

Indian Fairy Tales

AS TOLD TO THE LITTLE CHILDREN
OF THE WIGWAM

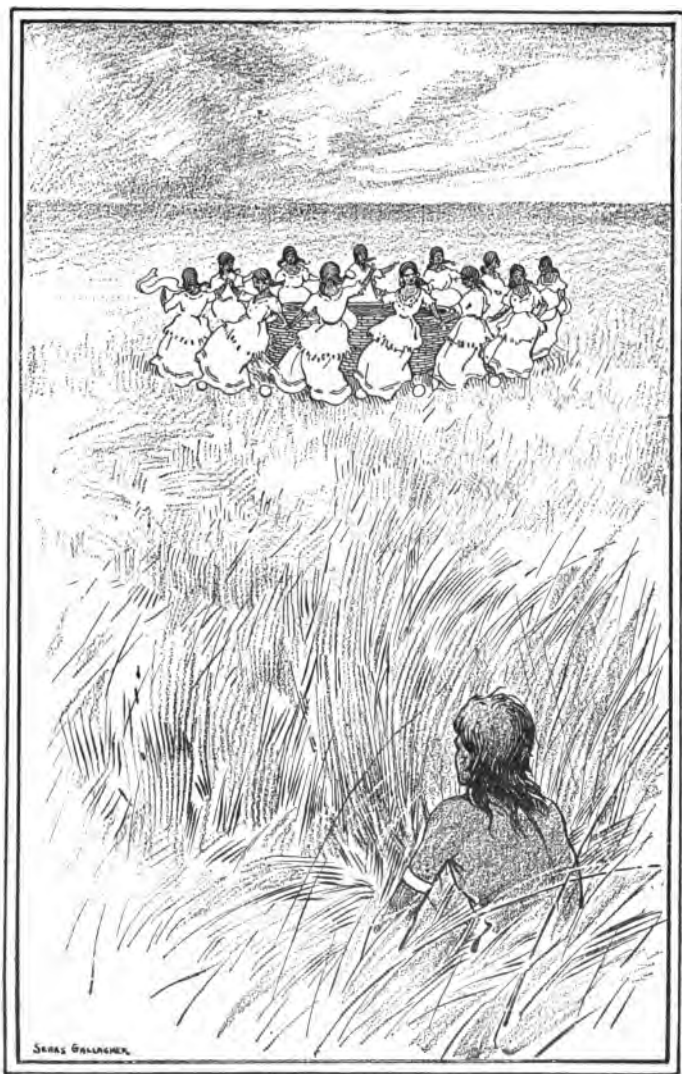
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THE YOUNG HUNTER WATCHING THE DAUGHTERS OF THE STARS

The Daughter of the Stars

ONCE upon a time as a young hunter was walking along over the prairie, he noticed a strange sight. It was a ring in the grass. It appeared as if steps had worn a path in the shape of a circle.

There was nothing strange in this alone, but the hunter saw that there was no path leading to the ring or from it. No men, therefore, could have made it; it was certainly a magic circle.

“I will stay here and watch,” the young man said to himself. “I will discover if I can how this ring was made.”

He lay down in the tall grass and prepared to wait patiently for what he might see. He did not have long to wait, for soon the sounds of sweet music were heard in the air above him. At the same time the watcher saw a tiny, tiny cloud far away in the sky overhead. It did not stay there, however, for it moved slowly downwards toward the earth.

As the hunter looked, he saw that it grew larger and larger till at last when it had drawn near the spot where

he lay hidden, he discovered that he was mistaken and that it was not a cloud at all. It was a basket-car and in it were twelve lovely maidens, the fairest and most beautiful his eyes had ever beheld.

And now the basket reached the ground, landing in the very center of the magic ring. The maidens sprang out and began to dance. Round and round the ring they moved and at each step they touched a shining ball with their feet.

