

Duane Topping

A Warriors Call

Chanti flung her eyes across the chasm that scarred and marked the eastern edge of her native lands. As she strained to see the forest on the other side, her mind wandered to what the coming days would hold.

"The time has come", she said solemnly to herself.

Time was not something entirely unfamiliar to Chanti, she was fully aware of its passage. The People of the Plains could not judge the millennia since, what the elders called, "The Second Fall", yet she felt the weight of time none the less. Chanti still listened intently to the stories of how the Ancient People had brought about the end, destroying the earth. In fact, the precipice that she currently found herself on, overlooked the only visible wound the land had suffered during The Fall. The canyon was impassable, sheer cliffs prevented descent into the gap and the high winds circulating along the abyss would surely blow a person to the gates of The Maker. According to legend, it had no beginning and the end was blocked by the sea, it was forbidden to test these boundaries. Thus the forest inside her gaze was a peaceful mystery, a distraction from what reality had placed at her feet. As Chanti scanned her eyes back across the fissure from the forest to the grasslands of her people, time plagued her thoughts again.

When Chanti was young her grandmother had said it was like a river that flowed through life, "Sometimes it flows slowly and others it's a raging



mass of unstoppable water". This was one proverb that had always stuck in Chanti's mind. It was the metaphor of all life, an endless flow to the south emptying into the waters of the horizon. And today, time felt like an unstoppable mass of water pushing her to towards horizon, and Chanti felt like she would drown before washing into the sea.

Chanti was now eighteen seasons old, and the grasslands her people inhabited never seemed so desolate before today. The time had come for Chanti to join the Mothers in their hut. At the beginning of her eighth season she began her training into the Warrior's Circle as all the females of her people did. And for the past ten seasons she had perfected her craft. Numerous raids of the neighboring clans for mate worthy men and countless wars for fertile ground had proven her worth as a Warrior. This prevented the dishonorable placement as a permanent Mother, or worse yet a Caregiver. However, upon the rise of the sun, she would embark on the spiritual journey that every women dreaded and praised in her culture. This was childbirth, a necessity to ensure the survival of her people.

Chanti had heard rumors of what the coming days would bring. The mating process for Warriors, while understood to be painful for some, did not particularly frighten Chanti. She would be placed belly first over a wool sack stuffed with cotton to ensure her rear-end was most prominent. The discipline she learned as a Warrior would allow her gaze to remain forward while The Maters (mostly men enslaved from other clans) would be lead into

The Mothers' Hut. They would mount the women, deposit their seed and leave the women to the fate that awaited. The mounting could be fierce and agonizing, but it was the fortune that followed which darkened Chanti's mood. How could an accomplished Warrior be reduced to simple reproduction in such a dishonorable fashion? This "person" would be growing like a weed inside her belly for nearly a full season. If she survived this atrocity, Chanti would face the desecration of childbirth. And what if this child had the birth defect marking it as a male? If this were to happen, Chanti's bid for clan matriarch would be destroyed and her life till now will have been for not. Yet these were the trials of a true Warrior, like the river of her grandmother's proverb, she would have to flow to her own southern destiny braving the rapids ahead. After all, this was law, not of The Plains People, but of The Maker.

The Maker had set down the laws when she created the Plains People. She provided the land between the western mountains and eastern canyon, it was bordered to the north by ice and to the south by the sea. The river that dissected the land was the blood of life still flowing from The Maker into womb. Women, having been gifted with strength and discipline, would rule the earth as Warriors. It was said that true Warriors would sacrifice a season to give back to The Maker a new generation of women as a sign that they were truly deserving of The Makers gifts. Those young girls who were not worthy of their mother's Warrior blood would be regarded as equals to the cattle. They

would have before them two paths. Either become a permanent Mother, caring for the children and tasked with childbearing during times of war, or, if unfruitful, would be simple Caregivers. Each would be reduced to the shadows of shame for having failed The Maker. Men would be labeled Providers, they will use their backs to till the dirt of the grasslands and coral the animals to feed the Plains People. Men who showed exceptional virility would provide the seed for the new Warriors of their clan and become Maters. If sterile or unable to raise the fruits of the dirt, their birth defect would be removed and they would live among The Mothers. Affection and fraternity would be reserved for only those within their own circles. For, as The Maker said, "A Warrior can only love a Warrior, and only a Provider can love a Provider. Only within the thralls of bloodshed can women show desire, only in the depths of the fertile dirt and among the animals can men show fraternity, and only by giving their seed to The Maker will Maters be precious. Those without a circle have lost their ability for passion, and shall walk among the shadows of the cattle". These were the tenets Chanti cherished and loved so deeply.

As a Warrior, Chanti had made The Maker proud in her mind and in the eyes of the Elders, including her grandmother. She had enslaved many virile males from neighboring clans to ensure the strength of new Warriors. She had also been an integral part of battles to maintain fertile dirt and grazing grasses that would produce her people's food and shelter. Yet, despite her unwavering service to The Maker, the next step in her devotion

to her people left an uneasy feeling in her heart and stomach. Chanti now questioned the sacrifice required of her, the burden of childbirth was not one she would have chosen herself. Were there not permanent Mothers for this task? The Warrior Circle was trained for a singular purpose, and they should not be reduced to the cattle that slunk in the shadows like cowards. How does the sacrifice of a season compare to a Warriors accomplishments? These were the conflicts in Chanti's mind and often at the tip of her tongue. Her only solace was the answers her grandmother gave to the questions about this great journey.

Chanti's grandmother told her that, "Childbirth can breed weakness in Warriors who have not been guided by The Maker and willingly sacrifice a season. If her heart and body are not pure, then she will be infertile and with no circle. If her offspring is cursed with the defect of a male, she will be drained of pride and a lack of pride in a Warrior cannot be a matriarch. The Maker will give the once proud Warrior a life subjugated to her sisters". The words now raced through Chanti's veins, chilling her bones with a new found fear. When the sun rose on the following day, she would have to steel her nerves and once again prove her worth as a true Warrior to The Maker. This would need to be done despite her fears that her mind had become weak, which can only be rewarded with the birthing of a male or a loss of the affection she had for her sister Warriors.

"The time has come", she said solemnly to herself.