

THE
ADVENTURES
OF
KOOTAH

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Mary Frances Damon Rude



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—Inslee Damon Rude

Chapter 1

Wings of Freedom

Once upon a time, on the edge of a great forest, there lived a little Indian boy whose name was Kootah. Now Kootah was often very sad because there were no other little children living within miles of his home with whom he could play.

One day, when Kootah's father came home from the hunt his mother told him of their little boy's lonely heart.

"I have just the thing for him," his father said, going over to the pack he had left outside the door. "It will make his heart sing with joy." He returned with a most beautiful bow and quiver of arrows. "You will see that I have not forgotten our son," he said, smiling happily.

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Now when Kootah returned and his father placed the bow and arrows in his hands he was very happy indeed. Here was something that would gladden the heart of any little boy. He was so proud of his new toy that he couldn't let it out of his sight, so that night when he went to bed, his bow and arrows went with him.

In the morning, his father once more sped swiftly away on the trail to join his fellow hunters, leaving Kootah and his mother alone again. But before he left, his father let the boy see that nothing would please him better than to find upon his return that his son had learned to use his weapon well.

That same day the little Indian boy took his bow and went into the deep dark woods to find something to shoot. Soon all his little forest friends crowded around, as they always did, murmuring and eyeing the strange toy in his hands. "What is that?" one of them asked.

Kootah looked around at their innocent faces. For the first time in his life, he could not bring himself to tell them the truth—that what they took to be a new toy was the means of taking away a creature's life. He knew they would all flee in terror from him, even if he told them he would never use it against them.

His face grew very, very sorrowful, and he was about to cast his weapon onto the ground when the sound of something stumbling

toward him out of the dark woods caused him to look up. Only a few feet away stood a great wolf tearing at the hamstring of a panting deer, which was struggling toward him, dragging the cruel hunter along with him.

In a moment he was quite alone, for all his playmates fled in mortal terror of the danger they saw. Kootah was so frightened that he, too, was about to turn tail and run, until he heard the deer cry out to him.

“Help! Kootah, help!”

It was Rambler! Reflexively, Kootah aimed his weapon and shot. The wolf dropped in his tracks. The little boy’s head snapped back in surprise when he realized that his arrow had pierced the wolf’s body. The Good Spirit of the woods must have guided the arrow that sped from Kootah’s bow.

Quickly he ran to the fallen deer and did his best to stop the flow of blood by pressing a piece of cloth to the wound. He helped the animal to its feet, and when he found it could stand, he put his arm around its neck and said,

“Come with me, Rambler, and let Mother bind up your wound, for she has more skill than I.”



Soon they arrived at Kootah's home and Kootah's mother, who was known for her wisdom with herbs, set about the task of giving first aid to the wounded animal.

“You must stay with us until your leg is healed,” Kootah pleaded. “Here you will be safe and we can take care of you. You won’t have a chance in the forest with the wolves. See, there is plenty for you to live on close by our teepee.”

Weak and weary from loss of blood, the stag accepted the invitation. He limped along the cool earth and found a bed of dry straw, and laid his weary head upon it.

Days passed and Kootah and Rambler became firm friends. The deer’s leg healed rapidly, partly because the little boy and his mother nursed him faithfully, and partly because the healing power of nature works magic with forest folk.

His mother, Kootah knew, was very proud of the friendship that sprang up between her boy and the handsome deer. Often they talked of the death of the wolf and wondered how one who had never shot an arrow in his life was able to drive it straight into the heart of the beast. Kootah no longer felt sad or afraid to tell his woodland friends about his bow and arrows for

had they not seen how he could make use of them in their defense?

When Rambler had once more disappeared on the distant heights, dimly outlined beyond the forest, the very first thing Kootah did was to grab his gift and seek his friends. It was weeks since he had seen them, but he knew they would be waiting for him among the trees.

Sure enough, he found Whistler's shavings, only a few hours old, under the tall yellow pine. He had missed his friends, and the sight of the scraps did his heart good. While he waited he could hear the stir of life among the trees and he knew that word of his coming was being passed swiftly along. Far in the distance a blue jay broadcasted the news when it reached him and with a squawk of pleasure hurtled himself through the air.

"Jay! Jay! Jay!" he called, as if proclaiming his own name, but the forest folk knew by the tone that their friend, Kootah, had arrived. Soon they began to drift in, and each in his way welcomed the boy they all loved.

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Of course everyone wanted to know about Rambler's fate, and Kootah told them in a few swift words everything that had happened. He let them examine his bow and arrows and laughed gaily when one of them called his darts *Wings of Death*. Not a thought of fear for their own safety did they have, for they knew Kootah would sooner turn his arrows against himself than against them.