

NEBRASKA FOLKLORE PAMPHLETS  
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## INDIAN GHOST LEGENDS

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### Editor's Note:

These Indian tales are reproduced as a result of reconstruction and piecing together. Elderly Indians and early residents, scattered over the State, furnished from their memories the titles and fragments of the stories. A great many other stories exist as titles only, and some others are too fragmentary to piece out. Those included in this pamphlet appear to be among the commonest or most generally known and are here reproduced by correlating versions of the same story from different sources, checked, where possible, with such anthologies as there are available. They are not offered as newly found versions of old tales. Our purpose has been to offer the stories themselves, in as complete a form as possible, for use in the schools.

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### PAHUKATAWA

One year toward the end of winter, five Pawnee men set out from a village to trap beaver. When they reached the south fork of the Loup River, they sent out a brave named Pahukatawa to look for signs of beaver and a good trapping ground.

Pahukatawa had not gone far from the camp when he met a party of Sioux. He ran across a little creek and hid in the brush. The other Pawnee heard shots and yells and hid themselves and waited. Next morning, the four men found Pahukatawa shot full of arrows and scalped, his arms and legs unjointed. They did not bury him. They returned to the village; and one of them called out, "Pahukatawa was killed!"

His father and mother grieved for him. It was nearly time for clearing patches for corn planting and hoeing, and the parents said, "We are old, and he helped us; but now he is gone."

After the spring planting, the whole tribe set out on their summer buffalo hunt. When they came to the place where Pahukatawa was killed, the father and mother searched for his bones, wishing to bury them. But they could find no bones--only arrows sticking straight up in the ground. The

mother cried so much she became blind. The tribe continued the buffalo hunt, and after two months, returned home by way of the Platte River.

One evening when the Pawnee were camped on the riverbank, they heard a voice. The air was warm and still; there was a light smoke in the air, and the sky was red in the west. The voice came from the other side of the river, saying, "Pahukatawa is coming back to you." The Indians all ran across the river to meet him, but no one was there. Then they heard the voice from the camp-side, "He is coming from here." They ran back, but he was not there. In a little while, they heard the voice from across the river again, saying, "He is coming." Then they stopped running about; they knew it was only a voice. The next day, they went down the river to the main village. After six months, their dried meat was all eaten up, and it was not yet spring.

One night at midnight, Pahukatawa came to the lodge where his mother was sleeping. His mother dreamed of him almost every night; so when he touched her and said, "Mother!" she thought she was dreaming. He touched her again, and she awoke.

Her mother put her arms around him and cried, "My son, you have come back to me." The boy said, "Yes, the Nahurac, the magical animals, made me alive again. I must go now; do not cry about me any more." When the mother awoke next morning, she found a piece of fresh meat by her side. Some nights later, the son came again. He said, "Mother, you are blind on account of me. Beside your daughter's bed there is water in a wooden bowl. Put your face in the water and open your eyes, and you shall see." He gave her some meat and left. The mother felt her way to the wooden bowl, put her face deep into the water, and opened her eyes. She could see. Everyone wondered how the mother's eyes had been healed, but she told only her eldest son.

Pahukatawa visited his brother next and said to him, "You have heard that I come to see our mother often. Put your lodge up outside the camp so that I can come and talk to you." When his brother had done this, Pahukatawa came and said to him, "Select two braves and let them go through the camp tomorrow night to summon the chiefs and the bravest warriors to your lodge. Do not build a fire."

The chiefs and braves gathered at the lodge just before dark and waited. When he came, it seemed that sparks of fire flew out from him with every step he made. "I am in everything," he said, "and I know everything--even your thoughts, even about the ocean which is so far off." He taught them two dances and songs about himself, and then he said, "A tribe of your enemies from far up the Missouri River is getting ready to make war against you. I will keep you informed concerning their movements."

Two nights later, Pahukatawa came and said, "Tomorrow night, they will be spying around camp. You must ask me to help you; I will make you strong. If you want to kill two or three, ask me. Call me Grandfather."

