

The Dwarf People

A Treasury Of Eskimo Tales

North American

Advanced
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Very long ago, before the white people ever went into the land of the Eskimo, there was a large village at Pik-mik-tal-ik. One winter day the people living there were surprised to see a small man and a small woman with a child coming down the river on the ice. The man was so little that he wore a coat made of a single white fox skin. The woman's coat was made from the skins of two white hares; while two muskrat skins clothed the child.

The father and mother were about two cubits high, and the boy not over the length of one's forearm. Though he was so small, the man was dragging a sled much larger than those used by the villagers, and he had on it a heavy load of various articles. He seemed surprisingly strong, and when they came to the shore below the village, he easily drew the sled up the steep bank, and taking it by the rear end raised it on the sled frame, a feat which would have required the strength of several of the villagers.

The couple entered one of the houses and were made welcome. This small family remained in the village for some time, the man taking his place among the other men and seeming entirely at home and friendly. He was very fond of his little son; but one day when the latter was playing outside the house, he was bitten so badly by a savage dog that he died. In his anger the father caught the dog up by the tail and struck it against a post so violently that the dog fell in halves.

In his great sorrow, the father made a handsome, carved grave-box for his son and placed the child with his

toys in it. Then he went into his house and for four days he did no work and would see no one. At the end of that time he took his sled, and with his wife returned up the river on their old trail, while the villagers sorrowfully watched them go, for they had come to like the pair very much.

Before this time the villagers had always made the body of their sleds from long strips of wood running lengthwise; but after they had seen the dwarf's sled with many crosspieces, they adopted that model.

Before this time, too, they had always cast their dead out on the tundra to be devoured by the dogs and wild beasts; but after they had seen the dwarf people bury their son in a grave-box with toys placed about him, they buried their dead in that way and observed four days of mourning as had been done by the dwarf; for they liked him and his gentle manners.

And ever since that time the hunters coming home at dusk and looking toward the darkening tundra, sometimes see dwarf people who carry bows and arrows, but who disappear into the ground if one tries to approach them. They are harmless people, never attempting to do anyone an injury. No one has ever spoken to these dwarfs since the time they left the village; but deer hunters have often seen their tracks near the foot of the mountains.

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