

QEYQEYŠÍ'S MARRIAGE*

Told by Pete Beaverhead
St. Ignatius, MT, 24 February 1975

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The story of how Qeyqeyší managed to get married is a comic account of a young man's brashness. Its humorous effect is evident not only in the content and in the story-teller's style, but in his audience's reaction: their laughter at the high points in the tale sometimes drowns his words. The translation below is inevitably a feeble reflection of the oral version; much of the texture of the story is lost in the switch from Salish to English and from oral performance (as recorded on tape) to the written page. The ideal audience for this story would be able to understand and appreciate the story-teller's words on tape. Providing such an audience is a major goal of the community's ongoing efforts to ensure that current and future generations can learn their ancestors' language. But for those who don't know the language, this translation will at least give a glimpse of the community's traditional oral literature. The story may be true, or it may be fiction, or (probably most likely) it may be a combination of the two. But regardless of its origin, it is a fine example of the story-teller's art, and a fine illustration of a people's good-natured humor.

The story must have been passed down through six or seven generations of story-tellers of the Pend d'Oreilles people of Montana. The Pend d'Oreilles—so named by whites, supposedly because they wore shell earrings—were and are so close ethnically, linguistically, and geographically to the other two Salishan tribes on the Flathead reservation that they are generally designated by a single name. Whites have called them all Flatheads since early in the 19th century; there are various conflicting theories about the source of the name, since this tribe never flattened their babies' heads as some coastal tribes (notably the Chinooks) did, but in any case the name is now being replaced by the group's self-name, Salish. Strictly speaking, 'Salish' may originally have been the self-name only of the Salishan people encountered by Lewis and Clark, the tribe whose name later became the designation for the entire language family. They lived in the Bitterroot Valley at that time, and they are now sometimes called Bitterroot Salish to distinguish them from other Salishan peoples on the modern reservation. The name Salish is used by modern tribal members to refer to all three Salishan tribes of Montana: the Bitterroot Salish, the Pend d'Oreilles, and the Kalispels. More Kalispels live on their own reservation in Washington than in Montana, but the only home of the Bitterroot Salish and the Pend d'Oreilles is in Montana.

1. THE STORY'S BACKGROUND, SETTING, AND CHARACTERS. St. Ignatius, the site of a handsome mission church built in the 19th century, lies in the Mission Valley of northwestern Montana. It is in the heart of the Flathead Reservation, home to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Since before reservation times St. Ignatius has been a residential center of the Pend d'Oreilles, one of the four tribes in the Confederacy. Several miles to the south, in and around Arlee, live the Bitterroot Salish; to the northwest, around Camas Prairie, live Kalispels; and to the north, by the southern half of Flathead Lake in Elmo and neighboring areas, live the Kootenai, who speak a language unrelated to Salishan and to all other known languages. The Mission Mountains, where patches of snow can be seen even during the summer months, rise steeply on the eastern side of St. Ignatius, and on the west, beyond the National Bison Range, are the Cabinet Mountains.

The heavily traveled (and dangerous) two-line highway US 93 carries most long-distance traffic through the valley, from Missoula in the south to Polson at the southern end of Flathead Lake and on along the lake's western shore to Kalispell in the north. Between mileposts 32 and 33 is Doug Allard's Flathead Indian Museum and Trading Post. Opposite Doug Allard's, a short road leads into the compact St. Ignatius business district. The St. Ignatius Community Center, first home of the Flathead Culture Committee, is on this road, just off highway 93. It was in the main hall of this building, surrounded by painted portraits of Bitterroot Salish and Pend d'Oreilles notables, that tribal elders began gathering in early February 1975 to tape-record tribal history, historical tales, and myths; the large and still growing collection of tapes is now housed in the Culture Committee's newer quarters near the mission church. Except for the presence of the tape recorder and the absence of children, the story-telling scene must have been similar to traditional story-telling sessions—a major source of winter entertainment for tribal members from the earliest times.

