



**BELDEN, THE WHITE CHIEF;**  
**OR,**  
**TWELVE YEARS**  
**AMONG THE**  
**WILD INDIANS OF THE PLAINS.**

**FROM THE DIARIES AND MANUSCRIPTS**

**OF**

**GEORGE P. BELDEN,**

*The Adventurous White Chief, Soldier, Hunter, Trapper, and Guide.*

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## IV.

## THE MAGIC CIRCLE ON THE PRAIRIE.

A YOUNG hunter, following the trail of a deer on the prairie, suddenly came upon a circular path trodden smooth by long use. It gave evidence of recent footsteps, made by dainty feet, but nowhere could he discover a trail leading to or from it. This puzzled him not a little, and he resolved to ferret out the mystery. Accordingly he concealed himself in the tall prairie grass near by, and patiently awaited the coming of the being or beings who had trodden the path so smoothly, for he knew this could have been done only by long-continued and frequent use. After a short time his vigil was broken by music, very faint at first, but exceeding sweet, which seemed to descend out of the heavens. Guided by the melody, his keen eye discovered a speck far up in the sky. Soon the speck grew larger, and the music plainer and sweeter still, and it was evident that the bird-like speck and the music were approaching the earth together. Never for a moment did the young hunter take his eye off the object that seemed coming right down upon him, and soon he discovered it was a very large basket, but, as it was made of ozier, very light. But he forgot the basket when he saw its wonderful burden. Twelve charming maidens sat upon cushions in the basket, and each had a little drum which she beat with the grace of an angel.

Lower and lower came this magic car, with its precious freight, until it rested exactly in the center of the ring formed by the mysterious path. Scarcely had it touched the ground, when the twelve maidens sprang out and began to dance around the circle, and to strike a shining ball from one to another.

The young hunter had seen many a gay dance among all the tribes of the prairie, but never had he seen any thing to compare with this. The music had at first delighted him, but now the matchless beauty and charming grace of the maidens made him forget all the world beside. All of them charmed him, but one, the youngest and loveliest, completely entranced him, and he resolved to seize and carry her home at any risk. Slowly and quietly he crept toward the circle, and succeeded in getting entirely up to it without making the least noise, or in any way attracting attention. Then, when his idol approached the side where he lay hid, he attempted, by a sudden spring, to capture her. But no sooner did the maidens see him, than they all sprang nimbly into the basket, and were sped, with the quickness of thought, back to the skies and out of sight.

Poor Algon, the hunter, was completely foiled. He stood gazing upward after his new love till the music of the singing maidens faded from his ear and the car vanished from his sight. Then he who an hour before was the bold hunter, brave, and fancy free, began to bewail his fate. "She is gone, forever gone, and I shall see her no more!" he said, and sadly turned away. He hunted no more, but went home to his lodge. All night he thought of this new wonder, and he determined to go back to the prairie next day, and once more try to win the fair maiden, the youngest of the twelve. Warned by his former failure, he did not attempt to seize her openly, but, by his magic

power, changed himself into an opossum. He did not wait long before he heard again the sweet music, and saw the car descend into the center of the ring. Again the maidens commenced the same gay dance and play. They seemed even more beautiful than the day before, and she, the youngest, was the perfection of grace. Slowly and cautiously the opossum crept toward the ring, but even this disguise could not deceive the wary maidens. The instant they saw him they sprang into the basket and rose in the air. The car stopped when a little way from the earth, however, and one of the older maidens spoke. "Perhaps," said she, "it is come to show us how the game is played by mortals;" but the youngest replied, "Oh no! quick! let us ascend," and, all joining in a heavenly chant, they rose out of sight.

Algon returned to his lodge again, sadder and more dejected than ever, but still resolved not to give up his new-found treasure. The night seemed an eternity to him, and early in the morning he set out over the prairie again, his head full of expedients to decoy and capture the cause of all his rapture and of all his uneasiness. Directly in his path lay an old hollow stump, in which a number of mice had made their nest. Surely, thought he, these diminutive forms can not create alarm, I will be one of them. So, moving the stump as near the circle as he dared, he became a little, harmless mouse, and mingled with the rest in the old stump. He had not been long in his new character, when the car descended and the sports began. "But see!" cried the youngest sister, "that stump was not there yesterday," and she ran, affrighted, to the car. The others only smiled, and, gathering around the stump to show her there was no danger, began to strike it in jest, when the mice all ran out and Algon among them. The sisters killed them all but

one, which the youngest pursued out into the prairie, where she was no longer protected by the charm of the circle. Just as she raised her stick to kill the mouse, it changed to a brave hunter before her eyes, and she was clasped in the arms of Algon. The other sisters all sprang into the ozier basket, and were drawn up to the skies, but the youngest was carried, an unwilling captive, to the hunter's lodge.

