



Old Man's Treachery

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Native Americannorth American

Intermediate
8 min read

The next afternoon Muskrat and Fine Bow went hunting. They hid themselves in some brush which grew beside an old game trail that followed the river, and there waited for a chance deer.

Chickadees hopped and called, “chick-a-de-de-de” in the willows and wild-rose bushes that grew near their hiding-place; and the gentle little birds with their pretty coats were often within a few inches of the hands of the young hunters. In perfect silence they watched and admired these little friends, while glance or smile conveyed their appreciation of the bird-visits to each other.

The wind was coming down the stream, and therefore the eyes of the boys seldom left the trail in that direction; for from that quarter an approaching deer would be unwarned by the ever-busy breeze. A rabbit came hopping down the game trail in believed perfect security, passing so close to Fine Bow that he could not resist the desire to strike at him with an arrow. Both boys were obliged to cover their mouths with their open hands to keep from laughing aloud at the surprise and speed shown by the frightened bunny, as he scurried around a bend in the trail, with his white, pudgy tail bobbing rapidly.

They had scarcely regained their composure and silence when, “snap!” went a dry stick. The sharp sound sent a thrill through the hearts of the boys, and instantly they became rigidly watchful. Not a leaf could move on the ground now—not a bush might bend or a bird pass and escape being seen by the four sharp eyes that peered

from the brush in the direction indicated by the sound of the breaking stick. Two hearts beat loudly as Fine Bow fitted his arrow to the bowstring. Tense and expectant they waited—yes, it was a deer—a buck, too, and he was coming down the trail, alert and watchful—down the trail that he had often travelled and knew so well. Yes, he had followed his mother along that trail when he was but a spotted fawn—now he wore antlers, and was master of his own ways. On he came—nearly to the brush that hid the hunters, when, throwing his beautiful head high in the air, he stopped, turning his side a trifle.

Zipp—went the arrow and, kicking out behind, away went the buck, crashing through willows and alders that grew in his way, until he was out of sight. Then all was still, save the chick-a-de-de-de, chick-a-de-de-de, that came constantly from the bushes about them.

Out from the cover came the hunters, and with ready bow they followed along the trail. Yes—there was blood on a log, and more on the dead leaves. The arrow had found its mark and they must go slowly in their trailing, lest they lose the meat. For two hours they followed the wounded animal, and at last came upon him in a willow thicket—sick unto death, for the arrow was deep in his paunch. His sufferings were ended by another arrow, and the chase was done.

With their knives the boys dressed the buck, and then went back to the camp to tell the women where the meat could be found—just as the men do. It was their first deer; and pride shone in their faces as they told their grandfather that night in the lodge.

“That is good,” War Eagle replied, as the boys finished telling of their success. “That is good, if your mother needed the meat, but it is wrong to kill when you have plenty, lest Manitou be angry. There is always enough, but none to waste, and the hunter who kills more than he needs is wicked. To-night I shall tell you what happened to OLD-man when he did that. Yes, and he got into trouble over it.

“One day in the fall when the leaves were yellow, and the Deer-people were dressed in their blue robes—when the Geese and Duck-people were travelling to the country where water does not freeze, and where flowers never die, OLD-man was travelling on the plains.

“Near sundown he saw two Buffalo-Bulls feeding on a steep hillside; but he had no bow and arrow with him. He was hungry, and began to think of some way to kill one of the Bulls for meat. Very soon he thought out a

plan, for he is cunning always.

“He ran around the hill out of sight of the Bulls, and there made two men out of grass and sage-brush. They were dummies, of course, but he made them to look just like real men, and then armed each with a wooden knife of great length. Then he set them in the position of fighting; made them look as though they were about to fight each other with the knives. When he had them both fixed to suit, he ran back to the place where the Buffalo were calling:

“Ho! brothers, wait for me—do not run away. There are two fine men on the other side of this hill, and they are quarrelling. They will surely fight unless we stop them. It all started over you two Bulls, too. One of the men says you are fat and fine, and the other claims you are poor and skinny. Don’t let our brothers fight over such a foolish thing as that. It would be wicked. Now I can decide it, if you will let me feel all over you to see if you are fat or poor. Then I will go back to the men and settle the trouble by telling them the truth. Stand still and let me feel your sides—quick, lest the fight begin while I am away.’

“All right,’ said the Bulls, ‘but don’t you tickle us.’ Then OLD-man walked up close and commenced to feel about the Bulls’ sides; but his heart was bad. From his robe he slipped his great knife, and slyly felt about till he found the spot where the heart beats, and then stabbed the knife into the place, clear up to the hilt.

“Both of the Bulls died right away, and OLD-man laughed at the trick he had played upon them. Then he gave a knife to both of his hands, and said:

“Get to work, both of you! Skin these Bulls while I sit here and boss you.’

“Both hands commenced to skin the Buffalo, but the right hand was much the swifter worker. It gained upon the left hand rapidly, and this made the left hand angry. Finally the left hand called the right hand ‘dog-face.’ That is the very worst thing you can call a person in our language, you know, and of course it made the right hand angry. So crazy and angry was the right hand that it stabbed the left hand, and then they began to fight in earnest.

“Both cut and slashed till blood covered the animals they were skinning. All this fighting hurt OLD-man badly, of course, and he commenced to cry, as women do sometimes. This stopped the fight; but still OLD-man cried, till, drying his tears, he saw a Red Fox sitting near the Bulls, watching him. ‘Hi, there, you—go away from

there! If you want meat you go and kill it, as I did.'

"Red Fox laughed—'Ha!—Ha!—Ha!—foolish OLD-man—Ha!—ha!' Then he ran away and told the other Foxes and the Wolves and the Coyotes about OLD-man's meat. Told them that his own hands couldn't get along with themselves and that it would be easy to steal it from him.

"They all followed the Red Fox back to the place where OLD-man was, and there they ate all of the meat—every bit, and polished the bones.

"OLD-man couldn't stop them, because he was hurt, you see; but it all came about through lying and killing more meat than he needed. Yes—he lied and that is bad, but his hands got to quarrelling between themselves, and family quarrels are always bad. Do not lie; do not quarrel. It is bad. Ho!"

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