

## Young People

## Running Wolf

By Olaf Baker

IT WAS in the days when the great trains of emigrant wagons went west. Over the endless prairies, day after day, the wagons jolted and rumbled, under a burning sun. Sometimes a cool breeze would blow from the Sweet Pine Hills, and a million acres of prairie grass would go billowing like the sea. But for the most part it was a dry, windless heat, which made the journey difficult for man and beast.

On the day on which the great thing happened to little Ned Turner, the prairie grass was billowing. He had felt the heat very much before, and had been glad enough to lie under the cover of his father's wagon, while the jolt of the great wheels kept his body on the bump. But to-day he felt very strong because of the breeze and the billowing of the grass, and he rode his little Indian pony like a man, sitting very straight in the saddle, and feeling very splendid indeed. And out west, as far as he could see, the prairies stretched for hundreds of miles; and it was a fine thing to be on horseback and to feel as if they all belonged to you, that you might gallop over them for ever against the sweet rush of the wind!

As to Indians, Ned did not often fear them. If there were any about—and though the country seemed as empty as the hollow of your hand, you never could be sure—he did not think they would dare attack such a long train of wagons, considering that the white people were armed with many guns.

At noon the wagons halted for the mid-day meal.

All at once Ned's father discovered that the boy was missing. He looked about anxiously. Then, far off across the prairie, he saw a little figure riding.

A great fear rose suddenly in his throat. Suppose a roving band of Indians, hidden by some swell of the prairie, should swoop down on the lad and carry him off under his very eyes?

The boy was riding quickly, as if he had something particular to do. His father put his hands to his mouth and let out a long, ringing cry. Whether the boy heard it or not, he gave no sign. He continued to ride. Then a rise of ground hid him from sight.

Leaping on his pony, his father started in pursuit. The Indian pony was off like the wind. In a few moments he had reached the rise. Here, not more than fifty yards away, he saw Ned on his knees beside some object in the grass. Suddenly the boy rose to his feet, saw his father, and called.

When the man reached the spot, he saw to his astonishment that the object in the grass was an Indian. It was plain to see that he had been badly wounded and was weak from loss of blood. He made no sound, but in his eyes, as he gazed up helplessly at the big white man, was the dumb cry of the dog that asks for mercy.

The man turned angrily upon his son. "What do you mean by riding off like this? I told you, you were never to leave the wagons." He raised his hand to strike the boy.

Ned cowered. He was very fond of his father, but when he made him angry through disobedience, he knew that a thrashing was not to be escaped.

But before the man's hand could descend, a thing happened. Through the long grass about his legs something slid and touched his ankle. He sprang back with an exclamation, yet it was only the Indian who had put out his arm.

The white man looked down quickly. Over the dusky face of the Indian a shadow seemed to flit. That was all. An eye less sharp than Turner's might have noticed nothing. But Turner had more knowledge of Indians than most people. He knew once that shadow lay, never so lightly, upon an Indian's face, that there would be mischief. It might hardly be there before it was gone; it might be as faint as the shadow of a blade of grass. There would be mischief, unless you took warning in time.

Turner cast a quick glance round the horizon. It might be that the wounded Indian was merely left there as a decoy. The rest of the tribe might only be a short distance away, and might sweep down at any moment. Yet though he darted a piercing glance in every direction, nothing broke the long levels of the prairie, billowing under the breeze.

"Come back," he said gruffly to Ned. He remounted his pony as he spoke, and waited for Ned to do the same. But the boy stood like a stone, without moving an inch.

"D'you hear?" Turner said in a low voice. "Get on your pony at once."

"We can't leave him like this," the boy said, pointing to the wounded man. "He'll die if he isn't attended to."

"Well, what if he does? We can't go round bringing in all the sick Indians we find. I know Indians. It would only mean trouble in the end."

But the boy stuck to his point. "We can't leave him," he repeated.

The words were very simple, yet something in the very simplicity of them made Turner uncomfortable. They made it seem a cowardly, even an impossible, thing to let the Indian lie out there to die. And all about him lay the vast prairies, lonely and lonely to the edges of the world!

The big white man looked down at the huddled form in the grass. Once again he swept the horizon with his eyes. Then, tenderly, he lifted the wounded man in his arms and laid him gently along the pony's back.

The long summer passed with a burning heat.

October came. The nights were beginning to be cold, and the prairie to yellow under the breath of the chill night breeze. Running Wolf, the wounded Indian, had long ago recovered, and had returned to his people in the north. Ned's father and the other settlers had built their cabins, ready against the winter storms. Now that the long journeying across the prairies was over, folk were glad to settle down in the new homes, prepared for whatever the winter might bring.

One morning Ned discovered to his disappointment that his pony had broken its hobble and gone off in the night. By the trail in the long grass, it was plain to see which way it had gone. Without saying

anything to his father, he started off by himself to find it. He followed the trail for a long distance up the creek. Then he lost it completely. He climbed the high left bank of the creek, hoping to see the pony from the height. At first he could see nothing. Then, very far off to the south, he saw a dark shadow that seemed to move. A small herd of buffalo or antelope, he thought. Anyhow, it was not the pony, and that was what really mattered. But what was that, about half-way between him and the moving shadow, a little to the left? It looked like a pony grazing, but he could not be sure.

By this time he had left the settlement a long way behind. He remembered his father's warning never to go out of sight by himself. He knew he ought to turn back. His father would be terribly angry if he knew. But the pony? If he did not make an effort to catch him now, he might lose him altogether. He ran down the bluff and started to cross the prairie in the direction in which he thought he had seen the animal.

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