

Iktomi and the Turtle

Old Indian Legends

Native American

Easy
5 min read

The huntsman Patkasa (turtle) stood bent over a newly slain deer.

The red-tipped arrow he drew from the wounded deer was unlike the arrows in his own quiver. Another's stray shot had killed the deer. Patkasa had hunted all the morning without so much as spying an ordinary blackbird.

At last returning homeward, tired and heavy-hearted that he had no meat for the hungry mouths in his wigwam, he walked slowly with downcast eyes. Kind ghosts pitied the unhappy hunter and led him to the newly slain deer, that his children should not cry for food.

When Patkasa stumbled upon the deer in his path, he exclaimed: "Good spirits have pushed me hither!"

Thus he leaned long over the gift of the friendly ghosts.

"How, my friend!" said a voice behind his ear, and a hand fell on his shoulder. It was not a spirit this time. It was old Iktomi.

"How, Iktomi!" answered Patkasa, still stooping over the deer.

“My friend, you are a skilled hunter,” began Iktomi, smiling a thin smile which spread from one ear to the other.

Suddenly raising up his head Patkasa’s black eyes twinkled as he asked: “Oh, you really say so?”

“Yes, my friend, you are a skillful fellow. Now let us have a little contest. Let us see who can jump over the deer without touching a hair on his hide,” suggested Iktomi.

“Oh, I fear I cannot do it!” cried Patkasa, rubbing his funny, thick palms together.

“Have no coward’s doubt, Patkasa. I say you are a skillful fellow who finds nothing hard to do.” With these words Iktomi led Patkasa a short distance away. In little puffs Patkasa laughed uneasily.

“Now, you may jump first,” said Iktomi.

Patkasa, with doubled fists, swung his fat arms to and fro, all the while biting hard his under lip.

Just before the run and leap Iktomi put in: “Let the winner have the deer to eat!”

It was too late now to say no. Patkasa was more afraid of being called a coward than of losing the deer. “Ho-wo,” he replied, still working his short arms. At length he started off on the run. So quick and small were his steps that he seemed to be kicking the ground only. Then the leap! But Patkasa tripped upon a stick and fell hard against the side of the deer.

“He-he-he!” exclaimed Iktomi, pretending disappointment that his friend had fallen.

Lifting him to his feet, he said: “Now it is my turn to try the high jump!” Hardly was the last word spoken than Iktomi gave a leap high above the deer.

“The game is mine!” laughed he, patting the sullen Patkasa on the back. “My friend, watch the deer while I go to bring my children,” said Iktomi, darting lightly through the tall grass.

Patkasa was always ready to believe the words of scheming people and to do the little favors any one asked of him. However, on this occasion, he did not answer "Yes, my friend." He realized that Iktomi's flattering tongue had made him foolish.

He turned up his nose at Iktomi, now almost out of sight, as much as to say: "Oh, no, Ikto; I do not hear your words!"

Soon there came a murmur of voices. The sound of laughter grew louder and louder. All of a sudden it became hushed. Old Iktomi led his young Iktomi brood to the place where he had left the turtle, but it was vacant. Nowhere was there any sign of Patkasa or the deer. Then the babes did howl!

"Be still!" said father Iktomi to his children. "I know where Patkasa lives. Follow me. I shall take you to the turtle's dwelling." He ran along a narrow footpath toward the creek near by. Close upon his heels came his children with tear-streaked faces.

"There!" said Iktomi in a loud whisper as he gathered his little ones on the bank. "There is Patkasa broiling venison! There is his teepee, and the savory fire is in his front yard!"

The young Iktomis stretched their necks and rolled their round black eyes like newly hatched birds. They peered into the water.

"Now, I will cool Patkasa's fire. I shall bring you the broiled venison. Watch closely. When you see the black coals rise to the surface of the water, clap your hands and shout aloud, for soon after that sign I shall return to you with some tender meat."

Thus saying Iktomi plunged into the creek. Splash! splash! the water leaped upward into spray. Scarcely had it become leveled and smooth than there bubbled up many black spots. The creek was seething with the dancing of round black things.

"The cooled fire! The coals!" laughed the brood of Iktomis. Clapping together their little hands, they chased one another along the edge of the creek. They shouted and hooted with great glee.

"Ahas!" said a gruff voice across the water. It was Patkasa. In a large willow tree leaning far over the water he

sat upon a large limb. On the very same branch was a bright burning fire over which Patkasa broiled the venison. By this time the water was calm again. No more danced those black spots on its surface, for they were the toes of old Iktomi. He was drowned.

The Iktomi children hurried away from the creek, crying and calling for their water-dead father.

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