize that at the next bison hunt he would have to accompany the butcher women on foot, since he had no horse, and he watched with seething anger as lesser huntsmen like his brother-in-law saddled their beasts for the chase. Blue Leaf, observing this, consoled him: 'When the hunt is over you'll get two or three trusted companions and go into the Ute country and capture horses from them. If you did this against the Comanche, you can do it against the Ute.'

'They keep their horses in mountains,' he snapped, 'and I've never been in mountains.'

'I will go to reason with my brother . . . offer him a different horse . . . later, when you make other coups,' and she moved toward the door of their tipi.

Lame Beaver was about to reply when all logic was driv-

en from his mind by a brilliant flash of light. Blue Leaf could not see it, for it came from within his heart, an illumination so transcendent that it would guide him for the rest of his life.

'No!' he cried in exaltation. 'No more brothers. No more council.' Rudely he pushed her away from the door, announcing with fierce dedication, 'We shall have other horses . . . after the Sun Dance . . . many horses.'

The coup which he performed that year was never counted officially, because it had no witnesses, and since he would tell no one what had happened, not even his wife, the tribe had to take it on faith that some extraordinary event had occurred, perhaps even the intercession of Man-Above. They referred to it in tribal annals as 'Lame Beaver's visit to the sun,' and accepted it as a mystery.

Let us look at Lame Beaver on the eve of his journey. He was slightly under six feet tall and weighed one hundred and seventy-three pounds, which gave him a lean, rangy look. He had black hair that he wore in two braids which came to the tip of his shoulders and were bound by bison thong decorated with elk's teeth. He had very dark eyes, deep-set, but because of his diffident nature, not piercing. His skin was a light bronze, not nearly so dark as a Ute's nor so red as a Pawnee's. At this stage he had all his teeth, but some of the corners were beginning to show signs of wear from his habit of eating only jerky during the winter; he did not like the easier-chewed pemmican, considering it women's food.

Since he had walked long distances most of his life, he liked moccasins made of the heaviest bison leather rather than the softer deer or elk even though they were easier on his feet. Most of the time he wore a breech-clout, and otherwise went naked except for his moccasins, but in winter he liked rather heavy full-length leggings whose outer seams were well fringed or even decorated with small feathers. He wore a vest, too, elaborately painted, and a light robe about his shoulders, made from the skin of a young bison.

Once as a child watching the great chiefs convene, he had been awed by their headbands of beads and eagle feathers, and had even gone so far as to fashion a childish one with little feathers picked up on the prairie. Later he recognized that he had no appetite for power and he relinquished its pretensions to others.

When he first experienced the horse and had one of his

own, he blended with it harmoniously, adapting his body to the animal's, and he might in time have become as good a rider as the Comanche, but being deprived of the pinto by tribal law, he ceased all identification with the horse and would henceforth consider it only as a means of transport and would allow no deep attachment to develop.

He seemed a cold, self-disciplined man, but he was not. Injustice had graved deep marks on both his heart and his face, and he was capable of furious action. He was careful, however, not to indulge in fits of rage before others or in conditions which might endanger him or any enterprise with which he was connected. He was able to bear much pain, either deprivation of water on long summer marches or the intense cold of winter, and he was about to exhibit this capacity to a degree that would have been totally impossible to most white men living at that period.

As to his intelligence, he was equipped to handle the world he knew. He had an excellent memory, fortified by acute powers of observation. Since his life was lived on a simple level, he addressed himself to simple problems. Since he was not required to bother with a lot of extraneous data from outside sources, he had not developed his reasoning powers to any high degree. He was largely unacquainted with abstract thought and was content to have his small world closely confined by tradition and custom.

He prized the companionship of all people, and was as much at home with children as he was with older warriors. He loved the intimacy of married life and retained close contacts with his three fathers, three mothers and various other relatives. Like most of Our People he was essentially gentle, avoided warfare when he could, but acknowledged that a man's final worth depended on his capacity to count coup. He had not yet killed a man and intuitively drew back from considering in what circumstances he might one day have to do so; he preferred not to think of this. He would face the necessity when it arrived but would not hasten the day. He suffered an inner fear that he might prove cowardly at the moment of trial.

He had a deep sense of identity with living things. Having once seen a fish jump in the river, arching its back in a lovely curve, he often watched the water, hoping to see this phenomenon again. He enjoyed excursions to find lodge poles for tipis and knew well the kinds of trees that yielded such poles. He understood the bison, and he could track elk and deer. He knew where the beaver hid and how eagles

could be trapped for their feathers. When his course required him to pass close to Rattlesnake Buttes he knew how to guard against the poison snakes and yet find a place to watch the prairie dogs at play. He liked the wolves and felt that they added definition to the other wild things of the prairie; sometimes he felt a deep identification with the wolf and had often speculated on the desirability of changing his name to Sun Wolf, after a great beast he had seen one day snapping at the sun.

It was this man, still seething with anger at having been deprived of his pinto, who sought spiritual cleansing for the task to which he was about to commit himself. To do what he intended, and alone, would require the control of every faculty he had, and this could be ensured only by offering himself to the sun. After pondering for some days what he must do, he appeared before his wife and announced, 'When the Sun Dance is held, I shall offer myself.'

Blue Leaf shuddered. Lame Beaver saw this and frowned. 'We must both make the sacrifice,' he insisted, without deigning to explain what his ultimate purpose was in committing himself to the sun. He did try to console her, but she withdrew. She appreciated the fact that when a man dedicated himself to the sun, events happened and no one could foresee their consequences.

The Sun Dance, as observed by Our People at that time, was a celebration covering eight days, and it was of such spiritual significance that other villages, oftentimes from far away, were invited to participate. Flat-Pipe was paraded to lend authority, and numerous intricate rituals were observed. On the fourth day stakes were driven into the ground, delimiting a ceremonial area, and on the fifth a sacred place was identified within this area.

It was marked by fourteen willow sticks painted red and protected by a low palisade of cottonwood branches. At the center Flat-Pipe was installed, flanked by two massive bison skulls, on each of which rested a very sharp wooden skewer plus a length of thong. Small boys, imagining the day when they would claim manhood, studied these skulls and shivered. Two young braves, noted for courage, moved forward, consecrated themselves to the sun, and stepped within the palisade, lifting the heavy skulls, the skewers and the thongs. Presenting these to a group of old men skilled in conducting this part of the ceremony, they waited impassively as the elders tested the sharp points of the skewers.

Now the older men went to the first brave, felt for his back muscle and jabbed a skewer under it. Pushing hard, they forced the wood beneath the taut muscle and out the other side, bringing with it a gush of blood. Testing the skewer for firmness, they secured one end of the thong to it, lashing the other end to the skull, which they placed in the young man's hands. Betraying no evidence of pain, he lifted the skull toward the sun, then threw it to the ground, waiting at attention while the old men repeated the ritual on his companion.

The young warriors now leaped forward. The thongs tightened against the skewers. The bison heads dragged heavily in the sand, almost tearing the skewers through the back muscles, and the braves danced and danced and danced.

Lame Beaver, who had not volunteered for this lesser offering, watched. Women chanted and old men urged the younger on, and for some hours the latter dragged the skulls in a kind of trance, the pain long since numbed by the self-hypnosis. Finally the horn of one skull caught in sagebrush; the thongs tightened and the skewer ripped through the back muscle of that dancer. He collapsed.

On the sixth day it was time for Lame Beaver to offer himself, and he sought out Cottonwood Knee, leading him to the spot where Blue Leaf stood awaiting this terrible moment. Taking his young friend's hand, Lame Beaver placed it in the hand of his wife and said in a loud voice, 'Take her. Get her with child. This is my first sacrifice.' Then he stepped back and watched as Cottonwood Knee led Blue Leaf to a tipi set aside for this highest of ritual purposes. Lame Beaver had sacrificed even his wife, and this proved his elegibility for the ordeal which awaited.

He now confronted his three fathers, holding out to them a pair of sharp skewers and two very long thongs. His oldest father stepped forward, grasped Lame Beaver by the soft flesh of his chest and probed with his fingers until he located his son's left pectoral muscle. Drawing it taut, he reached for a skewer, and after offering it ceremoniously to the sun, jabbed it under the muscle until both ends protruded. The second father did the same with the right pectoral muscle, staring into his son's eyes as the young man accepted the great pain without flinching.

The fathers then lashed the thongs to the skewers and signaled to the watching crowd. A lithe young man leaped forward, grasped the free ends of the thongs and climbed

to the top of a pole standing in the middle of the ceremonial area. There he passed the throngs over a deep notch cut into the top of the pole, allowing the ends to fall free. Before he reached the ground, eight strong men had grasped each thong and had started hauling Lame Beaver into the air until he dangled seven feet above the ground, his whole weight suspended from the skewers passing through his breast.

Up to this point Lame Beaver had not uttered a sound, not even when the skewers pierced him, but now when the thongs were lashed and he hung alone, he could feel the dead weight of his body and mumbled, 'This will tear me apart.' But the muscles held. During the first period, while the sun climbed toward the midday point, he felt each stage of pain and at times thought he must cry out to have them halt the ceremony, but when the sun shone on him at noon, he experienced a benign sensation, as if it were banishing the pain because of his bravery, and for the last four hours he existed in a trance, powerful, capable of facing any enemy. In an exaltation of spirit, the memory of which would abide with him the rest of his life, he endured the closing hour and watched with positive sorrow as the sun vanished, releasing him from his ordeal.

His fathers lowered him to the ground and loosened the thongs. Tenderly they drew out the skewers and then rubbed salt and ashes into the gaping wounds, the first to cleanse them, the second to create tattooed cicatrices which would forever mark Lame Beaver as an exceptional member of Our People.

On the seventh day Lame Beaver rested in a special tipi. He had a soaring fever and limbs so pain-racked that he could barely move them, but old men who had suffered the same torture in their youth knew how to tend him, so that on the last day he was prepared for the final ordeal. The various young men who had dragged bison skulls with their backs and he who had made the great sacrifice assembled in a circle around the altar where Flat-Pipe rested and began a solemn dance. To the beat of drums and the chanting of voices they moved, always facing the sun.

