

Ghost Woman

The Indian Reading Series



The Skull Story



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THE INDIAN READING SERIES:
Stories and Legends of the Northwest

The Skull Story

Ghost Woman

Level V Book 4

Developed by the Blackfeet Tribe

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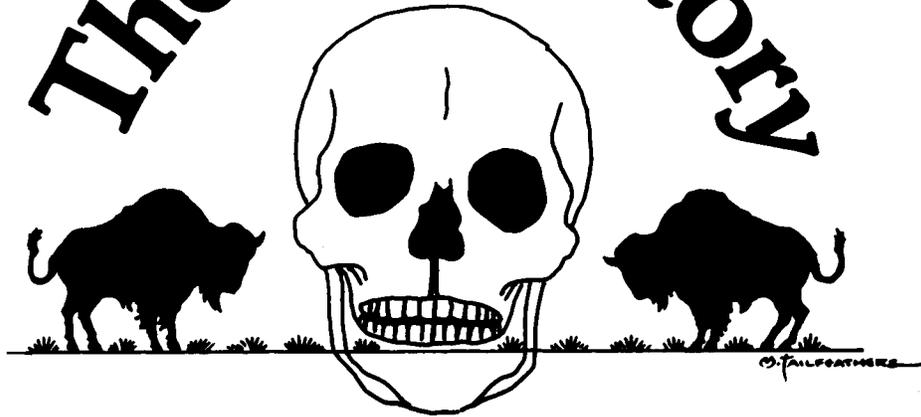
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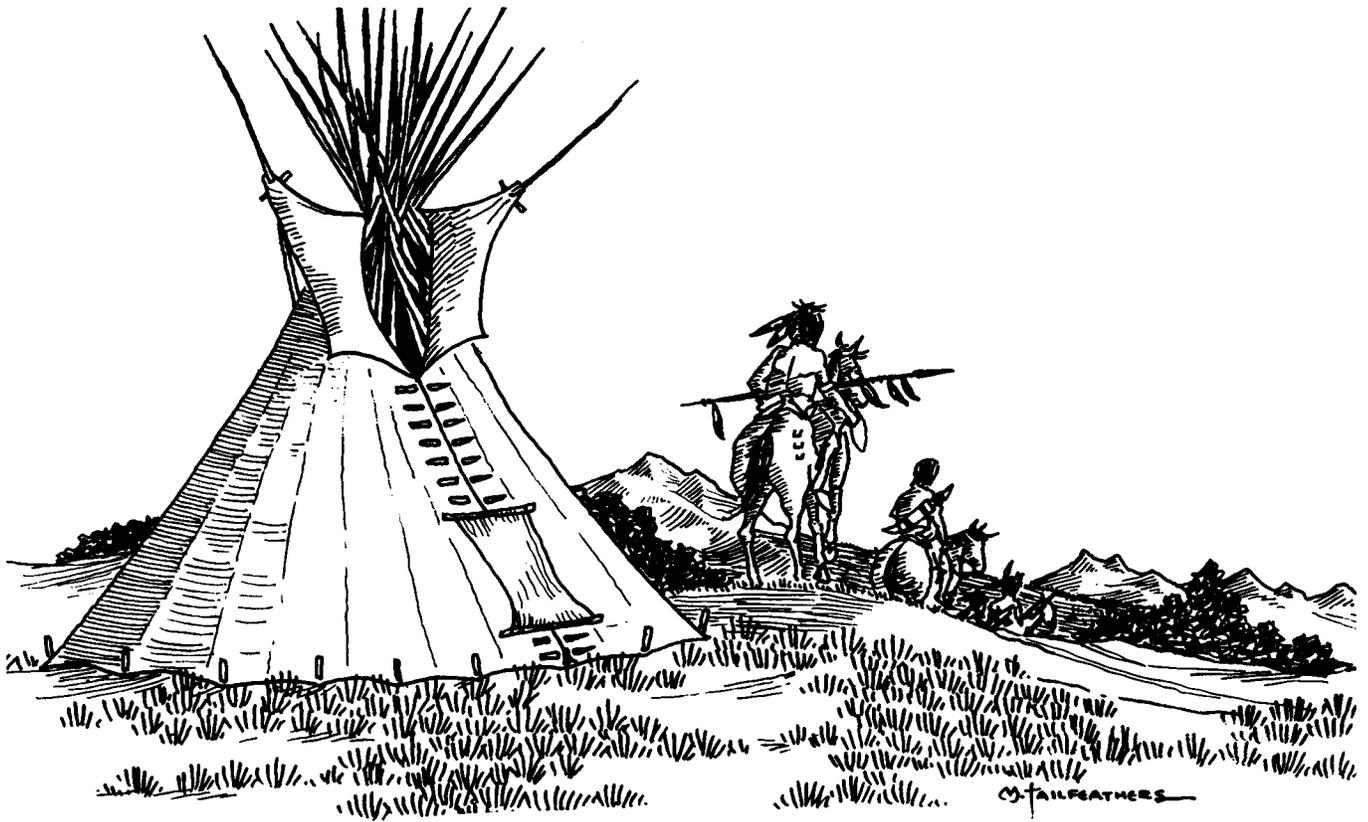
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The Skull Story



