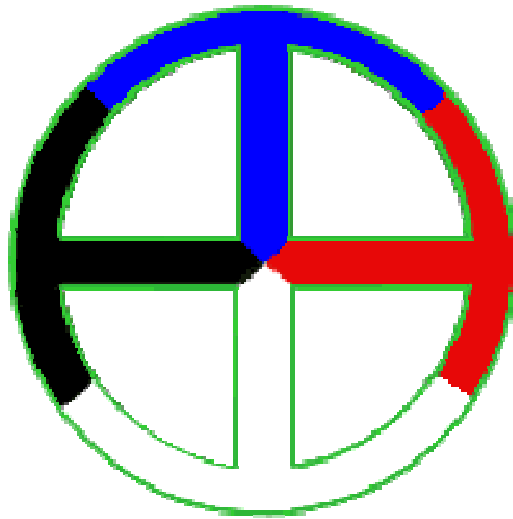


# Native American Tales Old and New



LIT 214

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## The Giant Elk

Jicarilla Apache Nation - U. S. A.

(Traditional, recorded in the *Journal of American-Folklore*, xi, 1875)

In the early days animals and birds of monstrous size preyed upon the people; the giant Elk, the Eagle, and others devoured men, women, and children, until the gods were petitioned for relief. A deliverer was sent to them in the person of Jonayaiyin, the son of the old woman who lives in the West, and the second wife of the Sun. She divided her time between the Sun and the Waterfall, and by the latter bore a second son, named Kobachischini, who remained with his mother while his brother went forth to battle with the enemies of mankind. In four days<sup>1</sup> Jonayaiyin grew to manhood<sup>2</sup>, then he asked his mother where the Elk lived. She told him that the Elk was in a great desert far to the southward. She gave him arrows with which to kill the Elk. In four steps he reached the distant desert where the Elk was lying.

Jonayaiyin cautiously observed the position of the Elk from behind a hill. The Elk was lying on an open plain, where no trees or bushes were to be found that might serve to shelter Jonayaiyin from view while he approached. While he was looking at the Elk, with dried grass before his face, the Lizard said to him, "What are you doing, my friend?" Jonayaiyin explained his mission, whereupon the Lizard suggested that he clothe himself in the garments of the Lizard, in which he could approach the Elk in safety. Jonayaiyin tried four times before he succeeded in getting into the coat of the Lizard. Next the Gopher came to him with the question, "What are you doing here, my friend?" When Jonayaiyin told the Gopher of his intention, the latter promised to aid him. The Gopher thought it advisable to reconnoiter by burrowing his way underground to the Elk. Jonayaiyin watched the progress of the Gopher as that animal threw out fresh heaps of earth on his way.

At length the Gopher came to the surface underneath the Elk, whose giant heart was beating like a mighty hammer. He then proceeded to gnaw the hair from about the heart of the Elk. "What are you doing?" said the Elk. "I am cutting a few hairs for my little ones; they are now lying on the bare ground," replied the Gopher, who continued until the magic coat of the Elk was all cut away from about the heart of the Elk. Then he returned to Jonayaiyin, and told the latter to go through the hole which had made and shoot the Elk.

Four times the Son of the Sun tried to enter the hole before he succeeded. When he reached the Elk, he saw the great heart beating above him, and easily pierced it with his arrows; four times his bow was drawn before he turned to escape through the tunnel which the Gopher had been preparing for him. This hole extended far to the eastward, but the Elk soon discovered it, and thrusting his antler into it, followed in pursuit. The Elk plowed up the earth with such violence that the present mountains were formed, which extended from east to west. The black spider closed the hole with a strong web,

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<sup>1</sup> The number four has great importance to many Native Americans. It's a number of religious significance and good fortune, similar to the number 40 to the ancient Hebrews.

<sup>2</sup> Native American heroes frequently grow from birth to adulthood within a sacred number of days. To many plains Native Americans the number was four.

the Elk broke through it and ran southward, forming the mountain four chains which trend north and south. In the south the Elk was checked by the web of the blue spider, in the west by that of the yellow spider, while in the north the web of the many-colored spider resisted his attacks until he fell dying from exhaustion and wounds. Jonayaiyin made a coat from the hide of the Elk, gave the front quarters to the Gopher, the hind quarters to the Lizard, and carried home the antlers. He found that the results of his adventures were not unknown to his mother, who had spent the time during his absence in singing, and watching a roll of cedar bark which sank into the earth or rose in the air as danger approached or receded from Jonayaiyin, her son.

