

THE RED INDIAN FAIRY BOOK



WHEN THE YELLOW HORNED SERPENT HEARD
THE STRANGE MUSIC, HE WAS CHARMED

THE RED INDIAN FAIRY BOOK

BY

FRANCES JENKINS OLCOTT



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TO
ROBERT YATES PHILLIPS
WHO LOVES INDIAN STORIES

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INTRODUCTION

HERE are sixty-four stories of the Red Men, telling of Magic, Mystery, and Fairies. Most of them are Nature stories—poetic fancies of the Indians about birds, beasts, flowers, and rocks of our American meadows, prairies, and forests. Here also are tales of the Wind, Rainbow, Sun, Moon, and Stars. A few moral stories, tender and simple, like “Little Burnt-Face,” are included. Indian customs, and life in the wigwam and forest, are all here.

The tales are arranged according to the Seasons. There are some for early Spring, when the maple sap mounts, and the arbutus blooms under the snow; for later Spring, when the birds nest, and the wild flowers blow; for Summer, with its heat, storms, fishing, and canoeing; for Autumn, with its corn, nuts, Witch-Night, and harvest feast; for Winter, with its ice, snow, and adventures.

In choosing themes for these stories, a large body of folklore of many tribes has been gone over. In retelling, all that is coarse, fierce, and irrational has been eliminated as far as possible, and the moral and fanciful elements retained. The plots have been more closely constructed, and retold in the direct manner interesting to children. The character and

spirit of the original stories have been carefully preserved, as may be seen by comparing the elemental tales of the Caddo and Vuntakutchin Indians with the more highly developed, poetic ones of the Algonquin or Iroquois tribes.

The reader may be surprised at the absence of the benign "Great Spirit" who figures in many modern Indian tales. But the truth is, he is not to be found in aboriginal Red Indian mythology. To quote from Mr. Leland's *Algonquin Legends*, "I do not believe that the idea of a Great Spirit, in the sense in which it is generally used by Indians, or is attributed to them, was ever known till learned from the whites." The *Second Annual Report* of the Bureau of American Ethnology says, "The 'Great Spirit,' so popularly and poetically known as the god of the Red Man, and the 'Happy Hunting-Ground,' generally reported to be the Indian's idea of a future state, are both of them but their ready conception of the white man's God and Heaven."

Most of these tales have been issued for story-tellers, in the columns of the *Saturday Magazine* of the New York *Evening Post*. So the stories are not only for the children's own reading, but they form a storehouse of Red Indian Nature myths, suitable for story-telling in homes, schools, and libraries. To aid the story-teller, a subject index is appended on page 295.

**APRIL THE MONTH OF SPRING
AND RAINBOWS**



THE SPRING BEAUTY

(Chippewa)

AN old man was sitting in his lodge, by the side of a frozen stream. It was the end of Winter, the air was not so cold, and his fire was nearly out. He was old and alone. His locks were white with age, and he trembled in every joint. Day after day passed, and he heard nothing but the sound of the storm sweeping before it the new-fallen snow.

One day while his fire was dying, a handsome young man entered the lodge. His cheeks were red, his eyes sparkled. He walked with a quick, light step.

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His forehead was bound with sweet-grass, and he carried a bunch of fragrant flowers in his hand.

“Ah, my Son,” said the old man, “I am happy to see you. Come in. Tell me your adventures, and what strange lands you have seen. I will tell you my wonderful deeds, and what I can perform. You shall do the same, and we will amuse each other.”

The old man then drew from a bag a curiously wrought pipe. He filled it with mild tobacco, and handed it to his guest. They each smoked from the pipe, and then began their stories.

“I am Peboan, the Spirit of Winter,” said the old man. “I blow my breath, and the streams stand still. The water becomes stiff and hard as clear stone.”

“I am Seegwun, the Spirit of Spring,” answered the youth. “I breathe, and flowers spring up in the meadows and woods.”

“I shake my locks,” said the old man, “and the snow covers the land. The leaves fall from the trees, and my breath blows them away. The birds fly to the distant land, and the animals hide themselves from the cold.”

“I shake my ringlets,” said the young man, “and the warm showers of soft rain fall upon the Earth. The flowers lift their heads from the ground, and the grass grows thick and green. My voice recalls the birds, and they come flying joyfully from the Southland. The warmth of my breath unbinds the streams, and they sing the songs of Summer. Music

THE SPRING BEAUTY

fills the groves wherever I walk, and all Nature rejoices.”