The next night, they danced and prayed. One man asked, "Let me strike nine, and the tenth, let me be wounded." Another said, "I want to strike five and capture the biggest man in the party." Another asked, "Let me strike two and then be killed." They heard Pahukatawa answer, "Let it be so," but they could not see him.

"Tomorrow morning," the voice said then, "the enemy will attack. I will send a fog from the north as a warning. Go out on the plain and have a skirmish; then draw off and watch the bluff. Charge when the wind changes."

The enemy came, and the warriors went out to meet them. After a skirmish, the Pawnee withdrew and looked toward the bluff. A white wolf came over the point, then turned and faced the north. Immediately, the wind changed, and the braves knew that the wolf was Pahukatawa.

They made the charge, and all promises were fulfilled. The braves chased and killed Sioux all day long and drove them far away.

The next night, Pahukatawa came to his brother's lodge and told him that he wished to speak to him alone. The brother sent all his wives out of the lodge. Then Pahukatawa said, "Brother, I want you to feel all over my body." The brother felt of his arms, legs, chest, and head. He felt something soft on the head, and Pahukatawa said, "That is down-feathers."

Then he told his brother about his death. "The Nahurac took pity on me," he said. "Flies, bugs, fishes, birds, deer, wolves, and other animals helped me come to life again. They brought my flesh and bones together and laid each piece in its own place, but the top of my skull they could not find. In place of the skull, they put the down-feathers. Then they danced, sang, prayed, and passed their paws over me. At length, I began to breathe; I was alive again, not as a person but as a spirit.

"I am in everything. I hear everything. I will help you in sickness and in war, but there is one thing: you must not get tired of me."

"I shall never get tired of you," the brother said.

After that, Pahukatawa often gave help to the Pawnee. But one night when he came to his brother's lodge, another man was sleeping there. Pahukatawa sent the man to summon his brother. The brother told the messenger to say that he was sleeping. Pahukatawa sent the messenger three times, and the third time, the brother said, "Tell him I cannot come; I am too sleepy." Then Pahukatawa said, "Very well. Tell my brother to sleep all he wants. He will see me no more. I shall go to another tribe."

So Pahukatawa went to the Rees, and for a long time, the Pawnee were angry at the brother.

NOTE: When this story was related in 1888, the Indian narrator said that a Ree woman who had recently died had seen and talked with Pahukatawa when she was a child.

## THE GHOST BRIDE

In a Pawnee village, one of the young women died. The tribe buried her in her finest clothes and then started out on a hunt.

The girl's lover had been away on a visit and returned to the village while the tribe was gone. From far off, he saw someone sitting on top of a lodge; coming nearer, he saw that it was the girl he

loved. She got down when she saw him coming and went inside. The young man went into the lodge and asked, "Why are you here alone?"

"The people have gone on the hunt," she replied, "I was sulky, and my relatives went away without me."

The young man wanted her to go with him and be married immediately. But the girl said, "No, I cannot marry you yet. You must not be afraid of what is going to happen. The ghosts will dance tonight." Then the young man knew that she had died and had come back. Often a ghost of the dead came back and talked to the living. Then the other ghosts would come and dance, going from one lodge to another, singing and dancing. The young man could hear them coming along the deserted streets, going in and out of the lodges. When they came to the lodge where the young man was, they sang and danced around him.

The next day, the young man persuaded the girl to follow the tribe and go with them on the hunt. They started out, but she told him she could not marry him yet. When they came to a hill in side of the camp, the girl stopped. "Now," she said, "you must go to the village first and get a place ready for me. I must sleep behind a curtain and must remain behind the curtain for four days and four nights. You must not speak to me nor mention my name."

The young man went down to where the tribe was encamped and found his lodge ready for him. He told a woman, one of his relatives, to go out and bring in the girl who was waiting on the hill. "Who is the woman?" the relative asked. In order not to mention her name, he told who her mother and father were. "It cannot be that girl," the woman said, "for she died a few days before we went on the hunt."

