

The background is a vibrant collage of geometric shapes. A large blue circle in the center contains the title. It is surrounded by concentric yellow and light blue rings. Various other shapes like circles, triangles, and rectangles in shades of yellow, red, and blue are scattered around. Some shapes have dotted patterns or are partially filled with different colors. A red horizontal bar with blue and white circular ends crosses the bottom of the central circle.

A Legend of Northland

A Legend of Northland Introduction to the poem

‘A legend of the Northland’ is a ballad. A ballad is a poem narrating a story in short stanzas. Ballad is such kind of poem that tells a story in short stanzas and in the poem all the stanzas comprise four lines. In total, there are 16 stanzas in this poem and these stanzas will tell us a story. Ballads are a part of folk culture or popular culture and are passed on orally from one generation to the next. (Folk culture is a story of any area and is known as ballad). Folk culture comprises of traditional stories which are passed on from one generation to next generation.

A Legend of Northland Introduction to the poem

This story is of the Northland area, the area which is near the North Pole. This exact place is not specified but ‘Northland’ means the area in the northernmost part of the earth i.e., near the North Pole. ‘Legend’ means a historical story, one which is very old and has been passed on from generation to generation.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Stanza 1

Away, away in the Northland,
Where the hours of the day are few,
And the nights are so long in winter
That they cannot sleep them through;



A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

In the region around the North Pole (Northland), the duration of the day is very less because its position is such that the Sun's rays reach for a very less time. When this area is experiencing winter season, the duration of night is very long, and the day time hours are very less. In line 4, 'they' refers to the people who live in this region. The poet says that the duration of the night time is so long that the people cannot sleep them through. If they go to bed, take a few hours of sleep and then, they wake up, it is still night time. He wants to emphasize on the fact that the duration of the night is very long.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Stanza 2

**Where they harness the swift reindeer
To the sledges, when it snows;
And the children look like bear's cubs
In their funny, furry clothes:**



A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Sledges: a vehicle on runners for conveying loads or passengers over snow or ice, often pulled by draught animals.

To harness means to tie the reindeers with a rope to a sledge so that it can be used for transportation.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Swift: something which runs very fast

The Northland region experiences severe cold conditions. It is a snowy area. The reindeer is an animal which is found in this polar region. People tie the reindeers to sledges and then the reindeers pull the sledges. He adds that the children look like young ones of a bear because they wear funny looking clothes made of fur which is like the furry skin of a bear.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Stanza 3

They tell them a curious story —

I don't believe 'tis true;

And yet you may learn a lesson

If I tell the tale to you.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Curious: strange

In line 1 ‘they’ refers to the parents or elders and ‘them’ refers to the children or the younger generation. The elders of the Northland region tell a strange and interesting story to the younger generation. The poet says that he doesn’t think that the story is true, but if he tells the story to the reader, maybe the reader could learn a lesson from it. The story gives an important message.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Stanza 4

Once, when the good Saint Peter
Lived in the world below,
And walked about it, preaching,
Just as he did, you know,



A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Saint Peter: an apostle of Christ, a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ

Preaching: to give a religious talk

The story is about Saint Peter. When Saint Peter used to live in the world and went around, giving religious lectures to the people just like all saints do, then an incident happened.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Stanza 5

**He came to the door of a cottage,
In travelling round the earth,
Where a little woman was making cakes,
And baking them on the hearth;**



A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

hearth: fire place where you do cooking

When Saint Peter was moving around the world, giving religious lectures to the people, he reached the door of a cottage where a small woman was making cakes. She was baking the cakes in the fireplace.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Stanza 6

And being faint with fasting,
For the day was almost done,
He asked her, from her store of cakes,
To give him a single one.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

faint: to be weak, famished

As Saint Peter had not eaten anything the entire day, he was very hungry and was feeling weak. So, he went to this woman who was baking cakes and he asked for one cake out of the many cakes that she had baked.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Stanza 7

**So she made a very little cake,
But as it baking lay,
She looked at it, and thought it seemed
Too large to give away.**

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

The woman was selfish. She did not give cake from her store. Instead, she started making a very small cake for Saint Peter. She did not want to share her things. But, when she put the cake for baking, she looked at it and thought that this cake was too big to be given to someone.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Stanza 8

**Therefore she kneaded another,
And still a smaller one;
But it looked, when she turned it over,
As large as the first had done.**

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

kneaded – to make dough from flour.

