

The Legend of Blackbird Hill

619 words

What the sad young man saw was a path up the hill. He had no idea where it went. It seemed to go nowhere at all, but he'd been all over the country looking for his love.

A thousand stories and as many legends begin at the foot of a path that has no visible end, but not this story. This story ends with a lonely road that leads to a deadly somewhere. And it's set here, not that far away, at the foot of a path now long gone, a path from the banks of the Missouri to the top of Blackbird Hill, a path that exists only in some folks' imagination.

It's a myth, a legend, but some say that come October 17, there'll be people out there to listen for the cry of a young woman murdered in a cabin right there overlooking the river. Did it really happen? No matter. What good are facts or history? What right have they to destroy our legends? You just have to believe.

The young man in the legend of Blackbird Hill was actually returning east when he stumbled on the darkened path. He'd been to California and back in search of the woman he loved, a woman he had once promised to marry. He'd been to Europe, or so the story goes, but his return was thwarted for some time, so long that this young lady had determined her darling would never return. So she'd married another man and gone west like so many were doing. She and this man she took in lieu of another she would love forever built a cabin high on Blackbird Hill.

The young man who took the path could have had no idea that the woman he'd searched for would be there at the end of road. He walked up in all innocence, and found her. Feel free to film that reunion on your imagination. Of course, she loved the wanderer still. The legend lives, after all.

When her husband returned, he left, but stayed not far away because he is a man of honor after all, and he knows the two of them need to speak about what has happened. The girl's determination to leave with her wandering lover is unrelenting—she will not stay. The lost have been found.

Her husband's anger rises, then erupts. He takes a knife in his fist but nothing will dissuade her, and his wrath boils over. He slashes. She bleeds. So goes the legend of Blackbird Hill. Beside himself with rage and jealousy, the husband takes his bleeding wife in his arms and rushes out the cabin, runs to the cliff overlooking the river, and, wife in his arms, leaps to his death—and hers.

Tragically, the wanderer is just a few steps behind. What he hears as he sees them disappear is the final anguished cry of the woman he loved, the woman he'd scoured the west to find.

Perhaps you think he too would throw himself from the cliff. That would be Shakespearean, but in this dire Siouland tale of love and loss, the lover falls to his knees, distraught and broken; and soon begins to wander once again, this time through the hills along the Missouri, until the Omahas find him and nurse him slowly back to health.

That's the way the legend goes, and the word is that people still gather right there at the edge of the overlook on October 17, because, it is said, if you listen very carefully, what you will hear in the low moan of the wind coming up from the river below is that very same sad and fateful scream.

Happy listening.