The young man did not answer but looked very cross; so the woman went out to the hill. She came back presently and said the girl was not there. The young man went up to look for her, and there she stood waiting for him. "You disobeyed me and told who I was," she said, "Now I shall always be a ghost. Because of what you have done, I cannot live again upon earth." Then she disappeared.

The young man went back to the camp, and that night, he died in his sleep.

## THE WHIRLWIND GHOST-MAN

Once, long ago, a man left his home and went to live in a graveyard. Whenever he came to the village, people noticed that whirlwinds came up by him as he walked along. They said that he must be a ghost.

Some time after the Ghost-Man went to live in the graveyard, a man in the village began to feel sick. When he walked about, a ghost or whirlwind surrounded him and tried to carry him away. The Ghost-Man heard about this and offered to cure the sick man. He sat down beside the bed, picked up dust from the earth floor, and threw it in the air. The dust became a whirlwind which enveloped the sick man and made him well. The Ghost-man cured other sick people.

One man became sick because he had dreamed of a dead person. The Ghost-Man went to his lodge

to help him; but instead of throwing dust into the air, he whirled himself around and became a whirlwind which enveloped the sick man and made him well. When the whirlwind settled, a skeleton fell to the ground. This frightened the people, and they ran out of the lodge. The cured man gathered up the bones and buried them, and the Ghost-Man was never seen again.

After that, the Indians said that whirlwinds were ghosts.

## THE WIFE WHO RETURNED FROM SPIRIT LAND

**\*It is possible that this legend is a variant and an elaboration of The Ghost Bride. Another similar story is The Ghost Wife.**

An Indian brave returned from a journey and found his village quiet and apparently deserted. The tribe had gone on a hunt, he thought; perhaps someone had stayed home and would give him something to eat. He noticed smoke coming up from one lodge and saw, through a window, a young woman sitting on the ground. He could not see her face. Around her were buffalo robes and other presents of the sort that are placed on graves.

After awhile, the girl said, without turning her head, "Come in, but do not come near me. Sit by the door." The young man knew the voice. This was the girl he had loved, and he knew that now she was dead.

The young man sat by the doorway all the night. Next morning, the girl told him to come to the fire pit and take some meat from the kettle on the fire. Every night after that, she allowed him to come a little nearer to her. At last, he came to where she was sitting, but the girl told him not to touch her. She told him to lie down in the bed and rest; she was just a ghost, she said, and did not need rest.

One night, the girl told the young man that something was going to happen; he must not be afraid and run away, or she might disappear. Soon the young man heard drumming, shouting, and singing in the village. The sounds came nearer, and he heard a noise like little children running before the drummers. They seemed to come into the lodge, though the young man could not see anyone.

The dancing stopped, and a voice said, "We have smoked." The girl told the young man to reply, "Mawa," and he did. Then the dancers left the lodge; the young man could tell by the moving away of the sounds.

The same thing happened the next night, but this time, the young man could see the feet of the dancers as they circled around the fireplace. The next night, the young man could see the children's bodies. The next night, when the dancing was over, the leader said, "Young man, we knew that you would be poor in spirit because this girl had died, and we decided to send her back to the living. You see her, but she is not real, and you must not make her angry, or you will lose her. There is one thing more you must do before this girl can stay with you."

When the dancers had gone, the girl said, "Those ghosts were my uncles and other relatives. They are helping you to get me back."

For a few days, there were no more dancing spirits. The young man rested and gained flesh. They had fresh corn to eat and dried buffalo meat. One day, the girl said, "Tomorrow is the day you must do that one thing more. It will take all your strength. When I tell you to, you must take hold of me; for my living uncles will be at my grave, and I will try to disappear."

