

Bokwewa the Humpback

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Native Americannorth American

Intermediate
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Bokwewa and his brother lived in a far-off part of the country. By such as had knowledge of them, Bokwewa, the elder, although deformed and feeble of person, was considered a manito, who had assumed the mortal shape; while his younger brother, Kwasynd, manly in appearance, active, and strong, partook of the nature of the present race of beings.

They lived off the path, in a wild, lonesome place, far retired from neighbors, and, undisturbed by cares, they passed their time, content and happy. The days glided by serenely as the river that flowed by their lodge.

Owing to his lack of strength, Bokwewa never engaged in the chase, but gave his attention entirely to the affairs of the lodge. In the long winter evenings he passed the time in telling his brother stories of the giants, spirits, weendigoes, and fairies of the elder age, when they had the exclusive charge of the world. He also at times taught his brother the manner in which game should be pursued, pointed out to him the ways of the different beasts and birds of the chase, and assigned the seasons at which they could be hunted with most success.

For a while the brother was eager to learn, and keenly attended to his duties as the provider of the lodge; but at length he grew weary of their tranquil life, and began to have a desire to show himself among men. He became restive in their retirement, and was seized with a longing to visit remote places.

One day, Kwasynd told his brother that he should leave him; that he wished to visit the habitations of men, and

to procure a wife.

Bokwewa objected; but his brother overruled all that he said, and in spite of every remonstrance, he departed on his travels.

He traveled for a long time. At length he fell in with the footsteps of men. They were moving by encampments, for he saw, at several spots, the poles where they had passed. It was winter; and coming to a place where one of their company had died, he found upon a scaffold, lying at length in the cold blue air, the body of a beautiful young woman. "She shall be my wife!" exclaimed Kwasynd.

He lifted her up, and bearing her in his arms, he returned to his brother. "Brother," he said, "can not you restore her to life? Oh, do me that favor!"

He looked upon the beautiful female with a longing gaze; but she lay as cold and silent as when he had found her upon the scaffold.

"I will try," said Bokwewa.

These words had been scarcely breathed, when the young woman rose up, opened her eyes, and looked upon Bokwewa with a smile, as if she had known him before.

To Kwasynd she paid no heed whatever; but presently Bokwewa, seeing how she lingered in her gaze upon himself, said to her, "Sister, that is your husband," pointing to Kwasynd.

She listened to his voice, and crossing the lodge, she sat by Kwasynd, and they were man and wife.

For a long time they all lived contentedly together. Bokwewa was very kind to his brother, and sought to render his days happy. He was ever within the lodge, seeking to have it in readiness against the return of Kwasynd from the hunt. And by following his directions, which were those of one deeply skilled in the chase, Kwasynd always succeeded in returning with a good store of meat.

But the charge of the two brothers was greatly lightened by the presence of the spirit-wife; for without labor of the hand, she ordered the lodge, and as she willed, every thing took its place, and was at once in proper array. The wish of her heart seemed to control whatever she looked upon, and it obeyed her desire.

But it was still more to the surprise of her husband Kwasynd that she never partook of food, nor shared in any way the longings and appetites of a mortal creature. She had never been seen arranging her hair, like other females, or at work upon her garments, and yet they were ever seemly, and without blemish or disorder.

Behold her at any hour, she was ever beautiful, and she seemed to need no ornament, nor nourishment, nor other aid, to give grace or strength to her looks.

Kwasynd, when the first wonder of her ways had passed, payed little heed to her discourse; he was engrossed with the hunt, and chose rather to be abroad, pursuing the wild game, or in the lodge, enjoying its savory spoil, than the society of his spirit-wife.

But Bokwewa watched closely every word that fell from her lips, and often forgot, like her, all mortal appetite and care of the body, in conferring with her, and noting what she had to say of spirits and fairies, of stars, and streams that never ceased to flow, and the delight of the happy hunting-grounds, and the groves of the blessed.

One day Kwasynd had gone out as usual, and Bokwewa was sitting in the lodge, on the opposite side to his brother's wife, when she suddenly exclaimed:

"I must leave you," as a tall young man, whose face was like the sun in its brightness, entered, and taking her by the hand he led her to the door.

She made no resistance, but turning as she left the lodge, she cast upon Bokwewa a smile of kind regard, and was at once, with her companion, gone from his view.

He ran to the door and glanced about. He saw nothing; but looking far off in the sky, he thought that he could discover, at a great distance, a shining track, and the dim figures of two who were vanishing in heaven.

When his brother returned, Bokwewa related all to him exactly as it had happened.

