



Manstin, the Rabbit

Old Indian Legends
Native American/north American

Intermediate
8 min read

Manstin was an adventurous brave, but very kind-hearted. Stamping a moccasined foot as he drew on his buckskin leggings, he said: "Grandmother, beware of Iktomi! Do not let him lure you into some cunning trap. I am going to the North country on a long hunt."

With these words of caution to the bent old rabbit grandmother with whom he had lived since he was a tiny babe, Manstin started off toward the north. He was scarce over the great high hills when he heard the shrieking of a human child.

"Wan!" he ejaculated, pointing his long ears toward the direction of the sound; "Wan! that is the work of cruel Double-Face. Shameless coward! he delights in torturing helpless creatures!"

Muttering indistinct words, Manstin ran up the last hill and lo! in the ravine beyond stood the terrible monster with a face in front and one in the back of his head!

This brown giant was without clothes save for a wild-cat-skin about his loins. With a wicked gleaming eye, he watched the little black-haired baby he held in his strong arm. In a laughing voice he hummed an Indian mother's lullaby, "A-boo! Aboo!" and at the same time he switched the naked baby with a thorny wild-rose bush.

Quickly Manstin jumped behind a large sage bush on the brow of the hill. He bent his bow and the sinewy

string twanged. Now an arrow stuck above the ear of Double-Face. It was a poisoned arrow, and the giant fell dead. Then Manstin took the little brown baby and hurried away from the ravine. Soon he came to a teepee from whence loud wailing voices broke. It was the teepee of the stolen baby and the mourners were its heart-broken parents.

When gallant Manstin returned the child to the eager arms of the mother there came a sudden terror into the eyes of both the Dakotas. They feared lest it was Double-Face come in a new guise to torture them. The rabbit understood their fear and said: "I am Manstin, the kind-hearted,—Manstin, the noted huntsman. I am your friend. Do not fear."

That night a strange thing happened. While the father and mother slept, Manstin took the wee baby. With his feet placed gently yet firmly upon the tiny toes of the little child, he drew upward by each small hand the sleeping child till he was a full-grown man. With a forefinger he traced a slit in the upper lip; and when on the morrow the man and woman awoke they could not distinguish their own son from Manstin, so much alike were the braves.

"Henceforth we are friends, to help each other," said Manstin, shaking a right hand in farewell. "The earth is our common ear, to carry from its uttermost extremes one's slightest wish for the other!"

"Ho! Be it so!" answered the newly made man.

Upon leaving his friend, Manstin hurried away toward the North country whither he was bound for a long hunt. Suddenly he came upon the edge of a wide brook. His alert eye caught sight of a rawhide rope staked to the water's brink, which led away toward a small round hut in the distance. The ground was trodden into a deep groove beneath the loosely drawn rawhide rope.

"Hun-he!" exclaimed Manstin, bending over the freshly made footprints in the moist bank of the brook. "A man's footprints!" he said to himself. "A blind man lives in yonder hut! This rope is his guide by which he comes for his daily water!" surmised Manstin, who knew all the peculiar contrivances of the people. At once his eyes became fixed upon the solitary dwelling and hither he followed his curiosity,—a real blind man's rope.

Quietly he lifted the door-flap and entered in. An old toothless grandfather, blind and shaky with age, sat upon the ground. He was not deaf however. He heard the entrance and felt the presence of some stranger.

“How, grandchild,” he mumbled, for he was old enough to be grandparent to every living thing, “how! I cannot see you. Pray, speak your name!”

“Grandfather, I am Manstin,” answered the rabbit, all the while looking with curious eyes about the wigwam.

“Grandfather, what is it so tightly packed in all these buckskin bags placed against the tent poles?” he asked.

“My grandchild, those are dried buffalo meat and venison. These are magic bags which never grow empty. I am blind and cannot go on a hunt. Hence a kind Maker has given me these magic bags of choicest foods.”

Then the old, bent man pulled at a rope which lay by his right hand. “This leads me to the brook where I drink! and this,” said he, turning to the one on his left, “and this takes me into the forest, where I feel about for dry sticks for my fire.”

“Grandfather, I wish I lived in such sure luxury! I would lean back against a tent pole, and with crossed feet I would smoke sweet willow bark the rest of my days,” sighed Manstin.

“My grandchild, your eyes are your luxury! you would be unhappy without them!” the old man replied.

“Grandfather, I would give you my two eyes for your place!” cried Manstin.

“How! you have said it. Arise. Take out your eyes and give them to me. Henceforth you are at home here in my stead.”

At once Manstin took out both his eyes and the old man put them on! Rejoicing, the old grandfather started away with his young eyes while the blind rabbit filled his dream pipe, leaning lazily against the tent pole. For a short time it was a most pleasant pastime to smoke willow bark and to eat from the magic bags.

Manstin grew thirsty, but there was no water in the small dwelling. Taking one of the rawhide ropes he started toward the brook to quench his thirst. He was young and unwilling to trudge slowly in the old man’s footpath. He was full of glee, for it had been many long moons since he had tasted such good food. Thus he skipped

confidently along jerking the old weather-eaten rawhide spasmodically till all of a sudden it gave way and Manstin fell headlong into the water.

“En! En!” he grunted kicking frantically amid stream. All along the slippery bank he vainly tried to climb, till at last he chanced upon the old stake and the deeply worn footpath. Exhausted and inwardly disgusted with his mishaps, he crawled more cautiously on all fours to his wigwam door. Dripping with his recent plunge he sat with chattering teeth within his unfired wigwam.

The sun had set and the night air was chilly, but there was no fire-wood in the dwelling. “Hin!” murmured Manstin and bravely tried the other rope. “I go for some fire-wood!” he said, following the rawhide rope which led into the forest. Soon he stumbled upon thickly strewn dry willow sticks. Eagerly with both hands he gathered the wood into his outspread blanket. Manstin was naturally an energetic fellow.

When he had a large heap, he tied two opposite ends of blanket together and lifted the bundle of wood upon his back, but alas! he had unconsciously dropped the end of the rope and now he was lost in the wood!

“Hin! hin!” he groaned. Then pausing a moment, he set his fan-like ears to catch any sound of approaching footsteps. There was none. Not even a night bird twittered to help him out of his predicament.

With a bold face, he made a start at random.

He fell into some tangled wood where he was held fast. Manstin let go his bundle and began to lament having given away his two eyes.

“Friend, my friend, I have need of you! The old oak tree grandfather has gone off with my eyes and I am lost in the woods!” he cried with his lips close to the earth.

Scarcely had he spoken when the sound of voices was audible on the outer edge of the forest. Nearer and louder grew the voices—one was the clear flute tones of a young brave and the other the tremulous squeaks of an old grandfather.

It was Manstin’s friend with the Earth Ear and the old grandfather. “Here Manstin, take back your eyes,” said the old man, “I knew you would not be content in my stead, but I wanted you to learn your lesson. I have had pleasure seeing with your eyes and trying your bow and arrows, but since I am old and feeble I much prefer my

own teepee and my magic bags!”

Thus talking the three returned to the hut. The old grandfather crept into his wigwam, which is often mistaken for a mere oak tree by little Indian girls and boys.

Manstin, with his own bright eyes fitted into his head again, went on happily to hunt in the North country.

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