A Prairie Borgia

John G. Neihardt

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WAZHINGA Saba was a great Medicine Man. An old Indian whose original being has not been blasted by the doubt of the white man, will tell you that he was a seer of strange things big in meaning; a dreamer of dreams that glared with the light of dawns and days, sundowns and stars, speaking with the ambiguous tongue of mystery! To his credulous subjects, Wazhinga Saba was a bronze Colossus, stretching a hard metallic hand across his little world, and the little world groaned or laughed according to the will of the many−mooded master; for such have been the people since the creation, and such have been the masters.

In the fall of the year 1812 the entire Omaha tribe, returning from a buffalo hunt on the plains which now constitute Western Nebraska, built its winter village at a distance of about 200 miles from Ne Shuga, the Great River.

The hunting had been poor, and the tribe, though originally intending to winter among the protecting bluffs of the great stream, where firewood was plentiful, discontinued its march in order to conserve its strength. Who toils must eat much; therefore the tribe ceased toiling that the small stock of meat might endure the winter.

The Omahas built comfortable mud lodges along the banks of a creek, which would at once afford them water and a limited supply of wood from the scattered plum thickets.

The fall days passed and the Northwest breathed with snowy breath upon the hills, and the tribe was locked in the desolate little valley as by a hand of ice. Confinement to the lodges and insufficiency of food brought sickness. Many a strong brave became less than the shadow of a squaw. Many a squaw tottered and fell beneath her load, and became weaker than the child at her back.

It was one of the numerous humble tragedies that history does not see.

But daily about the windswept village went a youth who entered the lodges where the groans of suffering were loudest. There was a strange light in his eye, and he who from the bed of sickness saw the light trusted in the youth and muttered to his kinsmen: "Did you not see the light in the eye of this youth? Wakunda smiles upon him — his power is great!"

This the people did not guess. The light was the glare of the life that was being consumed within him, blown upon by the strong breath of the winter and the hunger. For wherever the youth went he brought not only the mysterious drinks brewed from herbs, but he brought morsels of meat which he himself should have eaten.

And it happened that some of the stricken died and the greater part lived. Then a small noise of voices with a big meaning spread throughout the village. A buzz of wonder, which was full of the doings of the youth, whom the people learned to call Wazadi (Healer.)

In all races have appeared these sacrificing men of genius. Some have been Christs in their small way; some have remained unappreciated martyrs. All have contributed to the upbuilding of belief in the supernatural. These are the incarnations of Pity, grotesque in a world of cruelty and suffering. Many have missed immortality but by the length of Pilate's judgment.

The noise of wondering voices spread and swelled into a cry that beat into the lodge of the stern and selfish chief, Wazhinga Saba. And as he heard, the little warmth that hid in his heart died and the coldness came; for jealousy is the northwest wind of the soul.

Many days he sat alone in his lodge, speaking only with the jealousy of his heart. He said to himself: "Am I not the greatest of all medicine men? Shall a youth walk between Wazhinga Saba and the belief of his people?"

Then the coldness of his heart answered things that would have been terrible upon a tongue. And the Chief listened.

So it happened one evening that a runner came to the lodge of the youth called Wazadi, summoning him to go to the big chief's lodge. Wazadi followed the runner to the big lodge.

He pushed aside the buffalo hide that hung across the door and entered. The chief, dressed in his most

elaborate garments, profusely decorated with wolfs' teeth and hawks' beaks, sat alone by his fire. As the youth entered, the chief arose and stood in the glare of the flames that gave an additional attraction to his regal figure. For a moment Wazadi stood awed into immobility at the sight, nor moved until Wazhinga Saba smiled a pleasant smile. The smile had its meaning. The Chief had wished to dazzle the youth, and it was accomplished.

Wazhinga Saba motioned the youth to sit upon the opposite side of the fire. After a prolonged silence, during which each regarded the other through the haze of flame−lit smoke, the Chief said:

"The great heart of Wazhinga Saba is glad of the good words that have been spoken among the lodges. Does not the Chief love his people? The little words of a chief are big. Wazhinga Saba wishes to do great honor to Wazadi." At the name, the speaker paused and smiled again. "This place is not good," he continued; "there is an evil spirit in this place. There is much sickness and groaning and dying. It must not be. Does not the Great Chief love his people? We will take the sunrise trail; we will leave the groaning and the sickness behind us. We will go to the banks of the great smoky water. It is a good place; there are good spirits there."

