

The Partridge Witch

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North American

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Two brothers, having hunted at the head of the Penobscot until their snow-shoes and moccasins gave out, looked at each other ruefully and cried, "Would that there was a woman to help us!" The younger brother went to the lodge that evening earlier than the elder, in order to prepare the supper, and great was his surprise on entering the wigwam to find the floor swept, a fire built, a pot boiling, and their clothing mended. Returning to the wood he watched the place from a covert until he saw a graceful girl enter the lodge and take up the tasks of housekeeping.

When he entered she was confused, but he treated her with respect, and allowed her to have her own way so far as possible, so that they became warm friends, sporting together like children when the work of the day was over. But one evening she said, "Your brother is coming. I fear him. Farewell." And she slipped into the wood. When the young man told his elder brother what had happened there—the elder having been detained for a few days in the pursuit of a deer—he declared that he would wish the woman to come back, and presently, without any summons, she returned, bringing a toboggan-load of garments and arms. The luck of the hunters improved, and they remained happily together until spring, when it was time to return with their furs.

They set off down the Penobscot in their canoe and rowed merrily along, but as they neared the home village the girl became uneasy, and presently "threw out her soul"—became clairvoyant—and said, "Let me land here.

I find that your father would not like me, so do not speak to him about me.” But the elder brother told of her when they reached home, whereon the father exclaimed, “I had feared this. That woman is a sister of the goblins. She wishes to destroy men.”

At this the elder brother was afraid, lest she should cast a spell on him, and rowing up the river for a distance he came upon her as she was bathing and shot at her. The arrow seemed to strike, for there was a flutter of feathers and the woman flew away as a partridge. But the younger did not forget the good she had done and sought her in the wood, where for many days they played together as of old.

“I do not blame your father: it is an affair of old, this hate he bears me,” she said. “He will choose a wife for you soon, but do not marry her, else all will come to an end for you.” The man could not wed the witch, and he might not disobey his father, in spite of this adjuration; so when the old man said to him, “I have a wife for you, my son,” he answered, “It is well.”

They brought the bride to the village, and for four days the wedding-dance was held, with a feast that lasted four days more. Then said the young man, “Now comes the end,” and lying down on a bear-skin he sighed a few times and his spirit ascended to the Ghosts’ road—the milky way. The father shook his head, for he knew that this was the witch’s work, and, liking the place no longer, he went away and the tribe was scattered.

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