They danced this way for eight hours, encouraged by their kinsmen. Aching with thirst, they kept on until their legs seemed about to explode. Visions of white bison assailed them, and haunting memories. Some staggered and others collapsed, and all the while watchers cajoled them to continue, to remain strong, until at last the sun went down.

That night Lame Beaver returned to his own tipi, where Blue Leaf waited. 'Now I am ready to go,' he said, and she fed him and bathed his wounds and gave him consolation for the sacrifices he had made, and before dawn he was walking alone, quietly, making no noise and leaving no trail, for his solitary confrontation with the Pawnee.

With unbelievable vigor he walked and ran all the way to the confluence of the two Plattes, but found no Pawnee. He continued eastward, well into the heart of enemy country, but they were gone. When he penetrated their permanent villages, these, too, were deserted.

He went to the south toward Kansas and far along the Big Blue River, but they were not hunting there, and then he caught a smell of bison far to the west. He did not actually smell them, of course. They were much too distant for that, but he knew from many signs that they were there, well south of the Platte toward Apache country.

Gambling on his intuition, he made a sweep toward the Arkansas River and came in sight of a Pawnee hunting camp. He remained hidden for three days, exercising the most cruel discipline, for he was alone and without a horse. He required everything to be in his favor if he were to have even a slight chance of success. His spirits were kept alive by his discovery that these Pawnee had several hundred horses.

On the fourth day of scouting he concluded that this night would provide the best possible combination of circumstances, and if a lone warrior were ever to have any chance, this was it. The Pawnee hunters had been riding far to the west—very far for the Pawnee, who customarily kept to the east—and they would come home tired. The camp had been slaughtering for three days, and that, too, was hard work. Tonight he would strike.

Having made that decision, he fell sound asleep and did not awaken till midnight. The stars showed that he had much time till dawn, and he spent it moving into the one position that would enable him to cut out a score of horses and get off to a galloping start toward the Platte. The guard would be at the opposite end of the improvised corral and Lame Beaver would have a brief advantage.

Breathing deeply and recalling his devotion to the sun, he touched his breasts and said, 'I am of Our People. Man-Above, help me.'

He slipped around to the far end of the corral and saw with disgust that the lone guard was not where he had been

each previous night but right where he could do the most harm. It would be necessary to kill him; there could be no other solution. But as Lame Beaver was about to move forward to cut the guard's throat, a coyote called, three low notes ending in a higher one. The guard looked in the direction from which the sound had come, and then turned and threw a stone. He threw another, and the coyote called again. Throwing stones rapidly, the Pawnee ran after the pesky beast, and in that moment Lame Beaver dashed into the corral, caught a handsome red horse by the mane, threw himself on its back and hallooed a score of horses northward.

It took some time for the Pawnee to discover what he had done, but when they did, they launched an immediate pursuit.

Pawnee riders, the best of the tribe, chased him all that morning. The sun rose and dew vanished from the low grass. Some of Lame Beaver's horses scattered, but others kept galloping with him. Still the Pawnee scouts hammered across the plains, sending up clouds of dust and ignoring the strays that broke away from Lame Beaver's little herd.

They would have overtaken him except for one thing: the ordeal he had undergone at the Sun Dance was so much more harrowing than a chase across the plains that when his Pawnee pursuers had to stop at a small stream to catch a drink of water, he galloped on, unaware of thirst. Neither dust nor fatigue nor anxiety deterred him; from midafternoon, as he galloped toward the Platte, he seemed to be growing stronger rather than weaker. He realized that at the river he would face a crisis: how could he urge his riderless horses into the water and out the other side?

He was saved by the fact that Red Nose and some braves were searching the riverbanks for beaver. When they saw Lame Beaver speeding across the plains, they were able to guess what was happening. Goading their horses into the water, they sped to his rescue, surrounding him in a protective arc and gathering in the horses.

When the exhausted Pawnee reined up, some distance away, it was obvious that their tired mounts would be no match for the fresh ones ridden by Our People, and they prudently retired, but not before one of their braves made a last heroic effort. Urging his foam-flecked horse, he drove right at Red Nose, touching him with his lance and scoring one of the most gallant coups ever witnessed by Our People. Two warriors tried to knock him down as he passed,

but he escaped, and as he rode back to the Pawnee, Our People cheered his bravery.

That night Lame Beaver was acclaimed at Rattlesnake Buttes, for he had brought back not only his own big red stallion, but eighteen other horses as well. One he gave to Red Nose and one to his friend Cottonwood Knee and one fine pinto mare to his wife, Blue Leaf. The others he turned over to the council, almost with contempt, to do with as they wished.

When this was done he washed, ate a long meal of bison liver and hump steak, and told his wife, 'Now we have horses.' From that time on, the warriors who camped around Rattlesnake Buttes rode, and only the women walked . . . except Blue Leaf, who had her own prancing pinto. But Lame Beaver was not awarded a coup, for it could not be ascertained if he had actually touched a Pawnee. Whenever prying ones asked him to explain how he had captured, single-handed, nineteen horses, he said, 'They were a gift of the sun.'

4. Death of Never-Death

In the years when Our People came to occupy the land between the two Plattes, they were surrounded by enemies and life was difficult. But they could depend on one ally, the finest tribe of Indians on the plains, the Cheyenne. They were taller than Our People—in fact, the tallest Indians in America—and braver. They were better horsemen and always more willing to engage in battle. They were sage men and their customs were different: they scorned Our People's practice of eating dogs and abhorred their custom of willingly offering up their women to other men; it was more difficult to count coup among them, too, for they allowed only three of their warriors to count coup on a single enemy, whereas Our People allowed four; and they viewed with special detestation the custom of the Pawnee whereby each year they sacrificed a virgin Indian girl, captured from another tribe if possible, or taken from their own if necessary.

Lame Beaver's father once told him—that is, his real father—'The two things Our People can depend upon are the rising of the sun and the loyalty of the Cheyenne.' Once they had been bitter enemies, and it was no small thing for the Cheyenne to declare war on Our People who,

though they were not flamboyant and did not make a ritual of war, could still be terribly stubborn, and men like Lame Beaver were not uncommon. His grandfather had fought the Cheyenne many times, until one day leading chiefs of the two tribes convened, the Cheyenne bright with paint and eagle feathers, and they had reasoned: 'It is stupid for us to destroy ourselves. We share many things,' and they smoked the pipe, and for a century after that—indeed, for as long as Indians roamed the plains—no Cheyenne ever fought with Our People, and no Cheyenne in distress ever sought aid from Our People without receiving it. Longer than almost any other treaty existing anywhere, any time, the treaty between these two tribes was honored.

This was the more remarkable in that neither tribe could speak the other's language. In fact, each of the Indian tribes with whom Our People came into contact could speak only its own language. Thus Our People could not speak to their enemies the Dakota, nor the Ute, nor the Comanche nor the Pawnee; they could not even speak to their trusted allies.

There was, of course, a sign language which did not depend upon spoken words, but rather on generalized ideas, and all Indians on the plains were conversant with it. Two men from tribes a thousand miles apart could meet at some riverbank and talk intelligently in signs, and in this way communication passed rapidly from one part of the country to the other.

Our People were imprisoned within the most difficult of the Indian languages, so difficult indeed that no other tribe except one related branch, the Gros Ventres, ever learned to speak it. It stood by itself, a language spoken by only 3300 people in the world: that was the total number of Our People. The enemy tribes were not much larger: the Ute had 3600; the Comanche, 3500; the Pawnee, about 6000. The great Cheyenne, who would be famous in history, had only 3500. The Dakota, known also as the Sioux, had many branches, and they totaled perhaps 11,000.

In the year 1776 the Cheyenne chiefs sent a messenger to Our People, their allies, and he said in sign language, 'Comanche in the region between the Platte and the Arkansas are raiding and killing. We are going to make war against them and seek your help.'

There could be only one reply to such a request, and Our People said, 'We will send our warriors with you.' Therefore, in the late summer of that year an army of Cheyenne

supported by Our People rode south to teach the Comanche a lesson, but they had traveled only a short distance when scouts reported that the Comanche were aware of their coming and had sought help from their allies, the Apache. This was dread news indeed, for the Comanche by themselves were formidable and cruel, but when allied with the Apache, they would be well-nigh unbeatable.

There was no talk of retreat. The Cheyenne chiefs said, 'If we allow them to invade our land, they will ransack our villages and take our women. They must be taught a lesson, Comanche and Apache alike.' Discipline tightened, and men moved with caution, for to be captured by this dreadful enemy meant more than death.

It was then that the warriors, at night, began to talk about Never-Death: 'I fought against him once. He's a Comanche with a deep scar down his left cheek. When he comes to your part of the battlefield, move away. He is invincible.'

Many reports attested to this. Once when the Pawnee were trying to steal horses, they launched a running battle to distract the Comanche, thus allowing a surprise group to sweep in against the horses, and this would have succeeded had not Never-Death, riding his big black horse, detected the ruse and countered it single-handed. He rode right at the Pawnee, one man against eleven, but his big medicine made their arrows fall harmless. This so terrified the Pawnee raiders that they turned and fled, with Never-Death following them, and when the leading Pawnee saw this, they realized that a miracle of some kind had occurred, and they, too, fled. All the tribes that roamed the plains carried tales of how this ultrabrave Comanche on the black horse possessed a medicine which could not be penetrated by arrows.

