

PASSAGE II

This passage is adapted from the book Old Indian Days by Charles Eastman.

It was now dark. The night was well-nigh intolerable for Antoine. The buffalo milled around him in countless numbers, regarding him with vicious glances. It was only by reason of their natural aversion to man that they gave him any space. The bellowing of the bulls grew louder, and there was a noticeable uneasiness on the part of the herd. This was a sign of an approaching storm.

- 5 On the western horizon, Antoine saw flashes of lightning. The cloud which had been a mere speck increased to large proportions. Suddenly the wind came, and lightning flashes became more frequent, showing the ungainly forms of the animals like strange monsters in the white light. The colossal herd was again in violent motion in a blind rush for shelter. There seemed to be groaning in heaven and earth—millions of hoofs and throats roaring in unison. As a shipwrecked man clings to a piece of wood, so Antoine, although almost
10 exhausted with fatigue, stuck to the saddle of his pony. As the mad rush continued, every flash of lightning displayed heaps of bison in death struggle under the hoofs of their companions.

- The next morning, when Antoine awoke, he saw the herd had entered the strip of timber which lay on both sides of the river, and it was here that Antoine conceived his first distinct hope of saving himself. “Waw, waw, waw!” was the hoarse cry that came to his ears, perhaps from a human being in distress. Antoine strained his
15 eyes and craned his neck to see who it could be. Through an opening in the branches ahead, he saw a large grizzly bear lying along an inclined limb and hugging it desperately to maintain his position. The bear was completely surrounded by the buffalo. He had taken his unaccustomed refuge after making a brave stand against several bulls, one of which lay dead nearby, while he himself was bleeding from several wounds. Antoine had been assiduously looking for a friendly tree, by means of which he hoped to effect his own escape
20 from captivity by the army of bison. His horse, by chance, made his way directly under the very box-elder that was supporting the bear, and there was a convenient branch just within his reach.

- He saw at a glance that the occupant of the tree would not interfere with him. The two were, in fact, companions in distress. Antoine tried to give a war-whoop as he sprang desperately from the pony’s back and seized the cross-limb with both his hands. By the middle of the afternoon, the main body of the herd had
25 passed, and Antoine’s captivity had at last come to an end. He swung himself from his limb to the ground and walked stiffly to the carcass of the nearest cow, which he dressed, and prepared himself a meal. But first he took a piece of liver on a long pole to the bear!