Pete Beaverhead, who was born in 1899 and died in August 1975, was the main storyteller during the first months of the recording project. He told the story presented below on February 24. It is on Tape #11 among other historical tales, including some from the early reservation period; but this story and the one that follows it on the tape, about the escapades of a wild young man named Qeyqeyśí and his equally wild friend One-Night, are set in pre-reservation days. This is clear from Pete Beaverhead's identification of the Qeyqeyśí in the stories as 'the father of the one in the picture'. Probably he gestured toward the portrait on the wall as he said this. It still hangs in the Community Center's main hall, showing an imposing elderly man with long white hair flowing free around his shoulders.

The Qeyqeyśí of the portrait was born about 1837, and he died in 1922; some present-day elders remember him in his last years. He is called Baptiste Ka-ka-she, son of Baptiste (or Tenas) Ka-ka-she, in the allotment records, which list all tribal members to whom 80 acres of reservation land were assigned ca. 1905, several years before the rest of the reservation was opened by government decree to white settlement. The elder Qeyqeyśí was therefore probably born between 1800 and 1817, though he could have been born well before 1800. Since he was a man of marriageable age at the time the story takes place, and since men usually didn't marry until they were at least twenty years old, the story is set sometime before 1837, and quite possibly twenty or more years earlier. (As the story makes clear, the usual economic reasons for waiting till age twenty or so to get married didn't apply to Qeyqeyśí, so he could have been a bit younger; but this factor wouldn't skew the very rough time estimate seriously.)

The elder Qeyqeyśí, then—the Qeyqeyśí of the story—was a young man not only before the reservation was established by the Hell Gate Treaty of 1855, but before the Salishan tribes of Montana had had any sustained contact with whites. Indeed, he may have been born before the people (*sqélix^w* ‘person, Indian’) even saw many white men (*suyápi*): the first recorded contact between them and whites was when they provided members of the Lewis and Clark expedition with horses in 1805, although they must have met individual trappers before then. Whites set up trading posts in the region a few years later, but contact between the people and whites was limited until Jesuit missionaries arrived in the region, founding St. Mary’s in the Bitterroot Valley in 1841 and the St. Ignatius mission in 1854.

Both the story-teller and the story’s main character were Pend d’Oreilles, so Pete Beaverhead presumably heard tales of Qeyqeyśí’s youthful adventures from Pend d’Oreilles elders during his own youth. There is of course no reason to suppose that the Qeyqeyśí stories record actual events with precise accuracy, but it is at least likely that the young Qeyqeyśí of the stories was less dignified than his mature son, the Qeyqeyśí of the portrait, who was widely respected as a leader of his people. As a young man, in any case, the elder Qeyqeyśí was apparently viewed by his people as irresponsible and unworthy of respect. And even if the stories are wholly fictional, they must at least reflect culturally plausible behavior and events.

The story is set in a camp, most likely a hunting camp on the plains east of the Rocky Mountains. Details of Pend d’Oreilles customs are hard to find in early accounts of tribal life; the better-known Bitterroot Salish tribe was most often the subject of descriptions by both travelers and scholars. (The information in the following paragraphs is drawn—with due caution, relying mainly on converging independent accounts—from a variety of sources, but especially Teit 1927-28, Flathead Culture Committee 1979, Turney-High 1937, Malan 1948, and Ronan 1890.) It is certain, however, that Pend d’Oreilles’ daily lives in the first decades of the 19th century closely resembled the lives of the Bitterroot Salish people. In spring and early summer the women dug roots and gathered berries while the men fished; family groups camped in separate locations for these activities. Later in the year the entire tribe would move eastward in a body, crossing the Rockies to the plains for the annual buffalo hunt. Since the setting for the Qeyqeyśí story is clearly a large tribal encampment, and since the tribe is breaking camp and moving on (which they wouldn’t be as likely to do if they were home in what is now known as the Mission Valley), they are probably in the eastern hunting grounds.

The buffalo-hunting expeditions were also military expeditions, because the warlike Blackfeet and other plains tribes made traveling east of the mountains extremely dangerous. The Salishan peoples had acquired horses earlier than the Blackfeet, certainly before the middle of the 18th century; but by the late 18th century the Blackfeet had horses too, and unlike the Salish they also had firearms before the end of that century. They were therefore militarily dominant until the Salishan tribes received firearms shortly after Lewis and Clark’s visit.