Jonayaiyin next desired to kill the great Eagle, I-tsa. His mother directed him to seek the Eagle in the West. In four strides he reached the home of the Eagle, an inaccessible rock, on which was the nest, containing two young eaglets. His ear told him to stand facing the east when the next morning the Eagle swooped down upon him and tried to carry him off. The talons of the Eagle failed to penetrate the hard elk-skin by which he was covered. "Turn to the south," said the ear, and again the Eagle came, and was again unsuccessful. Jonayaiyin faced each of the four points in this manner and again faced toward the east; whereupon the Eagle succeeded in fastening its talons in the lacing on the front of the coat of the supposed man, who was carried to the nest above and thrown down before the young eagles, with the invitation to pick out his eyes. As they were about to do this, Jonayaiyin gave a warning hiss, at which the young ones cried, "He is living yet." "Oh, no," replied the old Eagle; that is only the rush of air from his body through the holes made by my talons." Without stopping to verify this, the Eagle flew away.

Jonayaiyin threw some of the blood of the Elk which brought with him to the young ones, and asked them when their mother returned. "In the afternoon when it rains," they answered. When the mother Eagle came with the shower of rain in the afternoon, he stood in readiness with one of the Elk antlers in his hand. As the bird alighted with a man in her talons, Jonayaiyin struck her upon the back with the antler, killing her instantly. Going back to the nest, he asked the young eagles when their father returned. "Our father comes home when the wind blows and brings rain just before sunset," they said. The male Eagle came at the appointed time, carrying a woman with a crying infant upon her back. Mother and baby were dropped from a height upon the rock and killed. With the second antler of the Elk, Jonayaiyin avenged their death, and ended the career of the Eagles by striking the Eagle upon the back and killing him. The wing of this eagle was of enormous size; the bones were as large as a man's arm; fragments of this wing are still preserved at Taos. Jonayaiyin struck the young eagles upon the head, saying, "You shall never grow any larger." Thus deprived of their strength and power to injure mankind, the eagles relinquished their sovereignty with the parting curse of rheumatism, which they bestowed upon the human race.

Jonayaiyin could discover no way by which he could descend from the rock, until at length he saw an old female Bat on the plain below. At first she pretended not to hear his calls for help; then she flew up with the inquiry, "How did you get here?" Jonayaiyin told how he had killed the eagles. "I will give you all the feathers you may desire if you will help me to escape," concluded he. The old Bat carried her basket by a slender spider's thread. He was afraid to trust himself in such a small basket suspended by a thread, but she reassured him, saying: "I have packed mountain sheep in this basket, and

the strap has never broken. Do not look while we are descending; keep your eyes shut as tight as you can." He began to open his eyes once during the descent, but she warned him in time to avoid mishap. They went to the foot of the rock where the old Eagles lay. Jonayaiyin filled her basket with feathers, but told her not to go out on the plains, where there are many small birds. Forgetting this admonition, she was soon among the small birds, who robbed the old Bat of all her feathers. This accounts for the plumage of the small bird klokin, which somewhat resembles the color of the tail and wing feathers of the bald eagle. The Bat returned four times for a supply of feathers, but the fifth time she asked to have her basket filled, Jonayaiyin was vexed. "You cannot take care of your feathers, so you shall never have any. "This old skin on your basket is good enough for you."

"Very well," said the Bat, resignedly, "I deserve to lose them, for I never could take care of those feathers."

## The Origin of Tapa

Hawaii - U. S. A.  
Traditional

Maikoha lived in Nuuanu Valley, Honolulu. He was sorrowful because the Hawaiians who lived in the mountains suffered from the lack of clothes and bedding, since the mountains were rain-chilled and cool, and the people needed clothes (unlike those who live naked by the ocean and so shed the shame of clothing<sup>3</sup>).

When he was about to die he said to his daughters, "Bury me beside this stream. From my body will grow a tree. The inner bark will make clothes and bedding for our people in the mountains."

