

Story Outline

Dances With Wolves

Michael Blake

Act I

LT. JOHN DUNBAR, rather than lose his severely wounded leg to amputation, slips away from a Union Army field hospital. He rides back to his unit, which is holding its position in a cornfield away from a Confederate army.

The delirious lieutenant grabs a horse and tries to commit suicide by riding unarmed into the Confederate troop positions. But his unit backs him up, and routs the rebels.

The general thinks Dunbar is a hero and orders his personal physician to look after the lieutenant's mangled leg.

Dunbar is rewarded with the horse he rode on his daring "assault", and with an assignment to anywhere he wants? He chooses a post out in the Great Plains, the vanishing American frontier.

Dunbar receives his formal orders to the outpost at Fort Sedgewick. The officer who gives those orders is obviously mentally disturbed.

Dunbar meets his guide, a crusty coot by the name of TIMMONS. As the two of them leave Fort Hayes, the commander shoots himself in the head.

The two wayfarers spend the night at the scene of an old Indian massacre. Dunbar makes the best of his humorous, but vulgar, companion.

The next morning, they get off to an early start. As they cross the prairies and badlands, Dunbar searches in vain for Indians and buffalo.

When they finally arrive at Fort Sedgewick, they find the place in a shambles and deserted. It doesn't look like anybody's been there for quite a while.

Dunbar insists on staying at his assigned post, and has to pull a gun on Timmons to get his help with unloading the provisions. That task done, Timmons gladly leaves.

That night, Dunbar writes in his diary that he has assigned himself cleanup duty. The next morning, the jumpy lieutenant is startled by his horse, Sisko.

While cleaning and rebuilding, Dunbar discovers that his missing comrades had lost all their provisions and had been living in caves just over the hill from the fort.

Out on the prairie, marauding Indians kill Timmons, the only person who knows exactly where Dunbar is and what he's doing.

Back at Fort Sedgewick, Dunbar waits for his relief and tries to figure out why the previous soldiers had been living in caves. He spots a wolf across the lake and draws a bead on it with his rifle, but reconsiders.

It's been 30 days now, and still no relief from Fort Hayes. Dunbar's been making friends with the stray wolf, which he named Two Socks.

While Dunbar is bathing and doing his laundry one day. Two Socks alerts him to a curious Indian [KICKING BIRD] who is poking around the fort. The startled Indian beats a hasty retreat when Dunbar, unarmed and naked, confronts him.

Dunbar buries his weapons so they can't be stolen by Indians, then prepares the fort for a possible attack.

Act II

At Kicking Bird's village, the tribal council discusses the strange ways of white men and the threat they pose. Kicking Bird thinks Dunbar might be a good man to try and make treaties with.

Three Indian boys who were spying on the meeting raid Fort Sedgewick. Dunbar knocks himself out trying to defend his post, and the boys take off with the horse Sisko, who later breaks free from his captors.

Sisko returns to Dunbar, but only for a short time. Two Socks the wolf again alerts Dunbar to the presence of Indians, this time led by WIND IN HIS HAIR, an aggressive young man from Kicking Bird's tribe. Wind In His Hair lets Dunbar know that he is not afraid of him, and rides off to join the other Indians, who have stolen Sisko.

But once again Sisko has broken free, and the horse returns to Dunbar, who has fainted after his close call with the angry Indian.

Dunbar realizes he has become a target for the Indians and decides to ride out to meet them as a representative of the United States.

On the way to the village he finds a white woman in Indian clothing who has tried to commit suicide. He rescues her against her will and carries her back to her village.

Wind In His Hair drags the woman away from the lieutenant, then yells for him to go away. Dunbar, dejected, does as he is told.

In a council meeting that night, CHIEF TEN BEARS orders Wind In His Hair and Kicking Bird to go have a talk with the white man at his soldier fort.

Dunbar welcomes the guests to his home and they all do their best to communicate. The lieutenant respects both of the emissaries, and though he likes Kicking Bird, he's a little scared by Wind In His Hair.

On the Indians' next visit, Dunbar entertains his guests over coffee. They are all getting along well.

Kicking Bird tries to convince the woman Dunbar saved, STANDS WITH A FIST, to interpret the white man's words. But she is scared of the soldier and declines.

Stands With A Fist flashes back to when she was a child, and a tribe of hostile Indians killed her family.

At Fort Sedgewick, Dunbar encourages the wolf's friendship with food. Kicking Bird and Wind In His Hair arrive with a gift of buffalo hide. Dunbar writes in his diary that the Indian stereotypes are wrong, and that he is growing to care greatly for these people.

Dunbar receives an invitation to join Kicking Bird, Wind In His Hair and Chief Ten Bears at the Sioux village, to share a peace pipe. Stands With A Fist shows up to interpret, and after introductions, the Indians politely ask Dunbar about the white man's intentions in Sioux territory.

At his own camp, Dunbar writes in his diary that he's afraid to tell the Indians too much about the white man's designs on the prairies. He is shaken out of bed early the next morning by thundering herds of buffalo.

Dunbar rides to tell the Indians the good news—that the buffalo are here—and the camp pulls up stakes to follow the herd. Dunbar joins the Sioux, to whom he has become a bit of a celebrity.

As they ride, Stands With A Fist and Dunbar exchange flirtatious glances.

The Indians find the carcasses of hundreds of buffalo, killed by white hunters for their hides and tongues, then left to rot in the sun. The Sioux are heartbroken, and Dunbar begins to think of white men as people quite different from himself.

That night, the lieutenant exiles himself to the edge of camp.

