

The Endless Fall

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Retold here is a story that was told to me many years ago by a man named Domingo Molinas. I think that maybe he heard it from his father. It's the sad story of three natives of this continent, Falling Star, Falling Rocks, and Falling Rain.

Prologue

An age ago, when this land was wild and untamed, and its people treated it with honor and were a part of it, there was a tribe of people who lived within a valley in the mountains. They took what they needed from the land. They gave back what was the land's. They were happy. Those people are no more. This is the story of their passing.

The Giving of Names

As the woman struggled and the old crone assisted her, the Wise Man chanted outside of the tent. The woman's man, who was the Hunter, waited just within the opening of the tent, as was the custom. The woman labored through the night but she was young, healthy, and strong. In the early hours of the morning, as the dew was forming on the stones and the sky was not yet light, her child was born. The child was a male. He showed all of the signs of health, strength, and long life. Rejoicing and, as was the custom, the Hunter stepped from his tent to receive the Sign of Naming. He opened his mind as his father had taught him to do and there was the Sign, before him. Streaking across the sky was a miracle of the Gods, a Falling Star. Thus, the child received a name from the Heavens. His name was Falling Star.

Before morning, it was apparent that Falling Star was to have a sibling. The labor continued and as dawn was breaking upon the land, the Hunter rejoiced again. The Fates and his woman had conspired to give him a double blessing. The second son was as perfect as the first and resembled him in every way. Custom was again observed. The Hunter stepped from his tent, opened his mind, and the Sign came to him. This time, the Sign came from the mountains. A ram upon a high bluff dislodged a small avalanche of gravel and boulders, giving the second son of the Hunter his name. The second son received a name from the mountains. His name was Falling Rocks.

Later, but in the autumn of the same year, the Chief's woman brought into the world a daughter. Custom was again observed. That time it was the Chief who stepped from his tent to see what Sign would attend the Naming of his girl. Down the valley in which they lived, the Chief heard an echoing roll of thunder. Turning his gaze with the sun at his back, he saw beneath the thundercloud a gauzy curtain of silvery grey rain. Thus, the daughter of the Chief, his only child, the inheritor of his love if not of his position, received a name from the clouds. Her name was Falling Rain.

The Web of The Gods

When the Fates conspire, no human element can resolve the web of happenstance that is woven about the lives of men. So it was with those three, the select of the

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menagerie of young who lived in that generation. Falling Star and Falling Rocks were always at the head of every enterprise. They ran the fastest. Their arrows flew the straightest. They were in all ways nature's perfect pair, as identical as ever twins had been. In every pursuit, neither could surpass the other. Always nearby, and with shy grace, Falling Rain watched. They never acknowledged her watching but, from an early age, all that they did was for her eyes only.

When Falling Rain became a woman, she was bound by custom to choose a man. Since a woman could not be the Chief, and since the Chief did not have an heir, the man chosen by Falling Rain would inherit leadership when the Chief's time ended. Any man would have sought her favor for her beauty and grace alone but the dowry of the position of Chief would have made even a hag of a daughter pause to consider her choices. Falling Rain had known from an early age that she would chose either Falling Star or Falling Rocks but, though she had watched them carefully and sought the counsel of her heart, she had not been able to select between them. Custom demanded that she choose only one mate. Such customs are not to be denied. While she had been a girl, she had lingered over the choice. She had, in fact, secretly delighted in its consideration. As a woman, she was required to choose. Unable to do so wisely, she sought the counsel of her father.

The Chief loved his daughter more than life itself, for she was his life after life. He pondered in his very soul the choice that she was required to make. When he had searched the depths that were within him, he did not have an answer to give. So, together, they went to the Wise Man.

The Wise Man had seen many years and had aided many choices. He listened patiently to the problem. Then he smoked and considered. Well did he know Falling Star and Falling Rocks. He had watched them from their births. The Wise Man, for rightly was he named, discerned that no human sense could ever devise a choice for Falling Rain. The choice must be made by the Gods.