Therefore, as the allies approached the Arkansas River, they became more cautious, searching out the best location for their attack, and finally their scouts reported that by crossing the Arkansas and striking the Comanche from the south, they might drive a wedge between the great horsemen and their Apache allies. Then the chiefs consulted. For the Cheyenne there was Broken Hand and Howling Wolf and Gray Beads and Bison Wallow, and for the discussion they dressed in ceremonial gear with headbands resplendent with eagle feathers. For Our People it was Straight Arrow and Jumping Snake and Gray Wolf. Using sign language and drawing many designs in the sand along

the riverbank, they devised a clever plan, requiring subtle timing and much deception. They doubted that the enemy would be able to react quickly; they expected to invade the camp itself and create much havoc among the Comanche before the Apache could rally to their assistance. It was a plan that would have done credit to any of the European generals who were engaged in battle in that late summer of 1776, or to any American generals so occupied.

But always the council had to take into account Never-Death, and after much discussion of this imponderable, Gray Wolf had a suggestion. 'Have you among your young Cheyenne three men of great bravery?' They did, of course, and he continued: 'We will assign three of our young men who have conducted themselves well, my son Lame Beaver, Red Nose and Cottonwood Knee, and the six shall have only one responsibility. To fight Never-Death and keep him from striking terror in our braves.'

'Will that be enough?' Bison Wallow asked skeptically.

'It will keep his terror in one place,' Gray Wolf reasoned, and the plan was adopted.

Gray Wolf sought out the three young braves of his tribe and briefed them on his plan, while Bison Wallow instructed his Cheyenne. Finally the eight men convened as a unit and Bison Wallow gave the six warriors their instructions in sign language. 'No matter what happens in the fight, you are to hold back until Never-Death makes his appearance. Big black horse, scar down left cheek, usually dresses for battle in black. We must take him by surprise. You must surround him and engage him . . . only him.'

Gray Wolf then added his advice, also in sign language: 'It is useless to shoot arrows at him. It is useless to try to pierce him with lances. Club him to death. That hasn't been tried yet.'

So the six young warriors cast aside their weapons and armed themselves with clubs, Lame Beaver producing a fine, well-balanced one with knobs, made from a heavy wood. When he swung it in the air, it had a lively *swoooosh* and seemed as if it could deliver a lethal blow. He was satisfied.

Now the grand design was put into operation. The first step required crossing the Arkansas, at this point a deep, dark river. The two tribes rode their horses into the swift water, using a tactic they had learned from the Pawnee: stay on the horse till only his head is above water, then slip off and go the rest of the way holding onto his tail. Once on

the other side, the principal chiefs led the main body of warriors eastward along the riverbank until they neared the Comanche camp. A smaller group cut south to intercept the Apache if they should be moving in that area, while Lame Beaver and his special force rode apart, each inwardly terrified by the prospect of encountering Never-Death.

Scouts rode back to inform the allies that prospects were good. The Comanche camp had not moved. The Apache had not yet come into position. 'And Never-Death?' the chiefs asked. 'He has not been seen,' the scouts replied.

So the great battle was joined, and with the initial signal every fine stratagem the chiefs had devised evaporated, because in Indian warfare it was each man his own general, each unit its own command. The Cheyenne started for the Comanche village, but en route they came upon a Comanche riding a slow horse, and everyone tried to count coup on him, and by the time he was dead with eleven arrows through him, the village had been forgotten, because another Comanche was sighted running in the opposite direction.

Things were no better for the southern allies. The Apache had been warned that they must move quickly to support the village, and they would have, except that at the last minute they spotted a small band of Cheyenne who had gotten lost chasing a Comanche, and the whole Apache tribe diverted to annihilate that small band.

Only Lame Beaver, Red Nose and Cottonwood Knee held to the original plan; their three Cheyenne companions spotted an Apache separated from the main body, and chased him for a distance, killing him at last. Breathless, they returned to Our People, whom they accused in sign language of lacking valor. Lame Beaver laughed and replied, 'Anyone who fights an Apache is truly valorous, but we are waiting for Never-Death,' and the Cheyenne said 'We're waiting for him too,' but in the meantime they sighted another Apache, and off they went. This time they failed to catch him and returned quite winded but delighted with the battle, and Lame Beaver wondered how much help they would be if they did meet up with Never-Death. He knew they would be valiant . . . but exhausted.

The battle now degenerated into a confused melee, with the invaders retaining a slight advantage, but Never-Death had not yet made an appearance. Then came a small body of Comanche led by a large dark man riding a black horse. This was Never-Death, and his arrival so inspirited his allies that they launched a counterthrust against the Cheyenne, gambling that if they could terrorize these warriors, Our People would flee automatically.

But on this day Never-Death was not to have his accustomed effect, for as he was preparing to spread terror among the Cheyenne, Lame Beaver and his five companions rode speedily at him, and a violent scuffle ensued, highlighted by wild battle cries from the exhausted Cheyenne, who anticipated a fine brawl. Never-Death was as powerful as he had been depicted, but did not panic the six warriors. Our People drove steadily against him, but the wild Cheyenne, reveling in battle, sped in and out of the fight until Never-Death's followers unleashed a flood of arrows at them, killing one.

Never-Death supposed that this would discourage the others, and he made a dash for the main battle, but again Lame Beaver intercepted him, while the two remaining Cheyenne, ignoring arrows, slashed at him with their clubs. Never-Death now commanded his troop to evade the pestilential attackers by a wide running sweep, and this would have succeeded except that Lame Beaver spurred his own horse to a gallop, smashed into the heart of Never-Death's group, clubbed him over the head, then dived at him, knocking him from his horse and sprawling him on the ground.

As the two warriors fell, Lame Beaver discovered for himself that Never-Death really was different from other men. His body seemed not human but to be made of iron, and when he struck the earth, with Lame Beaver atop him, he rattled. He was a terrifying creature, and Lame Beaver expected Never-Death to destroy him in some magic way.

Lame Beaver had lost his club and felt powerless to hurt this terrible Comanche, but as Never-Death collected his strength and prepared to kill Lame Beaver, the latter remembered the caution of Gray Wolf: 'Only the rocks live forever,' and he determined that he would fight this Comanche to the death. Doubling his two hands into one powerful fist, he cocked his elbows and brought that fist against the face of Never-Death. The Comanche, stunned by this unexpected blow, fell back, and Lame Beaver struck him again and again. He heard bones breaking in the Comanche's head, and after one final blow he saw that head lying at an impossible angle to the body. He would have fainted, except that his two Cheyenne companions rode up shouting and laughing and proclaiming victory. Kneeling in

the dust, he pointed at his fallen adversary and said in sign language, 'Powerful medicine. No more.' The Cheyenne cheered.

Next morning the defeated Comanche and Apache chiefs sought pow-wow with the Cheyenne, who insisted that Our People participate too. The losers proposed that all prisoners be released, and this was done. They said that they would overlook the destruction of the two camps, and the Cheyenne council members nodded. They said they were offering the Cheyenne twenty horses in exchange for the iron shirt which their great chieftain had worn for so long and which two Cheyenne had stripped from his dead body.

The shirt was produced for all to marvel at, a cuirass made centuries ago in Spain of iron and silver, exhumed from the grave of a Spanish explorer who had died in these alien lands in 1542, and long the treasure of the Comanche. Deep Water, a Comanche chief, said in sign language, 'For your warriors this would be nothing. For us it is the great medicine of our tribe.'

There was a moment of hesitation, which Lame Beaver broke by signaling without authorization, 'Sixty horses,' and without a second's pause Deep Water shouted and signaled, 'Eighty horses,' and the trade was completed.

In this great battle, which stabilized the southern frontier for nearly forty years and was therefore the outstanding Indian battle of half a century, 113 Comanche and 67 Apache fought 92 Cheyenne and 39 Our People. The southern confederacy lost 28 men, including Never-Death; the northern 16, including Gray Wolf.

The victors returned home with the eighty horses from the Comanche, plus another nineteen captured from the Apache. Coups were counted for many nights, none so notable as the one Lame Beaver gained when he grappled barehanded with Never-Death and disclosed the secret of his powerful medicine.

5. Nine Horses Lost

In the year 1782, when Lame Beaver was thirty-five years old, a major imbalance developed on the plains, one which threatened Indian stability until it was corrected. The arrival of the horse was the only other phenomenon which approached it in importance.

That year the Pawnee acquired a substantial supply of guns and for a while dominated all tribes to the west. There had been guns before, isolated examples of some lucky Indian's obtaining a rifle and three or four lead bullets with just enough powder to fire them; but after that explosive celebration, in which his own fingers were liable to be shot off, or his friend's head, only the barren rifle remained. In the end it was used as a club.

But in 1782 the Pawnee got the rifle in earnest through trading with Saint Louis, and acquired the skill to use it. They set forth immediately to impose upon the Platte a Pax Pawnee, and for a while succeeded. Set free from the necessity of riding down their bison by brute strength and shooting them with bow and arrow, they could now stand well back and gun them down at leisure. A war party of six could roam from the Missouri to the Colorado mountains, and move in safety, assured that if trouble did develop with Our People or the Ute, their guns would defend them.

The more remote tribes, learning of the appalling advantage now enjoyed by the Pawnee, had only one desire—to get guns for themselves. But since they had not yet begun to trade with white men, they remained without modern arms. Their world was moving away from them and they were unable to catch up.

'I told you the Pawnee were the cleverest,' Jumping Snake repeated so often and so dolefully that the others wanted to silence him, but he was a senior chief with many coups and his lamentations continued.

Obviously, many councils were held and raids against the Pawnee were planned, but as Jumping Snake reiterated, 'If we got the black-sticks-that-speak-death, we wouldn't know what to do with them. What is their great medicine? Who can tell?'

A number of Our People were then encamped near Rattlesnake Buttes, and early one morning a boy of ten ran up to Jumping Snake and reported, 'A Pawnee war party in the cottonwoods!' The chiefs immediately dispatched scouts to see if this report was true, and they returned with ominous news: 'Fifteen Pawnee. Good horses. Four black sticks.'

The council had to assume that the Pawnee intended trouble, and some advised that the camp be evacuated immediately and reestablished at some point on the other side of the North Platte, and this counsel prevailed. But Lame Beaver and seven of the middle group of warriors were

given permission to stay behind to lure the Pawnee on, in hopes of somehow gaining possession of at least one of the rifles.

