The Lodge Journey
Many years ago a Blackfeet Indian chief died. He was laid to rest in a lodge some distance from the encampment for a period on four days and four nights. Then the Indian camp would move on to another area.
Some old ladies of the camp decided to go to the chief's burial lodge and cut some of the fine hide from the lodge for moccasins and leggings. They sharpened their knives and slowly proceeded toward the burial lodge. It took them a long time to reach the burial lodge. They traveled very slowly due to their age. They were sneaking because they knew they were not supposed to bother a dead person's possessions. It is believed that the person's spirit will come and reclaim their possessions during the night.
It was customary to sing and dance toward the lodge four times. They sang the appropriate song and danced toward the lodge for the first time. One of the old ladies pierced the lodge with her sharp knife. Then they backed away singing, “We are going to get some hides for our leggings and moccasins.” They rested awhile. Each time they danced close to the lodge one of the old ladies would cut the hole bigger. They danced back singing.
It was beginning to get dark. One of the grandchildren happened to ride by and saw the old ladies preparing to take some of the hide from the lodge. He was a child who delighted in teasing his old grandmother. A plan formed in his head. Quickly, he tied his horse and crept into the burial lodge. He laid down by the body of the dead chief and waited for the old ladies to finish dancing and singing.
Finally, the old ladies danced toward the lodge in a sneaky way. They were all a little afraid. They became brave and ripped the hole down to the bottom of the lodge. They all rushed to look in. They were stunned and shocked as they saw a ghost standing inside the lodge.
The old ladies were so frightened by this strange sight that they turned at the same time and tried to run away. As they turned, they ran into each other and knocked one another down.
The group was crawling, grabbing onto each other, pushing, yelling, and attempting to regain their balance in order to get away from the ghost. They forgot about being old and sneaky.
Eventually, the old ladies reached a thick bunch of bushes. They hurried in as fast as possible talking to each other in breathless and supposed soft voices. They were still frightened and hoped no one saw them. The group hurried on and finally stopped to listen and regain their breath.
After the ladies had rested awhile they looked up and saw another dead body buried in a tree just above them. The hands were hanging down as if reaching for them. Again they began grabbing, yelling, falling over each other, and running as fast as they could through the bushes.
The old ladies came to a bunch of magpies that were making a lot of noise. In fact these birds seemed to be laughing at them as they ran away. The ladies didn't stop. The group continued stumbling on, trying to get away from the burial grounds.
At last the old ladies reached the main camp. There, they learned it was the grandson who was in the lodge and not a ghost. They decided to go back again. This time not only did they do short dances but also sang very short songs. As the old ladies crept and opened the rip in the lodge a big black crow flew out. They were so frightened that they just fell down and started to cry and pray for help.
After nothing came to harm them, they jumped up, gathered their hides for moccasins and leggings and quickly started for their lodges.
That night, as they tried to sleep, their legs began to hurt and cramp up. They thought it was the chief bothering them and wanting his hides back. So the old ladies decided to take the hides back to the burial lodge. As they arrived they began to pray to the dead chief for protection. "Please don't bother us any more. We love you and respect you. We are returning your hides."
When they opened the door to place the hides inside, they came face to face with some big black eyes. They thought it was the chief. They soon discovered it was a porcupine who was inside the lodge. They dropped the hides and ran away as fast as they could go.
The old ladies never bothered to go back to the burial lodge to get hides for moccasins and leggings again. They were content to use what they had in camp.