

Why the Moon Waxes and Wanes

A Treasury Of Eskimo Tales
North American

Intermediate
2 min read

In a certain village on the Yukon River there once lived four brothers and a sister. The sister's companion was the youngest boy, of whom she was very fond. This boy was lazy and could never be made to work. The other brothers were great hunters and in the fall they hunted at sea, for they lived near the shore. As soon as the Bladder feast in December was over, they went to the mountains and hunted reindeer. The boy never went with them, but remained at home with his sister, and they amused each other.

One time, however, she became angry at him, and that night when she carried food to the other brothers in the kashim or assembly house where the men slept, she gave none to the youngest brother. When she went out of the assembly house she saw a ladder leading up into the sky, with a line hanging down by the side of it. Taking hold of the line, she ascended the ladder, going up into the sky. As she was going up, the younger brother came out and, seeing her, at once ran back and called to his brothers:

“Our sister is climbing the sky! Our sister is climbing the sky!”

“Oh, you lazy youngster, why do you tell us that? She is doing no such thing,” said they.

“Come and see for yourselves! Come, quick!” he cried, very much excited.

Sure enough! Up she was going at a rapid rate.

The boy caught up his sealskin breeches and, being in a hurry, thrust one leg into them and then drew a deerskin sock on the other foot as he ran outside. There he saw the girl far away up in the sky and began at once to go up the ladder toward her; but she floated away, he following in turn.

The girl became the sun and the boy became the moon, and ever since that time he pursues but never overtakes her. At night the sun sinks in the west, and the moon is seen coming up in the east to go circling after, but always too late. The moon, being without food, wanes slowly away from starvation until it is quite lost to sight; then the sun reaches out and feeds it from the dish in which she carried food to the kashim. After the moon is fed and gradually brought to the full, it is permitted to starve again, thus producing the waxing and waning which we see every month.

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