



The Lost Woman

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A long time ago the Blackfeet were camped on Backfat Creek. There was in the camp a man who had but one wife, and he thought a great deal of her. He never wanted to have two wives. As time passed they had a child, a little girl. Along toward the end of the summer, this man's wife wanted to get some berries, and she asked her husband to take her to a certain place where berries grew, so that she could get some. The man said to his wife: "At this time of the year, I do not like to go to that place to pick berries. There are always Snake or Crow war parties travelling about there." The woman wanted very much to go, and she coaxed her husband about it a great deal; and at last he said he would go, and they started, and many women followed them.

When they came to where the berries grew, the man said to his wife: "There are the berries down in that ravine. You may go down there and pick them, and I will go up on this hill and stand guard. If I see any one coming, I will call out to you, and you must all get on your horses and run." So the women went down to pick berries.

The man went up on the hill and sat down and looked over the country. After a little time, he looked down into another ravine not far off, and saw that it was full of horsemen coming. They started to gallop up towards him, and he called out in a loud voice, "Run, run, the enemy is rushing on us." The women started to run, and he jumped on his horse and followed them. The enemy rushed after them, and he drew his bow and arrows, and got ready to fight and defend the women. After they had gone a little way, the enemy had gained so much that

they were shooting at the Blackfeet with their arrows, and the man was riding back and forth behind the women, and whipping up the horses, now of one, now of another, to make them go faster. The enemy kept getting closer, and at last they were so near that they were beginning to thrust at him with their lances, and he was dodging them and throwing himself down, now on one side of his horse, and then on the other.

At length he found that he could no longer defend all the women, so he made up his mind to leave those that had the slowest horses to the mercy of the enemy, while he would go on with those that had the faster ones. When he found that he must leave the women, he was excited and rode on ahead; but as he passed, he heard some one call out to him, "Don't leave me," and he looked to one side, and saw that he was leaving his wife. When he heard his wife call out thus to him, he said to her: "There is no life for me here. You are a fine-looking woman. They will not kill you, but there is no life for me." She answered: "No, take pity on me. Do not leave me. My horse is giving out. Let us both get on one horse and then, if we are caught, we will die together." When he heard this, his heart was touched and he said: "No, wife, I will not leave you. Run up beside my horse and jump on behind me." The enemy were now so near that they had killed or captured some of the women, and they had come up close enough to the man so that they got ready to hit at him with their war clubs. His horse was now wounded in places with arrows, but it was a good, strong, fast horse.

His wife rode up close to him, and jumped on his horse behind him. When he started to run with her, the enemy had come up on either side of him, and some were behind him, but they were afraid to shoot their arrows for fear of hitting their own people, so they struck at the man with their war clubs. But they did not want to kill the woman, and they did not hurt him. They reached out with their hands to try to pull the woman off the horse; but she had put her arms around her husband and held on tight, and they could not get her off, but they tore her clothing off her. As she held her husband, he could not use his arrows, and could not fight to defend himself. His horse was now going very slowly, and all the enemy had caught up to them, and were all around them.

The man said to his wife: "Never mind, let them take you: they will not kill you. You are too handsome a woman for them to kill you." His wife said, "No, it is no harm for us both to die together." When he saw that his wife would not get off the horse and that he could not fight, he said to her: "Here, look out! You are crowding me on to the neck of the horse. Sit further back." He began to edge himself back, and at last, when he got his wife pretty far back on the horse, he gave a great push and shoved her off behind. When she fell off, his horse had

more speed and began to run away from the enemy, and he would shoot back his arrows; and now, when they would ride up to strike him with their hatchets, he would shoot them and kill them, and they began to be afraid of him, and to edge away from him. His horse was very long-winded; and now, as he was drawing away from the enemy, there were only two who were yet able to keep up with him. The rest were being left behind, and they stopped, and went back to where the others had killed or captured the women; and now only two men were pursuing.

After a little while, the Blackfoot jumped off his horse to fight on foot, and the two enemies rode up on either side of him, but a long way off, and jumped off their horses. When he saw the two on either side of him, he took a sheaf of arrows in his hand and began to rush, first toward the one on the right, and then toward the one on the left. As he did this, he saw that one of the men, when he ran toward him and threatened to shoot, would draw away from him, while the other would stand still. Then he knew that one of them was a coward and the other a brave man. But all the time they were closing in on him. When he saw that they were closing in on him, he made a rush at the brave man. This one was shooting arrows all the time; but the Blackfoot did not shoot until he got close to him, and then he shot an arrow into him and ran up to him and hit him with his stone axe and killed him. Then he turned to the cowardly one and ran at him. The man turned to run, but the Blackfoot caught him and hit him with his axe and killed him.

