

The Thunder Boy

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Native AmericanNorth American

Easy
10 min read

A POOR old woman lived in a smoky little cabin in the woods. She was only skin and bones and she cried all the time, both day and night. Her blanket was so old and dirty that nobody could have told of what kind of skin it was made.

This old woman had had seven daughters. Six had been carried off, one after another; the seventh daughter died.

The daughter who died had been buried some time when one night her mother heard crying. She took a torch and going out toward the grave found a naked baby. She wrapped the baby in her blanket and took it home.

The baby, a little boy, grew very fast. One day when the grandmother came home from gathering wood he was not in the house and she couldn't find him.

That night there was a storm with thunder and lightning. In the morning when the child came back the grandmother asked, "Where have you been, my grandson?"

"I have been with my father; he took me home with him."

"Who is your father?"

“HÍNO’ is my father. He took me home first, then we came back and were around here all night.”

“Was my daughter your mother?” asked the old woman.

“She was,” answered the boy, “and HÍNO’ is my father.”

The old woman believed her grandson. As the boy grew he often made a noise like the noise of thunder and whenever HÍNO’ came to the neighborhood the child went out and helped his father; he was HÍNO’HOHÁWAnK, son of HÍNO’.

After a time the boy asked his grandmother where his six aunts were, and she said, “Far from here there is a mother and son who live by playing dice. Your aunts went there with a company of people; they played, were beaten and their heads were cut off. Many men and women have gone to the same place and have lost their heads.”

“I will go and kill that woman and her son,” said the boy.

The grandmother tried to keep him at home but he wouldn’t stay with her. He was ragged and dirty. He asked her to make him two pairs of moccasins. She made them, and, for a pouch, she gave him the skin of a flying squirrel.

The boy started off toward the West and after a while he came to a large opening where there was a bark house with a pole in front of it, and on the pole hung a skin blanket. He heard a great noise and saw that at one end of the opening old men were betting and boys were playing ball.

When people saw him, one said to another, “Who is that boy? Where did he come from?”

Soon an old man went up to HÍNO’HOHÁWAnK, gave him a club and asked him to play.

He played ball so well that the same man came to him, and said, “We want you to play dice, my people will bet on you.

“I don’t know how to play dice,” answered the boy.

“We will risk our heads on you,” said the man.

Young HÍNO’ followed the old man to the pole that stood by the bark house. The betting woman was sitting

there on an elk skin. In front of her was a white stone bowl as smooth as glass. HÍNO'HOHÁWAnK knelt down beside the bowl.

The woman said, "You must play first."

"No," said he, "you must play first."

The woman took up her dice, which were round and made out of stone. She blew on them, threw them into the bowl, shook the bowl, and called out, "Game! Game!"

The dice flew up in the air, became crows and cawed as they went out of sight. Soon they came down, cawing; as they touched the bowl they were stones again.

The woman had three plays in which to get a count of seventeen. She threw three times, but made no score. Then young HÍNO' took dice out of his pouch made of the skin of a flying squirrel. The woman insisted on his using her dice, but he refused. He put his dice in the bowl and shook the bowl. The dice became wild ducks and flew into the air.

The ducks went very high, all the people heard them as they rose. When they came down and touched the bowl they were stones and scored ten.

HÍNO' shook the bowl again, and called "Game! Game!"

The old woman called "No game! No game!"

The ducks flew up and when they came down they scored another ten. He tried a third time and scored ten, then he called to the people to come and see him cut off the head of the betting woman.

"Wait," said the woman, "You must play ball with my son. If he loses, he will lose his head."

HÍNO' asked the old men what he should do. Seeing how powerful he was, they said, "Play."

He went to the ball ground—he was ragged and looked very poor. Only the two played. HÍNO'HOHÁWAnK sprang forward and knocked the club out of YEGEnHDJI's hand. The young man ran for his club, but before he could get it, HÍNO'HOHÁ sent the ball through the goal. This was repeated seven times, and HÍNO's son won the game.