And while they were thus talking, a wonderful change took place. The Sun began to rise. A gentle warmth stole over the place. Peboan, the Spirit of Winter, became silent. His head drooped, and the snow outside the lodge melted away. Seegwun, the Spirit of Spring, grew more radiant, and rose joyfully to his feet. The Robin and the Bluebird began to sing on the top of the lodge. The stream murmured past the door, and the fragrance of opening flowers came softly on the breeze.

The lodge faded away, and Peboan sank down and dissolved into tiny streams of water, that vanished under the brown leaves of the forest.

Thus the Spirit of Winter departed, and where he melted away the Indian children gathered the first blossoms, fragrant and delicately pink,—the modest Spring Beauty.

LITTLE DAWN BOY AND THE RAINBOW TRAIL

(Navaho)

WHEN the World first began in Red Indian Land, Little Dawn Boy dwelt in Red Rock House by the side of a deep cañon. And there he lived with his father, his mother, his brothers, his sisters, and a big Medicine Man.

Every morning, when the Sun rose, Little Dawn Boy sat on the edge of the cañon, and looked far across to the other side. He saw in the distance a purple mountain and behind it a high, white cliff like a tower, which hid its head in the clouds.

And every morning he asked the Medicine Man, "Who lives on the top of the white cliff?"

And the Medicine Man answered, "First learn my magic songs, and then I will tell you."

So Little Dawn Boy learned the magic songs, and one day the Medicine Man said:—

"Now that you know the songs, and are big enough, you may visit the Great-Chief-of-All-Magic,

LITTLE DAWN BOY AND THE RAINBOW TRAIL

who lives in the House of Evening Light on the top of the white cliff.

“In the house are four rooms and four doors. The first door is guarded by two bolts of bright lightning; the second door is watched by two fierce Bears; the third door, by two red-headed Serpents; and the fourth door, by two angry Rattlesnakes.

“If a visitor goes there who does not know the magic songs, the lightning strikes him, and the animal watchers eat him up. But you know the magic songs so well that you may go safely to the House of Evening Light and ask for good gifts for your people.”

“And how,” asked Little Dawn Boy, “shall I reach the top of the white cliff?”

“You must take with you presents for the Great-Chief-of-All-Magic,” replied the Medicine Man, “and you must strew the Pollen of Dawn on your trail. And when you get to the summit of the purple mountain, if you sing a magic song, you will see how to reach the top of the white cliff.”

So Little Dawn Boy rose up and painted himself beautifully, and decked his head with feathers. He took his bow and arrows, and made ready to start. The Medicine Man gave him two bags. In one were gifts of strings of wampum and sky-blue turquoises, and in the other the golden Pollen of Dawn which the Medicine Man had gathered from the Larkspur flowers.

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Little Dawn Boy set out on his way with dew about his feet and Grasshoppers skipping all around him. And as he went, he scattered the golden pollen on his trail.

All that day, and the second, and the third, he travelled, and early on the morning of the fourth day he climbed to the summit of the purple mountain. But still far off and high among the clouds towered the white cliff, and around its top flashed the red lightning.

But Little Dawn Boy was not afraid. He scattered more pollen on his trail, and began to sing his magic song:—

“Oh, Pollen Boy am I!
From Red Rock House I come!
With Pollen of Dawn on my trail!
 With beauty before me,
 With beauty behind me,
 With beauty below me,
 With beauty above me,
 With beauty all round me,
Over the Rainbow Trail I go!
Hither I wander, thither I wander,
Over the beautiful trail I go!”

And as he finished the song an arch of shimmering light, all rose, violet, blue, and every colour, and delicate as a veil, began to stretch from the summit of the purple mountain to the top of the white cliff. And in a minute Little Dawn Boy saw a bright Rainbow Bridge grow before his eyes.

LITTLE DAWN BOY AND THE RAINBOW TRAIL

Singing with delight he hastened over the Rainbow Bridge, and as he ran a wind sprang up and blew a many-coloured mist to the top of the cliff. And it blinded the eyes of the animal watchers at the four doors of the House of Evening Light.

And when Little Dawn Boy reached the house, he went in and the watchers did not see him. As he entered, he passed over a trail of daylight, and sprinkled the golden pollen, while he sang his magic song.

Then the Great-Chief-of-All-Magic looked at him angrily, and called out like thunder: "Who is this stranger who dares to come here unbidden? Is he one of the people from the Earth? No one has ever ventured to come here before."

And Little Dawn Boy answered and said, "See, I bring you beautiful gifts, and I trust to find many friends in this house." And he opened the gift-bag, and took out the strings of wampum and sky-blue turquoises.