The Chief paused and looked into the flames, thinking deeply. "I have a deed for a strong and brave man. A good trail must be found that the tribe may not go astray. Is Wazadi strong? Is he brave? Then let him seek a good trail to the great smoky water. Let him go alone, that the honor may not be divided like a big bison by many that are hungry!"

As Wazhinga Saba ceased speaking, a great joy born of vanity blazed in the blood of the youth, and he answered the question in the chief's eyes with a glad voice.

"I am strong and brave! I will seek the trail!"

When Wazadi withdrew from the lodge, Wazhinga Saba sat a long time staring into the flame. He was thinking. The future was again pleasant to look upon. Ever since the noise of the strange youth's deeds had beat into the lodge, striking discord in the song that his vain heart sang, the future had been as the horizon of the morning when a black cloud blinds the eyes of the climbing sun. But now the cloud had become but a thin, translucent vapor, promising to vanish in the glare of day.

As he gazed into the fire he was thinking of the long and cruel trail which his rival would follow; of the keen and merciless storm winds, mad with the zigzag flight of snow! His reverie grew deeper. In his mind he followed the youth down the sunrise trail. He saw him wallowing through drifts, tumbling into hidden ravines; stumbling on through the blinding, hissing snow that obliterated all landmarks! He saw the white ghost of a man thrown down with hunger and the cold, to be the senseless impediment upon which the snow caught and drifted.

The last thought came like the first far cry of an approaching triumph. The Chief leaped to his feet with a loud burst of laughter. "Wazadi will not come back!" he muttered slowly as though to taste the sweetness of the words: "Wazadi will not come hack! Wazadi!"

At the last word he chuckled with derision, and then lay down beside his fire. But he did not sleep. Defeat can sleep, because there is an element of death in it. Triumph is wakeful, because it is life new−born.

Before the sunrise of the next day Wazadi had disappeared among the frozen hills to the eastward. Upon the lips of Wazhinga Saba sat a smile beside a sneer. He had vanquished his budding rival and his heart held high festival.

For many days he feasted the other chiefs of the tribe, who had become puppets in his hands. Haunches of the best bison meat were wasted, until starvation stood between the tribe and the spring. And the people looked with wistful eyes upon the doings of their chief and muttered syllables of discontent like the sound of underground waters, for they dared not speak aloud.

But one evening, after many days of storm had swept across the sky, the figure of a man, frost−whitened, weakened, and blinded with the snow, stumbled into the village.

"Wazadi has come back! Wazadi has come back!"

The shout passed contagiously from lip to lip, and grew into a clamor that found its way through the door of the lodge of Wazhinga Saba. The cry wrought a terrible anger in his heart.

What! Was this the way the great Wazhinga Saba took revenge? No! He would see the blood of this audacious Wazadi! Yet it could not be done with violence; for did not the people love the youth? An oppressed people is like a pack of wolves. Both flee until the trail ends, then they turn and their bites are terrible! Would not the violent death of Wazadi end the trail?

At this thought the revenge of Wazhinga Saba became indefinite; yet some time it would be. He would wait.

These turbulent thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of the youth himself. He stood at the door of the lodge, the white ghost of a man. His eyes were sunken and bleared. The skin was drawn across his cheek bones. He tottered. His voice was the ghost of a strong voice:

"I have found the trail; the tribe will not go astray. The trail is long and there is death upon it. The winds strike like the forefeet of a bear and bite like the teeth of a wolf. I was strong and I am here. It is a bad thing for the people to take the trail!"

Wazhinga Saba smiled and answered: "Does the strong man make his toil worthless with his groaning? Wazhinga Saba speaks with the spirits. Wakunda (God) will put his hand upon the winds and they will sleep; his hand upon their teeth and they will be dull. The tribe will take the trail."

The words of the Chief flew through the village, and in their wake a groan followed. "If we take the trail we die!" muttered the people among themselves; yet the work of preparing for the march began and progressed rapidly. The little word of a chief is big; and the people feared Wazhinga Saba.