We have attempted to relate some of the legendary stories which have been handed down from generation to generation by our Blackfeet people. The Blackfeet Tribe is located in Montana, U.S.A., but other segments of our people are located in Alberta, Canada. These people are called the Blood Tribe, North Piegan, and Blackfoot. Relatives and friends continue to go back and forth across the U.S. and Canadian border to visit and share in tribal ceremonies and celebrations.

We especially thank elderly people like Laurie Plume, who have shared with us their great wisdom and knowledge about our Indian culture.



The skull story is about a skull which helped some Indian hunters get buffalo meat for their families several generations ago. The Indian elders who passed this story on say that it actually happened.

The people were camped and still living in tepees at the time that this story took place.

Two Bear arose at daybreak and went out to where his horse had been picketed for the night. He led his horse down to the creek to water him. There he met Running Crane and Black Crow.

The men walked back to Two Bear's tepee where they sat down to talk about the buffalo hunt they were going on that day. Winter had just turned to early spring and food was very scarce in the encampment. The winter had been long and cold with very much snow. Shortly, Flying Eagle and Many Horses entered the tepee and joined the group.

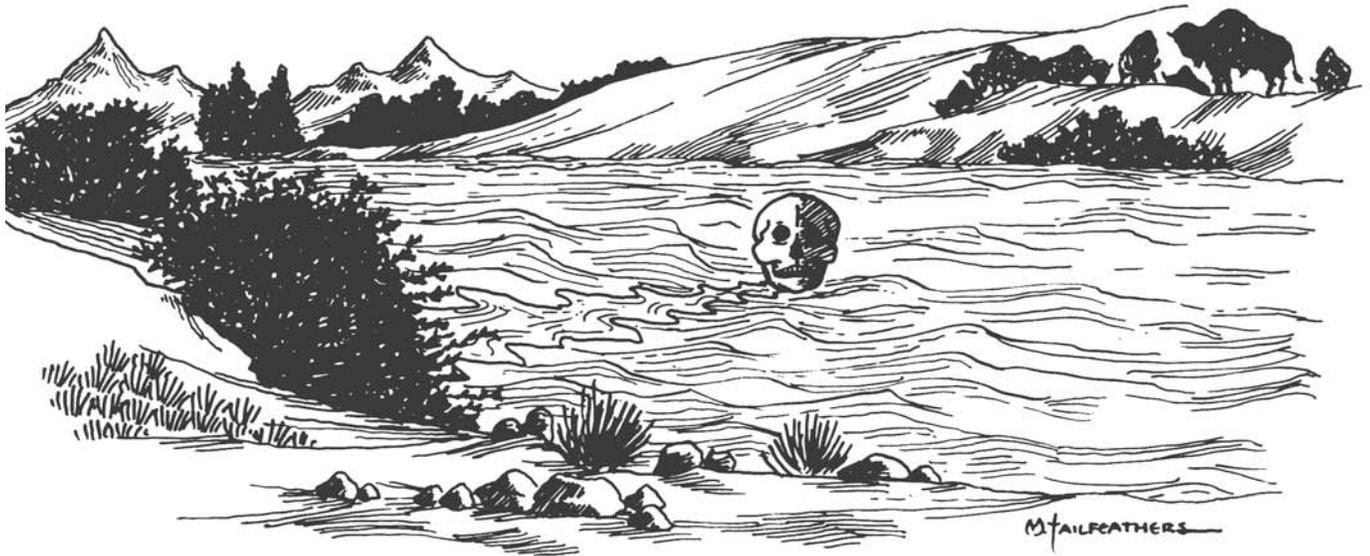
After spending some time making a decision about heading north to hunt, the five men mounted their horses and rode off.