From the grave of Maikoha grew a small spreading tree, the first of its kind ever seen in Hawaii. His daughter cut a branch of the tree, pounded the inner bark, and made the first tapa, or barkcloth, of the Hawaiians. The branches took root wherever they fell or were washed by the stream. Soon all of Hawaii was blessed with the gift of the wauke tree, and Maikoha became the god of the tapa makers.

## The Deadly Moss

It seemed to the people of Maui that Kauka was always working in his taro patch. As they passed his home on the way to the ocean they used to call, "You'd better come surfing, Kauka."

Kauka would growl back, "Be careful or you will lose head or tail."

The people laughed for they thought Kauka was crazy. That night the man who called to Kauka was missing and could not be found. Again and again this happened. And always the man who was missing was the man who called to Kauka. The people were filled with fear, and they went to a wise man for advice. He told them to call together all the men of the district. When the men assembled, the wise man said, "Let every man take off his clothing."

Every man stripped naked except Kauka. The men tore Kauka's short cape from his shoulders, and under it was a second cape. They tore it off, and there, between Kauka's shoulders, they saw the fearful mouth of a shark.

"There is the shark, the shark who has been eating our men," cried the wise man. "Kill and burn him."

They killed Kauka and burned his body. They gathered up all the ashes up all the ashes and scattered them along ocean shore. But that was not the last of Kauka, the shark man, for from his ashes sprang a deadly moss called Limu Make.

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<sup>3</sup> There have been – and still are – many cultures and societies that viewed the wearing of clothes as sinful. Even now in Indonesia, there are people who refuse to convert to either Islam or Christianity if it means they must wear clothes. Also, during the days of ancient Egypt, working class free women commonly wore nothing.

## The Dogs Hold an Election <sup>4</sup>

Jonathan Lane Deer  
Brule Sioux (Lakota) Nation - U. S. A.

We don't think much of the white man's elections. Whoever wins, we Indians always lose. Well, we have a little story about elections. Once a long time ago, the dogs were trying to elect a president. So one of them got up in the big dog convention and said: "I nominate the bulldog for president, He's strong. He can fight."

"But he can't run," said another dog. "What good is a fighter who can't run? He won't catch anybody."

Then another dog got up and said: "I nominate the greyhound, be-cause he sure can run."

But the other dogs cried: "Naw, he can run all right, but he can't fight. When he catches up with somebody, what happens then? He gets the hell beaten out of him, that's what! So all he's good for is running away."

Then an ugly little mutt jumped up and said: "I nominate that dog for president who smells good underneath his tail."

And immediately an equally ugly mutt jumped up and yelled: "I second the motion."

At once all the dogs started sniffing underneath each other's tails. A big chorus went up:

"Phew, he don't smell good under his tail."

"No, neither does this one."

"He's no presidential timber! Yech!"

"No, he's no good, either."

"This one sure isn't the people's choice."

"Wow, this ain't my candidate!"

When you go out for a walk, just watch the dogs. They're still sniffing underneath each other's tails. They're looking for a good leader, and they still haven't found him.

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<sup>4</sup> I first heard this story at the Eastern Cherokee Nation Pow Wow, Memorial Day Weekend, in May, 1992. I failed to record the speaker's name. I later found it in *American Indian Myths and Legends*. I've no way of determining if I heard Lane Deer himself.

## Iktome Sleeps with His Wife by Mistake <sup>5</sup>

Jonathan Lame Deer  
Brule Sioux (Lakota) Nation - U. S. A.

Iktome was dissatisfied. He was restless. Looking at his wife, he thought: "This woman has become old. She has become ugly. Her face is wrinkled. Her breasts are sagging. She's all dried up. It's no fun sleeping with a woman like that. I must have a young, pretty girl. I must have a young girl soon."

His wife was looking at him. She knew him well, and she knew that look on his face. She said to herself: "That no-good husband of mine! He's thinking of some young, nice-looking Winchinchala, not of giving me a little pleasure. I'll fix him!"

"Well, I'll go out now," said Iktome. "I have things to do."

"I bet," said his wife.

Iktome was looking for a young girl to seduce. He saw one he liked: young and handsome, with laughing eyes, a laughing mouth, and clear, smooth skin. She wore a fine white doeskin outfit with little bells attached to it, so that she made a pleasing sound when she moved.

