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This legend comes from the Multnomah and Clatsop Tribes, about a young woman who gives herself so that those she loves may continue on.

“A Legend of Multnomah Falls”

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Many years ago the head chief of the Multnomah people had a beautiful young daughter. She was especially dear to her father because he had lost all his sons in fighting, and he was now an old man. It was important to use great care and to pick a husband from a strong and honorable tribe. He chose a young chief from his neighbors, the Clatsop people. To the wedding feast came many people from tribes all along the lower Columbia River.

The wedding feast was to last for several days. There were swimming races and canoe races on the river. There would be bow-and-arrow contests, horse racing, dancing, and feasting. The whole crowd was merry, for both the maiden and the young warrior were loved by their people.

But without warning the happiness changed to sorrow. A sickness came over the village. Children and young people were the first victims, and then strong men became ill and died in only one day. The wailing of the women was heard throughout the Multnomah village and the camps of the guests.

"The Great Spirit is angry with us," the people said to each other. The head chief called together his old men and his warriors for counsel and asked gravely, "What can we do to soften the Great Spirits wrath?"

Only silence followed his question. At last one of the old medicine men arose. "There is nothing we can do. If it is the will of the Great Spirit that we die, then we must meet our death like brave men. The Multnomah have ever been a brave people."

The other members of the council nodded in agreement, all except one, the oldest medicine man. He had not attended the wedding feast and games, but he had come in from the mountains when he was called by the chief. He rose and, leaning on his stick, spoke to the council. His voice was low and feeble.

"I am a very old man, my friends; I have lived a long, long time. Now you will know why. I will tell you a secret my father told me. He was a great medicine man of the Multnomah, many summers and many snows in the past.

When he was an old man, he told me that when I became old, the Great Spirit would send a sickness upon our people. All would die, he said, unless a sacrifice was made to the Great Spirit. Some pure and innocent maiden of the tribe, the daughter of a chief, must willingly give her life for her people. Alone, she must go to a high cliff above Big River and throw herself upon the rocks below. If she does this, the sickness will leave us at once."

Then the old man said," I have finished, my fathers secret is told. Now I can die in peace."

Not a word was spoken as the medicine man sat down. At last the chief lifted his head. "Let us call in all the maidens whose fathers or grandfathers have been headmen."

Soon a dozen girls stood before him, among them his own loved daughter. The chief told them what the old medicine man had said. "I think his words are words of truth," he added.

Then he turned to his medicine men and his warriors, "Tell our people to meet death bravely. No maiden shall be asked to sacrifice herself. The meeting has ended."

The sickness stayed in the village, and many more people died. The daughter of the head chief sometimes wondered if she should be the one to give her life to the Great Spirit. But she loved the young warrior, she wanted to live.

A few days later she saw the sickness on the face of her lover. Now she knew what she must do. She cooled his hot face, cared for him tenderly, and left a bowl of water by his bedside. Then she slipped away alone, without a word to anyone.

All night and all the next day she followed the trail to the great river. At sunset she reached the edge of a cliff overlooking the water. She stood there in silence for a few moments, looking at the jagged rocks far below. Then she turned her face toward the sky and lifted up her arms. She spoke aloud to the Great Spirit.

"You are angry with my people. Will you make the sickness pass away if I give you my life? Only love and peace and purity are in my heart. If you will accept

me as a sacrifice for my people, let some token hang in the sky. Let me know that my death will not be in vain and that the sickness will quickly pass."

Just then she saw the moon coming up over the trees across the river. It was the token. She closed her eyes and jumped from the cliff.

Next morning, all the people who had expected to die that day arose from their beds well and strong. They were full of joy. Once more there was laughter in the village and in the camps of the guest.

Suddenly someone asked, "What caused the sickness to pass away? Did one of the maidens---?"

Once more the chief called the daughters and granddaughters of the headmen to come before him. This time one was missing

The young Clatsop warrior hurried along the trail which leads to Big River. Other people followed. On the rocks below the high cliff they found the girl they all loved. There they buried her.

Then her father prayed to the Great Spirit, "Show us some token that my daughters spirit has been welcomed into the land of the spirits."

Almost at once they heard the sound of water above. All the people looked up to the cliff. A stream of water, silvery white, was coming over the edge of the rock.

It broke into floating mist and then fell at their feet. The stream continued to float down in a high and beautiful waterfall.

For many summers the white water has dropped from the cliff into the pool below. Sometimes in winter the spirit of the brave and beautiful maiden comes back to see the waterfall. Dressed in white, she stands among the trees at one side of Multnomah Falls. There she looks upon the place where she made her great sacrifice and thus saved her lover and her people from death.

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