A long time ago, in a village by a lake, there lived a great hunter who was invisible. He was called the Hidden One. It was known that any young woman who could see him would become his bride.

Many were the hopeful young women who visited his wigwam at the far end of the village. Each was tested by the hunter’s sister, who was called the Patient One. But years passed, and none succeeded.

In the same village lived two sisters who had lost their mother. The younger sister had a good heart, but the older one was jealous and cruel. While their father was out hunting, the older sister would torment the younger one, holding her down and burning her arms and face with sticks from the fire.

“Don’t you dare tell our father,” she would say, “or next time will be worse!”
When the father came home, he would ask in dismay, “Why is she burnt again?”
The older sister would answer, “The stupid, clumsy thing! She was playing with the fire, just like you told her not to!”

The father would turn to the younger. “Is this true?”
But she only bit her lip and said nothing.

After a while she had so many scars, she was called Little Scarface. She lost her long
braids too, when her sister singed them off. And she had to go barefoot and wear rags, for her sister would not allow her any skins to make moccasins or new clothes.

Of course, the sister made up all different reasons to tell their father. And he would shake his head in sorrow and disappointment.

One day, the older sister put on her finest clothes and many shiny strings of shell beads.

“Do you know what I’m doing?” she asked Little Scarface. “I’m going to marry the Hidden One. Of course, that’s something you could never dream of.”

Little Scarface bowed her head.

When the older sister reached the wigwam at the edge of the village, she was greeted by the sister of the hunter.

“You are welcome,” said the Patient One. “My brother will return soon from the hunt. Come help me prepare the evening meal.”

The two of them worked awhile, until the sun was nearly down. Then the Patient One led the young woman to the shore of the lake.

“My brother comes,” the Patient One said, pointing along the shore. “Do you see him?”

The young woman saw no one, but she had decided to pretend. “Of course. There he is now!”

The eyes of the Patient One narrowed. “And what is his shoulder strap?”

“A strip of rawhide,” said the young woman, thinking it a safe guess.

The Patient One frowned. “Let us return to the wigwam.”

They had just finished making the meal when a deep voice said, “Greetings, my sister.”

The young woman jumped in surprise. She stared at the entrance but saw no one. “Greetings, my brother,” replied the Patient One.

As the young woman watched with wide eyes, a moccasin appeared in mid-air and dropped to the floor, followed by another. A moment later, bits of food were rising from a birch-bark tray near the fire and vanishing into an invisible mouth.

The young woman turned to the Patient One. “When will our wedding take place?”

The Patient One turned to her angrily. “What wedding? Do you think my brother would marry a liar and a fool?”

The young woman ran crying from the wigwam.

All the next morning she stayed in bed, weeping and sobbing. Then Little Scarface came to her.

“Sister, let me have skins to make moccasins and new clothes. It is my turn to visit the Hidden One.”

“How dare you!” screamed the sister. She jumped up and slapped Little Scarface, knocking her to the floor. “Are you so stupid to think you can do what I couldn’t? Even if you saw him, do you think he’d marry a pathetic thing like you?”
She sank back to the bed in tears.
Little Scarface sat huddled for a long time, listening to her sister howl and sob. Then she rose and said again, “It is my turn to visit the Hidden One.”
Her sister stopped crying and stared in amazement.
Little Scarface went to her father’s chest and took out an old pair of moccasins. She put them on her own small feet.
Then she went out into the woods. She chose a birch tree and carefully stripped off the bark in a single sheet. From this she made a suit of clothes, which she put on in place of her rags.
Then she started back through the village.
“Look at Little Scarface!” yelled a boy. “She’s dressed like a tree!”
“Hey, Little Scarface,” a young man called, “are those moccasins big enough for you?”
“I don’t believe it!” an old woman said. “She’s on her way to the Hidden One!”
“Little Scarface,” called a young woman, “did you burn yourself and cut off your hair to look pretty for him?”
Ignoring their taunts and laughter, Little Scarface walked on till she reached the wigwam at the village edge.
The Patient One regarded the young woman with surprise, but she told her, “You are welcome.”
Little Scarface helped prepare the evening meal. When the sun was nearly down, the Patient One led her to the lake.
“My brother comes,” the Patient One told her. “Do you see him?”
Little Scarface gazed along the shore. “I’m not sure . . . .”
Then her eyes lit in wonder. “Yes, I see him! But how can there be such a one?”
The Patient One looked at her curiously. “What is his shoulder strap?”
“His shoulder strap is . . . is the Rainbow!”
The Patient One’s eyes grew wide. “And his bowstring?”
“His bowstring is . . . the Milky Way!”
The Patient One smiled. “Let us return.”
When they reached the wigwam, the Patient One took the strange clothes off Little Scarface and washed her with water from a special jar. The young woman’s scars disappeared, leaving her skin shining and smooth. A magic comb made the young woman’s hair grow quickly to her waist, ready for braiding.
Then the Patient One opened a chest and took out a beautiful wedding outfit. Little Scarface had just put it on when a deep voice said, “Greetings, my sister.”
Little Scarface turned to the entrance and stared at the magnificent young hunter. As their eyes met, she saw the surprise in his.
“Greetings, my brother,” said the Patient One. “You are discovered!”
The Hidden One walked over to Little Scarface and took her hands in his. “For years I have waited to find a woman of pure heart and brave spirit. Only such a one could see me.
And now you shall be my bride.”

So they were married. And from then on, Little Scarface had a new name—the Lovely One. For she too had been hidden, and now was hidden no more.

About the Story

This tale was popular in many Native American tribes with languages in the Algonquian family. The variant here comes from the Mi’kmaq (or Micmac) tribe of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, Canada. It was recorded in Nova Scotia.

The sources for my retelling were Legends of the Micmacs, by Silas Rand, Longmans, New York and London, 1894; and The Algonquin Legends of New England, by Charles Leland, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1884. (Rand’s manuscript, though published later, was the basis for Leland’s version.) Background on the Micmacs came from The Micmac Indians of Eastern Canada, by Wilson and Ruth Wallis, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1955.