To one who has some acquaintance with the prairie, the insanity of moving an entire tribe, with its sickness and hunger, a distance of 200 miles in the dead of winter, is apparent. On the prairie there is treachery in the bluest winter sky. The Southwind that whines so abjectly in the morning, at noon may be crowned with a crown of ice in the silent North, and return a terrible Conqueror in the evening. The elemental Lackey becomes the elemental Emperor.

Wazhinga Saba, feeling that his rival was the product of the people's praise, wished to retaliate upon the people. He knew the consequences of such a movement in the winter, but the idea pleased him. He would make the tribe suffer. It would feel his power.

Throughout the village was the activity of an imminent departure. Drags were being fashioned, and upon these was packed the baggage of the tribe. There was no song among the toilers; but everywhere there was muttering and much hopeless shaking of the head. The people thought of the long trail and shivered.

One morning when the work was finished, through the pale and shivering light of the early dawn, the tribe filed out of its desolate village, and at its head walked Wazadi breaking the trail.

The sick, the old, and the children were packed like baggage on the drags. In order that the trail might be easier for those who followed, the tribe proceeded in single file, those who had extra ponies riding, and those who had none walking. So long was the column that the foremost were lost from sight among the hills when the last left the village.

By midday a heavy fall of snow began. For three days and nights the snow came, soft and gentle as a kiss that goes before betrayal. Then during the fourth night the Northwest shouted and shook the people from their shivering sleep. It was the battle cry that could not be answered.

The poles of the hastily constructed tepees groaned with the blows of the storm; many were thrown to the ground, while the blankets that were wrapped about them flapped, tore and went with the wind. The light snow scurried along the ground with a hiss like the warning of a snake, caught the madness of the storm, leaped into the air, writhing, striking, biting!

It is easy to imagine the many elemental phenomena as being merely magnifications of human passions projected upon the universe. A cyclone is sudden anger; a southwind is feminine tenderness; a rainfall is grief; the spring sunshine is love. Madness is a conglomeration of all passions. A blizzard is the madness of the air! It has the fury and blindness of anger, the hiss of hate, the shout of joy, the dusk of melancholy, the shiver of fear, the coldness of jealousy; and when its force is spent, it folds its victims in a shroud of white, which may be the act of love — a savage love!

A blizzard transforms. What it touches it leaves grotesque. It annihilates the boundary line of light and darkness. In its breath the night becomes merely a deepening of shadow upon the dim twilight of the day.

God wished to demonstrate to mankind the awful tragedy of unbridled passions, and his precept was the blizzard!

A strange, one−sided battle had begun. The Omahas, who would have turned their faces to an onslaught of the Sioux, huddled together with their backs to the storm like a herd of lost sheep surrounded by the howl of wolves. The bravest whimpered as they blew upon their stiffened fingers. In those rare places where some one had contrived to coax a sickly fire with scant fuel, there was a jostling, fighting, crying mass of men, women and children struggling toward the glow that fought a losing fight with the breath of the storm!

At last the morning came without a sunrise. A blizzard deals in paradoxes. It was not day: it was as if an evil spirit had travestied God's sunlight!

The storm grew stronger. A blizzard has the impetuosity of youth upon the first day, the strength of manhood upon the second, and upon the third day it grows peevish with senility and dies in the evening. In the sense of time, it is little more than an ephemeron. To its victims it is thrice a centenarian!

When the mockery of the day came, the people took heart and began to reconstruct their places of shelter. Yet scarcely had they cooked and eaten their morning meal when an order to take the trail came from Wazhinga Saba. A part hesitated; a part, whose fear of the chief was greater than the fear of the elements, prepared for the march; the remainder followed.

The long file disappeared into the swirling haze. It is true that the Chief also suffered; yet his selfishness was so great that to reach its ends, it ignored self. It was the apotheosis of egotism. Selfishness can become an inexorable god.

The hundreds of stumbling hoofs and feet left no trail. A foot−print was momentary and served only to catch the drifting snow. Many wandered from the column into the terrible loneliness of the storm and never re−appeared. Many more tottered with weakness and the cold and lay where they fell. Those who followed stumbled across these unfortunates, and felt no pity. Despair crept icily through the blood of the tribe.

Despair is pitiless because it is the annihilation of all passion and the exaltation of egotism. It is that condition of the mind when the democratic government of the passions is cast down and the ego seizes the throne of reason, becoming dictatorial in defense of its realm.