The next day, they find the rest of the herd—thousands upon thousands of buffalo, and the tribe, to include Dunbar, prepares for the hunt.

The hunt: In a flurry of horses, Indians, buffalo, and dust, the Sioux take only what they need to sustain themselves.

There's a tense moment when a large bull charges a boy who was thrown from his horse, but Dunbar saves the day with some skillful shooting.

Dunbar joins Wind In His Hair for a ritual mouthful of the dead animal's liver.

Saving the boy's life has made Dunbar a living legend. In camp that night, he has to tell the story of the rescue for the hundredth time. He and Wind In His Hair exchange gifts of clothing, and Wind In His Hair sticks up for Dunbar when one of the other Sioux decides that he now owns the soldier's hat.

The celebration goes on into the night, with Stands With A Fist admiring Dunbar.

Dunbar spends the night with Kicking Bird and his family, and the lieutenant and Stands With A Fist barely contain their mutual longing.

The next day the tribe moves out, and they drop Dunbar off at Fort Sedgewick. The soldier's respect and understanding of the Sioux has grown by leaps and bounds, and he misses his new friends almost instantly.

A couple of days later, Dunbar rides out to visit the Sioux village. Two Socks the wolf, who has been hanging around a lot lately, follows. Kicking Bird spots Dunbar and the wolf chasing each other around the field.

Autumn comes and the tribe has given Dunbar his own lodge. He talks his way around their questions concerning the white man's plans. He wants to join a war party going against the Pawnee, a tribe that has been harassing the Sioux, but Kicking Bird asks him to fulfill an even greater honor—to look after his family while the war party is away.

Dunbar learns that the tribe has christened him Dances With Wolves, after his romp in the field with Two Socks.

While the warriors are away, Dances With Wolves learns the Sioux language and gets to know Stands With A Fist better.

Dances With Wolves speaks the language fluently with one of the elders, and learns that Stands With A Fist is still mourning a dead husband, which is why she's not married. She will mourn until Kicking Bird, her adoptive father, says she is through.

Stands With A Fist learns that the whole camp knows how well she's been getting along with Dances With Wolves.

Dances With Wolves rides back to Fort Sedgewick and reminisces through his journal. On one page he writes, like a teenager with a crush. Dances With Wolves loves Stands With A Fist. He's distracted by Two Socks, who will now eat from his hand.

Back near the Sioux village, Dances With Wolves finds Stands With A Fist and they go for a romp in the bushes, then sneak back to camp. These two are in love. That night she visits his lodge and they make love again. But they're interrupted by the news of an approaching Pawnee war party.

Dances With Wolves takes one of the boys to help dig up the rifles buried near Fort Sedgewick, then the battle begins. It's old men, women and children against the Pawnee warriors, but with the help of the rifles the Sioux prevail. Dances With Wolves realizes that he feels more like a Sioux than a white man.

The Sioux warriors return, and celebration follows. Dances With Wolves and Stands With A Fist sneak rather obviously off to bed. And Kicking Bird's wife convinces him to end their adopted daughter's mourning.

Dances With Wolves and Stands With A Fist get married.

Dances With Wolves is a full-fledged member of the tribe, in full costume now, and has a chat with his new father-in-law about having a baby with Stands With A Fist.

Dances With Wolves finally tells the full truth about the plans white men have for the prairies.

Chief Ten Bears tells Dances With Wolves the Sioux have driven away Spaniards, Mexicans, and Texans. But they fear they will not be able to hold off the white man.

The Sioux prepare to leave for their winter camp. Dances With Wolves realizes that his journal at Fort Sedgewick will tell all about his life with the Indians, and he rides back to retrieve the book.

But a large Union Army unit has already arrived at the abandoned fort. They kill Sisko and take Dances With Wolves prisoner.

Act III

Wind In His Hair and Kicking Bird realize that something must have happened and send some men to check out the fort.

The soldiers interrogate Dances With Wolves, then club him senseless. He's chained and shackled, and when he regains consciousness, he refuses to lead the army to the Indian camps.

At least the journal is less of a threat—two illiterate soldiers are using the pages for toilet paper.

Wind In His Hair's scouts observe Dances With Wolves being mistreated by the soldiers. The soldier-turned-Sioux is to be sent back to Fort Hayes and hanged as a traitor.

The army convoy pulls out for Fort Hayes. When the soldiers see Two Socks and start shooting at the wolf, Dances With Wolves tries to stop them, but gets clubbed again. When some of the soldiers walk up a hill to look for Two Socks' corpse, they nearly discover a group of Sioux warriors that have been trailing the group.

Wind In His Hair leads an ambush on the army convoy, and Dances With Wolves helps kill the soldiers. During the battle, Dunbar's journal falls free and floats down the river.

At the winter camp, Dances With Wolves comes home to a joyous reunion with the tribe, and of course, Stands With A Fist.

In order to keep the soldiers from finding the village, Dances With Wolves decides that he and Stands With A Fist must go away and try and negotiate peace with the white men. The Indians do not want their friends to leave. Chief Ten Bears tries to talk him into staying, but Dances With Wolves knows he must go.

Stands With A Fist tells Dances With Wolves she will go wherever he goes.

Dances With Wolves, Stands With A Fist and the rest of the Sioux say their good-byes, and exchange farewell gifts. Kicking Bird now speaks very serviceable English.

One of the boys had fetched Dunbar's diary from the river, and the youth returns the book to Dances With Wolves.

The soldiers were hot on the Indians' trail, but by the time they find the campsite the Sioux are gone, and Dances With Wolves and Stands With A Fist ride into the hills.