The widow who attracts Qeyqeyśí’s attention in the story belongs to a group that would have been fairly numerous in any Bitterroot Salish or Pend d’Oreilles camp of the era: young men, married and otherwise, were frequent casualties in the battles over buffalo-hunting grounds. The emphasis on her horses would also have been a common cultural theme, because horses were wealth—they offered mobility, they enabled men to kill the buffalo that provided hides for tipi covers as well as meat, and in short they gave access

to all the necessities and luxuries of life. The people made a distinction between ordinary horses (such as pack horses) and buffalo-hunting horses: the horses ridden to the hunt were by far the most valuable animals.

It isn't hard to understand why Qeyqeyší would want to marry the widow; she is very rich, because her husband left her many horses. It's not so easy to understand why she would want to marry someone who is not respected by his tribesmen and who has neither horses nor anything else of value. That, no doubt, is why One-Night laughs so uproariously at the idea of Qeyqeyší's presuming to address this woman, and why Qeyqeyší's own mother assumes that he is lying when he says the woman has agreed to marry him. It is of course possible that Qeyqeyší appealed to her because he was an attractive man, though her own words in the story suggest that that wasn't a factor in her decision. Another possible motive might come from the fact that a widow's position in the tribe was unenviable. With no man to bring buffalo to her, a widow was forced to follow the men to the hunt; if she were lucky a relative or a friend would kill a buffalo for her, but even then she would have to butcher it and haul it back to camp herself. A rich widow was probably able to get more help, and since this woman was living with her parents she could presumably expect help from them too. Still, having an able-bodied husband meant a much easier life for a woman. She herself declares in the story that, after her husband's death, she decided to marry the first man to come along; and Qeyqeyší is the first man to come along with a marriage proposal.

Qeyqeyší's marriage rites are typical (though there were also other traditional ways of getting married). Early in the morning the crier rides around the camp urging people to get ready to move, and the people take down their tipi poles, catch their horses, load their belongings on their pack horses, and line up to move on to their next camp. The new husband leads a good horse to his bride's tipi for her to ride on, and they set out together, thus announcing their marriage to their fellow tribesmen.

A final small point: when Qeyqeyší finds the widow's tipi all lit up, the light would come from the fire in the center of the floor, below the smoke hole in the top of the structure.

Other details of the story require no background information, because they are universals of the human condition, not features specific to Pend d'Oreilles culture.

2. THE STORY'S FORM. Most of the story is told in dialogue, though there are also some narrative passages. The story-teller makes use of variations in loudness, in length, and especially in pitch to highlight parts of his tale; in particular, he uses high pitch for emphasis, and he shifts into falsetto for some of the funniest parts. Most of these variations cannot be represented in the translation without distracting from the story's smooth flow, but lengthened words are sometimes indicated here by multiplying an English letter.

Pete Beaverhead also uses different voices for the various characters: Qeyqeyší speaks in the story-teller's normal voice, neither especially high nor especially low; his friend One-Night has a high and reedy voice, a frivolous voice, in keeping with his character; Qeyqeyší's mother speaks gruffly, sometimes almost in a whisper but always sounding firm and adult; the widow's voice is rather high and loud. Only the widow's parents have indeterminate voices, though they do sound different from the other characters. Unfortunately, the distinctive voice qualities cannot be conveyed directly on paper, so I have been forced to add some 'he said' and 'she said' to identify the speakers. (Some of these indications are already in the Salish text; only a few additions were needed.)

Otherwise the translation is as close to the original as possible—which doesn’t mean a literal translation, but rather a free English version that is meant to preserve the light-hearted spirit of the original Salish. The translation has two sources. First, I have used the translation that was prepared for the Culture Committee by tribal elder Dolly Linsebigler some years ago, adopting her phrasing in many instances. In addition, I transcribed and translated the tape with the help of Culture Committee members in the early 1980s, and those word-by-word translations have filled in a few gaps and provided a more precise rendering of some parts of the story.

