

Shooting of the Red Eagle

Old Indian Legends

Native American

Intermediate

6 min read

A man in buckskins sat upon the top of a little hillock. The setting sun shone bright upon a strong bow in his hand. His face was turned toward the round camp ground at the foot of the hill. He had walked a long journey hither. He was waiting for the chieftain's men to spy him.

Soon four strong men ran forth from the center wigwam toward the hillock, where sat the man with the long bow.

"He is the avenger come to shoot the red eagle," cried the runners to each other as they bent forward swinging their elbows together.

They reached the side of the stranger, but he did not heed them. Proud and silent he gazed upon the cone-shaped wigwams beneath him. Spreading a handsomely decorated buffalo robe before the man, two of the warriors lifted him by each shoulder and placed him gently on it. Then the four men took, each, a corner of the blanket and carried the stranger, with long proud steps, toward the chieftain's teepee.

Ready to greet the stranger, the tall chieftain stood at the entrance way. "How, you are the avenger with the magic arrow!" said he, extending to him a smooth soft hand.

"How, great chieftain!" replied the man, holding long the chieftain's hand. Entering the teepee, the chieftain

motioned the young man to the right side of the doorway, while he sat down opposite him with a center fire burning between them. Wordless, like a bashful Indian maid, the avenger ate in silence the food set before him on the ground in front of his crossed shins. When he had finished his meal he handed the empty bowl to the chieftain's wife, saying, "Mother-in-law, here is your dish!"

"Han, my son!" answered the woman, taking the bowl.

With the magic arrow in his quiver the stranger felt not in the least too presuming in addressing the woman as his mother-in-law.

Complaining of fatigue, he covered his face with his blanket and soon within the chieftain's teepee he lay fast asleep.

"The young man is not handsome after all!" whispered the woman in her husband's ear.

"Ah, but after he has killed the red eagle he will seem handsome enough!" answered the chieftain.

That night the star men in their burial procession in the sky reached the low northern horizon, before the center fires within the teepees had flickered out. The ringing laughter which had floated up through the smoke lapels was now hushed, and only the distant howling of wolves broke the quiet of the village. But the lull between midnight and dawn was short indeed. Very early the oval-shaped door-flaps were thrust aside and many brown faces peered out of the wigwams toward the top of the highest bluff.

Now the sun rose up out of the east. The red painted avenger stood ready within the camp ground for the flying of the red eagle. He appeared, that terrible bird! He hovered over the round village as if he could pounce down upon it and devour the whole tribe.

When the first arrow shot up into the sky the anxious watchers thrust a hand quickly over their half-uttered "hinnu!" The second and the third arrows flew upward but missed by a wide space the red eagle soaring with lazy indifference over the little man with the long bow. All his arrows he spent in vain. "Ah! my blanket brushed my elbow and shifted the course of my arrow!" said the stranger as the people gathered around him.

During this happening, a woman on horseback halted her pony at the chieftain's teepee. It was no other than the young woman who cut loose the tree-bound captive!

While she told the story the chieftain listened with downcast face. "I passed him on my way. He is near!" she ended.

Indignant at the bold impostor, the wrathful eyes of the chieftain snapped fire like red cinders in the night time. His lips were closed. At length to the woman he said: "How, you have done me a good deed." Then with quick decision he gave command to a fleet horseman to meet the avenger. "Clothe him in these my best buckskins," said he, pointing to a bundle within the wigwam.

In the meanwhile strong men seized Iktomi and dragged him by his long hair to the hilltop. There upon a mock-pillared grave they bound him hand and feet. Grown-ups and children sneered and hooted at Iktomi's disgrace. For a half-day he lay there, the laughing-stock of the people. Upon the arrival of the real avenger, Iktomi was released and chased away beyond the outer limits of the camp ground.

On the following morning at daybreak, peeped the people out of half-open door-flaps.

There again in the midst of the large camp ground was a man in beaded buckskins. In his hand was a strong bow and red-tipped arrow. Again the big red eagle appeared on the edge of the bluff. He plumed his feathers and flapped his huge wings.

The young man crouched low to the ground. He placed the arrow on the bow, drawing a poisoned flint for the eagle.

The bird rose into the air. He moved his outspread wings one, two, three times and lo! the eagle tumbled from the great height and fell heavily to the earth. An arrow stuck in his breast! He was dead!

So quick was the hand of the avenger, so sure his sight, that no one had seen the arrow fly from his long bent bow.

In awe and amazement the village was dumb. And when the avenger, plucking a red eagle feather, placed it in his black hair, a loud shout of the people went up to the sky. Then hither and thither ran singing men and

women making a great feast for the avenger.

Thus he won the beautiful Indian princess who never tired of telling to her children the story of the big red eagle.

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com