

Wicasa Hanska He (1986, p. 42, *Conceptions Southwest*, Vol.9, Issue 2)

The tall, thin, young man sat in an easy chair in the cramped living room, crowded with furniture which once belonged to a much larger room, now neatly compacted into one less than half its size. With a husky voice, a tear trickling from his eyes, in broken English, he told his story but with words not matching his thoughts.

*Around him lay the darkness of a South Dakota night. He was surrounded by it. He was alone in the night. Like a "cry in the wilderness," he lifted his song to the spirit of his ancestors. Gently, the red wool blanket he had circling his body against the chill slipped away. His spirit warmed and stirred within him.*

A woman with a peaked, pointed face and two dulled eyes, her head cocked so she could catch what was being said on the TV with one ear, nodded her head patiently, if not comprehendingly, at the speaker. A cigarette dangled from the end of a young hand already worn by a life filled with too few blessings.

The young man paused. He stared at the cigarette in his hand. His fine dark hair hung limply against his neck, just barely brushing his shoulders. The nostrils of his hawk-like nose flared with a deep sigh as he chest heaved accordingly while his mind raced onward.

*The eagle soared in the brightness of the sun. The boy's eyes teared as he tried to look at it. With the swiftness of a deer, the boy ran in the direction the eagle flew. With the cunning of a fox, he plotted how he could catch it. There was strength and joy in the boy's heart. An eagle feather would be "good medicine" for an aspiring young warrior.*

He lifted the cigarette slowly to his lips and inhaled deeply. Its numbingness filled his chest. Behind him two other girls giggled wickedly, the one blue-eyed blond, and

already provocative at eight, the other still freckle-faced innocence. The young man took no notice. His ears and eyes, the color and texture of soft doeskin, were focused elsewhere.

“Can I get you something to eat?” The young woman stirred momentarily from her watching and nodding.

“Yeah, have something to eat!” Her husband joined in.

“No, I’m not hungry!” The young man replied in a voice which filled the tiny room and drifted on out into the parking lot. “Hell,” he said, “you don’t know where I’ve been; you don’t understand our ways. I’m a Sioux. Do you know what that means?” Suddenly, his six foot frame sprang uncertainly into the air. His cigarette brushed against the arm of the chair sending a shower of sparks in all directions. The woman leaped up to rescue the upholstery of her chair.

“Are you all right?” Her husband asked.

“I’m all right!” He answered, then more softly, “I need to pee. Where’s the john?”

The two girls giggled knowingly. The young woman finished brushing off her chair and eyed her husband annoyingly. Her husband just shrugged. “He’s all right; he’s just drunk.”

The young man returned to the easy chair in the living room. Reaching down next to the chair, he brought up two beers. “Here, have another beer.” He said as he handed on the balding man seated across from him. He looked into the weather-beaten face of the other, eyes glazed. For him

*The flame burned bright before his eyes. “No, no,” his mind begged, “don’t hurt me. I’m a good boy. I won’t do it again.” The sudden pain of the flame on his hand shot up his*

*arm and ended in his armpit. His stomach lurched as the pain engulfed him shutting off all other sensation.*

Unexpectedly, he burst out, "You, bastard! You no-good, lousy bastard!" Sputum and anger burst from his mouth. "I guess you'd just like to see me go!" His anger and bitterness choked him. Like a caged mountain lion, he began to pace the tiny living room.

"Calm down, man. What happened? Maybe you'd better go home and lie down." The balding man said.

"Damned right, I'll go home!" He reached down for the rest of his beer. Swiftly he was through the door. The resulting calm settled over the room.

Outside the cool summer breeze did little to clear his head. Through force of habit his feet led him back to his own tiny apartment. He went in without switching on the light. Closing the door behind him, he reached for his sleeping bag on the couch and threw it on the floor.

*Soft, warm arms held him gently. He could hear the comforting rhythms of her heart. Soft, comforting words filled his tiny words. Here he was safe; he knew that. No harm would come to him here. Rocking as one, he nuzzled further against her soft breast, a pillow for his head. Peace, warmth, and stillness came within. "I love you, Mommy."*

"Hell, man, I'm a Sioux!" He whispered softly as he slipped his sleeping bag around him.