

This story begins with the Gros Ventres who were once living at the mouth of the Knife River. At the mouth of the Knife River there lived an old man and his wife. Their lodge was one of the earth-covered lodges such as was used in eagle-trapping. After all the other people of the village had left for the fall eagle trapping, the old man said, "We are all alone now. We have lived together a long time but I am going to leave you to visit some of my clansons at Covered With Fat Butte. (So.W. of the present post office at Independence). If I get any presents, some back to you. From there I am going to visit my grandchildren at the mouth of the Yellowstone. The trip will take me four camps." His main purpose was to visit his daughter-in-law, for in the medicine doings, she would be the one who would be given to him.

After bidding his wife good-by in the usual Indian fashion, he left. A short distance from the village, he took the winter calf skin off of his medicine bundle and made prayers to the contents of the bundle and immediately he turned into a bird and flew into the air. He flew to where his "son" was and turning into a human being again, he walked toward the village, reaching his son's lodge just before sunset. As he came into sight, the people saw that his moccasins were old and torn, and that he carried a cane, travelling slowly, for he was then an old man. When he reached the camp, everyone pitied him. One woman led him to a lodge, one identical to the kind used today for eagle trapping, and there offered him a seat far from the door; but he asked to sit near the door. He also asked to be given a block of wood to sit on and the wood was supplied also. The woman brought him a new pair of moccasins saying that one of her sons owned them but that he should have them. Some of the young men gave their wives to him, others gave robes and moccasins. He thanked them and said that they had made him very happy. The young men asked him to tell them a story and he said:

"There once lived a man named Yellow Old Man. He had lived with the Indians since infancy and had partaken of their food. We liked their corn. All the people smelt nice and although not a human being, himself, (being a bird in human form) he was pleased with their way of living."

That was the story he told them. Then he said, "When I came into your camp, one of my daughter-in-laws was good to me and I wish her husband success in the eagle pits. I am a bird and know their habits. I will send any number of eagles he may ask for. All these presents you have given, take to my wife living at Knife River. For all you have given me, this camp will be rewarded with a big catch of eagles. My next stop will be Eagle Butte (South of Sanish) so be sure to give all my presents to my wife."

"We will see that she gets them. Stay all night in our lodge and leave in the morning," the young men asked. He said he was in a hurry so changed immediately into a bird and flew out through the smokehole. All present in the lodge cried for they were sorry to see him leave them. Their crying pleased the old man for he liked to have people cry for him. He did not go far that night but roosted in a tree that night. In the early morning he flew on, first killing a jackrabbit for his morning meal, and reached the second camp just as the sun was setting. When near the camp, he changed into an old man again, and walked toward the village. A woman seeing him, felt sorry for him. When he told her how far he had come that day, she could not understand how such an old man could travel so far in so short a time.

There was another woman in the village who thought he had no business coming to their village. She was afraid that her husband would return and "give" her to the old man but she did not say so. Some women went so far even as to say what they had in their heart. The good woman said, "Be quiet. He may be a holy man." She went to her lodge and returned with leggings, a buffalo robe, and moccasins. He asked for a block of wood to sit on and she

suspected that he was a bird at heart. The others in the lodge gave him presents and even offered him their wives. He refused the wives, praying for the success of the husband, and thanked them for the presents. The young men asked him to tell them a story. He said:

“When I got to the first camp, a woman pitied me and gave me presents. As a reward, I have given her husband enough eagles to make two war bonnets. There was another woman who did not like me so I am going to send her husband bad luck. When his friends are all catching eagles, he will wish that he had shown greater respect for me. So that he would catch eagles too.”

He thanked those who had given him presents and asked them to take the presents back to the village with them to his wife when returning in the spring. He told them that he was going to visit his clansmen’s sons. He told the men that he was going to visit his clansmen’s sons. He told the men that he had not said anything to the women of the camp who did not like him at heart. Then he flew up through the smokehole and all cried because he was leaving them. That pleased him.