The following morning, they went out to the edge of the village toward the hill where the girl was buried. They stopped when they saw her uncles approaching the grave. As her uncles were placing meat on her grave, she said, "Take hold of me quickly." The young man seized her, and the girl threw herself this way and that. The young man was thrown to the ground, and the girl got away. When the young man got back to the lodge, there was the young woman laughing at him. "You have no strength at all," she said. "If I get away from you four times, you will never see me again. Now let us go out; and you shall try again."

Twice more the girl escaped. When they returned to the grave the fourth time, the girl said, "This is your last chance. If you want to keep me, you must use more strength. If my uncles hear you calling, they will come; if they touch me, then I will stay."

This time, the young man shouted to the uncles, and they came running to help him. The girl struggled with all her might and knocked the young man to the ground, but he held her by the hair. When all the uncles had hold of the girl, she gave up. "You have held me, " she said to the young man, "and I will stay with you."

One night after the boy and girl were married, the girl noticed her mother watching her. Presently, the old woman took a hoe and went out. When she returned, the girl said, "Mother, I know where you have been. You found my body in the grave, and you think I am not your daughter. My body lies up there; my spirit is here. I can disappear if I am not happy."

The young man and the girl had a boy child and lived happily together for many years. At last, the man decided to take another wife. The girl told him she was afraid there would be trouble, but she wanted him to be happy, so she consented.

They were happy a few years more; then one day, the second wife was jealous because the husband was wearing a pair of moccasins that his first wife's relatives had made for him. The first wife said to her husband, "Your other wife called me a ghost-wife, just as I said she would." The husband struck her; they argued, and he struck her again. "I shall go away," she said, "and take my child with me." He struck at her, but she disappeared; in her place, a whirlwind arose, spun around, and vanished.

At evening, the husband went up the hill to his wife's grave. He cried and begged her to come back and stayed there till late in the night. The people put the child to bed; next morning, it was dead. They took the child and buried it in the mother's grave.

The husband mourned at the grave four days and four nights. Then the woman appeared to him and said, "I am not coming back to you. Do not stay around the grave for you shall never see me again." Then she disappeared in a whirlwind.

The man stayed at the grave. His other wife came for him, but he would not go with her. He stayed at the grave until he starved to death, and then his people took him away and buried him.

## PROOF OF GHOSTS

One time, when the Skidi Pawnee were returning to the village from a hunt, a man who did not believe in ghosts happened to go ahead of the others. In the evening, after darkness came on, the man went to bed. He lay thinking about the stories an old man in the tribe had told about ghosts. Suddenly, he heard strange noises all about the lodge; there were voices of persons he knew were dead, and one voice said, "White Hawk has come back to the village." The voices went on and repeated what he had said about the number of bundles of dried meat for the medicine-men's dance and for all the other dances. And they quoted him correctly. Still he said to himself, "These are my people; I will pay no attention to them." But as they seemed to come closer, he cried out, "Now I believe the story of the old man; I know you are spirits of the dead."

The spirits then went away, and the man went to sleep. In the night, the rest of the tribe returned, and in the morning, the man told them about the visit of the spirits. But there were two women who still did not believe.

It happened next evening that these two women were out gathering corn, and they stayed late in the field. It was dark when they started for home. On the way, they saw two other women approaching, one of them carrying a baby in her arms. Suddenly, the strangers and the baby vanished into air. The women who had been gathering corn were so frightened that when they reached the village, they were sick. They now believed that dead people lived, and that their ghosts appeared to human beings.

## SALINE RIVER GHOST

In a Pawnee village on the banks of the Platte lived the chief warrior of the nation, known throughout the surrounding country for his fierceness and cruelty. In every hostile village for miles around, there was wailing for those he had killed. Women and children were afraid to go far from their homes.

He thought of nothing but killing. He would remain behind alone on the battlefield and bathe his hands in the blood of his victims. He would surprise and kill warriors who stole back to mourn for some friend or relative. His own people were proud of him as a leader, but they were afraid of him; they never went to this lodge to visit. He would sit alone and plan new attacks.

There was a beautiful girl in the village, and many of the warriors desired her. At last, the chief warrior noticed her, too, and told her father that he wanted the girl for his wife. The father did not want to give his daughter to so cruel a man, but he knew that he could not keep her from him.

