

The First Man

A Treasury Of Eskimo Tales

North American

Intermediate
5 min read

In the time before there were any people on earth, a large pea-vine was growing on the beach, and in the pod of this pea the first man lay coiled up for four days. On the fifth day he stretched out his feet and that bursted the pod. He fell to the ground, where he stood up, a full-grown man.

He had never seen anything that looked like him, and he did not know what to make of himself. He looked around, and then at himself; then he moved his arms and hands and was surprised that he could do it. He moved his neck and his legs, and examined himself curiously.

Looking back, he saw the pod from which he had fallen still hanging to the vine, with a hole at the lower end out of which he had dropped. He went up and looked in through the hole to see if there were any more like him in the pod. Then he looked about him again, and saw that he was getting farther away from the place where he started, and that the ground seemed very soft and moved up and down under his feet.

After a while he had an unpleasant feeling in his stomach, and stooped down to take water in his mouth from a small pool at his feet. The water ran down into his stomach and he felt better. When he looked up again, he saw a big dark object coming through the air with a waving motion. It came on until it was just in front of him when it stopped and, standing on the ground, looked at him.

This was a Raven, and as soon as it stopped it raised one of its wings, pushed up its beak like a mask, to the top of its head, and changed at once into a man. Before he raised his mask, the Raven had stared at the Man and

now he stared more than ever, moving about from side to side to obtain a better view. At last he said:

“What are you? Where did you come from? I have never seen anything like you.”

He looked again and said, “You are so much like me in shape that you surprise me.”

Presently he said, “Walk away a few steps so that I may see you more clearly. I am astonished at you! I have never before seen anything like you. Where did you come from?”

“I came from the pea-pod,” said Man pointing to the plant from which he came.

“Ah!” exclaimed Raven, “I made that vine, but did not know that anything like you would ever come out of it. Come with me to the high ground over there. This ground I made later and it is still soft and thin, but it is harder and thicker over there.” They came to the higher ground which was firm under their feet.

“Have you eaten anything?” Raven asked Man.

“I took some soft stuff into me at one of the pools,” replied Man.

“Ah! you drank water,” said Raven. “Now wait for me here.”

He drew down the mask over his face, changing again into a bird, and flew far up into the sky where he disappeared. Man waited where he had been left until the fourth day, when Raven returned, bringing four berries. Pushing up his mask, Raven became a man again and held out two salmonberries and two heathberries.

“Here is what I made for you to eat. I wish them to be plentiful over the earth. Now eat them.”

Man took the berries and placed them in his mouth one after the other, and they satisfied his hunger which had made him feel uncomfortable. Raven then led Man to a small creek near by and left him till he went to the edge of the water and molded two pieces of clay into the form of a pair of mountain sheep. He held them in his hand till they were dry and then called Man to show him what he had done.

“Those are very pretty,” said Man.

“Close your eyes for a little while,” said Raven.

As soon as Man’s eyes were closed Raven drew down his mask and waved his wings four times over the images, when they came to life and bounded away as full-grown mountain sheep.

Raven then raised his mask and said, “Look! Look quick!” When Man saw the sheep moving away full of life he cried out with pleasure. Seeing how pleased he was, Raven said, “If these animals are numerous, perhaps people will wish very much to get them.”

“I think they will,” said Man.

“Well, it will be better for them to have their home in the high cliffs,” said Raven, “and there only shall they be found, so that everyone cannot kill them.”

Then Raven made two animals of clay and gave them life when they were dry only in spots; and they remained brown and white, and were the tame reindeer with mottled coats.

“Those are very handsome,” exclaimed Man, admiring them.

“Yes, but there will not be many of these,” said Raven.

Then he made a pair of wild reindeer and let them get dry only on their bellies before giving them life; and to this day the belly of the wild reindeer is the only white part about it.

“These animals will be very common and people will kill many of them,” said Raven.

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