The tribe was desperate. There is a terrible strength and power of endurance in desperation. Hope avails to goad the limbs only until that moment when the limbs become feeble; then it vanishes in terror and despair fights defeat. More heroes have been made by the probability of failure than by the possibility of success. It is the difference between the narcotic and the stimulant.

With his teeth set and his face to the east, Wazadi led his people into the storm. Even he had forgotten the meaning of pity. There was rage in his heart; the rage of a brave man who is a fighter and faces great odds. The coward grows tender in the midst of danger. The brave man grows angry.

Wazadi struck at the storm with his clenched fists! He wished that the wind would materialize into a bear that he might grapple with it and die with his teeth set in its neck.

But a storm is an anger without intelligence; a bodiless foe; an enemy without nerves! It knows not its strength of offense and feels no blow of defense. It is irresistible and invulnerable.

The day lingered like a century, and when it had passed it was like a dream. The nights were terrible. Inaction lessens courage and increases suffering. Thus the three days passed, and the wind died. The white prairie emerged from the terrible shadow and the sun went down smiling like a cynic.

Wazadi looked upon his people and his heart grew sick. Hundreds were missing, and the survivors were shadows of men. Many of the ponies had strayed into the storm, dragging with them the children, the sick and the old. And a great wail shook the frozen air. It was the return of conscious suffering after delirium.

But upon the next morning the tribe again took up the trail, and when the sun of the twelfth day reached the highest point in its brief arc, a great shout went up from the foremost of the tribe, for the broad, frozen river lay before them, and the trail was ended.

Immediately the entire tribe began the difficult task of building lodges from the frozen ground. The young and old, the squaws and the braves, threw their feeble efforts into the work and their hearts grew warm again with the warmth that clings about a home. They felt no hatred against their chief for their past suffering; no more than the sleeper feels against the night when awakened from a nightmare. They had not forgiven; they had forgotten. Joy was gigantic and left no nook for the dwelling place of hate.

In a few days the village was complete, and the tribe again settled down for the winter. But Wazhinga Saba was not happy. His heart was dull with the tedium that follows a dead triumph. The Chief wanted diversion; he wanted feasting merriment. Therefore he sent runners about the village collecting a certain amount of meat from each lodge; and the people groaned as they gave, for they could see starvation stalking through the months of spring.

Then, for many months Wazhinga Saba ate with his puppet chiefs; and there was much laughter in the big lodge, much groaning without.

But the feasting lost its flavor and Wazhinga Saba longed for new pleasures. He found no beauty in his old women; years and toil and suffering had seamed their faces. Again he sent runners about the village, and this time they demanded the fairest of the maidens, whom he smiled upon in the evening and frowned upon in the morning.

To a primitive Indian, women were inviolate. They might toil and suffer, but they dared not be impure. An impure woman would have been stoned from the village.

So a great murmur of anger grew among the lodges; and all this indefinite muttering rage gathered and centralized in one voice. That voice was Wazadi. He stood in the center of a growing crowd of his tribesmen, and his voice was loud and fearless:

"Does my cry reach the ears of badgers? Are you brave but deaf? Are you strong but blind? Did Wakunda make the prairie and the people for Wazhinga Saba? Was it not enough that he gave us to be bitten by the winds? Are we wolves that we turn and flee not? The love which I gave to you at the summer's end, that love continues. I made you well; but Wazhinga Saba is worse sickness. Let us put this sickness from us!"

When the fearless youth had ceased speaking he became the center of a great shouting.

"Lead us! Be our chief!" the people cried.

"Wazadi will be your brother," he answered, "your brother and your chief. Let us build a village of our own where Wazhinga Saba will not be."

The last words went among the people and divided them. Many shouted with approval; many only scowled and shook their heads. Their fear was greater than their hate.

That day Wazadi led his party carrying all its baggage out of the old village into the hills to the north, and there a new village was built. And the people of his party changed the bold youth's name, calling him Tawagaha (little village maker), and the name clung, and to this day it is as a great noise in the ears of the Omahas.

The winter grew old; the sun crept northward; the southwinds blew. The great hoarse voice of the river with its booming ice went like a herald before the approach of spring. The snow faded from the hills. The meadow−larks and the killdeers came back; the gophers chattered. The days grew balmy and the frogs sang again. The last ice of the winter crashed past and the big muddy river exulted like a thing with a heart. Greenness and warmth and sweet scents!