The little miser woman thought that the cake was too big to be given away. So, she started making another smaller cake. When she looked at that cake, she again felt that it was as big as the previous one. Again, she was not ready to give this smaller cake to Saint Peter.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Stanza 9

**Then she took a tiny scrap of dough,
And rolled and rolled it flat;
And baked it thin as a wafer —
But she couldn't part with that.**



A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

scrap: small amount

The third time, she took a very small amount of dough and rolled it. The poet says that she rolled and rolled to lay emphasis on the fact that she rolled the dough and made it very thin like a wafer and baked it. But she was so greedy that she couldn't give that thin piece of bread to the saint.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Stanza 10

For she said, “My cakes that seem too small

When I eat of them myself

Are yet too large to give away.”

So she put them on the shelf.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

The woman reasoned that, when she ate the cakes, she felt that they were very small but if she had to give them to someone, she felt that they were too big to be given away. She put all the cakes on the shelf of her kitchen and she did not give any cake to Saint Peter.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Stanza 11

Then good Saint Peter grew angry,

For he was hungry and faint;

And surely such a woman

Was enough to provoke a saint.

provoke: cause to get angry

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Saint Peter became angry. He was very hungry, he was feeling very weak and the selfish woman was not ready to give him even a small cake. This behavior of the greedy woman angered the saint.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Stanza 12

**And he said, “You are far too selfish
To dwell in a human form,
To have both food and shelter,
And fire to keep you warm.**

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

dwell: to live

Saint Peter cursed the woman and said that she was very selfish. She did not deserve to live like a human being. He added that God had given her food, shelter, fire to keep warm but she had become selfish for all the resources she had. She did not want to share them with anybody.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Stanza 13

Now, you shall build as the birds do,
And shall get your scanty food
By boring, and boring, and boring,
All day in the hard, dry wood.”



A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

scanty: very little

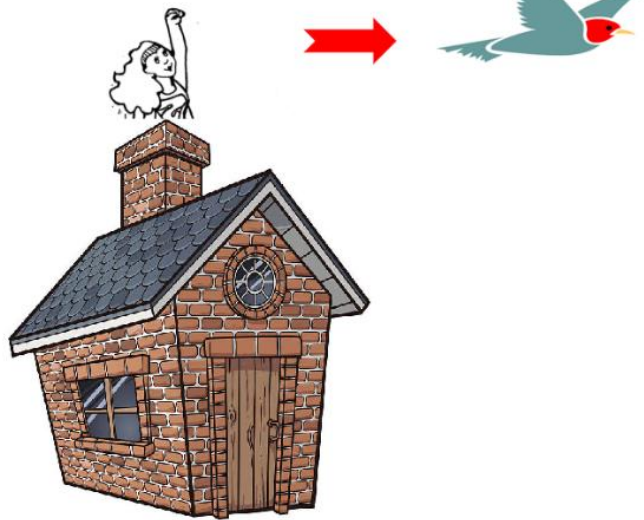
boring: make a hole in something with a tool or by digging.

Saint Peter cursed the woman that hence, she would become a bird because she did not deserve the human form. She shall become a bird and just like birds build their houses by boring into the wood and collect very little food by working hard the entire day, similarly, she would also work hard in the dry wood, all day and get little food and make a small place for herself to live in.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Stanza 14

Then up she went through the chimney,
Never speaking a word,
And out of the top flew a woodpecker,
For she was changed to a bird.



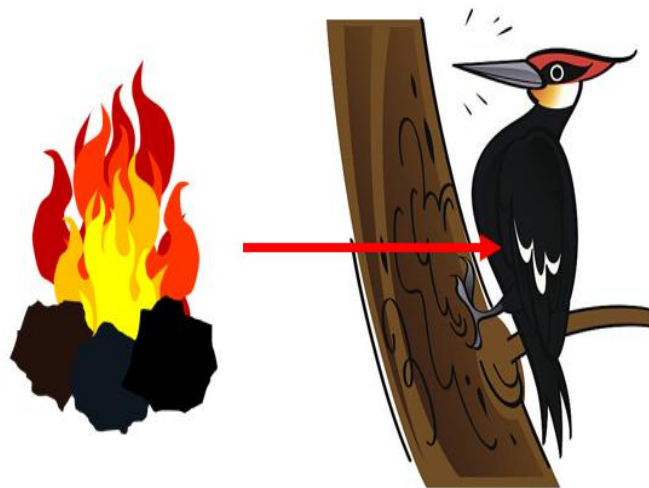
A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