The face of Kwasynd changed, and was dark as the night. For several days he would not taste food. Sometimes

he would fall to weeping for a long time, and now only it seemed that he remembered how gentle and beautiful had been the ways of her who was lost. At last he said that he would go in search of her.

Bokwewa tried to dissuade him from it; but he would not be turned aside from his purpose.

“Since you are resolved,” said Bokwewa, “listen to my advice. You will have to go South. It is a long distance to the present abiding-place of your wife, and there are so many charms and temptations by the way that I fear you will be led astray and forget your errand. For the people whom you will see in the country through which you have to pass, do nothing but amuse themselves. They are very idle, gay and effeminate, and I fear that they will lead you astray. Your path is beset with dangers. I will mention one or two things which you must be on your guard against.

“In the course of your journey you will come to a large grape-vine lying across your path. You must not even taste its fruit, for it is poisonous. Step over it. It is a snake. You will next come to something that looks like bear’s fat, of which you are so fond. Touch it not, or you will be overcome by the soft habits of the idle people. It is frog’s eggs. These are snares laid by the way for you.”

Kwasynd promised that he would observe the advice and bidding his brother farewell, he set out. After traveling a long time he came to the enchanted grape-vine. It looked so tempting, with its swelling purple clusters, that he forgot his brother’s warning, and tasted the fruit. He went on till he came to the frog’s eggs. They so much resembled delicious bear’s fat that Kwasynd tasted them. He still went on.

At length he came to a wide plain. As he emerged from the forest the sun was falling in the west, and it cast its scarlet and golden shades far over the country. The air was perfectly calm, and the whole prospect had the air of an enchanted land. Fruits and flowers, and delicate blossoms, lured the eye and delighted the senses.

At a distance he beheld a large village, swarming with people, and as he drew near he discovered women beating corn in silver mortars.

When they saw Kwasynd approaching, they cried out:

“Bokwewa’s brother has come to see us.”

Throngs of men and women, in bright apparel, hurried out to meet him.

He was soon, having already yielded to temptation by the way, overcome by their fair looks and soft speeches, and he was not long afterward seen beating corn with the women, having entirely abandoned all further quest for his lost wife.

Meantime, Bokwewa, alone in the lodge, often musing upon the discourse of the spirit-wife, who was gone, waited patiently his brother's return. After the lapse of several years, when no tidings could be had, he set out in search of him, and he arrived in safety among the soft and idle people of the South. He met the same allurements by the way, and they gathered around him on his coming as they had around his brother Kwasynd; but Bokwewa was proof against their flattery. He only grieved in his heart that any should yield.

He shed tears of pity to see that his brother had laid aside the arms of a hunter, and that he was beating corn with the women, indifferent to the fate and the fortune of his lost wife.

Bokwewa ascertained that his brother's wife had passed on to a country beyond.

After deliberating for a time, and spending several days in a severe fast, he set out in the direction where he saw that a light shone from the sky.

It was far off, but Bokwewa had a stout heart; and strong in the faith that he was now on the broad path toward the happy land, he pressed forward. For many days he traveled without encountering any thing unusual. And now plains of vast extent, and rich in waving grass, began to pass before his eyes. He saw many beautiful groves, and heard the songs of countless birds.

At length he began to fail in strength for lack of food; when he suddenly reached a high ground. From this he caught the first glimpse of the other land. But it appeared to be still far off, and all the country between, partly veiled in silvery mists, glittered with lakes and streams of water. As he pressed on, Bokwewa came in sight of innumerable herds of stately deer, moose, and other animals which walked near his path, and they appeared to have no fear of man.

And now again as he wound about in his course, and faced the north once more, he beheld, coming toward him, an immense number of men, women, and children, pressing forward in the direction of the shining land.

In this vast throng Bokwewa beheld persons of every age, from the little infant, the sweet and lovely penaisee, or younger son, to the feeble, gray old man, stooping under the burden of his years.

All whom Bokwewa met, of every name and degree, were heavily laden with pipes, weapons, bows, arrows, kettles and other wares and implements.

One man stopped him, and complained of the weary load he was carrying. Another offered him a kettle; another his bow and arrows; but he declined all, and, free of foot, hastened on.

And now he met women who were carrying their basket-work, and painted paddles, and little boys, with their embellished war-clubs and bows and arrows, the gift of their friends.

With this mighty throng, Bokwewa was borne along for two days and nights, when he arrived at a country so still and shining, and so beautiful in its woods and groves and plains, that he knew it was here that he should find the lost spirit-wife.

He had scarcely entered this fair country, with a sense of home and the return to things familiar strong upon him, when there appeared before him the lost spirit-wife herself, who, taking him by the hand, gave him welcome, saying, "My brother, I am glad to see you. Welcome! welcome! You are now in your native land!"

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