

The Story of the Pet Crow

Sioux

Once upon a time there came to a large village a plague of crows. So thick were they that the poor women were sorely tried keeping them out of their tepees and driving them away from their lines of jerked buffalo meat. Indeed they got so numerous and were such a great nuisance that the Chief finally gave orders to his camp criers or heralds to go out among the different camps and announce the orders of their Chief, that war should be made upon the crows to extermination; that their nests were to be destroyed and all eggs broken. The war of extermination was to continue until not a crow remained, except the youngest found was to be brought to him alive.

For a week the war on the crows continued. Thousands of dead crows were brought in daily, and at the end of the week not a bird of that species could be seen in the neighborhood. Those that escaped the deadly arrow of the warriors, flew away, never to return to those parts again.

At the end of the war made upon the crows, there was brought to the Chief's tepee the youngest found. Indeed, so young was the bird that it was only the great medicine of the Chief that kept him alive until he could hop about and find his own food. The Chief spent most of his time in his lodge teaching the young crow to understand and talk the language of the tribe. After the crow had mastered this, the Chief then taught him the languages of the neighboring tribes. When the crow had mastered these different languages the chief would send him on long journeys to ascertain the location of the camps of the different enemies.

When the crow would find a large Indian camp he would alight and hop about, pretending to be picking up scraps, but really keeping his ears open for anything he might hear. He would hang around all day, and at night when they would all gather in the large council tent (which always stood in the center of the village) to determine upon their next raid, and plan for a horse stealing trip, Mr. Crow was always nearby to hear all their plans discussed. He would then fly away to his master (the Chief) and tell him all that he had learned.

The Chief would then send a band of his warriors to lie in ambush for the raiding party, and, as the enemy would not suspect anything they would go blindly into the pitfall of death thus set for them. Thus the crow was the scout of this chief, whose reputation as a Wakan (Holy man) soon reached all of the different tribes. The Chief's warriors would intercept, ambush and annihilate every war party headed for his camp.

So, finally learning that they could not make war on this chief's people unbeknown to them, they gave up making war on this particular band. When meat was running low in the camp this chief would send the crow out to look for buffalo. When he discovered a herd he would return and report to his master;

then the chief would order out the hunters and they would return laden with meat. Thus the crow kept the camp all the time informed of everything that would be of benefit to them.

One day the crow disappeared, over which there was great grief among the tribe. A week had passed away, when Mr. Crow reappeared. There was great rejoicing upon his return, but the crow was downcast and would not speak, but sat with a drooping head perched at the top of the chief's tepee, and refused all food that was offered to him.

In vain did the chief try to get the crow to tell him the cause of his silence and seeming grief. The crow would not speak until the chief said: "Well, I will take a few of my warriors and go out and try to ascertain what has happened to cause you to act as you do."

Upon hearing this, the crow said: "Don't go. I dreaded to tell you what I know to be a fact, as I have heard it from some great medicine men. I was traveling over the mountains west of here, when I spied three old men sitting at the top of the highest peak. I very cautiously dropped down behind a rock and listened to their talk. I heard your name mentioned by one of them, then your brother's name was mentioned. Then the third, who was the oldest, said: 'in three days from today the lightning will kill those two brothers whom all the nations fear.'"

Upon hearing what the crow stated the tribe became grief stricken. On the morning of the third day the chief ordered a nice tepee placed upon the highest point, far enough away from the village, so that the peals of thunder would not alarm the babies of the camp.

A great feast was given, and after the feasting was over there came in six young maidens leading the war horses of the two brothers. The horses were painted and decorated as if for a charge on the enemy. One maiden walked ahead of the chief's horse bearing in her hands the bow and arrows of the great warrior. Next came two maidens, one on either side of the prancing war steed, each holding a rein. Behind the chief's horse came the fourth maiden. Like the first, she bore in her hands the bow and arrows of the chief's brother. Then the fifth and sixth maidens each holding a rein, walked on either side of the prancing horse of the chief's brother. They advanced and circled the large gathering and finally stopped directly in front of the two brothers, who immediately arose and taking their bows and arrows vaulted lightly upon their war steeds, and singing their death song, galloped off amid a great cry of grief from the people who loved them most dearly.

Heading straight for the tepee that had been placed upon the highest point, adjacent to the village, they soon arrived at their destination and, dismounting from their horses, turned, waved their hands to their band, and disappeared within the tepee. Scarcely had they entered the lodge when the rumblings of

distant thunder could be heard. Nearer, and nearer, came the sound, until at last the storm overspread the locality in all its fury. Flash upon flash of lightning burst forth from the heavens. Deafening peals of thunder followed each flash. Finally, one flash brighter than any of the others, one peal more deafening than those preceding it, and the storm had passed.

Sadly the warriors gathered together, mounted their horses and slowly rode to the tepee on the high point. Arriving there they looked inside the lodge and saw the two brothers lying cold and still in death, each holding the lariat of his favorite war horse. The horses also lay dead side by side in front of the tent. (From this came the custom of killing the favorite horse of a dead warrior at the burial of the owner).

As the Indians sadly left the hill to return home, they heard a noise at the top of the tepee, and looking up they saw the crow sitting on one of the splintered tepee poles. He was crying most pitifully, and as they rode off he flew up high in the air and his pitiful "caw" became fainter and fainter till at they heard it no more. And from that day, the story goes, no crow ever goes near the village of that band of Indians.