In either village there was not a throat that could not sing, save one. Wazhinga Saba still held the winter at his heart. The shadow of his hate preserved the snow of his soul. While the broad sky and the vast prairie relented, he thought only of revenge.

Nothing can invent like a hate that lingers. It is a diabolical genius. It would burn away where love would wilt and weep. This is because it has nothing to lose; it has all to gain. If Leander had taken the flood that he might kill a sleeping rival, the Hellespont would have been narrower.

Wazhinga Saba sat in his lodge and plotted. He knew that the people believed him to be a terrible medicine man, a doer of magic things; yet he knew all his past successes to have depended merely upon trickery. Therefore he would not depend upon magic for his revenge, but merely as an appropriate setting for that revenge.

Several years before, the steamboats of the white man had sailed up the Missouri as far as the place where the Omahas were now camped, the American Fur Company having established a trading post in 1810 at Bellevue at a distance of about 150 miles down stream.

Every spring and fall since then the company's boat, St. Ange, had made a trip to the foot of Blackbird Hill, where the Omahas had their winter village, in order to trade for the valuable furs which the Indians disposed of very cheaply.

Ever since Columbus first trod the American shore, the Indian has looked upon the white man as a being of superior powers; and the Omaha was no exception. Did not the Wahgah (big knife or white man) know the magic that made the talking stick and the sticks that walk? Did he not chain fire in the belly of his big canoe and make it snort with toil? Then might he not also possess some great mysterious medicine?

Sometimes thus ran the thoughts of Wazhinga Saba, and his heart became glad with the gladness of a young revenge. He had at last formed a great plan.

One evening during the time when the squaws pull the weeds in the gardens (May), runners, sent to watch the river from the bluffs, came puffing into the tepee of Wazhinga Saba. "Monda Tonga! (big canoe) Wahgah! Wahgah!" they cried, motioning excitedly toward the river. At that moment the long sonorous howl of a steamboat's whistle came from the south and echoed in the bluffs. The Chief leaped to his feet, his face glowing

with a great joy.

"Go! Bring the Wahgah to Wazhinga Saba!" he cried, and the runners bounded out of the tepee and disappeared in the direction of the river. An hour later a half dozen white men led by the runners and followed by a curious mob of Omahas, approached the tepee of the Great Chief. The rabble, however, satisfied its curiosity at a respectful distance from the "talking sticks" which the traders carried.

With much ceremony Wazhinga Saba received his white brothers, and dispersed the crowd with a motion of his arm. The traders, through their interpreter, at once set about displaying a stock of gaudy trifles, but Wazhinga Saba would have none of them. He forthwith explained his peculiar needs.

"He wants some kind of strong medicine," said the interpreter to the traders.

"Tell him about whiskey," they said.

The interpreter talked with the Chief in the Omaha tongue.

"He wants to know what it can do," said the interpreter laughing.

"Make much crazy," volunteered the traders, executing an extravagant pantomime of drunkenness: "So!"

Wazhinga Saba's face beamed as he watched the white man's insane evolutions. Perhaps he was mentally putting Tawagaha in the same ridiculous position. Yes! that was the medicine he wanted!

The interpreter explained, with much recourse to hyperbole, the great value of the medicine in question, and the Chief answered by showing the big stack of bison hides which he would give for ever so little. When a rich child wants anything a trade is easy; and when the traders withdrew from the Chief's tepee, Wazhinga Saba sat gloating over a jug of "medicine."

The next morning the St. Ange, well−stocked with buffalo hides, took the current, whistling like a live thing glad of a full stomach, and the Omahas took up their usual routine of life. One morning a runner left the tepee of Wazhinga Saba and took his way to Tawagaha's village. He entered the tepee of the self−constituted chief and spoke kind things into his ear for Wazhinga Saba. It was represented with many honeyed words that the Big Chief's heart ached with his past unkindness to Tawagaha, with whom he wished to talk and feast that the past might be as a dead thing.

Tawagaha, having the tender heart which goes with generosity, at once arose and followed the runner to the tepee of Wazhinga Saba, where many other sweet words met his ear.