After he had killed them, he scalped them and took their arrows, their horses, and the stone knives that they had. Then he went home, and when he rode into the camp he was crying over the loss of his wife. When he came to his lodge and got off his horse, his friends went up to him and asked what was the matter. He told them how all the women had been killed, and how he had been pursued by two enemies, and had fought with them and killed them both, and he showed them the arrows and the horses and the scalps. He told the women's relations that they had all been killed; and all were in great sorrow, and crying over the loss of their friends.

The next morning they held a council, and it was decided that a party should go out and see where the battle had been, and find out what had become of the women. When they got to the place, they found all the women there dead, except this man's wife. Her they could not find. They also found the two Indians that the man had said that he had killed, and, besides, many others that he had killed when he was running away.

When he got back to the camp, this Blackfoot picked up his child and put it on his back, and walked round the

camp mourning and crying, and the child crying, for four days and four nights, until he was exhausted and worn out, and then he fell asleep. When the rest of the people saw him walking about mourning, and that he would not eat nor drink, their hearts were very sore, and they felt very sorry for him and for the child, for he was a man greatly thought of by the people.

While he lay there asleep, the chief of the camp came to him and woke him, and said: "Well, friend, what have you decided on? What is your mind? What are you going to do?" The man answered: "My child is lonely. It will not eat. It is crying for its mother. It will not notice any one. I am going to look for my wife." The chief said, "I cannot say anything." He went about to all the lodges and told the people that this man was going away to seek his wife.

Now there was in the camp a strong medicine man, who was not married and would not marry at all. He had said, "When I had my dream, it told me that I must never have a wife." The man who had lost his wife had a very beautiful sister, who had never married. She was very proud and very handsome. Many men had wanted to marry her, but she would not have anything to do with any man. The medicine man secretly loved this handsome girl, the sister of the poor man. When he heard of this poor man's misfortune, the medicine man was in great sorrow, and cried over it. He sent word to the poor man, saying: "Go and tell this man that I have promised never to take a wife, but that if he will give me his beautiful sister, he need not go to look for his wife. I will send my secret helper in search of her."

When the young girl heard what this medicine man had said, she sent word to him, saying, "Yes, if you bring my brother's wife home, and I see her sitting here by his side, I will marry you, but not before." But she did not mean what she said. She intended to deceive him in some way, and not to marry him at all. When the girl sent this message to him, the medicine man sent for her and her brother to come to his lodge. When they had come, he spoke to the poor man and said, "If I bring your wife here, are you willing to give me your sister for my wife?" The poor man answered, "Yes." But the young girl kept quiet in his presence, and had nothing to say. Then the medicine man said to them: "Go. To-night in the middle of the night you will hear me sing." He sent everybody out of his lodge, and said to the people: "I will close the door of my lodge, and I do not want any one to come in to-night, nor to look through the door. A spirit will come to me to-night." He made the people know, by a sign put out before the door of his lodge, that no one must enter it, until such time as he was through making his medicine. Then he built a fire, and began to get out all his medicine. He unwrapped his

bundle and took out his pipe and his rattles and his other things. After a time, the fire burned down until it was only coals and his lodge was dark, and on the fire he threw sweet-scented herbs, sweet grass, and sweet pine, so as to draw his dream-helper to him.

Now in the middle of the night he was in the lodge singing, when suddenly the people heard a strange voice in the lodge say: "Well, my chief, I have come. What is it?" The medicine man said, "I want you to help me." The voice said, "Yes, I know it, and I know what you want me to do." The medicine man asked, "What is it?" The voice said, "You want me to go and get a woman." The medicine man answered: "That is what I want. I want you to go and get a woman—the lost woman." The voice said to him, "Did I not tell you never to call me, unless you were in great need of my help?" The medicine man answered, "Yes, but that girl that was never going to be married is going to be given to me through your help." Then the voice said, "Oh!" and it was silent for a little while. Then it went on and said: "Well, we have a good feeling for you, and you have been a long time not married; so we will help you to get that girl, and you will have her. Yes, we have great pity on you. We will go and look for this woman, and will try to find her, but I cannot promise you that we will bring her; but we will try. We will go, and in four nights I will be back here again at this same time, and I think that I can bring the woman; but I will not promise. While I am gone, I will let you know how I get on. Now I am going away." And then the people heard in the lodge a sound like a strong wind, and nothing more. He was gone.

Some people went and told the sister what the medicine man and the voice had been saying, and the girl was very down-hearted, and cried over the idea that she must be married, and that she had been forced into it in this way.

When the dream person went away, he came late at night to the camp of the Snakes, the enemy. The woman who had been captured was always crying over the loss of her man and her child. She had another husband now. The man who had captured her had taken her for his wife. As she was lying there, in her husband's lodge, crying for sorrow for her loss, the dream person came to her. Her husband was asleep. The dream-helper touched her and pushed her a little, and she looked up and saw a person standing by her side; but she did not know who it was. The person whispered in her ear, "Get up, I want to take you home." She began to edge away from her husband, and at length got up, and all the time the person was moving toward the door. She followed him out, and saw him walk away from the lodge, and she went after. The person kept ahead, and the woman followed him, and they went away, travelling very fast. After they had travelled some distance, she called out to

the dream person to stop, for she was getting tired. Then the person stopped, and when he saw the woman sitting, he would sit down, but he would not talk to her.