'We shall need some horses to use as bait,' Lame Beaver said, so they were given sixteen, which included their own mounts, and eight of these they allowed to roam as lures in the direction of the South Platte.

The Pawnee were not marching westward arrogantly, even though they had guns. They kept scouts properly posted, and in time one of them, on a reconnoiter to the north, spotted the horses. He was not so stupid as to imagine that the animals were unattended, and since no men were visible, he concluded that they must be a trap. Soon the other Pawnee were in position to study the situation. Obviously this was a trap, but there was a good chance that whoever had set it knew nothing of guns. This would be a good opportunity to make them permanently afraid of the Pawnee and to get some good mounts at the same time. They laid their plans to snare the horses and terrify their owners.

But as they were doing so, Lame Beaver and his men were constructing contrary plans, and it was obvious that the two must come into violent conflict. The battle started when the fifteen Pawnee fanned out to drive the grazing horses into the river. Lame Beaver allowed this maneuver to develop, because it diluted the force of the enemy, and when the spread was at its greatest, he and Cottonwood Knee made a determined charge at its apex.

They broke through, but now they were encircled by the enemy. This was not accidental; it was an act of special courage, for it distracted the attention of the Pawnee, allowing the other warriors from Our People to attack the two flanks.

Confusion resulted. At first the Pawnee leader thought he might be able to dispose of the two intruders without using his guns, but Lame Beaver and Cottonwood Knee were so wild in their passage, and so disruptive, that ordinary tactics could not contain them and he signaled one of his men bearing a gun to fire.

There was a loud blast, much smoke, and Cottonwood Knee was blown off his horse, his chest shattered. Lame Beaver, seeing the destruction of his friend and knowing from the spurting blood that he must be dead, wheeled his horse and rode hard at the Pawnee who had fired, and that warrior was so preoccupied with his gun that he could not protect himself. Lame Beaver, leaning far out of his saddle,

grabbed at the smoking gun with both hands and wrested it from its owner. His momentum carried him out of the semicircle and back toward his own men.

'I have it!' he shouted, waving the gun aloft.

At this Our People on the left flank rallied and started a concerted drive on the Pawnee, who retreated slowly, firing another gun and taking the eight horses and Cottonwood Knee's mount across the Platte with them.

It was an inconclusive battle. Our People had lost nine good horses, which they could not afford, and Cottonwood Knee was dead, a courageous man with many coups to his credit. The Pawnee had been repulsed, leaving two of their men dead and surrendering one precious gun.

Lame Beaver sent a messenger across the North Platte to inform the chiefs that it was safe to return to Rattlesnake Buttes, and while they waited for the tribe to come back and pitch their tipis, they studied the gun. They had seen iron before, and some had knives of it, but they had never seen it in such quantity or so handsomely molded. They found pebbles to run down the interior of the barrel and deduced that these became the deadly missiles.

At this point they cut open Cottonwood Knee to find out what it was that had slain him, and the shape of the bullet confirmed their deductions. They could make nothing of the firing mechanism; its sophistication was quite beyond their understanding at the moment, but one brave did fit his finger against the trigger and conclude that this had something to do with the mystery. They had a gun. They didn't know quite what to do with it, but they were no longer outside the pale.

In this battle fifteen Pawnee faced eight of Our People, and when it came time to counting coups it was agreed that Lame Beaver had gained one, because he had touched the Pawnee who held the gun, but that evening he lost whatever honor he had gained, for as he was helping Blue Leaf raise their tipi he heard an ominous rattle, close to his wife.

Looking frantically about, he saw to his horror a great rattlesnake, coiled and preparing to strike Blue Leaf. Acting instinctively, he leaped at the hideous thing and clubbed at it with the newly captured gun.

He knocked the venomous creature to one side, but saw that it was still capable of striking, so he clubbed it again and again until it lay stretched on the sand beside the tipi.

A crowd, hearing the fight against the snake, gathered, and a woman cried, 'Lame Beaver has killed a great snake,'

but a more observant boy said, 'He's broken the stick-that-speaks!'

Hushed warriors gathered in the sunset to stare at Lame Beaver, who stood holding the gun by the end of its barrel, the stock and firing mechanism shattered.

6. New Poles for the Tipi

Our People, dependent upon the bison, had become like the bison. Just as those shaggy animals divided into two herds, one centering on the plains lying north of the North Platte, the other keeping pretty much to the plains south of the South Platte, so Our People were beginning to divide into two tribes, North and South, the former depending upon Flat-Pipe while the southern revered Sacred-Wheel.

Lame Beaver and his small group, now led by Jumping Snake, belonged to the southern group, and although they sometimes ranged far north toward the land of the Crow, they returned always to that congenial land between the two Plattes to pitch their camp near Rattlesnake Buttes. It must not, however, be thought that they lived there. They were nomads, hunters who went where the bison went, and it was of no concern to them what type of land they lived on. In some years they might not camp within a hundred miles of Rattlesnake Buttes; in others they might move far south to the Arkansas. They had no home. They did have a predominant group of bison which they followed, and from time to time, elements of that herd wandered up to the good grass between the two Plattes and Our People followed them.

This constant moving about, increased since obtaining the horse, had one unexpected consequence which caused Our People some trouble. The travois, that primitive but functional invention for hauling goods, was constructed always from two poles used otherwise to support the tipi, and as they dragged for mile after mile across rough terrain, the large ends were gradually abraded until the poles were no longer of sufficient length to use in making the tipi. The Pawnee might have used them, for they constructed low tipis, but Our People liked slim, towering ones, not too wide in circumference at the bottom and gracefully tapered at the top. Long poles were a necessity.

But where to get them? Often Our People would spend eighteen months in the heart of the prairie, where never a

tree was seen, not one. And when they did come to a place like Rattlesnake Buttes, all they found was cottonwood, which produced neither long nor straight trunks.

They had to trade for their tipi poles. In the north there were Indians who would give a Pawnee nine short poles for one horse, but since Our People demanded longer poles and better, they received only seven for one horse. They considered this a fair trade, for to Our People the tipi was the center of life.

In the year 1788, when Lame Beaver was forty-one years old and one of the wisest men of the tribe, he noticed with some dismay that the three key-poles of his tipi were so ground down at the butt ends that they no longer permitted the tipi to assume its lofty and dignified form. He was unhappy. For many years now, in fact, ever since his decision not to seek a high station in the tribe, he had found exceptional pleasure in his tipi. It was the most satisfactory in the camp, not the loftiest nor the most garish—for there were others more copiously decorated—but the most congenial. In all its proportions it was correct.

At the end of a long trek he liked to lie back and watch his wife erect it, for she did this with skill and a certain grace, as if to do so were part of her religion. First she gathered the three key-poles and laid them on the ground where the tipi was to stand. Then she lashed the thin ends together with pliant antelope thongs, about three feet from the tips. Thus she had a tripod, which she set upright, the heavy ends of the three poles wedged into the ground, far enough apart to assure stability.

Next she took about a dozen lesser poles, shorter and not so straight, and these she also wedged into the ground, propping them against the point where the key-poles were lashed together. She now had the skeleton of her tipi, its base securely settled on the ground, its top rising far into the air. Her next task was to throw over it the tanned bison hides that would form the covering, and this she did by climbing partway up to the junction of the key-poles and binding a segment of the skin to it.

She allowed the skin to fall naturally, draping it evenly over the poles and making sure that the opening through which people would enter would face east. It was inconceivable that a tipi should be oriented in any other way.

The tipi was now erected save for one other important feature which made it habitable. Taking two extra-long poles, she adroitly fitted their tips into the corners of the

bison covering which rested on the very top of the tipi, and these poles she did not fasten in the earth. By swinging them to different positions about the tipi and at different angles, she could determine how much ventilation would come in at the top, or how much would go out if the flap were left open, and in this way ensure both a warm house and a healthy one. The air in her tipi was never suffocating.

When she was finished, Lame Beaver would lift from the travois various parfleches, those boxlike carrying cases made of heavy partially tanned hide, closer to wood than to leather, and from them Blue Leaf would take the cots, her cooking gear and whatever mementos her husband had acquired in his hunting and fighting.

Lame Beaver took charge of building his own cot, for he was proud of it and spent much of his life on it. It had a low wooden frame upon which he placed a mat made of carefully selected and smoothed willow sticks, each one pierced at the ends so that antelope sinews could be passed through, keeping the willow firm and in place. Over this he placed two bison blankets carefully tanned and pliable, and on the tipi wall behind, a medium-sized bison robe which had been worked to the consistency of parchment. On it Blue Leaf, using stick ends for brushes and a variety of pigments for coloring, had drawn memorable scenes from her husband's life; the yellow which predominated came from the bile sac of the bison. She was not an outstanding artist, but she could depict bison and Pawnee and Ute, and these were the things which preoccupied her husband.

The cot had this peculiarity: the willow-stick mat extended for several feet at each end, and these extensions were held in upright position by stout tripods, so as to form two backrests. The exposed wood was highly polished and some of the strands were colored, so that Lame Beaver's cot constituted a kind of throne, with the painted skin behind it and the handsome backrests on either end.

Since no tribe could be at war constantly, or hunt bison when there were no bison, and since there were no books, nor alphabet to print them in if there were, and since no one from Our People could converse with anyone from another tribe, and since there was no need of constant council meetings, Lame Beaver had days and weeks on end of idle time, with no great thoughts to occupy him and no one to share them with if they had mysteriously arisen. He led a

bleak, impoverished intellectual life, the highlight coming when younger warriors crowded into his tipi to hear him tell of his adventures in the past.

Then he would seat the most promising young man beside him, and they would lean back against the willow backrests and he would speak to him alone, allowing the others on the floor to listen, and he would relate how he had battled Never-Death and how he had captured the first gun and then destroyed it. He was meticulous in his narration, always giving more than just credit to Cottonwood Knee and Red Nose, the former dead, the latter a considerable chief. He counted no coups that he had not rightfully won, and no interrupter ever had occasion to halt his narrative to ask, 'Who saw you gain that coup?' The coups he counted were part of tribal history and were preserved on the skin his wife had painted.