The hunters searched and searched but no buffalo were to be found. Finally, they came to Old Man River which is located southwest of Lethbridge, Alberta.

The water was very high and swift from the spring thaw in the Rocky Mountains which lie to the west. The men dismounted from their horses and stood talking and stretching after the long journey on horseback.

Two Bear said, "Look across the river. There are some buffalo on the north side of the river." "There are seven buffalo over there." said Many Horses. After much discussion the hunters decided that they could not get across the river because it was near flood stage from the spring thaw.



Black Crow, a person who loved to tell jokes, started kicking at a small dirt covered mound near some brush. He unearthed a human skull. He picked the skull up and started talking to the skull in the Blackfeet language. "Who are you? How did you get here? I'm going to paint this skull with my red paint." he told the other hunters. Running Crane said, "You should not bother the dead. Let them rest in peace." "I mean no harm." said Black Crow. "This is our religious and sacred ceremony to purify and cleanse. People who need help for any kind of problem are painted and prayed for to help them with whatever is troubling them."

After Black Crow had carefully painted the skull he laid it in the water. Instead of the skull floating down the river like the hunter thought it would, it floated straight across the river to the north bank. The hunters stared in amazement.



The skull reached the north bank of the river and traveled around the outside of the seven buffalo that were grazing. The buffalo entered the river in single file and swam across the river toward the hunters on the south bank.

The hunters started shooting at the buffalo as they emerged from the water. Six of the buffalo were killed.



The seventh buffalo was wounded but it jumped back into the river and started swimming across. The hunters let it go. Flying Eagle said, "We were helped in getting food for our families and friends. We cannot be selfish and greedy. Let the skull have the seventh buffalo for himself and for others who are hungry."



The hunters started the butchering of the animals by skinning the hides from the six buffalo. As Indian people butcher they usually eat the kidney or brisket of the animal while the parts are still very fresh. Flying Eagle cut a part of a kidney and brisket. He put them into the river. "We will share these parts with the skull spirit." he said.

The hunters finished the butchering of the animals and went back to camp still very much amazed by all that had happened that day. Two Bear said, "I believe the skull's spirit and other spirits that the skull called helped us get food for our people today." At their lodges they gave thanks again to the Creator for providing food and for meeting their other needs.

Ghost Woman



The Blackfeet people have different types of ceremonies to help their people who are sick or who are having problems in their lives.

The following story is about the origin of the fly pipe ceremony which is used by a group of the Blackfeet people to heal the sick spiritually and physically.



Coyote Man and his wife Otter Woman had a little boy, Flies Along. One day Coyote Man's wife got very sick and died. Coyote Man really loved his wife and so did the little boy. The boy Flies Along was really lonely. He kept crying every day and every night for his mother. Flies Along started to get sick. He was so lonesome for his mother.



One day Coyote Man told his people, "I pity my son very much and I love him. I also miss my wife. I loved her very much. I'm going to look for her."

Coyote Man headed east. He kept walking. He slept at night. He saw all kinds of animals and birds.



The animals or birds would come to him and say, "We pity you and we know what you are after, but we can't help you." Coyote Man kept going, trying to find Big Sand. This is where he felt he would find his wife. He believed that when Indians die they go to Big Sand.



One night when Coyote Man was sleeping he heard people talking. A man's voice said, "You people see this man lying here? Get away from him and don't bother him. Go some place else. Leave him alone and let him sleep."

