



The Forsaken Brother

One summer evening, scarcely an hour before sunset, the father of a family lay in his lodge dying. Weeping beside him were his wife and three children. Two of them were almost grown up; the youngest was but a small child. They were the only human beings near the dying man, for the lodge stood on a little green mound away from all the others of the tribe.

A breeze from the lake briefly returned the sick man's strength. He raised himself a little and talked to his family.

"I know that I will leave you soon. Your mother, my partner of many years, will not stay long behind. She will join me in the land of the spirits. But you my children have just begun your lives. Promise me that you will not forsake your younger brother. There is much wickedness in the world and I leave him in your care. Please love him and hold him dear to your heart."

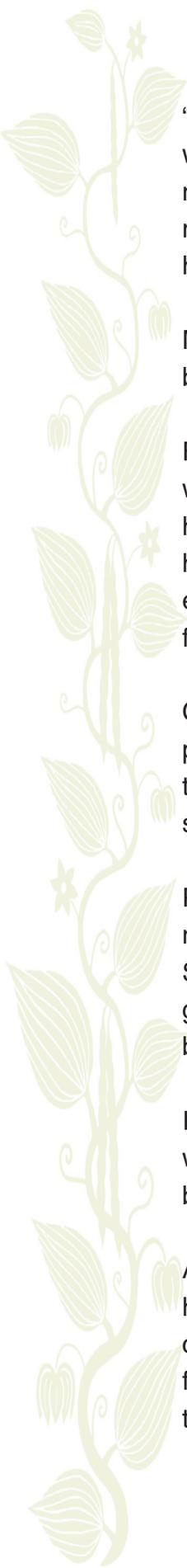
The effort to speak exhausted the man but he asked the older brother and the older sister to both take a vow that they would watch out for their younger brother and not forsake him.

They both chimed in, "We promise. Never, never will we forsake our little brother."

At that point, contented to hear the promise, the man died.

Five moons passed and on the sixth moon, the mother died too. In her last moments, she too made the older children promise to care for their younger brother.

The winter passed away and spring came. The girl, who was the oldest of the three siblings, directed her brothers. She was tender with the youngest brother who was sickly and very delicate. The older brother, however, already showed signs of selfishness and spoke, "My sister, are we always to live as if no other human beings are in the world? Must I never associate with other men? I have decided that I am going to visit the village of our tribe. I have made up my mind and you cannot prevent me from going."



“My brother,” replied his sister. “I do not say no to you, and you can do as you wish. We were not forbidden to associate with others, but we were commanded never to forsake one another. If we separate to follow our own selfish desires, we may be compelled to forsake our brother and both of us promised to care for him.”

Making no reply to his sister, the brother picked up his bow and arrow and other belongings and left.

For many moons the sister cared for the younger brother. At last, she too became weary with their solitude and wished to escape from her duty. Her strength and her ability to provide food and clothing had increased over the years, but she had a deep desire for company. Her loneliness troubled her more and more as each year passed. At last, thinking only of herself, she decided to leave and forsake her little brother.

One day, she placed all the food she had gathered in the lodge. After bringing a pile of wood to the door, she said to the younger brother, “Do not stray far from the lodge while I am gone. I am going to look for our brother. I shall be back soon.”

Picking up her bundles, she set off for the village. She discovered that the village next to the lake was wonderful and she became occupied with the people there. She became so distracted that soon the affection she felt for the younger brother gradually left her heart. For a long time, she did not even think about the sickly brother she had left in the woods.

In the meantime, the older brother had settled in a village on the same lake. He was not far from the graves of his parents and the woods where the younger brother had been abandoned.

All too soon, the little brother had eaten all the food left behind by his sister. He had to teach himself to dig nearby roots and find berries, so he could eat. Winter came, and the poor child was exposed to winds and cold. He could not find any food on his own. Sometimes he was forced to spend the night in a tree and eat the fragments left by wolves.



Soon he learned to depend entirely on the food the wolves left behind. He became so fearless that he would even sit close to them while they devoured the animals they had killed. His condition aroused the pity of the animals and they always left something for him. Thus he lived on the kindness of wolves until spring came. As the lake thawed, he learned to stay near the water like the wolf pack.

One day, it happened that his older brother was on the lake, in a canoe, fishing. He heard the faint cry of a child and paddled closer to see and listen. He did not know it was his younger brother. This is what he heard:

My brother, my brother!
I am now turning into a wolf.
I am turning into a wolf.

At the end of his song, the boy howled like a wolf. The older brother approached him and was shocked to find that the boy was half wolf and half human. Leaping up and heading for the shore, the older brother tried to catch him in his arms. "My brother, my brother, come to me."

But the boy fled still singing and howling as he ran. "I am turning into a wolf. I am turning into a wolf," he cried.

The older brother felt guilty. He felt his love for his younger brother return to his heart and called to him, "Brother, brother, please come back to me." But the nearer he came to the child, the more rapidly the boy changed into a wolf.

Now he even called to his sister:

My sister, my sister!
I am now turning into a wolf.
I am turning into a wolf.

When the change was complete, he announced, "I am a wolf! I am a wolf!"

Both the older brother and sister saw how they had failed to keep the promise they had made to their parents. They knew they would have to live their lives with the memory of losing their younger brother to the wolves. They never ceased to mourn him until their death.