

The Marmot and the Raven

A Treasury Of Eskimo Tales

North American

Intermediate

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Once when a Raven was flying over some reefs near the shore of the sea, he was seen by some Sea-birds that were perched on the rocks. They began to revile him, calling him disagreeable names: "Oh, you offal eater! Oh, you carrion eater! Oh, you black one!" until the Raven turned and flew away, crying, "Gnak, gnak, gnak! why do they call me such names?"

He flew far away across the great water until he came to a mountain on the other side, where he stopped. Just in front of him he saw a marmot hole. He said to himself, "If it is a disgrace to eat dead animals I will eat only live ones. I will become a murderer."

He stood in front of the hole watching, and very soon the marmot came home, bringing some food. Marmot said to Raven, "Please stand aside; you are right in front of my door."

"It is not my intention to stand aside," said Raven. "They called me a carrion eater, and I will show that I am not, for I will eat you."

"If you are going to eat me, you ought to be willing to do me a favor," replied Marmot. "I have heard that you are a very fine dancer, and I long to see you dance before I die. If you dance as beautifully as they say, I shall be willing to die when once I have seen it. If you will dance I will sing, and then you may eat me."

This pleased Raven so much that he began to dance and Marmot pretended to go into ecstasies about it.

“Oh, Raven, Raven, Raven, how well you dance!” he sang. “Oh, Raven, Raven, Raven, how well you dance!”

By and by they stopped to rest and Marmot said, “I am very much delighted with your dancing. Do shut your eyes and dance your best just once more, while I sing.”

Raven closed his eyes and hopped clumsily about while Marmot sang, “Oh, Raven, Raven, Raven, what a graceful dancer! Oh, Raven, Raven, Raven, what a fool you are!” And with a quick run, Marmot darted between Raven’s legs and was safe in his hole.

There he turned, putting out the tip of his nose and laughing mockingly as he said, “Chi-kik-kik, chi-kik-kik, chi-kik-kik! You are the greatest fool I ever met. What a ridiculous figure you made while dancing; I could scarcely sing for laughing. Look at me, and see how fat I am. Don’t you wish you could eat me?”

And he tormented Raven till the latter flew away in a rage.

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