



Old Man Steals the Sun's Leggings

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Intermediate
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Firelight—what a charm it adds to story-telling. How its moods seem to keep pace with situations pictured by the oracle, offering shadows when dread is abroad, and light when a pleasing climax is reached; for interest undoubtedly tends the blaze, while sympathy contributes or withholds fuel, according to its dictates.

The lodge was alight when I approached and I could hear the children singing in a happy mood, but upon entering, the singing ceased and embarrassed smiles on the young faces greeted me; nor could I coax a continuation of the song.

Seated beside War Eagle was a very old Indian whose name was Red Robe, and as soon as I was seated, the host explained that he was an honored guest; that he was a Sioux and a friend of long standing. Then War Eagle lighted the pipe, passing it to the distinguished friend, who in turn passed it to me, after first offering it to the Sun, the father, and the Earth, the mother of all that is.

In a lodge of the Blackfeet the pipe must never be passed across the doorway. To do so would insult the host and bring bad luck to all who assembled. Therefore if there be a large number of guests ranged about the lodge,

the pipe is passed first to the left from guest to guest until it reaches the door, when it goes back, unsmoked, to the host, to be refilled ere it is passed to those on his right hand.

Briefly War Eagle explained my presence to Red Robe and said:

“Once the Moon made the Sun a pair of leggings. Such beautiful work had never been seen before. They were worked with the colored quills of the Porcupine and were covered with strange signs, which none but the Sun and the Moon could read. No man ever saw such leggings as they were, and it took the Moon many snows to make them. Yes, they were wonderful leggings and the Sun always wore them on fine days, for they were bright to look upon.

“Every night when the Sun went to sleep in his lodge away in the west, he used the leggings for a pillow, because there was a thief in the world, even then. That thief and rascal was OLD-man, and of course the Sun knew all about him. That is why he always put his fine leggings under his head when he slept. When he worked he almost always wore them, as I have told you, so that there was no danger of losing them in the daytime; but the Sun was careful of his leggings when night came and he slept.

“You wouldn’t think that a person would be so foolish as to steal from the Sun, but one night OLD-man—who is the only person who ever knew just where the Sun’s lodge was—crept near enough to look in, and saw the leggings under the Sun’s head.

“We have all travelled a great deal but no man ever found the Sun’s lodge. No man knows in what country it is. Of course we know it is located somewhere west of here, for we see him going that way every afternoon, but OLD-man knew everything—except that he could not fool the Sun.

“Yes—OLD-man looked into the lodge of the Sun and saw the leggings there—saw the Sun, too, and the Sun was asleep. He made up his mind that he would steal the leggings so he crept through the door of the lodge. There was no one at home but the Sun, for the Moon has work to do at night just as the children, the Stars, do, so he thought he could slip the leggings from under the sleeper’s head and get away.

“He got down on his hands and knees to walk like the Bear-people and crept into the lodge, but in the black darkness he put his knee upon a dry stick near the Sun’s bed. The stick snapped under his weight with so great a noise that the Sun turned over and snorted, scaring OLD-man so badly that he couldn’t move for a minute.

His heart was not strong—wickedness makes every heart weaker—and after making sure that the Sun had not seen him, he crept silently out of the lodge and ran away.

“On the top of a hill OLD-man stopped to look and listen, but all was still; so he sat down and thought.

“I’ll get them to-morrow night when he sleeps again”; he said to himself. ‘I need those leggings myself, and I’m going to get them, because they will make me handsome as the Sun.’

“He watched the Moon come home to camp and saw the Sun go to work, but he did not go very far away because he wanted to be near the lodge when night came again.

“It was not long to wait, for all the OLD-man had to do was to make mischief, and only those who have work to do measure time. He was close to the lodge when the Moon came out, and there he waited until the Sun went inside. From the bushes OLD-man saw the Sun take off his leggings and his eyes glittered with greed as he saw their owner fold them and put them under his head as he had always done. Then he waited a while before creeping closer. Little by little the old rascal crawled toward the lodge, till finally his head was inside the door. Then he waited a long, long time, even after the Sun was snoring.