They feasted and smoked the peace pipe, and Tawagaha forgot. At last Wazhinga Saba produced an earthen bowl containing a copper−colored liquid.

"Wazhinga Saba has talked much with the good spirits," said the Big Chief. "Here is the water of kindness; drink and we shall be friends."

Tawagaha looked suspiciously at the mysterious water.

"See!" said Wazhinga Saba, "it is colored with the color of the evening after a day of winds. Wazhinga Saba has been cruel like the winds, and this is the evening of his hate. Drink, and there shall be a big sunrise of friendship!"

Tawagaha raised the earthen bowl to his lips.

"It is the gift of the good spirits," said the Big Chief, coaxingly.

Tawagaha drank great draughts, and set the bowl down.

"It bites!" he said.

"Like hate!" said Wazhinga Saba.

After a silence Tawagaha frowned.

"It gnaws!" said he.

"Like cruel words," said the Chief.

Tawagaha sat for some time like one stunned. Then he grasped his head with both hands and leaped to his feet.

"It tickles!" he shrieked, and leaped out of the tepee yelling and beating his head with his fists. He dashed through the village and the people scattered before him. Civilization had not yet given them a broad understanding!

Tawagaha shouted and laughed and shrieked. He danced and struck enormous blows at an imaginary enemy, and ran howling to his village. When he had disappeared, Wazhinga Saba came out of his tepee and spoke grave words to his startled people.

"Tawagaha's head is on fire," he said. "Wakunda has punished him for his deed against the great Wazhinga Saba! Let none follow Tawagaha!"

The people trembled as they heard. They shook their heads and were glad that they had not followed the daring youth. The same day a crier went through the village of Tawagaha and repeated the words of the Chief in a loud voice:

"Come back to the village of Wazhinga Saba," he cried; "the Great Chief loves his people and would protect them from evil spirits."

A primitive Indian was always superstitious first and generous afterward. He would do more for the fear of a black spirit than for the love of a leader. So it happened that the people of the little village at once moved to the larger village, again coming under the control of Wazhinga Saba.

Then spring came to the heart of the Chief, and he could smile again.

But Tawagaha, having fallen into a heavy slumber in his tepee, awoke the next day and the fire was dead in his brain. He arose and walked about his village, but found it deserted. He stopped and thought deeply, as if trying to recollect a vague dream. At last he remembered the mysterious liquid. Then all was clear to him. He knew whither his people had gone, and he walked toward the larger village with a heavy heart.

When he entered the village there was none to give him greeting. His own people looked at him tremblingly, and fled from him. He wandered through the village, but everywhere it was the same. It was like a ghost roaming through a village of ghosts. None spoke to him. Everywhere the people shook their heads and shut themselves in their tepees. The very children hid at his coming and peered after him when he had passed.

Then Tawagaha gave a great cry of despair that was followed only by the silence. When the people ventured to come out of their tepees, Tawagaha had disappeared.

The summer came — a burning summer. The prairie is a double wonder. It can blossom like an oasis and burn like a Sahara. The breath of the winds is its life or its death. The Southwest strikes it barren.

In the beginning of the month of the bellowing of the bulls (July), the terrible wind awakened. The prairie grew sallow as the skin of an impoverished thing. The corn in the gardens wilted. The creeks were anaemic veins creeping sluggishly into the river that dwindled to a creek. The great smoky water was as a giant stricken with fever. Its sandbars were as the protrusions of mighty ribs.

The people sent up a wail like the echo of the Southwest's moan. And there was much crying after the rain, but no cloud reared it's white head from under the dazzling horizon.

Wazhinga Saba sang a thunder song, but the rain spirits were deaf. The blue basins of the rain were dried up.

But one evening as the people sat about their tepees talking about the rains that did not come, the sound of a wild voice arose upon the dull air. The people sat charmed into breathlessness and listened. They recognized the mysterious syllables of the thunder song. Who was the singer? Was it a spirit?

In answer to the silent question the naked form of a man, emaciated as with famine, walked with slow steps through the village. His head was thrown back and his lips were parted with ecstatic song.

As the people looked upon the face of the singer they shuddered, for it was the face of Tawagaha! He passed on through the village chanting the song that the thunder spirits love, and disappeared.