And when the Great-Chief-of-All-Magic saw these, he was well pleased, and looked kindly at Little Dawn Boy, and welcomed him to the House of Evening Light. And he asked him what presents he would like in return.

And Little Dawn Boy answered: "Gifts for my kindred I wish. Give me, I pray, yellow and white and blue corn, green growing plants, fragrant flowers, black clouds and thunderstorms with lightning; also the soft Spring showers and the gentle Summer breezes, with pale mists, and golden Autumn hazes."

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And so the Great-Chief-of-All-Magic gave him what he asked for, together with many other presents. He feasted him with good things to eat and drink, and afterward sent him on his way.

And as the boy stepped out of the House of Evening Light, he began to sing another magic song:—

“Oh, Little Dawn Boy am I!
From the House of Evening Light!
On the Trail of Evening Light!
To Red Rock House I return!
Held fast in my hands are gifts!
 With soft rains above me,
 With sweet flowers below me,
 With white corn behind me,
 With green plants before me,
 With pale mists all round me,
Over the Rainbow Trail I go!
Hither I wander, thither I wander,
Over the beautiful trail I go!”

And as he sang, the Rainbow, all rose, violet, blue, and every colour, began to span with its bright arch the space from the white cliff to the purple mountain. And over the Rainbow Bridge Little Dawn Boy hastened singing his magic song.

And for three days and three nights he travelled, until early on the fourth day, just as the Sun rose, he reached the edge of the deep cañon, and entered Red Rock House.

LITTLE DAWN BOY AND THE RAINBOW TRAIL

And there he saw his people waiting for him. And joyfully they welcomed him, and spread a magic buckskin for him to sit upon. And he related all his adventures, and gave them the many good gifts that had come from the House of Evening Light.

And ever since that day his people have sung the magic song of Little Dawn Boy:—

“With soft rains above us,
With sweet flowers below us,
With white corn behind us,
With green plants before us,
With pale mists all round us,
Over the Rainbow Trail we go!
Hither we wander, thither we wander,
Over the beautiful trail we go!”

THE MEADOW DANDELION

(Chippewa)

WHEN the Earth was very young, says the Chippewa Grandmother, Mudjekeewis the Mighty kept the West Wind for himself and gave the three other winds to his sons. To Wabun he gave the East Wind; to the rollicking Kabibonokka he gave the Northwest Wind. But he made the lazy Shawondasee ruler of the South Wind and of the Southland. And very sad was Shawondasee to leave the cool and pleasant Northland, and, sorrowing, he set out on his way.

“Farewell, Brother,” roared the Northwest Wind Kabibonokka. “Many’s the time in your hot land you will long for my cooling breath.”

But the lazy Shawondasee gave no answer, and slowly making his way to the Southland, built his lodge of branches. There in the flowery tangle of the forest, he sat sleepy and lazy in his lodge. He did not see the bright birds and flowers. He did not feel the fragrant airs, but ever he looked toward the North, and longed and sighed for its people and cool hills.

And when he sighed in the Springtime, flocks of eager birds flew northward to feast in the grain-

THE MEADOW DANDELION

fields. In the Summer when he sighed the hot winds rushed to the North to ripen the waiting ears of corn and to fill meadows and woods with flowers. And in the Autumn when he sighed a golden glow drifted northward, and the purple haze of Indian Summer draped the hills.

But Shawondasee, too lazy to follow in the paths of birds and winds, lay in his lodge and sighed with longing.

One Spring, while looking northward, he beheld a slender maiden, standing in a grassy meadow. Her garments were green and waving, and her hair was as yellow as gold.

And each night Shawondasee whispered, "To-morrow I will seek her." And each morning he said, "To-morrow I will win her for my bride." But always on the morrow he looked and sighed and said, "To-morrow I will go." But, sleepy and lazy, he never left his lodge to travel northward.

One morning as he gazed he saw that the maiden's hair was no longer yellow, but her head was white like snow. Full of grief, he gave out many short and rapid sighs. Then the air was filled with something soft and silvery like thistledown, and the slender maiden vanished forever.

And Kabibonokka, the Brother Northwest Wind, came rollicking southward. Jolly and brisk was he, and laughing loudly.

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“Ho, lazy one!” cried he, as he blew around the lodge of Shawondasee. “It was no maiden that you gazed upon, but a *Meadow Dandelion!*”

LITTLE BURNT-FACE

(Micmac)

ONCE upon a time, in a large Indian village on the border of a lake, there lived an old man who was a widower. He had three daughters. The eldest was jealous, cruel, and ugly; the second was vain; but the youngest of all was very gentle and lovely.

