

What the Man in the Moon

Did

A Treasury Of Eskimo Tales

North American

Easy
5 min read

Long ago there was a poor little orphan boy who had no home and no one to protect him. All the inhabitants of the village neglected and abused him. He was not allowed to sleep in any of the huts, but one family permitted him to lie outside in the cold passage among the dogs who were his pillows and his quilt. They gave him no good meat, but flung him bits of tough walrus hide such as they gave to the dogs, and he was obliged to gnaw it as the dogs did, for he had no knife.

The only one who took pity on him was a young girl, and she gave him a small piece of iron for a knife. "You must keep it hidden, or the men will take it from you," she said.

He did not grow at all because he had so little food. He remained poor little Quadjaq, and led a miserable life. He did not dare even to join in the play of the boys, for they called him a "poor little shriveled bag of bones," and were always imposing upon him on account of his weakness.

When the people gathered in the singing house he used to lie in the passage and peep over the threshold. Now and then a man would take him by the nose and lift him into the house and make him carry out a jar of water.

It was so large and heavy that he had to take hold of it with both hands and his teeth. Because he was so often lifted by his nose, it grew very large, but he remained small and weak.

At last the Man in the Moon, who protects all the Eskimo orphans, noticed how the men ill-treated Quadjaq, and came down to help him. He harnessed his dappled dog to his sledge and drove down. When he was near the hut he stopped the dog and called, "Quadjaq, come out."

The boy thought it was one of the men who wanted to plague him, and he said, "I will not come out. Go away."

"Come out, Quadjaq," said the Man from the Moon, and his voice sounded softer than the voices of the men. But still the boy hesitated, and said, "You will cuff me."

"No, I will not hurt you. Come out," said the Moon Man.

Then Quadjaq came slowly out, but when he saw who it was he was even more frightened than if it had been one of the men standing there. The Moon Man took him to a place where there were many large boulders and made him lie across one as if he were to be paddled. Quadjaq was scared but he did not dare disobey.

The Man from the Moon took a long, thin ray of moonlight and whipped the boy softly with it.

"Do you feel stronger?" he asked.

"Yes, I feel a little stronger," said the lad.

"Then lift yon boulder," said the Man.

But Quadjaq was not able to lift it, so he was whipped again.

"Do you feel stronger now?" asked the Man.

"Yes, I feel stronger," said Quadjaq.

"Then lift the boulder."

But again he was not able to lift the stone more than a foot from the ground, and he had to be whipped again. After the third time he was so strong that he lifted the boulder as if it had been a pebble.

“That will do now,” said the Man from the Moon. “Rays of light even from the Moon give you strength. Tomorrow morning I shall send three bears. Then you may show what power you have.”

The Man then got into his sledge and went back to his place in the Moon.

Every time a moonbeam had hit Quadjaq he had felt himself growing. His feet began first and became enormously large, and when the Man left him, he found himself a good-sized man.

In the morning he waited for the bears, and three bears did really come, growling and looking so fierce that the men of the village ran into their huts and shut the doors. But Quadjaq put on his boots and ran down to the ice where the bears were. The men peering out through the window holes said, “Can that be Quadjaq? The bears will soon eat the foolish fellow.”

But he seized the first one by its hind legs and smashed its head on an iceberg near which it was standing. The next one fared no better. But the third one he took in his arms and carried it up to the village and let it eat some of his persecutors.

“That is for abusing me!” he cried. “That is for ill-treating me!”

Those that he did not kill ran away never to return. Only a few who had been kind to him when he was a poor skinny boy were spared. Among them, of course, was the girl who had given him the knife, and she became his wife.

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