The young hunter exhausted all his skill and invention to win the affections of his fairy bride. He wiped the tears from her eyes, told in pictured words his adventures in the chase, painted all the charms of life on the earth, and told his never-dying love. He was incessant in his attentions, and picked out the smoothest path as he led her toward his home. How his heart beat with joy and love as she entered his lodge! From that moment he was the happiest of men. Winter and summer quickly sped away, and another joy came. A little boy, pledge of their love, was added to the lodge-circle. The novelty of the scenes at first amused the young bride, and the loving devotion of Algon made her content to live on earth, but by and by she began to pine to see her sisters once more, and to visit her father—for she was the daughter of one of the stars. But she was obliged to hide these feelings from her husband, and to appear cheerful and contented before him, for she knew he would thwart any attempt she might make to leave the earth. She remembered the charm that would carry her up, and secretly made a wicker basket, large enough to hold herself and her son, and kept it hid away. Now she collected all the rare and beautiful things of earth that she thought would please her father, together with the most dainty kinds of food. At last all was ready, and she only awaited an opportunity to escape. Taking her child and her treasures, with the basket,

one day while Algon was absent in the chase, she set out across the prairie to the magic circle. Taking her little son in her arms, she sat down in the basket and commenced her song. The charm was still potent, and as her song rose on the air the basket began to ascend.

Algon was hunting on the prairie, and, as the song was borne by the winds, it struck his ear with ineffable sweetness. In a moment he recognized the voice, and, in an agony of surprise, realized that his wife and son, all that he cared for on earth, were being wafted to the skies. Wild with suspense, he ran with the swiftness of the deer toward the fatal spot, but, before he could reach the ring, the basket, with its precious burden, was high in the air. Loudly and anxiously he cried to his dear ones to come back, but all of no avail. Higher, higher went the basket, the happy song of his wife, dirge of all his hopes, grew fainter and fainter, and finally died away. He watched the receding speck, straining his eyes until it entirely vanished; then, gazing up into heaven where his loved ones had gone, long after they had disappeared, he stood alone on the prairie, alone in the world. Then he bowed his proud head in agony to the ground and wept like a child.

A long, dreary winter and a cheerless summer passed, and still Algon bewailed his loss. The chase had lost its charm to him now, and he loathed his food since the loving hands that were wont to prepare it were absent. He mourned the loss of his beautiful wife, but his son, who was all his hope and who was to perpetuate his race, was still a greater loss. His smile was gone, and he who had been the life of the village was now sad and gloomy.

Meanwhile his wife had reached her starry home, and almost forgot, in the renewed joys and blissful employments of her child-

hood's home, that she had left a husband on the earth. But her son, true to his race, longed to visit the place of his birth, and to see his father, whom he could just remember as the proud hunter. The little fellow's entreaties so won the heart of his grandfather that, calling his daughter to him one day, "Go, my child," he said, "take your son down to his father, and ask him to come up and live with us, and tell him to bring a specimen of every bird and animal he kills in the chase."

So she took the boy and returned to earth. Algon, who ever hovered near the enchanted spot, heard her voice, singing as she had sung the first time he saw her. How slow the descent of the car seemed to him! His heart beat with impatience and hope as he saw the forms of his wife and child, and soon he clasped them in his arms, and was happy once more. He heard the message from the star, and accepted the invitation with alacrity. Now he began to hunt with the utmost activity, that he might collect the presents for the grandfather of his son. Whole nights as well as days he spent on the prairie, searching for every curious and beautiful bird and useful animal. He only kept a foot, tail, or wing of each, and when he had collected specimens of all that was beautiful or useful in the chase, he took them with his wife and child, and was wafted up in the wicker-basket, to the music of his wife's voice.

Great joy was shown when they arrived on the starry plains. The star-chief summoned all his people to a great feast, and, when they had assembled, he proclaimed aloud that each one of the guests might take of the earthly gifts whatever he liked best. Immediately a very strange scene of confusion commenced. One chose a foot, another a wing, another a tail,



and another a claw, until all the guests had chosen gifts. Then those who had chosen a tail or a foot became animals and ran off; the others chose a wing or a claw, and became birds and flew away. Algon chose a white hawk's feather, which was his token. His wife and son followed his example, and all three became white hawks, and flew down to earth and mingled with the feathered tribes. From that day the white hawk became the boldest of birds.