The young hunter admired the maidens, but the youngest one of all won his heart completely. He sprang from his hiding place that he might take her in his arms, but the very moment he appeared the beautiful strangers took fright. They sprang into the light basket which had borne them to the earth and rose rapidly in the air till they were quite lost to sight.

The young man's heart was sad for he thought he should never again see the maidens. He went slowly home to his lodge and tried to fill his mind with his usual tasks.

Yet somehow the world had lost its joy. No longer did he care to hunt the wild creatures of the prairie. The stories of the old warriors around the evening fire were without their usual charm. The maidens of his tribe had no more interest for him. His mind turned again and again to the magic ring worn in the prairie

grass and the beautiful beings who had delighted to frolic within its bounds.

Even when the young hunter was asleep he seemed to hear the heavenly music and see the maidens who did not belong to this earth.

“I will go back to the ring in the grass,” he said to himself. “It may be that they will come again. This time I will change my shape into that of an ugly opossum; then if they see me they will not be afraid, nor flee from my sight.”

He kept his word. The next day he went to the prairie and hid in the long grass near the magic ring, but he no longer had the form of a young Indian brave. He looked for all the world like that ugly, stupid creature, the opossum.

Not long after he had settled himself in his hiding place, the sound of sweet music floated downward through the air, and the hunter saw what he had longed for so earnestly,—the basket-car bearing the twelve beautiful maidens. Downward it floated till it lighted on the very spot where it had rested before,—the center of the magic circle.

Again, as on that other day, the maidens sprang out and began their joyous dance. Then the seeming opossum crept out from the tall grass and moved slowly toward the dancers. As soon as they noticed him, the

music suddenly came to an end, the light feet stopped their gay tripping, and the frightened maidens sprang into the car which began to rise at once.

While it was still close to the earth, the hunter heard the oldest of the dancers tell her sisters that there was no cause for fear; the ugly creature they saw might have wished to show them how the people of the earth played the game they had been playing.

But the youngest maiden cried out, "No, no, it cannot be; let us rise at once."

These were the only words the listener could hear, as the basket moved swiftly upward and was soon lost to sight. The young man was almost hopeless. What form could he possibly take so that the heavenly maidens would have no fear of him?

As he stood thinking, his eyes fell upon the hollow trunk of a tree which stood near the magic ring. A family of field mice were running in and out of the trunk which seemed to be their home.

"Ah!" thought the hunter, "I will change myself into a mouse. Such a tiny creature as a mouse would hardly be noticed."

He moved the trunk still nearer the magic ring. Then he went home to his lodge to wait anxiously for the next day.

Soon after the sun's bright rays bade "good morn-

ing" to the earth, the hunter went back to the prairie and in the shape of a mouse took his place in the hollow trunk.

Very soon there was the sound of music; then the watcher, peeping anxiously out of his hole, saw the wished-for car float down to the earth.

Again his eyes feasted on the twelve beautiful maidens as they sprang from the car and began their graceful dance; but most of all he gazed at the youngest of the dancers, who enchanted him more than all the others. All at once one of the maidens noticed the old trunk.

"That was not there yesterday," she said to her sisters. "Look! What does it mean?"

But the others only laughed. They tripped lightly to the trunk and struck it. The mice came running out, and among them was the young hunter still in the form of these humble creatures.

The maidens ran here and there, chasing the mice and killing all of them except the young hunter. He was clever enough not only to escape being killed but also to manage so that the youngest of the maidens should follow him.

While she was chasing him about she caught up a stick from the ground and was on the point of striking him with it when he suddenly changed himself back into

his true shape. Then before she could escape he caught her in his arms. At last he had his prize!

When the other maidens saw what had happened, they fled in fright to their airy basket and quickly rose from the earth. Their sister looked longingly after them, but she was now a prisoner.

“I will make her happy,” the hunter said. “My prize shall be made to love me and to forget her home in the stars.”