The spirit then told Coyote Man, "I feel sorry for you. I know what you are after. You will get your wife back and you will go home with her. You will have to go through a sacred ceremony, however, before you can have your wife back. There are certain things that you must remember not to do."



Coyote Man realized he had finally reached Big Sand, the land of the spirits.



The next day four sweat lodges were put up. Sweat lodges are used for cleansing spiritually and physically, as well as for good health. Soon Coyote Man looked up and saw his wife Otter Woman approaching with a pipe in her hands. He was very happy. The spirit told him, "Now we must perform the sacred ceremony before your wife is able to go back with you."



The woman went into the first sweat lodge. When she came out there were all kinds of different bugs, weeds, and small sand piles in the sweat lodge. She went into the second sweat lodge. When she came out there were less bugs and weeds than the first time. Otter Woman went into the third lodge and there were hardly any bugs or weeds left in there. There were no bugs or weeds at all in the fourth sweat lodge.



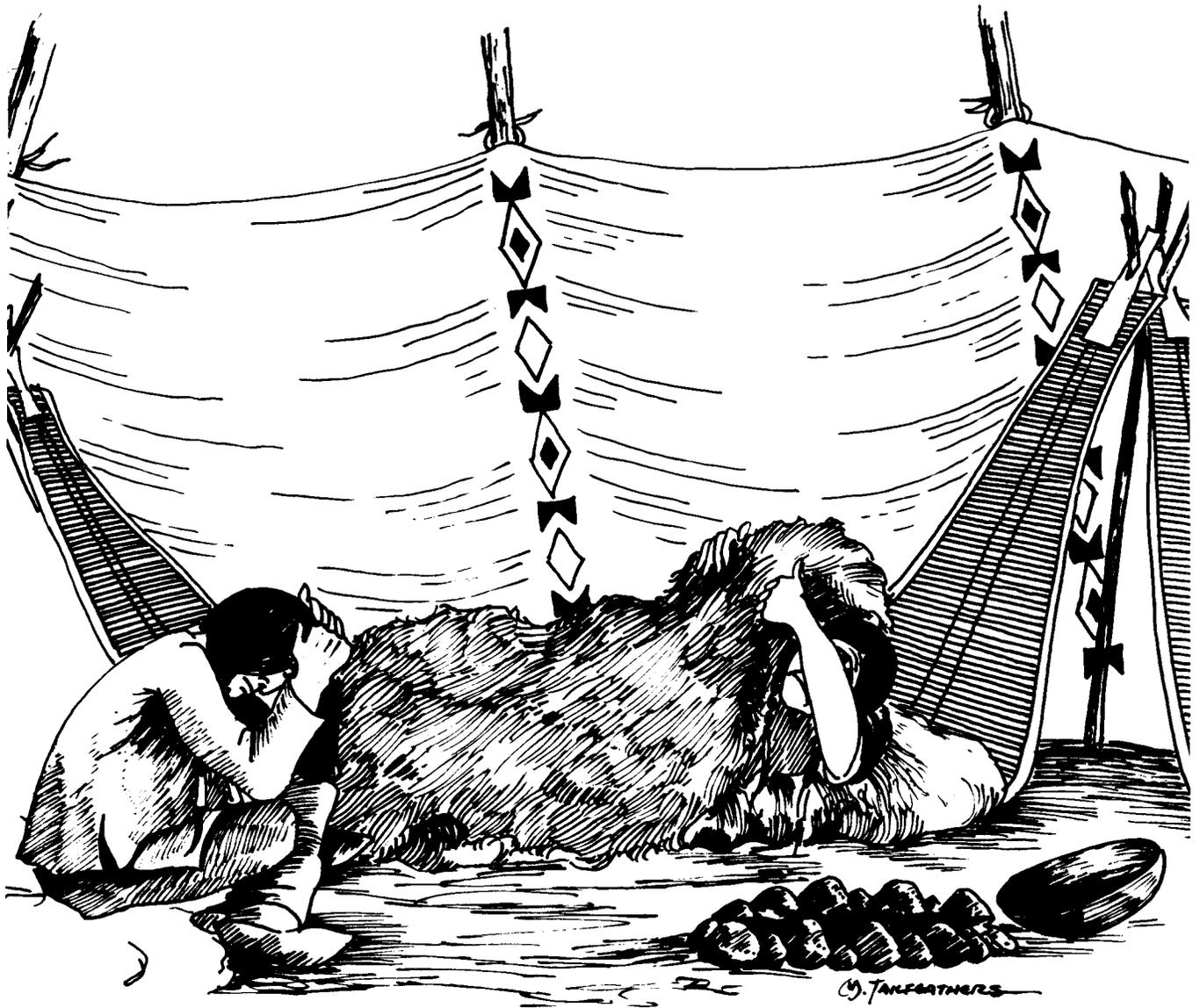
The spirit told the man, “Now you have your wife back. You may go home. Take this fly pipe with you. In future generations use the fly pipe and the ceremony that we have just completed to help your people. Make this sacrifice for your people who are ill or need help. When you get home go through this ceremony again. Put up four sweat lodges and use the pipe as I have instructed you. Remember to be kind to your wife. Do not call her Ghost Woman, or lazy.”