In the early summer of 1788 he counted one of the great coups of his life, not because of its inherent bravery but because of the extraordinary consequences which flowed from it, not in that year but seventy-three years later.

It started when he was resting one day, watching his wife build the tipi. 'We need some new poles,' he said half out loud.

His wife stopped her work and said, 'We should have traded for them when we were north. We could have got maybe seven poles for one horse.'

'Well, we're not north,' Lame Beaver said, 'but I think I know where there are some good poles, and we don't have to give a horse for them, either.'

She assumed from this that he intended raiding the Pawnee again; he was always ready to test his wits against them, so she decided to stop that line of reasoning before it went further. 'Pawnee poles are not long enough,' she said, resuming her work.

'I would not have a Pawnee pole,' he said. 'Not if a village stood unprotected right over there.' He tossed a stone toward the spot at which some years before he had killed the rattlesnake, and he began laughing at the way he had smashed the first gun. 'Remember that snake?' he called to his wife as she climbed the pole to fix the skin. He made a noise like a rattler, and it was so real that she looked back in old terror. 'Me,' he said.

He had a plan for getting new poles. One of the younger braves, trying to trap beaver, had gone partly by accident,

partly by design, well into the mountains and had found a steep valley, one of whose sides was covered with blue spruce, the other with tall, straight aspen. He had told Lame Beaver of this, and at the time the older man had said, 'That might be a place to get some tipi poles,' and the younger had said, 'The aspen were very straight,' but Lame Beaver had explained, 'Aspen rot. You want pine or spruce. How were the spruce?' The young brave assured him they were straight.

Now Lame Beaver sought out the younger man, Antelope by name, and asked him if he would lead a party back to the valley to collect some key-poles. The young brave was eager to do so, but warned, 'It's Ute country,' and Lame Beaver said, 'Everywhere on earth is somebody's country. You just have to be careful,' and the young brave said, 'But I saw signs of Ute in the valley,' and Lame Beaver said, 'I've been seeing Ute signs all my life, and usually it means that there's Ute about.'

They put together a war party of eleven men plus four packhorses and marched westward for one day toward the mountain where the stone beaver tried vainly to reach the summit. The next day they followed one of the small streams which in times past had carried torrential rains and melted ice down from that mountain. They proceeded up it for a while, coming to a fork which led to the south, and this brought them at last to Blue Valley. When they came to it, plains Indians seeing the interior majesty of the mountains for the first time, they stopped in admiration, aware that they were viewing one of the precious sights of their earth.

That day it was magnificent, the dark-blue spruce clustering together on the southern bank where there was no sun, the lighter aspen in many shades of dancing green shimmering on the north bank, and after some moments spent admiring the perfect valley, Lame Beaver dismounted, studied the terrain and said, 'There have been Ute here. They were hunting beaver.' He therefore posted two outlooks and proceeded to the job of cutting key-poles among the spruce.

He had chopped down some two dozen, leaving the trimming of the upper branches to the younger men, when one of the scouts whistled like a bird and indicated that six Ute with horses and guns were coming down the valley from the opposite direction. Lame Beaver weighed this unwelcome information and decided to wait the situation out by

simply halting all work and withdrawing into the protective shadows of the spruce. He did this, unaware of three unusual events that had recently taken place near where he hid.

First, in a spring freshet some years ago a boulder tumbling down the stream bed had knocked off the end of a major pipe and brought almost pure gold to the surface. The pipe, with its tip unsealed, had released several nuggets of the highest-quality gold, and these had scattered along the bottom of the stream, where later sediment had partially covered them.

Second, it had not been much later that the Ute in this district had got their first gun and with it a set of equipment for making bullets. They knew how to melt lead and pour it into the iron molds the Pawnee had traded them for beaver skins. Also, they understood powder and how to get a constant supply by trading bison skins south to the Mexicans at Santa Fe. The Ute were now an armed tribe.

Third, some time ago on an exploration down Blue Valley for beaver, a Ute brave responsible for pouring bullets in the mold had spotted the yellow nuggets in the stream bed and had idly picked them up to see if they could be molded into bullets. To his surprise, this could be done without melting, and he made two fine bullets out of pure gold. He had looked around for more of the metal, recognizing it as easier to use than lead, but he found none.

It was this brave, with the iron mold and the two gold bullets, who now came down the valley, carefully watching the stream for signs of beaver. He would have gone right past the hiding enemy had he not happened to see a white chip of wood. Thinking this to be the work of a beaver, he moved inland from the stream, turned a corner and came face to face with Lame Beaver, who knifed him in the throat and took his gun and the parfleche in which he carried his bullets.

When this was done, Our People leaped onto the trail, scaring the five remaining Ute warriors into flight. Seeing that their leader was dead and that they were outnumbered, they turned and fled back toward the head of the valley, where they hoped to find reinforcements.

This gave Lame Beaver and his companions time to load their key-poles and head for lower ground, but before they did so the young brave who had discovered the valley and had led Lame Beaver to it asked him if he wanted the scalp of the dead Ute. Lame Beaver shook his head no, so the

younger man neatly lifted the scalp to take back to camp as a souvenir of his first important encounter with the enemy.

Lame Beaver, like most of the serious warriors among the Cheyenne and Our People, never bothered with scalps. Collecting such grisly tokens was not a traditional part of Indian culture; it had been introduced a hundred years earlier by French and English military commanders who, before paying bounty, demanded proof from their Indian mercenaries that they had actually slain an enemy. The habit had become ingrained in the eastern tribes and had slowly spread westward, where some tribes like the Comanche made it a respected part of their ritual.

So now Our People came trailing out of the mountains with four treasures: two dozen key-poles of high quality, a Ute scalp, a memory of the most beautiful valley they had ever seen, and two gold bullets in Lame Beaver's parfleche.

7. Invading the Camp of Strange Gods

In the land between the two Plattes, the temperatures in winter often went down to thirty degrees below zero and stayed there for days, freezing the rivers solid. How did Our People survive?

In the first place, the air was so clear and the wind so calm at such times that the cold was exhilarating rather than exhausting. At zero, if the sun was out, men often played at stick games, wearing nothing above the waist, and at ten below, the weather could be quite pleasant, if there was no wind.

In the second place, the Indians of the plains were accustomed to cold; the Cheyenne had a specific tradition on this point: 'In the old days when we lived far north, before we had crossed the river and survived the flood, we used to go naked all the time and had no tipis. What did we do in winter? We found a hole in the bank and covered ourselves with earth and waited for sunny days when we could gather berries. And men went barefoot in the deepest snow and survived.' Our People also had memories of seasons without tipis, but not of years when they went naked.

But there were also blizzards, when icy cold winds howled for days, depositing so much snow that any man caught out must freeze. What did Our People do then?

They crawled into their tipis, and men sent the women out to close the upper vent, all but a crack, and they directed the women to lay heavy rocks about the edges of the tipi so that snow and wind could not infiltrate. Then all came inside, and a very small fire was lit, wasting only a few precious sticks, and it was kept burning for days, and its heat made the tipi snug, and people inside huddled together and congratulated themselves on being out of the storm, and men talked and women sat in near-darkness day after day and children peeped out and cried the exciting news over their shoulders: 'You can't even see Jumping Snake's tipi from here.'

Winds howled and snow piled halfway up the tipi but there was great warmth within; men went outside only to cut cottonwood branches so that their horses might eat the bark. Once Lame Beaver reflected that each of his children had been born in autumn, having been conceived during blizzards. 'We are like beavers,' he said, 'hiding in our snug lodge while the world outside freezes.'

In the year 1799, when Lame Beaver was an old man of fifty-two, he engaged in an exploit which earned him commendation, for it was a deed requiring courage of a new sort.

In late winter that year scouts reported that two men from an entirely different tribe were making their way up the Platte. They were not red like the Pawnee, from whose lands they came, and they carried with them no Indian artifacts. They were not even dressed like Indians, for their winter clothing was bulky, and they wore no feathers or paint. Their heads were covered with beaver fur and they dragged behind them a travois that slid easily over the snow. Both carried guns, and from their travois projected two other guns, and from this they would have been judged wealthy, except that they had no horses. They were a strange enemy and would bear watching.

Why did Our People not destroy those two white men on first acquaintance? Why had the Pawnee allowed them to traverse their lands? The Pawnee must have watched them every day, as Our People now did. Perhaps it was because these two gods, for so they were called at Rattlesnake Buttes, moved with authority and without visible fear. They moved more like bison than like men, as if they belonged to the prairie and owned it. Scouts kept them in sight every hour and reported always the same thing: 'They moved a little farther west today, and always they seemed to be looking for us. There is a short one, almost as dark as a Ute, and a taller one, not so tall as a Cheyenne, but tall,

and on his face he has reddish hair. But it is the smaller one who gives the commands.'

When they reached the confluence of Beaver Creek and the Platte, they halted. They had detected something that pleased them and for the first time they pitched a permanent camp, taking the time and trouble to scrape snow from a flat area and to cut some cottonwood, from which they built a very low shelter. Neither of the strange gods could enter it without stooping.

Our People watched, bewildered, and Lame Beaver, as the most courageous of the Indians, decided to find out more about these gods and their curious tipi. One night, creeping very close, he watched as they unrolled bundles, disclosing small items that shimmered in the light of their torches. Long ago when trading with the Crow for tipi poles he had seen such ornaments.

Another time he saw the taller god trying to catch fish in the river, and he became so intent that he failed to notice the approach of the shorter visitor, and before Lame Beaver could run away, the stranger had come upon him, and stood fast, and stared at him. In that fleeting moment Lame Beaver perceived that these strangers were not gods. They were men like himself, and he hurried back to his tipi to inform Blue Leaf of his discovery.

'Those two, there's nothing special about them.'

'They have four guns.'

