

# *The Woman Magician*

A Treasury Of Eskimo Tales

North American

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*Intermediate*  
*6 min read*

Long ago, in Aggo, a country where nobody lives nowadays, there were two large houses standing far apart. In each of these houses many families lived together. In the summer the people in the two houses went in company to hunt deer and had a good time together. When fall came they returned to their separate houses. The names of the houses were Quern and Exaluq.

One summer it happened that the men from Quern had killed many deer, while those from Exaluq had caught but a few. The latter said to each other, "They are not fair; they shoot before we have a chance;" and they became very angry.

"Let us kill them," said one.

"Yes, let us kill them, but let us wait till the end of the season, and then we can take all the game they have in their storehouse," said the others. For the game was packed in snow and ice and was taken home on dog sledges when the hunting was over.

When it came time to go home both parties agreed to go on a certain day to the storehouses and pack up the game ready to start early in the morning. This was the time for which the men of Exaluq had been waiting.

They started off all together with their sledges, but when they got a long distance from the camp and very near to the storehouse, those from Exaluq suddenly fell upon the others and slew them, for the men from Quern had never suspected that there was any ill-feeling.

Fearing that if the dogs went back to camp without their masters, the women and children would guess what had happened, they killed the dogs also. When they returned, they told the women that their husbands had separated from them and had gone off over a hill, and they did not know what had become of them.

Now one of the young men had married a girl from Quern, and he went to her house that night as usual, and she received him kindly, for she believed what she had heard about the men of her party straying off. She and all the other women thought the men would soon find their way back, as they had hunted in these parts so long that they knew the land.

But in the house was the girl's little brother who had seen the husband come in; and after everybody was asleep he heard the spirits of the murdered men calling and he recognized their voices. They told him what had happened, and asked the boy to kill the young man in revenge for their deaths. So he crept from under the bed and thrust a knife into the young man's breast.

Then he awakened all the women and children in the great row of huts and told them that the spirits of the dead men had come to him and told of their murder, and had ordered him to avenge them by killing the young man.

"Oh, what shall we do? What shall we do?" they cried. "They have killed our men and they will kill us!" They were terribly frightened.

"We must fly from here before the men from Exaluq awaken and learn that the young man is slain in revenge," said one of the old women.

"But how can we fly? Our dogs are dead, and we cannot travel fast enough to escape."

“I will attend to that,” said the old woman. In her hut was a litter of pups, and as she was a conjurer, she said to them, “Grow up at once.” She had no fairy wand to wave over them, but she waved a stick, and after waving it once the dogs were half-grown. She waved it again, saying, “Be full-grown instantly;” and they were.

They harnessed the dogs at once, and in order to deceive their enemies they left everything in the huts and even left their lights burning, so that when the men arose in the morning they would think that they, too, had arisen and were dressing.

When it had come full daylight next morning the men of Exaluq wondered why the young man did not come back to them, and presently they went to find out. They peeked into the spy-hole of the window and saw the lamps burning, but no people inside the hut. They discovered the body of the dead man, and then when they looked they saw the tracks of sledges.

They wondered very much how the women could have gone away on sledges, since they had no dogs, and they feared some other people had helped them to get off. They hastily harnessed their own dogs and started in pursuit of the fugitives.

The women whipped their dogs and journeyed rapidly, but the pursuers had older and tougher animals and were likely to overtake them soon. They became very much frightened, fearing that they would all be killed in revenge for the death of the young man.

When the sledge of the men drew near and the women and children saw that they could not escape, the boy who had slain the man said to the old woman:

“The spirits of our murdered men are calling to us to cut the ice. Cannot you cut it?”

“I think I can,” she answered, and she slowly drew her first finger across the path of the pursuers, muttering a magic charm as she did so.

The ice gave a terrific crack, and the water came gushing through the crevasse. They sped on, and presently she drew another line with her finger, and another crack opened and the ice between the two cracks broke up and the floe began to move.

The men, dashing ahead with all speed, could scarcely stop their dog team in time to escape falling into the open water. The floe was so wide and so long that it was impossible for them to cross, and thus the women and children were saved by the art of their conjurer.

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