

The First Woman

A Treasury Of Eskimo Tales

North American

Intermediate
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“You will be very lonely by yourself,” said Raven to Man one day. “I will make you a companion.”

He went to a spot some distance from where he had made the animals, and, looking now and then at Man as an artist looks at his model, he made an image very much like Man. He took from the creek some fine water grass and fastened it on the back of the head for hair. After the image had dried in his hands, he waved his wings over it as he had done with all the live things, and it came to life and stood beside Man, a beautiful young woman.

“There is a companion for you!” cried Raven. “Now come with me to this knoll over here.”

In those days there were no mountains far or near, and the sun never ceased to shine brightly. No rain ever fell and no winds blew. When they came to the knoll Raven found a patch of long, dry moss and showed the pair how to make a bed in it, and they slept very warmly. Raven drew down his mask and slept near by in the form of a bird. Wakening before the others, Raven went to the creek and made three pairs of fishes: sticklebacks, graylings, and blackfish. When they were swimming about in the water, he called to Man, “Come and see what I have made.”

When Man saw the sticklebacks swimming up the stream with a wriggling motion, he was so surprised that he raised his hands suddenly and the fish darted away.

“Look at these graylings,” said Raven; “they will be found in clear mountain streams, while the sticklebacks are

already on their way to the sea. Both are good for food; so, whether you live beside the water or in the upland, you may find plenty to eat.”

He looked about and thought there was nothing on the land as lively as the fish in the water, so he made the shrew-mice, for he said, “They will skip about and enliven the ground and prevent it from looking dead and barren, even if they are not good for food.”

He kept on for several days making other animals, more fishes, and a few ground birds, for as yet there were no trees for birds to alight in. Every time he made anything he explained to Man what it was and what it would do.

After this he flew away to the sky and was gone four days, when he returned bringing a salmon for Man and his wife. He thought that the ponds and lakes seemed silent and lonely, so he made insects to fly over their surfaces, and muskrats and beavers to swim about near their borders. At that time the mosquito did not bite as it does now, and he said to Man:

“I made these flying creatures to enliven the world and make it cheerful. The skin of this muskrat you are to use for clothing. The beaver is very cunning and only good hunters can catch it. It will live in the streams and build strong houses, and you must follow its example and build a house.”

When a child was born, Raven and Man took it to the creek and rubbed it with clay, and carried it back to the stopping-place on the knoll. The next morning the child was running about pulling up grass and other plants which Raven had caused to grow near by. On the third day the child became a full-grown man.

Raven one day went to the creek and made a bear, and gave it life; but he jumped aside very quickly when the bear stood up and looked fiercely about. He had thought there ought to be some animal of which Man would be afraid, and now he was almost afraid of the bear himself.

“You would better keep away from that animal,” he said. “It is very fierce and will tear you to pieces if you disturb it.”

He made various kinds of seals, and said to Man, “You are to eat these and to take their skins for clothing. Cut some of the skins into strips and make snares to catch deer. But you must not snare deer yet; wait until they are

more numerous.”

By and by another child was born, and the Man and Woman rubbed it with clay as Raven had taught them to do, and the next day the little girl walked about. On the third day she was a full-grown woman, for in those days people grew up very fast, so that the earth would be peopled.

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