

sign of a village's boundaries. She could hear feet crunching in the snow behind her as she ran but she did not look back. A clearing opened and she saw many lodges. Light flickered through the door of the closest lodge and she stumbled inside. Men and women looked up in surprise at the wildeyed woman who stood before them holding a baby.

"A monster," she said, "outside. It chases me!" Several of the men stepped out, clutching their war clubs. There, at the edge of the village, the creature stood, its jaws covered with blood, its eyes glowing like red flames. It came no closer and as the dawn light grew stronger it turned, went back into the trees and was gone.

When the woman had finished her story, a wise old woman spoke. "I was afraid this would happen. That lodge was the home of one whose name we do not speak. He was said to be a lover of evil. Now we must go to that place and dig out the root before it grows more wicked fruits."

Before the sun was two hands high, a group of warriors came with the wise old woman and the woman who had lost her husband to the lodge deep in the woods. Inside they found the body of the woman's husband still on the bed. All of the flesh had been eaten from his body. Within the cedar box, covered with blood, the skeleton of the wizard lay. The wise old woman placed herbs inside the cedar box and in front of the doorway.

"Now," she said, "pile dry wood all around." The men did as she told them. Then she set fire to the wood. "Stand in a circle all around the lodge," she said. "Watch and see if anything comes out of the flames."

Soon the whole lodge was burning. A noise like the screaming of a man began to come from the middle of the flames. Something was running back and forth within the lodge, trying to get out. Then, just as the walls of the lodge collapsed, a huge screech owl flew out. The circle of men struck at it, but it flew into the forest. So it was that the skeleton was destroyed. The woman who lost her husband found friends in the village. Eventually she married a man who helped her and listened to her advice. And it is said that from that time on people who died were no longer placed in cedar boxes above the ground. Instead they were buried in the earth. This way a wandering spirit would not find it so easy to escape and roam the night.

Kathleen Ragan's commentary (edited for length):

Traditionally the Iroquois lived in longhouses, which averaged 50 to 100 feet in length and 16 to 18 feet wide. Each longhouse was headed by a clan mother. Women owned the family's property and arranged the marriages. Children inherited clan membership (Bear, Wolf, Deer, etc) through their mothers. When a man married, he went to live with his wife's clan but he never became a part of her clan. The Iroquois were a democratic society and although men were the chiefs the women controlled the nomination process. The Iroquois were by tradition a matrilineal society; maybe that is why this story presents so many details reflecting a woman's perspective. The woman trudges on ahead breaking a path through deep snow, the child in a cradleboard on her back, she also carries most of the food. The man walks ahead complaining while the woman says nothing; she senses the evil of the lodge, while he does not and refuses her advice. He hogs the bed and the blankets and is killed by the vampire, while the woman's emotional intelligence and fast legs help her escape. The end of the story focuses on the woman's point of view and the future she found for herself in a new village with new friends.

• from Kathleen Ragan's *Fearless Girls, Wise Women and Beloved Sisters: Heroines in Folktales from Around the World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998)

The Vampire Skeleton Iroquois Tale

Many years ago there was a man who was said to be an evil wizard. Though no one could prove it, it was said that in the dark of the night he would would into an owl and go about doing bad things. When he died, no one was unhappy. He had no family and his body was placed-as was the custom in those days-in a box made of cedar wood which was left inside his lodge deep in the woods.

Many moons passed. It was the time of long nights. A woman, her husband and their small child came travelling through the woods. As they walked, the man complained. "Why is it that we must go visit your relatives? Why is it we must bring them food? We hardly have food enough for ourselves. Now we must walk through this deep snow and it is late at night."

The woman said nothing. She was embarrassed that he complained so about helping others. She trudged on ahead, breaking a trail through the snow. Their little boy rode in the cradleboard on her back. Most of the food was in the pack she carried in her arms. Then they came to a clearing. There, in front of them, was an old lodge.

"Ah," her husband said, "this is a place we can spend the night. It is a long walk to the nearest village."

The woman did not like the look of the place. "I am not tired," she said. "Let us keep walking."

But the husband would not listen. "It is decided," he said. "We shall stay here."

As they came closer to the place, the little boy woke up in his cradleboard and began to cry. It was very hard for the woman to soothe him. "If your child is not quiet," said the husband as he looked around the lodge, "I will not get much sleep." He walked over to one corner of the room where a bed had been made of spruce boughs. Near the bed was a large cedar box. "There is only one bed," said the man. "I shall sleep in it since it is closer to the door. Then if any trouble comes I can protect you and the child." He climbed onto the bed, wrapped his blankets about him and was soon asleep.

The woman made herself as comfortable as she could on the floor in the middle of the lodge. It was cold and she only had one small blanket which she wrapped around her child. Grandmother Moon's bright face was just beginning to appear from behind a cloud when she finally fell asleep.

How long she slept she did not know, but a strange sound wakened her. It was like the sound of an owl crushing the bones of a mouse. She opened her eyes slowly and looked around. Grandmother Moon's light was shining in through the open door. Her husband still lay wrapped in his blankets on the bed, but the woman sensed that something was wrong. She crept closer to look at him and saw a terrible thing. Her husband was dead. His throat had been torn out. Near his bed the cedar box was bathed in moonlight and its lid was open. She looked into it and saw an even more frightening thing! Within the box was the skeleton of a large man. The teeth of the skeleton were red with blood.

Ah, she thought, That is the body of one who was evil when he was alive. Even death has not stopped him from thirsting for human blood. He is satisfied now, but soon he will come after me and my child. I must not let him know he has been discovered.

Crawling silently back to the place on the floor where her baby lay wrapped in the blanket and cradleboard, she pretended to go to sleep. Then, slowly as a heron moves when it is stalking a fish, she began to move toward the open door, dragging her baby with her. When she was finally close to the doorway, swiftly as a leaping deer she sprang to her feet and rushed through the door, the cradleboard in her arms. Her feet sank in the deep snow as she ran. Now she was out of the clearing and on the trail to the village. She heard a terrible cry. "HOOO-WEHHHHH! HOOO-WEHHHHI" It was the scream of the vampire skeleton. It had discovered she was gone and was on her trail.

On she ran, on and on. Then the cry sounded again. "HOOOWEHHHH! HOOO-WEHHH! HOOO-WEHHH!" It was closer than before, but she kept running. She could see that the night was ending. The light which comes before dawn was beginning to paint the eastern sky. If only she could run just a little further!

"HOOO-WEHHH! HOOO-WEHHH! HOOO-WEHHH! HOOOWEHHHI" Again that awful cry came, right behind her. Her blood froze and she stumbled with fear but she kept on running. Her husband had said the village was far away, but she knew his words were only an excuse to hide his laziness. Ahead she saw a tree marked with a circle and a cross. It was the