

Taking Away the Sun

Eskimo folktale

People were becoming such good hunters that they killed a great many animals, more than Raven was willing to have killed, lest the animals become too few for the large number of people now on earth. For this reason, Raven took a grass basket and tied a long line to it and, going down to earth, caught ten reindeer which he took up to the skyland. The next night he let the reindeer down near one of the villages and told them to run fast and break down the first house they came to, and destroy the people in it.

The reindeer did so and ate up the people with their sharp, wolf-like teeth; then they returned to the sky. The next night they came down again and destroyed another house and ate up the people.

"What shall we do?" cried the people to one another. "They will destroy all of us if they keep on coming."

"I know what I am going to do," said the man who lived in the third house. "They will come to my house the next time, and I'm going to cover it with deer fat and stick sour berries all over in the fat."

When the reindeer came the third night, they got their teeth full of fat and sour berries, and ran off shaking their heads so hard that their long, sharp teeth fell out. Afterward small teeth, such as reindeer now have, came in their places, and these animals became harmless.

But Raven had not accomplished his purpose, for only two families had been destroyed, and there were still too many inhabitants left. He said, "If something isn't done to stop people from killing so many animals, they will keep on until they have killed everything I have made. I believe I will take away the sun from them, so that they will be in the dark and will die."

He took Man up to the sky with him, so that he would be safe from the trouble to come. Then he said, "You remain here while I go and take away the sun."

He went away and took the sun, and put it into his skin bag, and carried it far off to a part of the skyland where his parents lived, thus making it very dark on earth. There in his father's village he stayed for a long time, keeping the sun carefully hidden in the bag.

The people on earth were terribly distressed when it remained dark so long. They prayed to Raven and offered him rich presents of food and furs, but he wouldn't bring back the sun. They kept on begging him, saying at last: "We have crept around in the darkness finding our storehouses and getting the meat, till now it is almost gone, and we are likely to starve. Let us have light for a little time at least, so we may get more food."

So Raven yielded a trifle and held up the sun in one hand *for two days* while all the people went hunting; then he put it back and darkness returned. Another long time would pass and the people would make many offerings before he would let them have light again. This was repeated many times.

In this same sky village with Raven and his parents lived an older brother of Raven who thought the punishment of men was being carried too far. This brother felt sorry for the people on earth, but he didn't say a word about it to anyone. He thought out a plan which he kept to himself.

After a time he pretended to die, and was put away in a grave box in the customary manner. As soon as the mourners left his grave, he arose and went out a short distance from the village, where he hid his raven mask and coat in a tree. Then he turned himself into a young boy and went back to his father's house, where he skipped about in a lively manner, and amused the parents so much that the father at last became very fond of him.

When he had gotten them in the habit of indulging him, he began to cry for the sun as a plaything. He kept this up until the father went to the bag and took out the sun and let him have it for a while, being careful to see that it went back into the bag when anyone was coming, or when the boy was going out of doors.

One day the boy played with it for a time in the house, all the while watching his chance, and when no one was looking, he ran outside, fled to the tree where he put on his raven coat and mask and flew away with it. When he was far up in the sky, he heard his father's voice, sounding faint and far below, saying:

"Don't hide the sun. If you will not bring it back, let it out of the bag sometimes. Don't keep us always in the dark, if you mean to keep the sun for yourself."

The father went into the house, and the Raven boy flew on to the place where the sun belonged, and put the bag down. It was early dawn and he saw

the Milky Way leading far onward, and followed it to a hole surrounded by short grass which glowed with light. He plucked some of the grass and, standing close beside the edge of the earth just before sunrise time, he stuck it into the sky. It has stayed there ever since as the beautiful Morning Star.

Then he went back and tore off the skin covering and put the sun in its place. Remembering that his father had called to him not to keep it always dark, but to make it partly dark and partly light, he caused the sky to revolve so that it moved around the earth carrying the sun and stars with it, and making day and night.

Going down to earth he came to where the first people lived, and said to them, "Raven, my uncle, was angry because you killed more animals than you needed, and he took away the sun; but I have put it back and it will never be changed again."

The people welcomed him warmly when they knew what he had done for them. As he looked around upon them he recognized the Headman of the sky-dwarfs.

"Why, what are you doing down here?" he asked.

"I and some of my people thought we would like a change, and so we came down to live on earth for a while," replied the dwarf.

"What has become of Man?"

"Who is Man? I never heard of him," said Raven boy.

"He was the first person ever seen on earth. He was our Headman until he went away with Raven," said the people.

"I will go into the skyland and find him," said Raven boy. He tried to fly, but could get up only a little way. He tried several times, getting only a short distance above the ground. When he found that he could not get back to the sky, he wandered off and finally came to where there were living the children of the three men who last dropped from the pea-vine. There he took a wife and lived for a long time having many children, all of whom were Raven people like himself and could fly over the earth. But they gradually lost their magical powers, and were no longer able to turn themselves into men by pushing up their beaks. They became just ordinary ravens like those we see now on the tundras or marshy plains.