

The background of the entire image is a sepia-toned photograph of a natural landscape. In the foreground, there is a field of tall, thin grasses. Behind the grass, several trees with dark, gnarled trunks and branches are visible. The sky is bright and hazy, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall tone is warm and nostalgic.

***FREDERIC  
REMINGTON***

***THE WAY  
OF AN INDIAN***

**Frederic Remington**

# **The Way of an Indian**

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Contact: [DigiCat@okpublishing.info](mailto:DigiCat@okpublishing.info)



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# I. White Otter's Own Shadow

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White Otter's heart was bad. He sat alone on the rim-rocks of the bluffs overlooking the sunlit valley. To an unaccustomed eye from below he might have been a part of nature's freaks among the sand rocks. The yellow grass sloped away from his feet mile after mile to the timber, and beyond that to the prismatic mountains. The variegated lodges of the Chis-chis-chash village dotted the plain near the sparse woods of the creek-bottom; pony herds stood quietly waving their tails against the flies or were driven hither and yon by the herdboys—giving variety to the tremendous sweep of the Western landscape.

This was a day of peace—such as comes only to the Indians in contrast to the fierce troubles which nature stores up for the other intervals. The enemy, the pinch of the shivering famine, and the Bad Gods were absent, for none of these things care to show themselves in the white light of a midsummer's day. There was peace with all the world except with him. He was in a fierce dejection over the things which had come to him, or those which had passed him by. He was a boy—a fine-looking, skillfully modeled youth—as beautiful a thing, doubtless, as God ever created in His sense of form; better than his sisters, better than the four-foots, or the fishes, or the birds, and he meant so much more than the inanimate things, in so far as we can see. He had the body given to him and he wanted to keep it, but there were the mysterious demons of the darkness, the wind and the flames; there were the monsters from the shadows, and from under the waters; there were the machinations of his enemies, which he was not proof against alone, and there was yet the strong hand of the

Good God, which had not been offered as yet to help him on with the simple things of life; the women, the beasts of the fields, the ponies and the war-bands. He could not even protect his own shadow, which was his other and higher self.

His eyes dropped on the grass in front of his moccasins—tiny dried blades of yellow grass, and underneath them he saw the dark trceries of their shadows. Each had its own little shadow—its soul—its changeable thing—its other life—just as he himself was cut blue-black beside himself on the sandstone. There were millions of these grass-blades, and each one shivered in the wind, maundering to itself in the chorus, which made the prairie sigh, and all for fear of a big brown buffalo wandering by, which would bite them from the earth and destroy them.

White Otter's people had been strong warriors in the Chis-chis-chash; his father's shirt and leggins were black at the seams with the hair of other tribes. He, too, had stolen ponies, but had done no better than that thus far, while he burned to keep the wolf-totem red with honor. Only last night, a few of his boy companions, some even younger than himself, had gone away to the Absaroke for glory and scalps, and ponies and women—a war-party—the one thing to which an Indian pulsed with his last drop. He had thought to go also, but his father had discouraged him, and yesterday presented him with charcoal ashes in his right hand, and two juicy buffalo ribs with his left. He had taken the charcoal. His father said it was good—that it was not well for a young man to go to the enemy with his shadow uncovered before the Bad Gods.

Now his spirits raged within his tightened belly, and the fierce Indian brooding had driven him to the rim-rock, where his soul rocked and pounced within him. He looked at the land of his people, and he hated all vehemently, with a rage that nothing stayed but his physical strength.

Old Big Hair, his father, sitting in the shade of his tepee, looked out across at his son on the far-off skyline, and he hid

his head in his blanket as he gazed into his medicine-pouch. "Keep the enemy and the Bad Gods from my boy; he has no one to protect him but you, my medicine."

Thus hour after hour there sat the motionless tyro, alone with his own shadow on the hill. The shades of all living nature grew great and greater with the declining sun. The young man saw it with satisfaction. His heart swelled with brave thoughts, as his own extended itself down the hillside—now twenty feet long—now sixty—until the western sun was cut by the bluffs, when it went out altogether. The shadow of White Otter had been eaten up by the shadow of the hill. He knew now that he must go to the westward—to the western mountains, to the Inyan-kara, where in the deep recesses lay the shadows which had eaten his. They were calling him, and as the sun sank to rest, White Otter rose slowly, drew his robe around him, and walked away from the Chis-chis-chash camp.