The next evening he reached the third camp. (In each of the four camps, the trapping eagles lived in lodges apart from the women. All the lodges were alike except that in the men’s lodge, the altar was set up at the head of the lodge. In former times there were no horses, so at each camp, lodges of this type were set up.) Everything happened at the third camp just as it had at the second one. This camp was at End of Flat Lands, near the Sydney, Mont While in the camp, the young men again asked for a story and he said:

“An old man left his village at Knife River and came to Covered With Fat Village. Some of the people were good to him and their husbands caught many eagles but the husbands of those who treated him unkindly caught none. This old man reached a second camp at the mouth of the Yellowstone. Some of the women were kind to him, others did not. Only the husbands of the good women caught eagles. That old man is myself” and saying that he turned into a bird and left through the smokehole. He left the camp immediately and spent the next day flying and at night reached a camp on Woodpecker Creek, a branch of the Yellowstone. The camp, called Lonetree Eagle Pit, was at the mouth of the creek. This was the end of his journey. When he reached the camp, it was evening. It was one of those fine warm evenings of late autumn. All the women were out cleaning and scraping hides. One of the women said, “I pity that poor old man who has walked so far. She cried over him. His clansmen’s son’s wife was among those outside, for in reality, she was the one he had come for. He received gifts from the women of the village but the clansmen’s son’s wife was angry at him for coming so far when so old and said, “I suppose you have come to get some women.” A homely woman brought him many presents, saying, “This robe is your clan son’s. These leggings and moccasins are his also. You can have all these.

When they asked him to sit down, he called for his usual block of wood and placed it near the door as he had done in the other camp. (p. 4) the gifts were those of the wives, among whom was his clansmen’s son’s wife. Her husband said, “My clan father is here. I want you to take a bath and be ready to serve him.”

The wife said, “I won’t. I hate that old man.” Nevertheless she gave in to her husband when he said, “He may be a holy man since he has walked farther than any other old man of his age has ever gone.” He prepared a sweatlodge for the old man to go in it with the husband and his wife. After the sweatbath, the old man took his place at the door of the lodge as usual. The young men asked for a story and he told of the events of his trip, how he had stopped at three other camps, and how well treated he had been by one of his clansmen’s son’s wives. He told how he had promised her husband twelve eagles but that those who had been unkind to him

were to get none. Besides the twelve eagles, the same man was promised to power to kill a white buffalo calf.

In the fourth camp, the clansmen's son's wife was the real object of his visit for her husband had been very unsuccessful in eagle trapping as well as everything else he undertook. They had been unlucky because the wife had been unkind to the old man. All those clansmen's sons whose wives had been kind to him, he asked to be lucky and sometime to become chief or head man.

In olden times, when trapping eagles, it was the custom to go when the days began to grow short and stop trapping when the streams froze up. But the clansmen's sons whose wives had been kind to him, got many eagle feathers and a white buffalo robe and the husbands were happy, but the other woman who had been the real object of his visit but who had been unkind to him brought only bad luck to her husband.

On the way back to the village at Knife River, the clansman whose wife had been unkind to the old man, pierced holes through her wrists and punched out both of her eyes; then he tied her to one of the poles of the lodge. All the people left, leaving her alone there to die. While he was doing this, his brother cried because his sister-in-law was being treated so cruelly and her husband said, "She is a different person from our clan (People); you and I are the same clan. You should not cry for her" but the brother-in-law would not stop crying. At last the husband said, "Since you feel so sorry for her, go back to the place where she is tied" and he did, crying all the way back there. When he reached the lodge, he thought he heard the woman singing. When he got to the lodge, he found that it was one of the eagle snares singing, asking the gods to help him free the woman. Just then some small mice ran up the lodge pole and chewed the rawhide, freeing the woman. Then the snare called upon the mice to try to put back her eyes but they were unable to do so. An owl volunteered to bring her back her sight, and he did.

As the brother walked along crying, the snare sang of his return crying, the woman's crying, and identified his voice as that of the snare. When the brother-in-law reached the lodge, the snare said, "You are old enough to be married. Live here with your brother's wife. We will trap eagles together. The old man is a big bird and we will try to snare him too."

They were married and were very successful in catching eagles. In a short time, they had all the feathers they could carry back. When they reached the village at Knife River, the brothers were unfriendly. From that time, it became the custom to marry the brother's widow. The story tells why all strangers must be well treated when coming to our lodge.

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