The next morning, the Wise Man and all of the people gathered quietly to watch the dawn. They waited to see what the Gods would offer. As the people watched, two deer came walking out of the forest. Both were young bucks, in their first year. Each was as like the other as were Falling Star and Falling Rocks. Each of the people held his breath. The deer approached. The deer, when they suddenly became aware of the people, sprang apart and bounded into the mountains, one going east and one going west. The Wise Man rose and spoke.

"Falling Star must go east. Falling Rocks must go west. The people must wait until both have returned. The one who returns with the largest buck will be the one chosen by the Gods to have Falling Rain as his woman, and to be the Chief."

The Decree of Falling Star and Falling Rocks was punctuated by the Gods for, even as he spoke his instructions to the people, the Wise Man fell to the ground and died. The people knew then that they must obey his decree. No other statement had been permitted. The Decree of Falling Star and Falling Rocks was final.

The Quest

Bound by the words of the Wise Man, Falling Star went to the east and Falling Rocks went to the west. The people waited.

One moon later, Falling Star returned. He staggered under the weight of the buck that he carried upon his back. It was a magnificent beast. It had lived many winters and had seen the return of many springs. So large was it that few of the people would have had the strength to carry it. After that, the people waited impatiently for the return of Falling Rocks. By the next spring, he had not returned and the people became restless. They wondered if perhaps Falling Rain should marry Falling Star. Respectfully, they consulted with the new Wise Man, the apprentice of the Wise Man who had made the decree. The apprentice had been well trained by his fallen master and, when the Wise Man had died, the apprentice had taken his place in the tribe. The new Wise Man well remembered the death of his master. He also remembered the decree. "Falling Star must go east. Falling Rocks must go west. The people must wait until both have returned. The one who returns with the largest buck will be the one chosen by the Gods to have Falling Rain as his woman, and to be the Chief." The new Wise Man upheld the decree of his predecessor. He told the people that they would have to wait until Falling Rocks returned. Reluctantly, the people waited.

Time

After many years, that Wise Man also died. His apprentice took his position in the tribe. The new Wise Man well knew the Decree of Falling Star and Falling Rocks but he did not need to enforce it. During the snows of the previous winter, Falling Rain had perished, old, lonely, and childless. Falling Star, who had waited a lifetime to be her chosen man, had followed her spirit into the high and cloudy peaks, up into the barren rocks beyond the forest. He had not returned.

The people mourned the loss to themselves because there would not be a new Chief. Without a Chief, there would not be a tribe. They mourned the lifetime of waiting that had been the lot of Falling Star. They mourned his disappearance in the pursuit of the spirit of Falling Rain, his lost love. They mourned the barren, unfulfilled promise of the young maiden, Falling Rain, who had been the most beautiful woman in the history of the tribe. Mostly, they mourned the unknown and tragic fate of Falling Rocks. He had carried with him the future of all of his people and had lost it somewhere in the west, to circumstance beyond the ken of any member of the tribe.

The Telling of the Tale

Without a chief, there could not be a tribe. Without a tribe, the people had to seek new homes in other tribes. They scattered wherever whim or fate sent them. Their tribe had been well known, honorable, and strong. Thus, they were welcomed wherever they went. Wherever they went, they took with them the story of Falling Star, Falling Rocks, and Falling Rain. The story traveled with them, all across the land.

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There came a day when new men appeared in the land. They had pale skins. They came across the big water in boats that were driven by huge wings, extended high above them. They came in numbers and with powers that could not be resisted. They were fierce. They took whatever they wanted. The first men in the land were driven back. Most of them were killed by the new men. A few survived.

Not all of the new men came as killers. Some of them came to the surviving first men as equals, and sought their wisdom. Those men heard the story of Falling Star, Falling Rocks, and Falling Rain. They heard the story and they took it into their hearts. They told the story among themselves and it spread across their land and through the years. For generations, it passed from father to son among the new men until it became a part of their own lore. Even today, after all of these years, as you drive through the rugged mountains of the west you are likely to see signs that say, "Watch for Falling Rocks."