Coyote Man then took his wife home. When he got home he did what he was told to do. He set up four sweat lodges and did the pipe ceremony as he had been told.

When Coyote Man and his wife entered the first sweat lodge and came out, the lodge was filled with bugs and weeds. The same thing happened with the second and third lodges. The fourth lodge did not have any bugs or weeds in it.

Coyote Man and his wife lived happily for some time until he started becoming impatient with her. Coyote Man said, "You forget everything. I tell you to do something and you do the opposite thing." One evening Coyote Man and his friends sat around the campfire in the lodge eating and telling stories. The fire started to burn low. "Otter Woman, put some more wood on the fire so it will keep burning." Instead of Otter Woman putting wood on the fire, she poured water on it. The men in the lodge knew the man was getting angry so they went home. After everyone was gone Coyote Man told his wife, "I didn't tell you to pour water on the fire. I told you to put more wood on it. Everybody knows you are a Ghost Woman and lazy."





Otter Woman went screaming to the bed and covered up with a buffalo robe. Coyote Man thought about what he had said. He remembered that he had been told not to use the word Ghost Woman and the word "lazy." He regretted using those words. He was very sorry. He went over to his wife where she was covered with the buffalo robe.



Coyote Man pulled the robe up but found only a skeleton there. Coyote Man never did get his wife back after that. However, the sacred fly pipe ceremony for helping and cleansing and healing people is still carried on today.

Booklets available in the Level IV sequence are listed below. Numbers refer to the Planned Sequence of use in the *Teacher's Manual*. Materials developed by these tribes and others in the Northwest are included in the Levels I, II and III sequences.

1. *Warm Springs Animal Stories*
The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs
Reservation of Oregon
2. *Snail Women at Sq³a'le*
The Suquamish Tribe of the Port Madison
Reservation
3. *Blue Jay – Star Child/Basket Woman*
Muckleshoot Tribe
4. *Assiniboine Woman Making Grease*
Assiniboine Tribe of the Fort Peck Reservation
5. *Coyote*
The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs
Reservation of Oregon
6. *How the Summer Season Came*
Assiniboine Tribe of the Fort Belknap
Reservation
7. *Little Weasel's Dream*
Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead
Reservation
8. *Fort Hall Stories*
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall
Reservation
9. *The Bear Tepee*
Northern Cheyenne Tribe
10. *Sioux Stories and Legends*
Sioux Tribe of the Fort Peck Reservation
11. *Kootenai Stories*
Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead
Reservation
12. *Chief Mountain's Medicine*
Gros Ventre Tribe from the Fort Belknap
Reservation
13. *Coyote the Trickster*
Burns Paiute Reservation
14. *Running Free*
Shoalwater Bay
15. *Salish Coyote Stories*
Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead
Reservation
16. *Coyote and the Cowboys*
Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall
Reservation
17. *Napi's Journey*
Blackfeet Tribe
18. *Warm Springs Stories*
The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs
Reservation of Oregon
19. *Tepee Making*
Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead
Reservation
20. *Baskets and Canoes*
Skokomish Tribe
21. *Warrior People*
Blackfeet Tribe



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