The fierce warrior really loved the girl, and, at last, he seemed to be happy, and his people became more friendly. The girl loved her husband, and she was the only one who could make him change his mind about anything. He would do almost anything she asked him to do. He was like a fierce

animal tamed. But he did not have his wife long; in a few months, she died.

When she was buried, he did not moan or cry. He went and sat alone in his lodge. Some of the people went to his lodge, but he would not let them in. All night, he sat silent in his lodge, and in the morning, he came out. His body was covered with war paint. He had his bow and arrows and was ready to go on the warpath, but he did not invite anyone to go with him. His eyes had an angry look. Walking with a firm step, not looking at anyone, he went to where his wife was buried. As he looked down at the grave, his muscles seemed to relax, and he bowed his head. He picked a flower from the grass nearby and dropped it upon the mound. Then he straightened up and strode off across the prairie.

He came back in about a month. He brought back the scalps of men, women and children, and hung them in the smoke of his lodge. The next day, he started out again without speaking to anyone in the village. This time, he was gone a week. The people expected to see him bring back more scalps, but instead, he brought a big lump of salt. His countenance did not look so fierce, and some of the bolder ones asked him about the salt. Then he told them this story:

He had traveled many miles over the prairie. The sun had gone down, and he was tired. He went to sleep on a hill but was awakened in the night by the cries of a woman. He sat up; it was moonlight. A little distance away, he saw a decrepit old hag holding a tomahawk raised ready to strike. At her feet, a young woman was kneeling and begging for mercy.

The chief wondered how two women came to be there alone in the middle of the night. There was no village within forty miles, and he had made sure there was no hunting party near before he lay down to sleep. He got up and stood quite near them, but they did not notice him. When the girl saw that the old hag would show no mercy, she jumped up and tried to get hold of the tomahawk, but the old hag was stronger than she. The hag twisted one hand in the girl's long black hair and again raised the tomahawk. As the old woman made ready to strike, the girl's face was turned toward the warrior, and he looked upon the features of his dead wife. The chief rushed at the hag and split her skull with his tomahawk, but suddenly the earth opened, and both women sank from sight. The hole closed, and a rock of white salt stood on the spot where the women had struggled. The chief did not want to leave the spot where he had seen his wife. Finally, he broke off a piece of salt from the side where his wife knelt and brought it home with him.

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All the tribes who visited the salt basin had heard this story. Many of them believe that the rock of salt is guarded by the old hag, and that the only way to get any salt is to attack her. They do this by beating the ground with their tomahawks, and the old hag wails a protest. They continue this ceremony until they think the woman will let them get the salt without performing black magic against them. It is said that even the chiefs who ridicule this superstition perform the ceremony before collecting salt.

## THE WOMAN AND THE SPIRITS

A small boy died one spring and was buried on a hill that was bright with grass and flowers. Soon

afterward, the tribe started out on their annual summer hunt in the sandhills, many days' journey to the west. As they traveled farther from the village, the mother felt more and more desolate. Unable to eat the evening meal, she went to the edge of the camp and sat there alone. After awhile, she got up and started walking.

In the morning, weak and tired, she reached the home village. The village was still; there was not even a dog to greet her. She sat and wept for her child. Presently, she heard sounds. There seemed to be whispering and murmuring all about her. Every day after that, she heard these sounds; they were clearest when she fasted. Gradually, she began to understand something of what they were saying. She learned that they were the spirits of persons who had died in the village, and that it was their custom to come back when the village was deserted.

In a few days, the mother could not only hear the spirits but also talk with them. They did not speak as living people do; there was a murmuring and rustling like the sounds in the grass or the growing grain. The woman could not see the ghosts at first. Then she could see feet moving along on the floor, later she could see as far as the knees.

The people were gone a whole year. They were surprised to find the woman in her lodge when they returned; but when they spoke to her, she could not answer them. Her lips moved, but no sounds came--not even a whisper.

