



Extract from Blood Brothers Book Two of the Circular Scrolls

Death and Birth

Sam looked about her in bewilderment. Her bow was across her shoulders and the rifle of her adopted father was across her knees. She looked towards the dust cloud which now hid Aketcheta from her sight; was that where her path lay? The horse soldiers who had mounted the first attack were now routed, fleeing in disorder from the camp, trying to reach the safety of a small knoll. The braves pursuing them were losing interest, regrouping and turning to find new quarry. Sam made up her mind. But before she could move, out of the dust and riding hard towards her came four horsemen. Now she did not pause to consider. She snatched up the rifle, dug her heels into the pony's flanks and circled away to the left. Then whirling the pony about, nimble as a dancer, she rode down on them, leaning low over the pony's neck and twisting as she did so to look down the long barrel of the rifle. They had not had time to turn. Three times she fired; three crumpled in their saddles and fell into the dirt without a sound. Once more she circled and galloped towards the last man. As she took aim, he raised his rifle and pointed it at her. Everything seemed to slow down then so that Sam could see every detail; she could see that he was not a young man; just old enough perhaps to have a son of her age; she could see that his face was lined, but with worry and care and not bitterness or cruelty; she could see he had a command for there were stars upon his shoulder; she saw a soldier who was also a man... A man like... perhaps the thought passed between them because for a fraction of a heart beat his finger hesitated on the trigger and Sam saw his son and he saw her adopted father, like ghosts in a shared future and then Sam fired... For several beats more he remained upright in the saddle, the gun still raised, his eyes still on hers, an expression of mild surprise in them; and then slowly he let it fall from his hands... and followed it, toppling into the dust to lay at his horse's feet.

Suddenly there was a shout.

"Look! Look! Pakusha, Long Hair!"

Sam turned.

Across the river she could see a column of blue-coats marching; she could hear their bugles sounding. Their number was small; too small surely? Where was this madman going? Then it was obvious. The white chief seemed to be making for a hill, his men still in their neat orderly lines, but beginning to stretch out as they turned to fight a defensive action against a large attacking force at their rear. The man leading them rode a white horse and held his sabre above his head. He rode as a man of reckless courage, who believes the spirits are with him. He rode as one who wants to be seen and does not expect to fail; he rode, Sam thought, as a chief of her own tribe

would ride and she could not but help but admire him. But from her position, across the river Sam could see, as he could not, many other warriors coming up the other side of the bluff, hidden from the man on the white charger. And it was quite clear to Sam that they would reach the summit before he. Now she was up, for the fire of victory flowed through their veins and they all charged into the river to join the force at the long hair's back and drive him to meet his doom.

Like bees we swarmed; like a hurricane sent by the thunder beings, to drive the Chief of the Thieves from our land and I saw the warriors come up and to the top of the hill, line upon line of them, and reaching the top, they all pulled up and for a heartbeat, while the horses caught their wind, they were all framed with the blue of the sky behind them and the fierce sun directly above, casting no shadow, ghost warriors of the sun, fearless and insuperable... And there were many thousand warriors, all painted, many wearing the war bonnets of long courage, many carrying spears and as many, the long gun; and their horses were sleek with good living and painted too; and all the spear tips and arrow heads and long guns flashed in the sun and pointed down at the long hair as he turned to see his destiny... And they had the smell of victory on them and they were undefeatable and they knew it... and the long hair knew it too... And then the warriors came sweeping down the hillside, the air alive with their battle cries, and they pressed everything before them to the ground ... and the blue- coats were all confusion and the dust rose above them like a great yellow cloud and out of the cloud came many big, grey horses with empty saddles...

The blue- coats shot many shots out of that cloud but we shot truer and straighter... And our blood was hot and our hearts were bad on that day and we took many scalps and we took no prisoners... And many blue- coats had leapt from their horses as we crushed in on them, casting away their guns and pleading to be taken prisoner but I saw Aketcheta leading and busy with his hatchet and his heart was shorn of pity and we took no prisoners... And I saw the long hair standing like a sheaf of corn, for I saw now that his hair was cut short; up and down the lines he went, all the time, shouting to his men, to stand, to fight; and still the warriors came, like the river over the fall, shooting, riding fast, shooting again; and his dead men were like ears of corn about him... And I saw Aketcheta with his hatchet near the long hair... Then I heard a shot ring out and I saw a warrior fall; and then I heard another, and another, and I saw the long hair laugh ... and then he fell to his knees and crawled like a dog and the blood gushed from his side and his mouth... then our warriors closed around him and I saw no more...

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