As they travelled on, the woman, when she got tired, would sit down, and because she was very tired, she would fall asleep; and when she awoke and looked up, she always saw the person walking away from her, and she would get up and follow him. When day came, the shape would be far ahead of her, but at night it would keep closer. When she spoke to this person, the woman would call him "young man." At one time she said to him, "Young man, my moccasins are all worn out, and my feet are getting very sore, and I am very tired and hungry." When she had said this, she sat down and fell asleep, and as she was falling asleep, she saw the person going away from her. He went back to the lodge of the medicine man.

During this night the camp heard the medicine man singing his song, and they knew that the dream person must be back again, or that his chief must be calling him. The medicine man had unwrapped his bundle, and had taken out all his things, and again had a fire of coals, on which he burned sweet pine and sweet grass. Those who were listening heard a voice say: "Well, my chief, I am back again, and I am here to tell you something. I am bringing the woman you sent me after. She is very hungry and has no moccasins. Get me those things, and I will take them back to her." The medicine man went out of the lodge, and called to the poor man, who was mourning for his wife, that he wanted to see him. The man came, carrying the child on his back, to hear what the medicine man had to say. He said to him: "Get some moccasins and something to eat for your wife. I want to send them to her. She is coming." The poor man went to his sister, and told her to give him some moccasins and some pemmican. She made a bundle of these things, and the man took them to the medicine man, who gave them to the dream person; and again he disappeared out of the lodge like a wind.

When the woman awoke in the morning and started to get up, she hit her face against a bundle lying by her, and when she opened it, she found in it moccasins and some pemmican; and she put on the moccasins and ate, and while she was putting on the moccasins and eating, she looked over to where she had last seen the person, and he was sitting there with his back toward her. She could never see his face. When she had finished eating, he got up and went on, and she rose and followed. They went on, and the woman thought, "Now I have travelled two days and two nights with this young man, and I wonder what kind of a man he is. He seems to take no notice of me." So she made up her mind to walk fast and to try to overtake him, and see what sort of a man he was. She started to do so, but however fast she walked, it made no difference. She could not overtake

him. Whether she walked fast, or whether she walked slow, he was always the same distance from her. They travelled on until night, and then she lay down again and fell asleep. She dreamed that the young man had left her again.

The dream person had really left her, and had gone back to the medicine man's lodge, and said to him: "Well, my chief, I am back again. I am bringing the woman. You must tell this poor man to get on his horse, and ride back toward Milk River (the Teton). Let him go in among the high hills on this side of the Muddy, and let him wait there until daylight, and look toward the hills of Milk River; and after the sun is up a little way, he will see a band of antelope running toward him, along the trail that the Blackfeet travel. It will be his wife who has frightened these antelope. Let him wait there for a while, and he will see a person coming. This will be his wife. Then let him go to meet her, for she has no moccasins. She will be glad to see him, for she is crying all the time."

The medicine man told the poor man this, and he got on his horse and started, as he had been told. He could not believe that it was true. But he went. At last he got to the place, and a little while after the sun had risen, as he was lying on a hill looking toward the hills of the Milk River, he saw a band of antelope running toward him, as he had been told he would see. He lay there for a long time, but saw nothing else come in sight; and finally he got angry and thought that what had been told him was a lie, and he got up to mount his horse and ride back. Just then he saw, away down, far off on the prairie, a small black speck, but he did not think it was moving, it was so far off,—barely to be seen. He thought maybe it was a rock. He lay down again and took sight on the speck by a straw of grass in front of him, and looked for a long time, and after a while he saw the speck pass the straw, and then he knew it was something. He got on his horse and started to ride up and find out what it was, riding way around it, through the hills and ravines, so that he would not be seen. He rode up in a ravine behind it, pretty near to it, and then he could see it was a person on foot. He got out his bow and arrows and held them ready to use, and then started to ride up to it. He rode toward the person, and at last he got near enough to see that it was his wife. When he saw this, he could not help crying; and as he rode up, the woman looked back, and knew first the horse, and then her husband, and she was so glad that she fell down and knew nothing.

After she had come to herself and they had talked together, they got on the horse and rode off toward camp. When he came over the hill in sight of camp, all the people began to say, "Here comes the man"; and at last they could see from a distance that he had some one on the horse behind him, and they knew that it must be his wife, and they were glad to see him bringing her back, for he was a man thought a great deal of, and everybody

liked him and liked his wife and the way he was kind to her.

Then the handsome girl was given to the medicine man and became his wife.

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