That night it happened that the clouds gathered and thundered and the rain came in torrents. When the day dawned, the people's voices gathered into a great cry:

"It was Tawagaha! He brought the rain! Where is Tawagaha?" The shout echoed in the steaming hills and the hills sent back an answer. The answer was a man who walked with the swift step of happy feet toward the village.

Thus was Tawagaha re−instated in the people's favor. And Wazhinga Saba's hate grew like a wilted thing that has been watered with the rains.

The summer passed and the fall came, and with it came the trading boat, St. Ange. Again the traders were conducted to the lodge of the Big Chief. One of the white men, with a broad grin upon his face, asked through the interpreter if the medicine of last spring had acted properly.

"Ninga! Peazha!" replied the Chief, shaking his head decidedly.

"He says it was no good!" explained the interpreter.

"Ask him what he wants now?" said one of the white men.

The interpreter spoke briefly to the Chief, who began to explain with much impersonation of description, contorting his face, writhing with his body and at last falling in a tragic representation of death.

"He wants something that will hurt much and kill," the interpreter explained.

"Strychnine!" suggested one of the traders.

"Think we've got some on the boat," added another; and a man was forthwith sent after the desired medicine. He soon returned and displayed a small phial containing a white granular substance.

'This will kill," said the interpreter to the Chief.

Wazhinga Saba became excited. He offered a stack of buffalo hides as high as his knees. The traders shook their heads. Then the chief doubled the imaginary pile. Still there was no trade.

"What will it do? Show me," said the Chief to the interpreter. A dog had followed one of the white men and now it ran about expressing good humor with its sinuous tail. A piece of meat was procured from the Chief and a small particle of strychnine placed upon it. This was fed to the dog, who ate it greedily. Suddenly its eyes became glazed; it fell howling to the ground, writhed, and died!

The Chief's eyes blazed. He pointed to the peak of the tepee and swung his arm about him, thus saying that he would fill his tepee with buffalo hides in exchange for the medicine.

The trade was made, and when the hides had been collected from among the people of the village, the white men withdrew groaning beneath their spoils.

Forthwith the wily Wazhinga Saba set his brain in motion; it had become a diabolical machine propelled by hate. He knew that Tawagaha would refuse to feast with him again; so he decided to feast with Tawagaha. He waited four days (for four is a magic number) and upon the fourth evening he went, humbly dressed, to the tepee of his rival. He entered and fell upon his face before the youth, groaning as with great mental anguish.

The heart of Tawagaha, like all great hearts, was pitiful. He raised the Chief and told him to speak his grief.

"The days of Wazhinga Saba have been many," began the Chief, sniveling with a burlesque grief, "many and cruel. Now his head is white and his strength passes. Does the young man feel no pity for the old. We have been enemies, but Wazhinga Saba has become as a snake without fangs; pity him, and you shall be his chief!"

Tawagaha heard and was deceived.

"Tawagaha pities," said he; "let us smoke the peace pipe and eat together that we may be friends."

The two smoked. Then Tawagaha's squaw placed an iron kettle, bought from the white men, over a fire, and boiled a great piece of buffalo meat.

When the meat was cooked, Wazhinga Saba arose and bowing over the kettle, dropped something into it. "The blessing of an old man is good," he said.

Tawagaha opened the feast, bulging his cheeks with a liberal bite. The old man watched.

Suddenly the face of the young man grew livid. He shrieked and fell to the floor, writhing and groaning in terrible agony. His strong limbs contracted; his muscles stood out in knots; his veins swelled blue. Then with a last great effort he muttered a curse upon his smiling enemy, and died.

Wazhinga Saba heard the curse and his triumph brought him terror. He fled to his tepee and shut himself up for many days.

There was much wonder among the people, and when the boldest ventured to question the old chief concerning the death of Tawagaha he could only groan.

Some years after Wazhinga Saba fell ill with the small−pox, and believing it to be the curse of Tawagaha, he died in terror.

I have stood upon a high hill of the present Omaha Reservation. It is known as the Blackbird Hill for there the terrible chief was buried, sitting upon his horse with all his arms about him, that he might see the Big Knives (white men) come up the river in their fire−breathing canoes, as he said.

As I stood there I felt both admiration and pity. But when I asked an old Omaha about the dread chief, he scowled and would not answer. The memory of wrongs lives long and dies slowly.