Because Clarence Woodcock, late Director of the Culture Committee, graciously gave me a copy of the original tape years ago, I have been able to follow Pete Beaverhead’s lead in organizing the text of the story. To some extent the switches from speaker to speaker, and from narration to speech and back, impose their own patterning on the text. Further patterns also emerge, however, and I have therefore divided the story into lines for this translation. The organization below is based primarily on pause phrasing (as discussed in e.g. Tedlock 1972, 1983) and secondarily on prosodic phrasing. Pauses are the main cue for a transition between lines: I have started a new line after each of the story-teller’s pauses, except in a few instances where he was clearly searching for a word or where he was correcting a mistake, such as starting to say one name and then switching to another. At some important transitions he gives a cough, apparently not a throat-clearing cough but rather a cough meant to emphasize a break in the story. At the risk of distracting the reader from the progression of the story, I have indicated these emphatic coughs by an italicized *hm*.

Prosodic phrasing is important for dividing lines in cases where the story-teller does not pause at an obvious transition point—obvious because of the sentence structure and a dramatic change in pitch, from low to very high or from high to very low. In some cases these are transitions between speakers or between narration and a speaker, as when the narrative sentence *He said to his friend One-Night* is followed immediately by *“I’m going to tell you something, so listen!”*, spoken in a high emphatic voice.

Syntactic constituency and speakers’ turn-taking generally coincide with prosodic phrasing in the story, making line boundaries easier to find. There are some exceptions, among them very short acknowledgments by one speaker of something just said by another—e.g. Qeyqeyśí’s announcement *“I’m going to tell you something, so listen!”* followed by One-Night’s laconic response *“Ah”*. I’ve put such responses in the same line as the statements that motivated them. In a very few instances it was necessary to place a line break because of English sentence structure, a break that wouldn’t appear in the Salish text.

The story has some instances of syntactic parallelism, but not many, and I have found no clear groups of lines that might reflect underlying rhetorical form of the type described by Hymes (e.g. 1981) for texts in some other Native American languages. This does not of course mean that such patterns do not exist in the Qeyqeyśí story; but if they do exist, they do not leap out at the observer, or at least not at this observer. The ‘paragraphs’ I’ve set up are therefore groups of lines separated by major breaks. Some of these are prosodic breaks marked by extra-long pauses and some are discourse breaks marked by a change in topic, a change between narration and speaker, or a change from speaker to speaker.

3. THE STORY.

QEYQEYŠÍ'S MARRIAGE

One day, towards evening,
two young men were lying around.
One was Qeyqeyší—the father of the man in the picture there—
and the other was his friend One-Night.

Qeyqeyší said to his friend One-Night,
“I'm going to tell you something, so listen!” “Ah.”

These young men were always laughed at, they did crazy things,
and their fellow tribesmen didn't like them at all.

Qeyqeyší said,
“In the morning I'm going to get a wife.”
“Ah! Ah! So you're going to get a wife, my friend?” “Yes.”

There was a woman, she still had her father and mother,
her husband had been killed in a battle the year before.
He had owned lots of horses,
he had a tipi, and he had everything,
pack horses, who knows how many horses.
When the people would move camp, she'd go along herding her horses.

Qeyqeyší named this woman and said, “That's the one,
the woman whose husband got killed,
that's the one I'm going to marry.”

One-Night laid back—

“Ah, ha! Ha! HA! HA HA HA HA HA HA!
HA HA HA HA HA!
So you think this woman is saying,
'Oh boy, I'm going to be Qeyqeyší's wife!'
You sure have a lot of nerve to think that.
HA, HA, HA!
Say, do you think she'd have anything to do with ME?
Haaaaaaa!”

Qeyqeyší's mother was sitting there looking at them.
“What are you two up to?”

One-Night said,
“You’re going to get a daughter-in-law, your Qeyqeyší is going to get a wife. Haaaa!”

“Mmmmm my little son, you must be lying.”

He didn’t say a word, he just sat there.
One-Night laughed and laughed and wouldn’t quit.
Hm!