As soon as Saint Peter cursed the woman, she did not get a chance to speak for herself because that very moment, she flew up to the roof through the chimney and flew out in the form of a bird. Saint Peter's curse had converted the woman into a bird.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Stanza 15

She had a scarlet cap on her head,
And that was left the same;
But all the rest of her clothes were burned
Black as a coal in the flame.
scarlet: brilliant red colour



A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

When the woman turned into a bird, at that time she was wearing a red - coloured cap on her head. This cap was there on the bird's head also, but the woman's remaining clothes had burned and turned black in colour just like coal.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

Stanza 16

And every country schoolboy

Has seen her in the wood,

Where she lives in the trees till this very day,

Boring and boring for food.

A Legend of Northland Poem Explanation

country: belonging to the countryside i.e. rural areas

People who live in the countryside, even the small children who go to school, seen this kind of bird in the woods. They see that she stays there all day and keeps on digging the wood with her beak, to collect her food. Whenever any child sees this kind of bird, then his elders tell him this story. They say that the bird used to be a woman earlier. She was very greedy and so, she was cursed by Saint Peter and turned into a bird. They get a teaching that they should not be greedy.

Literary Devices in the poem

1. Rhyme Scheme: abcb

2. Alliteration: is the repetition of a consonant sound in two or more close words.

Literary Devices in the poem

Stanza 1 - that, they, them through - 'th' sound is repeating

Stanza 2 - they, the - 'th' sound is repeating

look, like - 'l' sound is repeating

funny, furry - 'f' sound is repeating

Literary Devices in the poem

Stanza 3 - they, them- 'th' sound is repeating

yet, you - 'y' sound is repeating'

learn, lesson - 'l' sound is repeating

tell, tale, to - 't' sound is repeating

Stanza 5 - woman, was – 'w' sound is repeating

Them, the, hearth - 'th' sound is repeating

Literary Devices in the poem

Stanza 6 - faint, fasting - 'f' sound is repeating

Stanza 8 - still, smaller - 's' sound is repeating

Stanza 9 - took, tiny - 't' sound is repeating

Stanza 10 - seem, small - 's' sound is repeating

Stanza 13 - build, birds - 'b' sound is repeating

by, boring, boring - 'b' sound is repeating

Literary Devices in the poem

3. Repetition: any word or sentence is repeated to lay emphasis on it.

Stanza 1 - 'away' word is repeated

Stanza 9 – 'rolled' word is repeated

Stanza 13, 16 – 'boring' word is repeated

Literary Devices in the poem

4. Enjambment: running lines of poetry from one to the next without using any kind of punctuation to indicate a stop

Stanza 1 - line 3 and 4

Stanza 2 - Line 1 and 2; line 3 and 4

Stanza 3 - Line 3 and 4

Stanza 4 - Line 1 and 2; 3 and 4

Stanza 10 - Line 1, 2 and 3

Stanza 11 - Line 1 and 2

Literary Devices in the poem

5. Simile: Comparison using ‘as’ or ‘like’

Stanza 2 – ‘the children look like bear’s cubs’. Children compared to bear’s cubs

Stanza 9 – ‘baked it thin as a wafer’. Cake is compared to a wafer.

Stanza 15 – ‘clothes were burned black as a coal’. The colour of the burned clothes is compared to that of coal.

A Legend of Northland Summary

The poem is a legend about an old lady who angered Saint Peter because of her greed. The story goes on like this. One day, Saint Peter was preaching around the world and reached the door of a cottage where this woman lived. She was making cakes and baking them on a hearth. St. Peter was fainting with hunger. He asked the lady to give him a piece of cake. The cake that she was baking then appeared to be too big, so she did not give him that and instead, she baked another smaller one. That also appeared to be big so she did not give him that also.

Literary Devices in the poem

The second time she baked yet another smaller cake but found it too big to give away. In the third attempt, she took an extremely little scrap of dough and rolled it flat. She had it as thin as a wafer but was unable to part with that also. This angered St. Peter a lot. He said that she was not fit to live in human form and enjoy food and warmth. He cursed her and transformed her into a woodpecker bird who had to bore in hard, dry wood to get its scanty food. She can be seen in the trees all day boring and boring for food.

Thank You