“The strange noises of the night bothered him, for he knew he was doing wrong, and when a Loon cried on a lake near by, he shivered as with cold, but finally crept to the sleeper’s side. Cautiously his fingers felt about the precious leggings until he knew just how they could best be removed without waking the Sun. His breath was short and his heart was beating as a war-drum beats, in the black dark of the lodge. Sweat—cold sweat, that great fear always brings to the weak-hearted—was dripping from his body, and once he thought that he would wait for another night, but greed whispered again, and listening to its voice, he stole the leggings from under the Sun’s head.

“Carefully he crept out of the lodge, looking over his shoulder as he went through the door. Then he ran away as fast as he could go. Over hills and valleys, across rivers and creeks, toward the east. He wasted much breath laughing at his smartness as he ran, and soon he grew tired.

“Ho!” he said to himself, ‘I am far enough now and I shall sleep. It’s easy to steal from the Sun—just as easy as stealing from the Bear or the Beaver.’

“He folded the leggings and put them under his head as the Sun had done, and went to sleep. He had a dream and it waked him with a start. Bad deeds bring bad dreams to us all. OLD-man sat up and there was the Sun looking right in his face and laughing. He was frightened and ran away, leaving the leggings behind him.

“Laughingly the Sun put on the leggings and went on toward the west, for he is always busy. He thought he would see OLD-man no more, but it takes more than one lesson to teach a fool to be wise, and OLD-man hid in the timber until the Sun had travelled out of sight. Then he ran westward and hid himself near the Sun’s lodge again, intending to wait for the night and steal the leggings a second time.

“He was much afraid this time, but as soon as the Sun was asleep he crept to the lodge and peeked inside. Here he stopped and looked about, for he was afraid the Sun would hear his heart beating. Finally he started toward the Sun’s bed and just then a great white Owl flew from off the lodge poles, and this scared him more, for that is very bad luck and he knew it; but he kept on creeping until he could almost touch the Sun.

“All about the lodge were beautiful linings, tanned and painted by the Moon, and the queer signs on them made the old coward tremble. He heard a night-bird call outside and he thought it would surely wake the Sun; so he hastened to the bed and with cunning fingers stole the leggings, as he had done the night before, without waking the great sleeper. Then he crept out of the lodge, talking bravely to himself as cowards do when they are afraid.

“Now,’ he said to himself, ‘I shall run faster and farther than before. I shall not stop running while the night lasts, and I shall stay in the mountains all the time when the Sun is at work in the daytime!’

“Away he went—running as the Buffalo runs—straight ahead, looking at nothing, hearing nothing, stopping at nothing. When day began to break OLD-man was far from the Sun’s lodge and he hid himself in a deep gulch among some bushes that grew there. He listened a long time before he dared to go to sleep, but finally he did. He was tired from his great run and slept soundly and for a long time, but when he opened his eyes—there was the Sun looking straight at him, and this time he was scowling. OLD-man started to run away but the Sun grabbed him and threw him down upon his back. My! but the Sun was angry, and he said:

“OLD-man, you are a clever thief but a mighty fool as well, for you steal from me and expect to hide away. Twice you have stolen the leggings my wife made for me, and twice I have found you easily. Don’t you know

that the whole world is my lodge and that you can never get outside of it, if you run your foolish legs off? Don't you know that I light all of my lodge every day and search it carefully? Don't you know that nothing can hide from me and live? I shall not harm you this time, but I warn you now, that if you ever steal from me again, I will hurt you badly. Now go, and don't let me catch you stealing again!

"Away went OLD-man, and on toward the west went the busy Sun. That is all.

"Now go to bed; for I would talk of other things with my friend, who knows of war as I do. Ho!"

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