Then he said to the people, "Now you can destroy the old woman and her son."

They did. Then the young boy said, "I am going to bring my grandmother to this place and we will have this long house to live in."

As he traveled toward home, he sang praises of himself, and his grandmother heard him when he was a long way off. When he came to the cabin he told her what he had done, and said, "We must go there and live in the long house."

She made ready and started, but it took a long time to reach the place, for friends went with them. When all had settled in houses built around the opening HÍNO'HOHÁ called the people to the long house for a dance. The grandmother threw away her old blanket and put on the clothes left by the gambling woman and then she looked like a young girl.

After a time HÍNO'HOHÁ went off with HÍNO', his father, and stayed with him all Winter.

When Spring came the grandmother was uneasy about the boy, but one day she heard Thunder off in the West and soon her grandson came to the cabin.

"Where have you been?" asked she.

"On a great mountain far off in the West. I have been with my father, helping the nations and protecting men."

The boy stayed with his grandmother that Spring and Summer. Once in a while when it began to storm, he went away, but he always came back when the storm was over. The two lived a long time in this way, but at last the boy said, "You have a brother living in the West. Some wizard stole him from you. I must go and find him."

And he went West to look for his uncle.

HÍNO'HOHÁ traveled till he came to a cabin. In the cabin a woman was sitting by a fire. When he asked where his uncle was she wouldn't answer. Taking his war club from his pouch, he struck her on the head and killed her. Then he went out and walked around the house, mourning and looking for his uncle. At last he heard a man groaning. He looked up in the trees for he couldn't see anyone on the ground, but the man was not in a tree.

He followed the sound and soon came to a large slippery elm tree. A man lay under the tree; he was held do,

down by great roots; his head came out between two roots on one side and his feet between two roots on the other side. The tree stood on the middle of his body. He was calling to his nephew to give him a smoke.

HÍNO'HOHÁ said, "Oh, my poor uncle, how badly off you are! I will give you a smoke right away."

He kicked the tree over, saying, "Rise up, uncle!"

The man stood up at once, and was well. HÍNO'HOHÁ took out his pouch and gave the old man a stone pipe and Indian tobacco, and he grew strong. Then he told his nephew how a woman had enticed him to go with her, then she ate him up and put his bones under the elm tree, The uncle and nephew went to the long house. The old grandmother was surprised and glad and the three lived happily together till one day the nephew went off in a storm and when the storm was over he brought back a wife. Then when he went off with a storm his wife was uneasy. The woman didn't know where she was from. In a terrible storm HÍNO'HOHÁ had brought her home on his back.

After a time she had a son and when the boy was old enough to run around, the uncle, whose bones had lain under the elm tree, began to teach him, and soon the child was able to make a noise like the roar of thunder.

One day the child followed his mother out of the house; he had a little dog and that followed too. As the boy was running along somebody seized him and rushed off. The dog ran after him, and, jumping to snatch him away, caught hold of his feet and pulled off his moccasins; the dog carried the moccasins home.

When the mother saw the moccasins, she knew that her boy was gone. The father was off in a storm. When he came home the woman asked if he had taken the boy away.

"I have not," said he.

"Oh, he is lost; he is lost!" cried the woman.

"He is safe," said HÍNO'HOHÁ. "He has many relatives around the world, uncles and cousins."

The boy was gone all Winter, but one day in Spring he came home with his father. Then HÍNO'HOHÁ said to his family, "We must all go and live with my father."

The old grandmother said, "I can't go; it is far and I am old."

“I will carry you,” said the grandson.

Then HÍNO’HOHÁ began to thunder, and lightning flew around. The long house was torn to pieces and blazed up in flames. All the rocks and houses and trees in the opening were destroyed. HÍNO’HOHÁ and his people rose up in the air. The East wind blew and it bore them to the high mountain in the West and there they found old HÍNO’.

And to this day the Thunder family live on that mountain in caves and among rocks.

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