

Name _____ Date _____

Little Yellow Fur

“Play close to the house,” mama warned Susanna. “South Dakota is a wild country. It’s not like the town where we used to live.” Susanna sat on the steps of the house making a castle from clay. She had heard wolves howl in the night and had been afraid. Papa said wolves would not come to the house.

Susanna and her parents were homesteaders. In 1913, they had settled on free public land near the Rosebud Sioux Reservation. Papa liked it here, but mama was lonely so far from her friends. Susanna thought the Sioux might become good friends. They often rode by on their ponies. They always waved to her. Often they stopped and talked to papa. They looked at the new barn papa was building. They touched Susanna’s curly blond hair. “Little Yellow Fur,” they named her.

Sometimes Red Cloud rode by on his spotted pony. Red Cloud was a leader of the Sioux. He did not wear his hair loose to his shoulders as young men did. His black hair was in two long braids. Red Cloud’s eyes were always sad. Susanna knew why. Red cloud had fought at the Battle of Wounded Knee twenty five years ago. His wife and children were killed in the fight with the soldiers. The Sioux still called it “the battle of the hundred slain.”

One afternoon Susanna went to the little creek on the prairie. She walked far along its bank and picked wild cherries. She heard a sound behind her and turned around. She was looking right into the face of an old man. She knew that wise face.

“Red Cloud,” she said. “Little Yellow Fur,” he said. Sioux women and children came from the bushes carrying skin bags of cherries. They laughed, happy to see her. “Come, rest,” they said. “Stay with us.” Since Susanna was tired, she went with them. It was a long walk to their village. At last they reached the circle of tepees. Women bent over outdoor campfires. They turned roasts of rabbit and prairie hen. The meat smelled good, and Susanna was hungry. The women gave her bits of roast hen, which they called sheo.

They laughed when Susanna blew on the meat to cool it. Boys and girls gathered round and ate with Susanna. They gave her chunks of chewy bread called aguiapi. They pointed to the rustling tree she knew as cottonwood. Waga chun they called it in Sioux.

The girls showed Susanna beautiful dresses and moccasins. “Made for special feast days,” they said. The skins of young elk and deer had been tanned. The women and girls had drawn picture designs on the skins. They used dyed porcupine quills and tiny bright beads. Susanna put her feet into a pair of moccasins much too big for her. The women laughed. They promised to make moccasins to fit her.

The sun went down and the campfires burned low. Old people yawned and Susanna was sleepy too. She wanted to go home, but the prairie was dark. She did not know which way to go. Red cloud bent over her. “Come Little Yellow Fur,” he said. His spotted pony stood behind him. Then papa came on his horse. Red cloud lifted Susanna and put her behind her father.

“I’m sorry if Susanna was any trouble,” her father said to Red cloud. Red Cloud spoke in the Sioux language. She could not understand it all. “What did he say?” Susanna asked as she and her papa rode home. “Red Cloud wants you to come again,” papa answered. Red Cloud said, “In a Sioux village every door is open to a child. Every pot has food for a hungry boy or girl. Every heart loves children. Helchetu Aloh.”

Susanna knew helchetu aloh means “It is true.”