

SUN DANCE SUITE

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Summer night on the prairie. Moonlight. A gentle South wind brings the fragrance of burning cottonwood, the scent of sweet grass, horse mint, Indian leather, ponies. The taper white tepees, stately and beautiful at hand, blur into vague clusters at only a little distance, and sweep grandly away in the great curve of the tribal camp circle, where clan by clan and family by family the A-rap-a-hos have pitched their conical tents in ancient, traditional order. Within this great circle dark masses slowly move about- the pony herds, driven in from their pastures on the hills for safety against marauding enemies, who may be lurking about the camp. Here and there a pony wanders apart from the herd, a straggler, coughing over the dusty grass. Dogs skulk about the lodges and whiff the meat drying on the scaffolds out of their reach. Far off, here and there around the big encampment, an outside cooking-fire tosses its small flame up into the fathomless night near a lodge where a feast is preparing. Alone and apart within the circle a large tepee glows yellow with its inside fire against the dark prairie; there the priests, crouching among their painted robes, their bison skulls and sacred calumets, rehearse in awful privacy the songs and manipulations of the ritual, initiating the novices who are to lead in the ceremony, the ordeal of the morrow. All around is a continual bustle, a muffled stir, a movement, life felt rather than seen or heard. Sheeted forms, tall and ghostly, pass; the parched short-grass crunches under the heels of moccasins nearby but unseen in the deceptive dazzle of the bright moonlight. A group of boys rush by, the quiet laughter of girls comes to our ears, the wail of a distant wolf, the thin, gnat-like voice of the camp crier, the patter of hoofs as some horseman lopes over the plain. But all