

The Origins of the Buffalo Dance Native American Lore

When the buffalo first came to be upon the land, they were not friendly to the people. When the hunters tried to coax them over the cliffs for the good of the villages, they were reluctant to offer themselves up. They did not relish being turned into blankets and dried flesh for winter rations. They did not want their hooves and horn to become tools and utensils nor did they welcome their sinew being used for sewing. "No, no," they said. We won't fall into your traps. And we will not fall for your tricks." So when the hunters guided them towards the abyss, they would always turn aside at the very last moment. With this lack of cooperation, it seemed the villagers would be hungry and cold and ragged all winter long. Now one of the hunters' had a daughter who was very proud of her father's skill with the bow. During the fullness of summer, he always brought her the best of hides to dress, and she in turn would work the deerskins into the softest, whitest of garments for him to wear. Her own dresses were like the down of a snow goose, and the moccasins she made for the children and the grandmothers in the village were the most welcome of gifts. But now with the hint of snow on the wind, and deer becoming more scarce in the willow breaks, she could see this reluctance on the part of the buffalo families could become a real problem. Hunter's Daughter decided she would do something about it. She went to the base of the cliff and looked up. She began to sing in a low, soft voice, "Oh, buffalo family, come down and visit me. If you come down and feed my relatives in a wedding feast, I will join your family as the bride of your strongest warrior." She stopped and listened. She thought she heard the slight rumbling sound of thunder in the distance. Again she sang, "Oh, buffalo family, come down and visit me. Feed my family in a wedding feast so that I may be a bride."

The thunder was much louder now. Suddenly the buffalo family began falling from the sky at her feet. One very large bull landed on top of the others, and walked across the backs of his relatives to stand before Hunter's Daughter. "I am here to claim you as my bride," said Large Buffalo. "Oh, but now I am afraid to go with you," said Hunter's Daughter. "Ah, but you must," said Large Buffalo, "For my people have come to provide your people with a wedding feast. As you can see, they have offered themselves up." "Yes, but I must run and tell my relatives the good news," said Hunter's Daughter. "No," said Large Buffalo. No word need be sent. You are not getting away so easily." And with that said, Large Buffalo lifted her between his horns and carried her off to his village in

the rolling grass hills. The next morning the whole village was out looking for Hunter's Daughter. When they found the mound of buffalo below the cliff, the father, who was in fact a fine tracker as well as a skilled hunter, looked at his daughter's footprints in the dust. "She's gone off with a buffalo, he said. I shall follow them and bring her back." So Hunter walked out upon the plains, with only his bow and arrows as companions. He walked and walked a great distance until he was so tired that he had to sit down to rest beside a buffalo wallow. Along came Magpie and sat down beside him. Hunter spoke to Magpie in a respectful tone, "O knowledgeable bird, has my daughter been stolen from me by a buffalo? Have you seen them? Can you tell me where they have gone?" Magpie replied with understanding, "Yes, I have seen them pass this way. They are resting just over this hill." "Well," said Hunter, would you kindly take my daughter a message for me? Will you tell her I am here just over the hill?" So Magpie flew to where Large Buffalo lay asleep amidst his relatives in the dry prairie grass. He hopped over to where Hunter's Daughter was quilling moccasins, as she sat dutifully beside her sleeping husband. "Your father is waiting for you on the other side of the hill," whispered Magpie to the maiden. "Oh, this is very dangerous," she told him. These buffalo are not friendly to us and they might try to hurt my father if he should come this way. Please tell him to wait for me and I will try to slip away to see him." Just then her husband, Large Buffalo, awoke and took off his horn. "Go bring me a drink from the wallow just over this hill," said her husband. So she took the horn in her hand and walked very casually over the hill. Her father motioned silently for her to come with him, as he bent into a low crouch in the grass. "No," she whispered. The buffalo are angry with our people who have killed their people. They will run after us and trample us into the dirt. I will go back and see what I can do to soothe their feelings." And so Hunter's daughter took the horn of water back to her husband who gave a loud snort when he took a drink. The snort turned into a bellow and all of the buffalo got up in alarm. They all put their tails in the air and danced a buffalo dance over the hill, trampling the poor man to pieces who was still waiting for his daughter near the buffalo wallow. His daughter sat down on the edge of the wallow and broke into tears. "Why are you crying?" said her buffalo husband. "You have killed my father and I am a prisoner, besides," she sobbed. "Well, what of my people?" her husband replied. We have given our children, our parents and some of our wives up to your relatives in exchange for your presence among us. A deal is a deal."

But after some consideration of her feelings, Large Buffalo knelt down beside her and said to her, "If you can bring your father back to life again, we will let him take you back home to your people." So Hunter's Daughter started to sing a little song. "Magpie, Magpie help me find some piece of my father which I can mend back whole again." Magpie appeared and sat down in front of her with his head cocked to the side. "Magpie, Magpie, please see what you can find," she sang softly to the wind which bent the grasses slightly apart. Magpie cocked his head to the side and looked carefully within the layered folds of the grasses as the wind sighed again. Quickly he picked out a piece of her father that had been hidden there, a little bit of bone. "That will be enough to do the trick," said Hunter's Daughter, as she put the bone on the ground and covered it with her blanket. And then she started to sing a reviving song that had the power to bring injured people back to the land of the living. Quietly she sang the song that her grandmother had taught her. After a few melodious passages, there was a lump under the blanket. She and Magpie looked under the blanket and could see a man, but the man was not breathing. He lay cold as stone. So Hunter's Daughter continued to sing, a little softer, and a little softer, so as not to startle her father as he began to move. When he stood up, alive and strong, the buffalo people were amazed. They said to Hunter's Daughter, "Will you sing this song for us after every hunt? We will teach your people the buffalo dance, so that whenever you dance before the hunt, you will be assured a good result. Then you will sing this song for us, and we will all come back to live again." Traditional Blackfoot story of How the Buffalo Dance was given to the people

Source: Camp Internet, Homeschool Campus

<http://www.rain.org/homeschool/reading/stories-native/story-2-origin-of-buffalo-dance.html>