In a few days, she was able to talk again. She took up her work and lived with her people as she did before the death of her child.

#### A SCALPED MAN MAKES MEDICINE

A party of Pawnee once went to the country of the Comanche Indians to steal ponies, where they were attacked by the Comanches. Many of the Pawnee warriors were killed, and the rest of the party fled in terror. The flight continued until night came when camp was made.

One man who was badly wounded was left on the field with a buffalo that had been killed and dressed by the others, together with water and wood. The party of survivors left, promising to send his relatives to carry him home.

The party was scarcely out of sight when the wounded man heard voices and thought that the enemy had discovered him. He was frightened, but he did not move. Suddenly, he heard a laugh, and then someone spoke in his ear, "Are you afraid? I made all that noise."

The wounded man looked around, but he could see no one. He missed some of his meat the next morning, and he thought that the enemy had surely found him. He was so frightened that he cried out that whoever was stealing his meat should come and kill him. But no one came, and each night, more of his meat was stolen. Often, he heard voices, but when he called out, he heard only a laugh in reply. When his last piece of meat was gone, he called out again. He then heard a laugh, and a scalped man appeared before him and said, "I will take you to my home and heal your wounds," whereupon he put the wounded man on his back and carried him to a big cave.

In the cave, he saw blue beads, eagle feathers, pieces of silk, wampum, and many buffalo robes. Back of a buffalo skull was his dried meat. His savior laid him on one of the buffalo robes. He looked around but could see no opening and wondered how they had entered the cave.

Every day, the scalped man left the cave. And always just before he returned, the wounded man would hear voices--war cries and moans. Then he would hear a laugh, and the scalped man would appear. One day, he thought he heard his father and mother calling to him, got up and went to search for them, but could find no door. As he was limping about, the voice of the scalped man said, "Get back before the people see you and take you away!" Then he laughed and appeared before the wounded man. He told them he had made all the noises, but the Pawnee would not believe him until he made a noise like many people talking at once. The scalped man then offered to give the Pawnee this power of making noises.

The scalped man taught the wounded Pawnee to make sounds of voices and to do many slight-of-hand tricks. He healed the wounded leg and put white clay all over his body. He put a white eagle feather in the Pawnee's hair, saying, "This will give you power. It stands for me! I am a spirit!" And he added, "This feather will help you to run fast or to fight or to do whatever you wish. Also, cover your body with white clay. Carry pieces of wild sage with you, and they will turn into arrows at your wish. Now I have taught you all that I know. Do not mention me to anyone, or I will punish you."

The scalped man then told him to return to the place where his friends had left him, for in a few days, his people would come for him. When his people came, they were surprised to find his wound healed. He asked them for some presents of beads, tobacco, and feathers, and during the night, he slipped away and took the presents to the scalped man. The next morning, he started back to the village with his relatives.

He went to the medicine lodge where the medicine men were performing and asked them to permit him to do some slight-of-hand tricks. When he controlled his voice so that it sounded like many voices, the medicine men were surprised and called him The Wonder Man.

During a ceremony of the medicine men, an alarm was given that the enemy were approaching the village. The Pawnee warriors rushed out to meet the attack. One of the enemy warriors possessed the power to turn arrows so that they would not strike him, and the Pawnee were afraid of him. The Wonder Man covered his body with white clay, put on the downy feather, hung an eagle wing whistle around his neck, and went to the attack. By the time he reached the field of battle, the Pawnee were already fleeing from the enemy. The Wonder Man went swiftly to the rear of the enemy and shot arrows at them, and though the enemy returned the fire, he was not hit. The one enemy warrior also had power to turn away arrows, but the Wonder Man killed him with his war club. When the enemy saw this, they gave way, but the Wonder Man rushed in and killed many.

The Wonder Man fought in many battles during his life and was never wounded. When he was in middle age, he committed suicide. He knew, by divination, that the Scalped Man was gone, and did not wish to live.

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