The split sticks in Big Hair's lodge snapped and spit gleams of light on the old warrior as he lay back on his resting-mat. He was talking to his sacred symbols. "Though he sleeps very far off, though he sleeps even on the other side, a spirit is what I use to keep him. Make the bellies of animals full which would seek my son; make the wolf and the bear and the panther go out of their way. Make the buffalo herds to split around my son, Good God! Be strong to keep the Bad God back, and all his demons—lull them to sleep while he passes; lull them with soft sounds."

And the Indian began a dolorous chanting, which he continued throughout the night. The lodge-fires died down in the camp, but the muffled intone came in a hollow sound from the interior of the tepee until the spirit of silence was made more sure, and sleep came over the bad and good together.

Across the gray-greens of the moonlit plains bobbed and flitted the dim form of the seeker of God's help.

Now among the dark shadows of the pines, now in the gray sagebrush, lost in the coulees, but ceaselessly on and on, wound this figure of the night. The wolves sniffed along on the trail, but came no nearer.

All night long he pursued his way, his muscles playing tirelessly to the demands of a mind as taut as bowstring.

Before the morning he had reached the Inyan-kara, a sacred place, and begun to ascend its pine-clad slopes. It had repulsion for White Otter, it was sacred—full of strange beings not to be approached except in the spiritual way, which was his on this occasion, and thus he approached it. To this place the shadows had retired, and he was pursuing them. He was in mortal terror—every tree spoke out loud to him; the dark places gave back groans, the night-winds swooped upon him, whispering their terrible fears. The great underground wildcat meowed from the slopes, the red-winged moon-birds shrilled across the sky, and the stone giants from the cliffs rocked and sounded back to White Otter, until he cried aloud:

“O Good God, come help me. I am White Otter. All the bad are thick around me; they have stolen my shadow; now they will take me, and I shall never go across to live in the shadow-land. Come to White Otter, O Good God!”

A little brown bat whirled round and round the head of the terror-stricken Indian, saying: “I am from God, White Otter. I am come to you direct from God. I will take care of you. I have your shadow under my wings. I can fly so fast and crooked that no one can catch up with me. No arrow can catch me, no bullet can find me, in my tricky flight. I have your shadow and I will fly about so fast that the spirit-wildcats and the spirit-birds and the stone giants cannot come up with me or your shadow, which I carry under my wings. Sit down here in the dark place under the cliffs and rest. Have no fear.” White Otter sat him down as directed, muffled in his robe. “Keep me safe, do not go away from me, ye little brown bat. I vow to keep you all my life, and to take

you into the shadow-land hereafter, if ye will keep me from the demons now, O little brown bat!" And so praying, he saw the sky pale in the east as he lay down to sleep. Then he looked all around for his little brown bat, which was no more to be seen.

The daylight brought quiescence to the fasting man, and he sank back, blinking his hollow eyes at his shadow beside him. Its possession lulled him, and he paid the debt of nature, lying quietly for a long time.

Consciousness returned slowly. The hot sun beat on the fevered man, and he moved uneasily. To his ears came the far-away beat of a tom-tom, growing nearer and nearer until it mixed with the sound of bells and the hail-like rattle of gourds. Soon he heard the breaking of sticks under the feet of approaching men, and from under the pines a long procession of men appeared—but they were shadows, like water, and he could see the landscape beyond them. They were spirit-men. He did not stir. The moving retinue came up, breaking now into the slow side-step of the ghost-dance, and around the form of White Otter gathered these people of the other world. They danced "the Crazy Dance" and sang, but the dull orbs of the faster gave no signs of interest.

"He-eye, he-eye! we have come for you—come to take you to the shadow-land. You will live on a rocky island, where there are no ponies, no women, no food, White Otter. You have no medicine, and the Good God will not protect you. We have come for you—hi-ya, hi-ya, hi-yah!"

"I have a medicine," replied White Otter. "I have the little brown bat which came from God."

"He-eye, he-eye! Where is your little brown bat? You do not speak the truth—you have no little brown bat from God. Come with us, White Otter." With this, one of the spirit-men strode forward and seized White Otter, who sprang to his feet to grapple with him. They clinched and strained for the