



The Moon and the Great Snake

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Native Americannorth American

*Intermediate
4 min read*

The rain had passed; the moon looked down from a clear sky, and the bushes and dead grass smelled wet, after the heavy storm. A cottontail ran into a clump of wild-rose bushes near War Eagle's lodge, and some dogs were close behind the frightened animal, as he gained cover. Little Buffalo Calf threw a stone into the bushes, scaring the rabbit from his hiding-place, and away went bunny, followed by the yelping pack. We stood and listened until the noise of the chase died away, and then went into the lodge, where we were greeted, as usual, by War Eagle. To-night he smoked; but with greater ceremony, and I suspected that it had something to do with the forthcoming story. Finally he said:

"You have seen many Snakes, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied the children, "we have seen a great many. In the summer we see them every day."

“Well,” continued the story-teller, “once there was only one Snake on the whole world, and he was a big one, I tell you. He was pretty to look at, and was painted with all the colors we know. This snake was proud of his clothes and had a wicked heart. Most Snakes are wicked, because they are his relations.

“Now, I have not told you all about it yet, nor will I tell you to-night, but the Moon is the Sun’s wife, and some day I shall tell you that story, but to-night I am telling you about the Snakes.

“You know that the Sun goes early to bed, and that the Moon most always leaves before he gets to the lodge. Sometimes this is not so, but that is part of another story.

“This big Snake used to crawl up a high hill and watch the Moon in the sky. He was in love with her, and she knew it; but she paid no attention to him. She liked his looks, for his clothes were fine, and he was always slick and smooth. This went on for a long time, but she never talked to him at all. The Snake thought maybe the hill wasn’t high enough, so he found a higher one, and watched the Moon pass, from the top. Every night he climbed this high hill and motioned to her. She began to pay more attention to the big Snake, and one morning early, she loafed at her work a little, and spoke to him. He was flattered, and so was she, because he said many nice things to her, but she went on to the Sun’s lodge, and left the Snake.

“The next morning very early she saw the Snake again, and this time she stopped a long time — so long that the Sun had started out from the lodge before she reached home. He wondered what kept her so long, and became suspicious of the Snake. He made up his mind to watch, and try to catch them together. So every morning the Sun left the lodge a little earlier than before; and one morning, just as he climbed a mountain, he saw the big Snake talking to the Moon. That made him angry, and you can’t blame him, because his wife was spending her time loafing with a Snake.

“She ran away; ran to the Sun’s lodge and left the Snake on the hill. In no time the Sun had grabbed him. My, the Sun was angry! The big Snake begged, and promised never to speak to the Moon again, but the Sun had him; and he smashed him into thousands of little pieces, all of different colors from the different parts of his painted body. The little pieces each turned into a little snake, just as you see them now, but they were all too small for the Moon to notice after that. That is how so many Snakes came into the world; and that is why they are all small, nowadays.

“Our people do not like the Snake-people very well, but we know that they were made to do something on this world, and that they do it, or they wouldn’t live here.

“That was a short story, but to-morrow night I will tell you why the Deer-people have no gall on their livers; and why the Antelope-people do not wear dew-claws, for you should know that there are no other animals with cloven hoofs that are like them in this.

“I am tired to-night, and I will ask that you go to your lodges, that I may sleep, for I am getting old. Ho!”

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