

The Two Jeebi

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Native Americannorth American

Intermediate
7 min read

There lived a hunter in the North, who had a wife and one child. His lodge stood far off in the forest, several days' journey from any other. He spent his days in hunting, and his evenings in relating to his wife the incidents that had befallen him. As game was very abundant, he found no difficulty in killing as much as they wanted. Just in all his acts, he lived a peaceful and happy life.

One evening during the winter season, it chanced that he remained out longer than usual, and his wife began to fear that some accident had befallen him. It was already dark. She listened attentively, and at last heard the sound of approaching footsteps.

Not doubting that it was her husband, she went to the door and beheld two strange females. She bade them enter, and invited them to remain. She observed that they were total strangers in the country. There was something so peculiar in their looks, air and manner, that she was disturbed by their presence. They would not come near to the fire. They sat in a remote part of the lodge, shy and taciturn, and drew their garments about them in such a manner as nearly to hide their faces. So far as she could judge, they were pale, hollow-eyed, and long-visaged, very thin and emaciated.

There was but little light in the lodge, as the fire was low, and its fitful flashes, by disclosing their white faces and then dropping them in sudden darkness, served rather to increase than to dispel her fears.

“Merciful Spirit!” cried a voice from the opposite part of the lodge; “there are two corpses clothed with

garments!"

The hunter's wife turned around, but seeing nobody save her little child, staring across from under his blanket, she said to herself, "The boy can not speak; the sounds were but the gusts of wind." She trembled, and was ready to sink to the earth.

Her husband at this moment entered, and in some measure relieved her alarm. He threw down the carcass of a large fat deer.

"Behold what a fine and fat animal!" cried the mysterious females; and they immediately ran and pulled off pieces of the whitest fat, which they greedily devoured.

The hunter and his wife looked on with astonishment, but remained silent. They supposed that their guests might have been stricken with famine.

The next day, however, the same unusual conduct was repeated. The strange females again tore off the fat and devoured it with eagerness. The third day, the hunter thought that he would anticipate their wants by tying up a share of the hunt, and placing it apart for their express use. They accepted it, but still appeared dissatisfied, and went to the wife's portion and tore off more.

The hunter and his wife were surprised at such rude and unaccountable conduct, but they remained silent, for they respected their guests, and had observed that they had been attended with marked good luck during the sojourn of these mysterious visitors in their lodge.

In other respects, the deportment of the females was strictly unexceptionable. They were modest, distant, and silent. They never uttered a word during the day. At night they would occupy themselves in procuring wood, which they carried to the lodge, and then, restoring the implements exactly where they had found them, resume their places without speaking. They were never known to stay out until daylight. They never laughed or jested.

The winter was nearly passed away, when, one evening, the hunter was abroad later than usual. The moment he came in and laid down his day's hunt, as was his custom, before his wife, the two females seized upon the deer and began to tear off the fat in so unceremonious a way that her anger was excited. She constrained

herself, however, in a good degree, but she could not conceal her feelings, though she said but little.

The strange guests observed the state of her mind, and they became uneasy, and withdrew further still into the remote gloom of the lodge. The good hunter saw the eclipse that was darkening the quiet of his lodge, and carefully inquired of its cause; but his wife denied having used any words of complaining or reproach.

They retired to their couches, and the hunter tried to compose himself to sleep, but could not, for the sighs and sobs of the two females were incessant. He arose on his couch and addressed them as follows:

“Tell me,” said he, “what is it that gives you pain of mind and causes you to bemoan your presence here. Has my wife given you offense, or trespassed upon the rights of hospitality?”

They replied in the negative. “We have been treated by you with kindness and affection. It is not for any slight we have received that we weep. Our mission is not to you only. We come from the other land to test mankind, and to try the sincerity of the living. Often we have heard the bereaved by death say that if the lost could be restored, they would devote their lives to make them happy. We have been moved by the bitter lamentations which have reached the place of the departed, and have come to make proof of the sincerity of those who have lost friends. We are your two dead sisters. Three moons were allotted us by the Master of Life to make the trial. More than half the time had been successfully passed, when the angry feelings of your wife indicated the irksomeness you felt at our presence, and has made us resolve on our departure.”

They continued to talk to the hunter and his wife, gave them instructions as to a future life, and pronounced a blessing upon them.

“There is one point,” they added, “of which we wish to speak. You have thought our conduct very strange and rude in possessing ourselves of the choicest parts of your hunt. That was the point of trial selected to put you to. It is the wife’s peculiar privilege. You love your wife. For another to usurp what belongs to her, we know to be the severest test of her goodness of heart, and consequently of your temper and feelings. We knew your manners and customs, but we came to prove you, not by complying with but by violating them. Pardon us. We are the agents of him who sent us. Peace to your dwelling. Farewell!”

When they ceased, total darkness filled the lodge. No object could be seen. The inmates heard the lodge-door open and shut, but they never saw more of the Two Spirits.

The hunter found the success which they had promised. He became celebrated in the chase, and never wanted for any thing. He had many children, all of whom grew up to manhood; and he who had lain in the lodge, a little child, while the Jeebi dwelt there, led them in all good deeds, and health, peace, and long life were the rewards of the hunter's hospitality.

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