Now, when the father was out hunting in the forest, the eldest daughter used to beat the youngest girl, and burn her face with hot coals; yes, and even scar her pretty body. So the people called her "Little Burnt-Face."

When the father came home from hunting he would ask why she was so scarred, and the eldest would answer quickly: "She is a good-for-nothing! She was forbidden to go near the fire, and she disobeyed and fell in." Then the father would scold Little Burnt-Face and she would creep away crying to bed.

By the lake, at the end of the village, there was a beautiful wigwam. And in that wigwam lived a Great Chief and his sister. The Great Chief was invisible; no one had ever seen him but his sister. He

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brought her many deer and supplied her with good things to eat from the forest and lake, and with the finest blankets and garments. And when visitors came all they ever saw of the Chief were his moccasins; for when he took them off they became visible, and his sister hung them up.

Now, one Spring, his sister made known that her brother, the Great Chief, would marry any girl who could see him.

Then all the girls from the village—except Little Burnt-Face and her sisters—and all the girls for miles around hastened to the wigwam, and walked along the shore of the lake with his sister.

And his sister asked the girls, “Do you see my brother?”

And some of them said, “No”; but most of them answered, “Yes.”

Then his sister asked, “Of what is his shoulder-strap made?”

And the girls said, “Of a strip of rawhide.”

“And with what does he draw his sled?” asked his sister.

And they replied, “With a green withe.”

Then she knew that they had not seen him at all, and said quietly, “Let us go to the wigwam.”

So to the wigwam they went, and when they entered, his sister told them not to take the seat next the door, for that was where her brother sat.

LITTLE BURNT-FACE

Then they helped his sister to cook the supper, for they were very curious to see the Great Chief eat. When all was ready, the food disappeared, and the brother took off his moccasins, and his sister hung them up. But they never saw the Chief, though many of them stayed all night.

One day Little Burnt-Face's two sisters put on their finest blankets and brightest strings of beads, and plaited their hair beautifully, and slipped embroidered moccasins on their feet. Then they started out to see the Great Chief.

As soon as they were gone, Little Burnt-Face made herself a dress of white birch-bark, and a cap and leggings of the same. She threw off her ragged garments, and dressed herself in her birch-bark clothes. She put her father's moccasins on her bare feet; and the moccasins were so big that they came up to her knees. Then she, too, started out to visit the beautiful wigwam at the end of the village.

Poor Little Burnt-Face! She was a sorry sight! For her hair was singed off, and her little face was as full of burns and scars as a sieve is full of holes; and she shuffled along in her birch-bark clothes and big moccasins. And as she passed through the village the boys and girls hissed, yelled, and hooted.

And when she reached the lake, her sisters saw her coming, and they tried to shame her, and told her to go home. But the Great Chief's sister received her kindly, and bade her stay, for she saw how sweet and gentle Little Burnt-Face really was.

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Then as evening was coming on, the Great Chief's sister took all three girls walking beside the lake, and the sky grew dark, and they knew the Great Chief had come.

And his sister asked the two elder girls, "Do you see my brother?"

And they said, "Yes."

"Of what is his shoulder-strap made?" asked his sister.

"Of a strip of rawhide," they replied.

"And with what does he draw his sled?" asked she.

And they said, "With a green withe."

Then his sister turned to Little Burnt-Face and asked, "Do you see him?"

"I do! I do!" said Little Burnt-Face with awe. "And he is wonderful!"

"And of what is his sled-string made?" asked his sister gently.

"It is a beautiful Rainbow!" cried Little Burnt-Face.

"But, my sister," said the other, "of what is his bow-string made?"

"His bow-string," replied Little Burnt-Face, "is the Milky Way!"

Then the Great Chief's sister smiled with delight, and taking Little Burnt-Face by the hand, she said, "You have surely seen him."

LITTLE BURNT-FACE

She led the little girl to the wigwam, and bathed her with dew until the burns and scars all disappeared from her body and face. Her skin became soft and lovely again. Her hair grew long and dark like the Blackbird's wing. Her eyes were like stars. Then his sister brought from her treasures a wedding-garment, and she dressed Little Burnt-Face in it. And she was most beautiful to behold.

After all this was done, his sister led the little girl to the seat next the door, saying, "This is the Bride's seat," and made her sit down.

And then the Great Chief, no longer invisible, entered, terrible and beautiful. And when he saw Little Burnt-Face, he smiled and said gently, "So we have found each other!"

And she answered, "Yes."

Then Little Burnt-Face was married to the Great Chief, and the wedding-feast lasted for days, and to it came all the people of the village. As for the two bad sisters, they went back to their wigwam in disgrace, weeping with shame.