"This is the one," thought Ikto, "that I shall sleep with tonight." He went up to the girl and said, "Pretty young Winchinchala, is this your tipi you are standing in front of?"

The girl just laughed.

"I have many pretty things I could give you."

The girl just laughed.

"Tonight after everybody has gone to sleep, I'll creep into your tipi. You be on the left side of the door."

The girl just laughed.

"I am a great lover," boasted Iktome. "You have no idea of the pleasures that await you."

The girl just laughed. She did not take Ikto seriously, he was so comical. But Iktome took her laughter for assent.

"Well, I'll go now. Tonight I'll make love to you. Don't forget, at the left side of the door."

From her tipi Iktome's wife had watched it all. After Ikto was gone, the wife went up to the girl.

"Winchinchala," she said, "has that no-good man asked you to sleep with him tonight?"

Yes," said the merry girl and laughed.

"I knew it. In this tipi here?"

"Yes, in this tipi."

"Where do you sleep?"

"He told me to sleep on the left side, those by the door."

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<sup>5</sup> Iktome is a man-spider trickster god; he's like coyote but not as clever.

"Winchinchala, let's you and me change places with each other. Let's exchange clothes?"

"What will you give me?" asked the girl.

"Why, this nice choker of red and blue beads."

"And what else?"

"These fine, big hair strings made of rare dentalium shells."

"Oh my, these are pretty! All right, let's change places tonight." So, the Winchinchala put on Ikto's wife's clothes and went into his tipi to sleep, while Ikto's wife took her place. That night after everyone had gone to sleep, Iktome crept into the pretty girl's tipi. At the left side he heard a woman stir, heard a slight tinkling of bells. He crept over there.

"Oh pretty girl," he whispered, "it's me, your lover Ikto."

There was giggling in the dark.

"Oh pretty one, how fresh your mouth tastes, not like the mouth of my aged wife."

There was more giggling. "Ah, how nice it is to fondle a firm young breast, not a sagging one like my wife's." There was more giggling. "Oh, pretty young one! How full of fire you are! How ardently you make love, not just lying there like dead, like my old woman does it." There was more giggling. "Oh, how pleasingly moist, how wet, how juicy this is! Not dry like my wife's." There was more giggling and squirming. "Ah! Aaaaah! Oh! Ooooooh!" More giggling and squirming. "Well, this was certainly enjoyable. Oh my! Yes, this was fun. Well. I must go now. Maybe pretty soon we'll do this again."

There was a last giggle.

"I wonder whether this Winchinchala ever opens her mouth except to giggle," thought Ikto. He was panting. He went home very slowly because the woman he had slept with had tired him out. By the time he got to his tipi, his wife and the pretty girl had already exchanged places again. They were now where they belonged. Iktome lay down beside his wife and fell asleep. In the morning when he awoke, his wife was already up and about.

"Old Woman," he said, "I'm hungry. Give me something good to eat."

"I'll give you something," said his wife and hit him hard with her turnip digger.

"Stop! Stop! You crazy woman! What are you doing?"

"So my mouth isn't fresh!" And she hit him again.

"Oh, Oh, Oh Have pity on me!"

"So my skin is wrinkled!" She was beating him all over.

"Oh! oh! oh! Don't do that. It hurts, stop!"

"So my breasts are sagging!"

The blows were coming thick and fast.

"Oh! oh! you're killing me!"

"So I'm not a hot one, you say. I just lie there like I'm dead!"

And she hit him a real good one.

"Oh, you're killing me!"

"So I'm all dried up. I'm not pleasingly moist!" She was hitting Iktome harder than ever.

"Have pity! I'll never sleep with anyone but you!"

Liar," she said and kept on whacking him.



Ikto managed at last to crawl out of the tipi and get away from her. He was running, afraid his wife would catch up with him. A long way off he stopped, hurting so much all over that he could hardly move. His mind was hurt, too.

"So I slept with my ugly old woman," he thought. "So she tricked me. Oh my! I'm losing my touch. If I don't watch out I'll make love to an old she-monster next. I must be more observant in the future."

After a while he got hungry. Nobody fed him. When he limped humbly back to his tipi. He entered cooing, making sweet talk: "Old Woman, you're still the prettiest. Be peaceful. Didn't I give you a good time last night? What's for breakfast?"