'I could have four guns if I traded with the Pawnee.'

'Their skins are different.'

'The Ute skin is different. You can tell a Ute from the other side of the river.'

Blue Leaf paraded all the doubts the tribe had voiced, and her husband refuted each, and finally she conceded, 'If they are like us, and if they are going to live among us, we should talk with them.'

'That was my thought,' Lame Beaver said, and forthwith he walked boldly to where the two strangers waited, and although many in his camp predicted disaster or death, he strode up to them, and looked at them, and raised his hand in greeting.

As he stood there the smaller man began cleverly to disclose the infinite variety of things he had brought up the river. One parfleche had scintillating beads, all in a row and of different colors. A pack contained blankets, not made of bison hide but of some soft and pliant material. Finally the man unfolded a special parfleche, and inside glimmered

one of the most beautiful substances Lame Beaver had ever seen, a hard metal like the barrel of a gun, but bright and clean and very white.

'Silver,' the short man said time and again, 'silver,' but when Lame Beaver reached for it, the man drew it back and lifted a beaver pelt. 'Beaver,' he kept repeating, indicating that if the Indians brought him pelts, he would give them shining ornaments of silver. And to prove his good intentions he handed a bracelet to Lame Beaver.

Back in his tipi, Lame Beaver put the lovely thing on his wife's arm, and she moved gracefully with it, allowing the sun to strike its facets, and it was then that he reached his decision: 'I will explore the camp of the strangers to determine what their medicine is.'

So, late on a dark night, he cautiously approached their tipi, but he hesitated outside, gripped by a deeper apprehension than any he had known when facing Comanche. He was entering a new and mysterious world, and his courage began to fail, but he bit his lip and crept inside, compressing himself like a sinew to avoid touching things.

Cautiously he stood erect, scarcely breathing while his eyes adjusted to the darkness. From the earth he could hear the rhythmic sleep-breath of the men and could tell that the smaller lay to his right.

He now faced the most difficult part of his mission. To count coup, he must touch one of them, and characteristically he chose the dark leader. Bending a fraction of an inch at a time, he brought himself closer and closer to the sleeping man until their faces almost touched. He then reached out his hand to place it upon the dark body, when in the dim light he became aware of a terrifying thing.

The sleeper was not asleep! He was wide awake! And in the dim light he was staring directly into the eyes of Lame Beaver.

The two men, each terrified of the other, held this gaze, and then ever so slowly Lame Beaver resumed the movement of his hand and placed it upon the dark face. The hand bore no weapon, no evil intent. Neither man breathed. The hand withdrew, and in that manner the red man first made contact with the white.

Then as Lame Beaver started to withdraw, the man in bed relaxed, and in doing so, made a slight noise. From the other bed the tall man leaped into action, grabbed a gun and would have fired at Lame Beaver had not a deep voice from the first bed cried, 'Arretez! Arretez!'

'What is it?' the man with the gun shouted.

'Il n'a pas d'armes,' and he knocked the gun away.

Slowly Lame Beaver retreated, satisfied that these were men obsessed by the same fears that gripped him, accustomed to sleep as he slept. Had they owned a special medicine, they would not have needed guns, and with this knowledge he returned to his camp.

In the morning he assembled his tribe and disclosed his findings. He assured the chiefs that the visitors were not gods and that they had come in peace. 'They could have killed me, and they let me go,' he said.

He collected all available beaver pelts and threw them onto a travois, leading the horse to where the visitors waited with their alluring goods. But as the trading began, he indicated that he wished no silver trinkets, no gaudy blankets. Pointing resolutely to one of the guns, he let the men know that he would accept nothing less. The younger man demurred, saying to his partner, 'If they get guns, they'll be as bad as the Pawnee,' and he withdrew the gun, but the older man retrieved it and handed it to Lame Beaver, saying in French, 'They'll get guns sooner or later. If they get them from us, we get their pelts.'

As Lame Beaver gained possession of the gun he looked deep into the eyes of the man who had traded it to him, and there was a long moment of silence as each acknowledged that in the previous darkness either could have slain the other but had refrained. No word was spoken, and in this cool diffidence the implied treaty between Our People and the white man was ratified.

8. Two Gold Bullets

In early autumn the straggling cottonwoods which marked the course of every river and stream knew a brief moment of glory, for their ill-formed leaves turned gold and for several days gleamed as if they were aspen, but the winds of the coming winter soon bore them away and the trees were left as bare as before.

In the year 1803, when Lame Beaver was fifty-six, the transformation of the cottonwoods presaged a gloomy time. He did not want to face another winter; the cold had been growing more bitter as the years passed, and he no longer found solace in sitting cross-legged on his bed, regaling younger men with his ancient deeds. Not even the

handsome bison skin painted by his wife gave him satisfaction.

His malaise had started some years back when he broke a tooth on a piece of jerked bison. He bit down as always, gave the meat a solid tug, and his tooth came away with the jerky. Next year he lost another, in the same way, and then two more, so that he was reduced to eating the soft pemmican, which he had never liked.

The friends of his youth were dying, too. Red Nose, the best chief of them all, had gone last winter, and Cottonwood Knee was long since dead, slain by a Pawnee rifle. Younger men were in command, and while they maintained the high spirit of the tribe, they handled themselves poorly in negotiation with the Comanche, and so far as resisting the Pawnee was concerned, they might as well have surrendered all the territory to them and been done with it.

He was worried about the Pawnee. They moved ever westward, and soon Our People would be squeezed into a pitiful territory around Rattlesnake Buttes. He was therefore already in gloomy spirits when scouts rushed into camp with the hideous news that the Pawnee had captured a young girl to use in their sacrifice.

'We must take her back,' he stormed, unwilling to consider any alternative. Trade for her? Never. Surrender more hunting land? Never. Horses, pelts, guns? He would listen to no such pusillanimity. 'We will ride east and take her back,' he shouted.

At councils, of which he was not a member, he broke in uninvited and cried, 'We must ride in like braves and take that girl back.' He broke up several intelligent discussions of how this could be achieved without resorting to a war party, but this did not worry him.

'The time comes with the Pawnee when you must face them down in battle,' he stormed. 'It has always been so and always will be. This is such a time.' He reminded the council of how Cottonwood Knee had been slain by the Pawnee in a previous time of decision, but most members of the council had forgotten who Cottonwood Knee was.

In this deep agitation of spirit Lame Beaver went to his wife, and they talked for a long time. She was well aware of what grave thing was on his mind, and what terrible consequences it must have for her. Yet she supported him. He had been a good husband, better than most among Our People, which was high praise, for they, like the Cheyenne, were good to their women and faithful. She had taken

pride in his accomplishments and had delineated them on the bison skin, his heroic triumphs set forth in detail. She knew that it would be to her dreadful disadvantage if he proceeded with the plan that she was certain was hatching, but never once did she complain.

'The Pawnee have to be stopped,' he reiterated, and she nodded.

'If they think you are weak, they press on the weakness,' he said, and she knew this to be true.

'They always coveted our land,' he moaned, feeling the empty spaces in his mouth, as if the vanished teeth symbolized the area already encroached upon by the Pawnee. 'Oh, if Man-Above allowed me to be young again,' he lamented, and she told him that he was still a fine warrior. Then, abruptly, he halted all talk of the Pawnee and turned his attention to his daughter.

Her name, Clay Basket, had been given while they were following bison in the north; a Dakota trader had brought forth a splendid basket made by the Cree. It looked as if it had been woven but was actually of clay. Blue Leaf had liked it and he had bought it for her with a bison robe. No matter that it was her robe and that she had worked on it for many months to make it pliable; he had traded the robe for the basket and it had become her principal treasure, the envy of other women. It was natural that they should name their daughter after this lovely thing, and she had reciprocated by becoming the lithe, poetic creature with whom he now talked.

He told of the tribal journey north and south, of the good days down by the Arkansas and of the delectable valley where the blue spruce grew. He recalled his battle with the huge rattlesnake, when he had sacrificed his first gun to save her mother. And he spoke of the two men who had camped for a while, hunting beaver. He told Clay Basket that they would return. Of that he was positive. And the prospect pleased him, for he liked the shorter man, the dark one without the beard, and felt indebted to him for the gun he now used so expertly. He would welcome such a man into his family.

'When he comes back, Clay Basket, talk with him. He has no woman. From watching him so carefully, I know this. He'll grow older. His teeth will begin to drop out, too. He'll need a woman to care for him. Think about this when I'm gone.'

'You will not go for many moons,' she assured him.

'You'll have good babies,' he said appraisingly, as if she were a mare. Suddenly he moved about the tipi in great agitation. 'It will all change!' he cried. 'The Pawnee will own everything. The Ute will come down out of the mountain and live like us. And those men will be back to hunt beaver. I don't know,' he moaned to himself, 'I don't know.' He never again spoke to his daughter in a serious manner.

He concentrated on his gun, loading and unloading it, fingering the two gold bullets which he still kept in his parfleche. It was as if he were measuring time by the white man's method and sensed that a new century had begun, one that would swiftly leave him behind with the stark rapidity of its change. He therefore brooded upon lasting things, simplifying the process until only two remained, Blue Leaf and the Pawnee. For him the bison were no more; others could track them now. The beaver and the rattlesnake; others could worry about them from here on. He had never bothered much with the Ute; they were steadfast fighters, but if you stood your ground you could manage the Ute.

As autumn deepened he and Blue Leaf had to acknowledge the dreadful situation that faced them, but he saw no escape, nor did she. She was therefore prepared, spiritually and in all other ways, when he announced: 'When we march against the Pawnee, I will stake myself out.' He was committing suicide for a noble purpose, and she knew it.

The fact that the most famous warrior of Our People was willing to sacrifice himself to teach the Pawnee a lesson sent a surge of patriotism through the tribe, and the vacillating council was powerless to prevent a decision in favor of war. It was determined without their consent and without their approval, but the spirit engendered by Lame Beaver's announcement was so high that all knew that victory was attainable.