Qeyqeyší got up and went out and walked around the camp.
“When my friend stops laughing, I’ll go home and go back in.”
Hm.

Aaaaah. So he walked around the camp,
and here he was before those people’s tipi, and it was all lit up.

When he said he was going to get married
he was lying to his friend, it wasn’t true.
Now he got there and stood a while, watching.
“O.K., I’m going to go in and propose.”

He went into their tipi and they were all sitting there,
the woman was there,
and her father was there, and her mother too.

Her father said,
“Well, come in, sit down over there.”
So he sat down.
“All right, come on now, what are you doing here?
You never came into my tipi before, but tonight you’ve come in.
You must have something on your mind.”

“Yes. You’ll find out, don’t be in such a hurry.

It’s your daughter I’ve come for.
You’re going to give her to me for my wife.

You know me very well.”

The three of them sat there real quiet for a long time.

Finally the mother said to her husband,
“Ehhhh,
Say something, be sociable, don’t just sit there!”

He said,
“Hm.
It’s not ME he’s proposing to, it’s our daughter, he’s come for her,
not me.
YOU think of something to say to him, you should be able to think of something.”

The woman sat there a while and then said,
“Why talk to us when you should be asking her?
Ask her—after all, you came to propose.”
Hm.

He said, “Yes,
you, woman, you already understand.
You saw me come in just now.
I don’t have anything at my mother’s.
I had everything I own with me when I came in—
all I have is my moccasins and my leggings and my shirt.

Don’t go thinking
that I have anything of value,
that I have horses for you to ride on,
even though a man is supposed to bring one for his bride
when he gets married.”

She sat there for awhile and then told him, “Well.
Here’s what I said after my husband died.
I said, if I’m sitting here
and a man comes into our tipi to propose,
even if he’s poor,
even if he’s a good-for-nothing,
even if he’s a laughing stock,
I’ll take him.
So O.K.

Remember, when we break camp in the morning, that’s when the people get married.
So tomorrow morning
we’ll get married, and a-a-a-all
the people will see us.”

Qeyqeyší said, "O.K., thanks."
He got up and walked out.

He went home and walked in with a bi-i-i-ig smile on his face.

One-Night asked him,
"Have you been visiting your wife-to-be?!"
Qeyqeyší didn't tell him he had just got through asking her.

"Have you been visiting your wife-to-be?"
"Yes." "Ah!
So why did you come back here?
You should have stayed there."

"No. You know our people's ways.
When we move, that's when we'll get married."

His mother said to him, "Ehhhhh!
You have a nerve—
you mean to say that you went proposing!
Nooooo!
Pitiful!"
Hm.

"NO, she accepted me already,
and I'm not going to back out now."

She said,
"Well, O.K."
His mother had a real nice horse,
a good buffalo-hunting horse.
She told him, "In the morning
you can lead him for your bride to ride on,
if you're telling the truth and not lying."
Hm.

So in the morning the crier got on his horse and trotted around the camp
telling everyone, "Come on! Get ready, we're going to move!"
Hm.

Qeyqeyší led the fine bay horse.
He walked around the camp,
And as he walked around the camp,
everyone was watching.

Hey look, Qeyqeyší's going to get a wife, wonder who it is!
Watch him so we'll know."

So-o-o-o they had already taken down their tipi poles,
they were packed and ready to move.
The woman told Qeyqeyší,
"Here's my saddle,"
and Qeyqeyší put it on the horse.

The people were already lined up and moving out of camp.
Hm.

She said to Qeyqeyší,
"Pick out a horse to ride on from these here,
they're all the same, they're walking along and not in use, they're all tame."
Ah. So they both got on their horses.

The people who were moving lined up and then walked alongside of them.
Qeyqeyší glanced back at his friend.

"Hey, my friend really did get a wife!"
He went up to Qeyqeyší and said, "Here, give me your hand.
Friend, how did you do it, how did you manage to get a wife?!
I ne-e-e-ver thought that woman would tell you,
'O.K., let's get married!' "

And that's the end of the story about Qeyqeyší and One-Night.

NOTE

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