





Blackfoot

Thunder's Gift of the First Pipe

Long ago, all-powerful Thunder struck the lodge of a young man and his wife. At first, neighbors thought the young man was dead, but he soon recovered. He could not find his wife, and he soon realized she had not just gone to fetch water or wood, but was nowhere to be found! People said that Thunder must surely have stolen her. . . .

The man was overcome with grief. He left the village, not knowing which way to go. He asked the birds and animals if they knew where Thunder lived, but they were too afraid to talk. "Go home!" Wolf told him. "When Thunder strikes, we are dead."

But still the young man walked on, until high in the mountains he came to a lodge made of stone, which belonged to the Raven chief. "Welcome, friend," he said. "Why have you come?" The young man told how he was looking for his wife, and he covered his head with his robe and cried. Raven told him: "Thunder lives close by, in a stone lodge like this. But nobody dares to enter. Hanging on the walls are the eyes of the people he has killed. Yes! It's a dreadful place! No man can enter and live. There is just one that Thunder fears, and cannot kill, and that is I, chief of all the Ravens. Take this Raven's wing; point it at him and he cannot harm you, and this elk-horn arrow too. Go! Search for your wife's eyes! The wing and arrow will protect you."

Entering Thunder's lodge, the young man sat close by the doorway. In the gloom at the back, sat dreaded Thunder, watching with malevolent piercing eyes. "You dare to enter my lodge," roared Thunder. "No man comes here and lives," and as he rose to strike, the man pointed the Raven's wing, and Thunder fell back. He rose again, and the young man shot the elk-horn arrow through the lodge cover, and suddenly sunlight filled that gloomy place. "Stop!" cried Thunder. "You are stronger! Take your wife's eyes, and have her back." The man cut the string which held them, and at that instant his beloved wife was beside him again.

Thunder spoke again: "Everyone knows my power! Everyone fears me! I live here during the summer, but when winter comes I travel with the birds far to the south." And then Thunder gave the man a bundle. "Take this pipe to your people. When you hear me return in the springtime, unwrap the pipe, and pray for my protection. I'll see the rising smoke, and I'll bring the rains to make everything grow, and to fill the berries with juice."

So it was that a young man, when searching for his wife, also received the first sacred pipe for his people.