Preparation became frantic, for the blow had to be struck before the first blizzard. Young warriors tended their horses and oiled their guns with bison tallow. Lame Beaver spent all his time with Blue Leaf, not telling her of his love but reminding her in many ways of the good life they had shared. 'Remember the wild duck in the cottonwoods?' he asked. Where had that taken place, along what fugitive stream visited once and seen no more? They had walked along so many streams and pitched their tipi in so many valleys that the mind could not recall them, but once there had been a wild duck caught in a cottonwood and he

had wanted to eat it and Blue Leaf had wanted to let it go, and it had flown north, days behind the others.

There was the tamed elk, too, that stayed about the camp in the north and the sound of coyotes along the Arkansas when Our People were planning to fight the Comanche, and the sandy places where the children played. They had possessed a universe of endless horizons and sunsets blazing with golden fire.

'Remember when we had no horses?' he asked, and they talked about those burdensome days when dogs and women hauled the travois so that their men could be ready to repel attack. 'We moved so slowly then,' he said.

The day came when the war party was ready to move eastward. It was cold and the leaves had left the cottonwoods. Lame Beaver bade his wife goodbye but ignored his watching daughter. He had his good horse, his rifle, his parfleche; the signal was given, and he left Rattlesnake Buttes for the last time.

Our People moved cautiously toward the confluence of the two Plattes, and there they found nothing, for the Pawnee had settled down for winter a far distance to the east. They continued to march in that direction until they came upon a sizable camp, but whether the Pawnee held the sacrificial girl here or in some other settlement, they could not know; so much time had elapsed since her capture that she was probably dead by now, and all except Lame Beaver acknowledged that fact. He kept saying, 'We shall take back our girl.' He had never seen her and it wasn't clear in his mind whose child she was, but she must be recaptured.

The leaders of the war party decided that this would be the village they would attack, whether the girl was there or not, so once more a clever battle plan was devised.

Lame Beaver's part in the fight was clear. 'I will stake myself out . . . there. I will not fight any warrior who comes at me. I will wait for the great chief, Rude Water, and I will shoot him dead. The Pawnee will panic, and we shall have the girl.' When he spoke these words, no one doubted that he would do exactly as he promised. Around him the battle would form, and if he could demoralize the first Pawnee charge, Our People would have a good chance of victory.

During the night he prayed, but not attentively, for his mind went back to just one thing, insistently: he kept seeing that first wild pinto he had captured from the Comanche and tamed in the river, only to lose it to Blue

Leaf's brother. How marvelous that pinto was, how like the wind. Its handsome black and white spots were etched on his mind and he could still recall the placement of each.

'Heigh! Go!' he cried, and the ghost horse leaped across the prairie like a ray of sunlight, illuminating everything it approached.

'Heigh! Heigh!' he called, and the pinto ran on and on into the mountains. Tears came into the old man's eyes and he turned to his gun, but always in the distance there stood the pinto, her colors bright and her mane standing clear.

'Come!' the old man called softly, but the pinto headed for other pastures.

New scouts moved into position, and those who had been watching came back to prepare for battle. Leaders grew nervous, and Lame Beaver took up his rifle and the stake to which he would attach the thongs that now hung loose about his neck.

The war party moved forward according to plan, then waited while Lame Beaver took a position where the Pawnee charge would be heaviest. Finding a stone, he hammered the stake into position, and this noise alerted the Pawnee guards. Shouts went up, and Our People charged the west entrance to the village; with this first violent sweep, the intricate battle plans evaporated, and it was each man for himself.

The Pawnee reacted as had been expected, with a countercharge of their own, and their leaders had covered only a short distance when they spotted Lame Beaver staked out, his rifle at the ready. They expected him to fire, so the first riders swerved to avoid him, but when he held his fire, those behind swept down upon him, and one caught him through the left shoulder with his lance, leaving the barbed shaft behind.

'Agh!' Lame Beaver grunted, for the lance had pierced his left armpit. The pain was so great that he wanted to discharge his gun in fury; instead he wrenched the lance loose, tearing away much flesh and inducing a heavy flow of blood. It was a bad beginning.

Rude Water did not appear in the second charge, either, and once more a Pawnee lancer made a hit, lightly striking Lame Beaver in the left leg. With contempt he wrestled the barb loose, placing the two lances beside him for possible future use.

On the third Pawnee charge Rude Water did appear, a tall, handsome, very red-skinned chief. Assuming that

Lame Beaver had been badly wounded, he rode his horse right at the tethered man, whereupon Lame Beaver took careful aim and shot him off his mount. Rude Water was dead.

It took time for Lame Beaver to reload his rifle: he swabbed it, poured in the powder, rammed down the greased wadding, then inserted his second gold bullet and carefully primed it. Taking aim at a lesser chief, he ignited the primer and again shot a warrior off his horse.

The rout of the Pawnee had begun, but it was by no means complete. Mounted warriors in retreat rode over Lame Beaver and two more stabbed at him. He was now bleeding from several wounds, but he took up the Pawnee lance which had caught him in the leg and tried to defend himself with it, but when a fifth Pawnee caught him with a lance from the rear, shoving it completely through his back and out the chest in front, he was finished.

Clutching the exposed point of the spear, he started to fall forward, but halted himself long enough to begin his going-away song:

'Only the rocks endure forever.
The bison thunders
but I do not see the dust.
The beaver slaps his tail
I do not hear.
Man-Above still sends the river flowing past,
Still helps the beaver climb the mountain peak,
Still turns the aspen golden in the fall.
The chiefs assemble
but they speak no words.
The enemy begins its charge
and spears are glistening
Only the rocks . . .'

A tremor passed through his body, stifling his song. With a mighty effort he tried to pull the fatal spear entirely through his chest, but his strength flagged. He fell forward into the dust of battle, facing the corpse of Rude Water, but Lame Beaver did not see his foe. His last earthly vision was of the pinto galloping across the prairie.

This battle had been more bloody than usual, and the death of Lame Beaver infuriated Our People, though why it should have is a mystery, for he went into the fight determined to die. Our People sacked the village and took fif-

teen Pawnee girls captive; they offered to trade them for the girl destined for sacrifice, but she was long since dead, so they traded for horses—three girls for one horse.

Jumping Snake decreed that Lame Beaver be given a chieftain's burial, and a high wooden platform was built in three cottonwood trees beside the Platte. There, well above ground, the shattered old body was laid to rest. The stake to which he had attached himself was placed beside him, with the thongs of honor drifting loose in the wind. He was covered with a blanket, and on one of the cottonwoods was hung the head of the horse Rude Water had been riding; on another, the tail. The Pawnee lance with which he had defended himself at the last was laid across his body, and young warriors wanted his rifle to be placed there, too, but Jumping Snake said he would keep the rifle. If he didn't, the Pawnee would take it.

There, high above the plains he had loved and the river he had so often followed, Lame Beaver, the man of many coups, found his rest.

He died at the end of an epoch, the grandest the western Indians were to know. In his lifetime an impoverished band of northern Indians had wandered south, hunting the bison on foot and confined by necessity to narrow regions. In their new home they had found the horse and the gun and had developed a wild, sweeping pattern of life which held on to the good customs of the past while embracing the viable new ones, now possible.

Our People and the Cheyenne! How few in number, how powerful in essence! Never did they number as many as seven thousand combined, which meant that there could not have been much over three thousand males. Many of these would have been old and more would have been infants, so that there might have been at most one thousand warriors.

Has there ever been in America another group of a thousand men who left so deep an imprint upon the image of the nation? These few men, tall and bronzed, welded to their horses, daring in battle and just in peace, rode across the prairies and into the permanent record of this land. They dominated their period and their terrain. They defended their homes with valor and left their plain not in defeat but trailing glory. In their last days they staked themselves out and parried all lances coming at them.

Cheyenne and Arapaho—for that was the name the

other tribes called Our People—were never the majority in any place they occupied; they were always pressed in upon by tribes at least as able: the Brule Sioux and the Oglala Sioux and the Cree and the Blackfoot and the dark Ute and the centaur Comanche, and the cruel Apache and the crafty Kiowa and the far-thinking Pawnee. But their customs were among the finest the Indians of America produced, and their physical bearing the most commanding.

When the Arapaho chieftains met to count coups in the battle against the Pawnee they formed a noble image: they wore the fringed leggings of winter, the vests decorated with quills and elk teeth, and above all, those resplendent headdresses of woven material set with colored stones and adorned with eagle feathers.

'He counted coup upon Rude Water,' a narrator related, 'and upon the warrior who pierced his leg and upon the one who stabbed him through the arm. With his captured lance he counted coup on the Pawnee with the torn shirt and on the Pawnee with the brown horse. He tried to count coup on the warrior who stabbed him through the back, but in this he failed.'

The great chiefs nodded. Thanks to the heroism of Lame Beaver, their eastern flank was secured for a few more years. Not soon would the Pawnee want to invade Arapaho lands after such a defeat. They would be back, of course, in time. The Pawnee would think of some way to retaliate, but for the present the Arapaho could direct their attention to the coming winter. This year they would camp at Rattlesnake Buttes.

While the Arapaho chiefs were awarding Lame Beaver his final set of coups, a gathering destined to have more lasting consequences took place among the ashes of the desolated Pawnee village. In burying their great chief Rude Water, someone discovered that he had been killed by a golden bullet, and then it was found that the lesser chief, too, had been slain by a bullet of gold, and since the Pawnee, because of their trading with whites, knew the value of gold, the discovery caused a sensation.

The bullets were sent with two knowing white men down the Missouri River to the trading post at Saint Louis and there delivered to a dealer who was stunned by their purity and the apparent size of the nuggets from which they had been formed. The white men pestered the Pawnee with repeated questions, but all they could tell was, 'Lame Beaver, big chief of the Arapaho, he fired the bullets.'