He gently led the maiden to his lodge, where he treated her most tenderly. He told her stories of his life and of the wild creatures he hunted. He tried in every way to turn her thoughts from her sisters in the heavens and to make her love the life of the red man.

Her fear quickly passed away. She soon learned to love the young and handsome hunter and was quite willing to become his bride.

Many moons passed by and a beautiful child came to bless the young couple and to bring more love and brightness into the lodge. Yet the child's mother began to have a great longing to return to her home in the heavens. If only she might make a visit to her father, the star-chief, she felt that she would be satisfied.

She did not tell her husband of her wish; nay, she kept it hidden carefully in her heart that he might not have the slightest thought how she felt.

In the meantime she set to work to make a basket within the magic ring where she and her sisters used to dance. She worked only while her husband was away from the lodge on his long hunts.

When everything was completed she carried there all the dainties of this earth that she thought would be pleasing to her father. Then she went back to the lodge, took her little son in her arms, and hurried to the magic circle. Leaping into the basket she began to sing. Instantly the basket rose, slowly at first, then faster and faster. Before long, the daughter of the stars had reached her old home and friends.

Now it happened that her husband, although he was a long way off, heard his wife's song as she rose into the air in her magic basket. He hurried to the prairie as fast as he could go, but alas! he was too late. He called to his wife in pitiful tones and begged her to return to earth and make his lodge happy once more. But she did not stop in her course or give any heed to his words.

He was alone with his sorrow. He lay down on the prairie with his face to the ground. It seemed as though his heart would break. If only his child had been left to him, he might have borne the loss of his wife. But to lose both! It was too much.

At last he rose from the ground and went back to his

lodge. How bright it had seemed to him yesterday, how dark and lonely to-day.

Many moons passed by and still the hunter mourned. All this time the days were going merrily for his wife in her starry home. There was so much to enjoy that she might have forgotten the little lodge on earth and the handsome hunter, her husband, if it had not been for one thing. Her child kept saying, "Let me go to my dear father. Please take me where I can see his kind smile and hear his loving words."

At last the boy's grandfather, the star-chief, said:

"My daughter, it is but right that your son should see his father. Go back to earth and get your husband. Bring him with you to our home in the heavens; but bring also one of each kind of living creature that he kills while hunting."

His daughter did as her father commanded. The hunter was never far away from the magic ring, and when he once more heard his wife's voice as she floated down toward the earth, he hastened to the charmed spot and was there to greet her as the basket landed.

And now once more he held his dear ones in his strong arms as he told them how he had missed them and how lonely his life had been without their company.

“My father bids me invite you to return with us to our home above,” his wife said to him. She also spoke of the star-chief’s wish for the birds and beasts of the earth.

Her husband was only too glad to do what she asked. He went hunting day after day, striving to make a choice collection of the birds of the air and the beasts of the field to be found in all the country round.

He did not keep the whole body of each of these creatures, however. If it was a bird, he saved only the wing or a claw. Or, if his prey happened to be a four-footed creature, he preserved the tail or a single foot. These were quite enough to show his wise father-in-law to what kind of creatures they belonged.

At last when he could do no more, he told his wife he was ready to go with her on the visit to her father. The little family, laden with their presents, entered the basket-car and rose to the realms above.

How gladly they were greeted! What joy there was in the star-home of the hunter’s wife! Soon after they arrived, her father held a great feast to which he invited all his people. It was like no other that had ever been heard of before.

When the guests had come together, the host invited each one to choose a present for himself out of the things the hunter had brought from earth.

Everyone made haste to select something. As soon as the choice was made, a strange change took place: those who had taken legs or wings at once became birds; while the ones who chose claws or tails were instantly changed into the forms of animals.

Now it happened that the emblem of the hunter's family was a white hawk; he, therefore, as well as his wife and son, chose feathers of that bird, and they were at once changed into hawks.

Spreading their wings, they flew downwards from the heavens, never stopping in their airy flight till they had reached the earth itself.