In this way the legend was launched that an Arapaho chief named Lame Beaver had discovered a deposit of pure gold from which he made bullets for shooting bison. 'Search the bison bones and you may find his golden bullets. Better still find out where he had his gold mine and you'll have wealth untold.' A thousand men would tramp the plains and probe the hills, searching for the lost mine of Lame Beaver the Indian who used gold bullets, and none would have believed the truth: that he shot those bullets without knowing what they were.

In the Arapaho camp a darker side of Indian custom was about to manifest itself, the hideous side that later apologists would want to forget or deny. Because Blue Leaf was no longer the wife of a warrior and co-head of a family, she had no right to a tipi of her own, and women from all parts of the camp now descended upon it to tear it apart for their own use. The two special poles which operated the upper vent through which the smoke escaped went first. They were grabbed by a woman whose husband had long envied them.

The three key-poles which Lame Beaver had cut in Blue Valley went next. They were ripped out of the ground and torn from their bison covering, which caused the rest of the tipi to collapse. The lesser poles went quickly, for it was known that Lame Beaver had the best in camp.

The bison skin was not a prize; it was old and would soon have to be replaced, but the parfleches that Lame Beaver had made were sturdy and much desired. Two women fell into a fight over the larger, and one suffered a cut hand, but the brawling did not stop for that. Quickly the clay basket vanished.

The bed on which Lame Beaver had spent so much of his life passed into the hands of a young wife who had long wanted its painted backrest for her warrior husband, and the beautiful bison rug, covered with paintings of Lame Beaver's many coups, vanished. No one would remember where it went.

Slowly the tipi was ground into the dust of cruel indifference, and at the end of the day Blue Leaf was left with no possessions in the world save what she was wearing. Her daughter Clay Basket had little more, but she at least was assured of a place to sleep at the home of an uncle. Blue

Leaf did not even have that for the law of the plains was clear and immutable: elderly widows who had no man to care for them had expended their usefulness, and the tribe would not allow itself to be impeded by them. For an older woman like Blue Leaf, with no son to protect her and no brother willing to invite her into his tipi, there was no home and there could be none.

That night the first heavy snow fell. Blue Leaf survived the snow by finding a place among the horses, the next day Clay Basket, seeing her pitiful condition, wanted to bring her into the tipi where she had found refuge, but her uncle, Blue Leaf's brother, who had deprived Lame Beaver of the pinto, refused.

On the third night a blizzard struck, and Blue Leaf could find no shelter except among the shivering horses. She had not eaten that day and was extremely weak, but as she crept closer to the horses and they to her, she did not complain. Lame Beaver and she had anticipated that this must be the consequence of his suicide. This had been the fate of her mother and her aunts, and she had expected nothing better.

In the morning she was found frozen to death. In this practical manner the Arapaho living at Rattlesnake Buttes were freed from the encumbrance of an old woman who had outlived her usefulness.

CAUTION TO *US* EDITORS. You have three basic considerations to keep in mind when you introduce any material on Indians in Colorado.

First, although the plains Indians were the most spectacular tribes in American history, they were also the least interesting intrinsically. The Arapaho and Cheyenne arrived very late on the scene. They occupied land which wiser Indians like the Pawnee and more indigenous ones like the Ute had inspected for several centuries and found unproductive. More important, their previous wanderings from east of the Mississippi and north of the Missouri to the arid plains had deprived them of most of their cultural heritage, which they had been forced to leave behind as so much unnecessary baggage. They were cultural nomads whose quality was uplifted by the horse. They must not be depicted in either your illustrations or your text as typical American

Indians. Almost any other of the major tribes would serve that purpose more appropriately.

Second, in preparing my notes I fought constantly, though perhaps unsuccessfully, against the temptation to attribute too many consequences to the Indian's obtaining the horse. Everything I say is true, but I sometimes have doubts as to what it means. I think the best precaution is to keep in mind that the arrival of the horse within a tribe like the Arapaho changed not one degree the basic attitudes which the Arapaho had developed over the preceding two thousand years. They were already nomads; the horse merely increased their range. They already had the travois; the horse could merely lug a bigger load. They were already tied to the bison; the horse allowed them to get to him more swiftly and to kill him in a less wasteful way. They already had a society constructed around coup and war party; the horse merely encouraged them to engage in raids which covered more territory. (I am impressed by the fact that with the horse the Arapaho engaged in not one battle which took them into any area which they had not previously penetrated on foot!) The horse merely intensified customs already in existence. There was, however, one minor change which may have been effectuated by the horse: an improved status for women. The burdens they had to carry became smaller; they could accompany the tribe on its farthest excursions; and some women did get horses of their own, which they rode on migrations or to the bison butchering. If Indian men loved their horses, Indian women must have adored them.

Third, you must not depict the plains Indians as having been for any great length of time in the locations where the white men discovered them. I have our branch of the Arapaho arriving in the land between the two Plattes in 1756. Virginia Trenholm, a leading expert on the Arapaho, claims they didn't get that far south until 1790, which is highly significant, because this would put them there somewhat *after* the first French and English fur trappers! I've looked at all the evidence and have concluded that they must have been there somewhat earlier than that; perhaps 1756 is premature, but I think not. If your own researches indicate a later date for their arrival, I do not object. But please do not fall into the error of writing about white men intruding onto areas which the Indians had held from time immemorial . . . at least not on the Colorado plains. The

Pawnee had lived in eastern Nebraska for centuries, but in the western areas where Lame Beaver operated they were latecomers. The Ute had lived in the Rockies but had never established any kind of firm foothold in the area around Centennial. In the period before they had horses, the Comanche were a miserably poor mountain tribe; they moved rather late into position along the Arkansas. The limited area you are dealing with appears to have been devoid of permanently settled human beings from about 6000 B.C. to about A.D. 1750. You are dealing with a very young area, culturally, and it was certainly not one which the Indians had occupied for very long.

Visual images. In depicting the Indian background do not commit these traditional errors:

Do not show them on war parties in full regalia. I judge from what I have read that Indians in their everyday occupations looked pretty much like students at the Boulder campus of Colorado University today, except that the Indians may have been somewhat cleaner.

On the other hand, don't overdo the cleanliness bit. When I was discussing the Arapaho tipi with an old expert, he listened to my favorable description, then grunted and said, 'You've left out the one thing you could be sure of in an Arapaho tipi.' When I asked what this was, he said, 'If you sat on the chief's bed with that handsome backrest, the one thing you could be sure of catching was lice.'

In the pre-white-man war parties and set battles, few members were engaged and few deaths occurred. The massed charges of western paintings did not occur.

For the pre-white-man era, the paintings of George Catlin are still the best ones to rely on.

For the white-man era, I much prefer the paintings of Charles M. Russell. The Frederic Remington paintings are authentic as depictions of the white man at work on the prairies, but I do not find them sensitive to the Indian.

Don't, for God's sake, perpetuate either in word or illustration or map the legend that the Indians got their horses from the chance descendants of two horses, one stallion, one mare, which escaped from Coronado's excursion and bred like crazy, producing hundreds of colts, all of whom bred just as single-mindedly. Sorry. Coronado had stallions, none of which escaped. The Indians got their mounts either while they were working for Spaniards, or in warfare, or by the time-honored process of after-dark theft, at which they were masters.

If you have your own artist to do the illustrations, remember that by the time the Indians got them, horses were much diminished in size and were called ponies, which meant small, compact horses, and the preferred coloring was pinto.

Moral problem. You are then left with the most difficult problem of all. Only when I finished the report did I realize that I had come close to depicting the Arapaho in the late 1700s as the noble savage of Rousseau. I did not intend to do so. I have endeavored at every point to introduce qualifying material by stressing the limitations of his mind, the primitiveness of his social order, the constriction of his language, his harsh treatment of women and his limited horizon. I bring this contradiction to your attention now because it will haunt both you and me during the life of this project. We shall have to make up our minds precisely where we stand on the inherent nobility of the Indian, because the problem will arise later when we least anticipate it. We have got to have our minds clear. To be specific: some ninety percent of American college and university students in 1976 will believe without question, and will vote in accordance with that belief, that the Indians who roamed the west in 1776 had solved all problems of group living and had attained the ecological balance that ought to exist between man and his environment. Will they be justified? Do not try to solve this enigma now. Wait till all the evidence is in. But in the end, you will have to check everything you say or illustrate about the Indian in light of this overriding problem: Was he, in his natural state, inherently superior? In this chapter I have given you as faithful a portrait of one Indian in the closing years of the eighteenth century as I could. That I liked the man and would have loved going hunting with him is obvious. That I have done him abstract historical justice, I do not claim.

Early man. As to the date for the arrival of man into the Americas, we know for certain only that Clovis man operated around Centennial about 12,000 years ago, because we have the projectile points he used and carbonized remnants of his fires.

I am convinced that within this century artifacts and sites will be found dating the North American ancestors of the Indians back to the land bridge of 40,000 years ago. I doubt that you ought to sponsor this date in your magazine but recommend that you do not lock yourself into some

date like 10,000 B.C. simply because we have assured carbon dates to support it. Primitive man was in these areas for a much, much longer time than we once thought possible, and do not be surprised if the Calico site in the Mohave Desert northeast of Barstow, California, is confirmed one of these days, pushing the date back toward the year 100,000 B.C.

Spear points. My love for the Clovis point has not blinded me to the fact that there are two other types which some experts have found even more beautiful: the long, slim, beautifully finished Eden point, and the small, exquisitely fluted Folsom. It comes down to this. If you prefer the nononsense painting of Giotto and the stark, powerful lines of Romanesque architecture, as I do, you will prefer Clovis. If your taste runs to the more sophisticated beauty of Giorgione and Chartres cathedral, you will prefer Eden. And if you like the delicate arabesques of Watteau and the Sainte-Chapelle, you will choose Folsom. But what I say about the unsurpassed beauty of all these ancient artworks holds true, regardless of which you prefer.

Language. As to the fact that the Ute and the Aztec spoke languages derived from the same root-language, you might want to introduce your readers to glottochronology, the science of dating origins by language attrition. If you need a summary of the studies, I can provide it.