

MARY HUNTER AUSTIN

THE BASKET WOMAN: A
BOOK OF INDIAN TALES
FOR CHILDREN

Mary Austin

**The Basket Woman: A Book
of Indian Tales for Children**

«Public Domain»

Austin M.

The Basket Woman: A Book of Indian Tales for Children /
M. Austin — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

PREFACE	5
THE BASKET WOMAN	8
THE BASKET WOMAN	12
THE STREAM THAT RAN AWAY	16
THE COYOTE-SPIRIT AND THE	19
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	21

Mary Austin

The Basket Woman: A Book of Indian Tales for Children

PREFACE

In preparing this volume of western myths for school use the object has been not so much to provide authentic Indian Folk-tales, as to present certain aspects of nature as they appear in the myth-making mood, that is to say, in the form of strongest appeal to the child mind. Indian myths as they exist among Indians are too frequently sustained by coarse and cruel incidents comparable to the belly-ripping joke in *Jack the Giant Killer*, or the blinding of Gloucester in *King Lear*, and when presented in story form, too often fall under the misapprehension of the myth as something invented and added to the imaginative life. It is, in fact, the root and branch of man's normal intimacy with nature.

So slowly does the mind awaken to the realization of consciousness and personality as by-products of animal life only, that few escape carrying over into adult life some obsession of its persistence in inanimate things, say of malevolence in opals or luckiness in a rabbit's foot, or the capacity of moral discrimination against their victims residing in hurricanes and earthquakes. The chief preoccupation of the child in his earlier years is the business of abstracting the items of his environment from this pervading sense, and ascribing to them their proper degrees of awareness. He arrives in a general way at knowing that it hurts the cat's tail to be stepped on because the cat cries, and that it does not hurt the stick. But if the stick were provided with a squeaking apparatus he would be much longer in the process, and if the stick becomes a steed or a doll it is quite possible for him to weep with sympathetic pain at the abuse of it.

He sees the tree and it is alive and sentient to him; you cut a stick horse from its boughs, and that is separately alive; cut the stick again into two horses, and they will prance whole and satisfying. Later when the game is played out, the stick may burn and furnish live flame to dance, live smoke to ascend, live ash to be treated with contumely; all of which arises not so much in the mere trick of invention as in the natural difficulty in thinking of objects freed from consciousness, almost as great as the philosopher's in conceiving empty space. There is a period in the life of every child when almost the only road to the understanding is the one blazed out by the myth-making spirit, kept open to the larger significance of things long after he is apprised that the thunder did not originate in the smithy of the gods nor the Walrus talk to the Carpenter. Any attempt, however, to hasten the proper distinctions of causes and powers by the suppression of myth making is likely to prove as disastrous as helping young puppies through their nine days' blindness by forcibly opening their eyes. You might get a few days' purchase of vision for some of them, but you would also have a good many cases of total blindness. What can be done by way of turning the myth-making period to advantage, this little book is partly to show.

Of the three sorts of myths included, about a third are direct transcriptions from Indian myths current in the campodies of the West, but it must not be assumed that myths like *The Crooked Fir* and *The White Barked Pine* are in any sense "made up," or to be laid to the author's credit. Since the myth originates in an attitude of mind, it must be understood that, to the primitive mind, nearly the whole process of nature presents itself in mythical terms. It is not that the Indian imagines the tree having sentience – he simply isn't able to imagine its not having it. All his songs, his ceremonies, his daily speech, are full of the aspect of nature in terms of human endeavor. The story of *The Crooked Fir* was suggested to me in the humorous comment of my Indian guide on one of the forks of Kings

River, the first time my attention was caught by the uniform curve of the trunks, and he explained it to me. The myth of *The Stream That Ran Away* might arise as simply as in the question of a child who has not lived long enough to understand the seasonal recession of waters, wishing to know why a stream that ran full some weeks ago is now dry. And if his mother has had trouble with his straying too far from the camp she might say to him that it had run away and the White people had caught it and set it to work in an irrigating ditch, "and that is what will happen to you if you don't watch out" ... or she might draw a moral on the neglect of duty if the occasion demanded it ... or if she were gifted with fancy, tell him that that was it which fell on us as rain in Big Meadow, and it would return to its banks when it had watered the high places. But whatever she would tell him would have an acute observation of nature behind it and would be stated in personal terms. It is so that the child begins to understand the continuity of natural forces and their relativity to the life of man.

There is a third sort of story included with these, which aside from being of the stuff from which hero myths are made, —*Mahala Joe* is in point, — has a value which must be gone into more particularly.

What is important for the teacher to understand is that the myth, itself a living issue, will not bear too much handling; in the process of making it a part of the child's experience, the meaning of it must not be pulled up too often to learn if it has taken root. Unless it elucidates itself in the course of time, — and one must recall how long a period elapsed between the first reading of the *Ugly Duckling*, say, and its final revelation of itself, — unless its content is broadly human and personal, it has practically no educative value. It is not absolutely indispensable that the whole unfolding of it should be within the limited period of school life that affords it; some of the noblest human myths reveal as it were successive layers of insight and purport, taking change and color from the passing experience; but it remains true that the best time to insinuate the myth in the child's mind is when he is normally at the myth-making period.

To make it, then, part of the child's possession it should be read to or by him at convenient intervals, until he can give back a fairly succinct version of it. Along with this must go the business of deepening and extending the background; and whether this is to be done at the time of the reading or intermediately, must depend largely on the local background. Children in schools on the Pacific slope should find themselves already tolerably furnished; any hill region in fact should yield suggestive material, without overlaying the content of the myth with trifling exactitudes of natural history.

It is very difficult to say in a word all that is implied in the extension of the background. One has only to consider the amount of time spent in teaching the so-called Classic Myths, tremendous in their power of vitalizing and coloring their own and related times, and reflect on their failure to effect anything beyond their mere story interest in modern life, to realize that the value of a myth is directly in proportion as its background is common and accessible. What would happen in a locality calculated to suggest and with a teacher properly equipped to interpret the background of Greek and Roman mythology, is not proven, but in practical school work the author has found it best to defer the teaching of it until by general reading a point of contact is established, which enables the child to read *backward* into its meaning, and for the actively myth-making period to use forms sprung naturally from the child's own environment. The better he can visualize and locate the objects mythically treated, the better they serve their purpose of rendering personal the influences of nature and sustaining him in that happy sense of the community of life and interest in the Wild.

It is for this purpose of extending the background that the introductory sketches and some others are included in this collection. *The Golden Fortune* could be read with *The White Barked Pine*, and *The Christmas Tree* with *The Crooked Fir*. Any hill country or wooded district should furnish additional color, but let it be cautioned here, that though all the nature references in these tales are entirely dependable, the child is not to be made unhappy thereby. Whatever branch of school work it is found necessary to correlate with the myths, it should be in general recreative rather than instructive; for what is comprehended in the term Nature is after all not a miscellany of objects, but a state of

mind set up by their happiest coincidences. The least that can be said to achieve a proper notion of a tree or a glacier is so much better than the most; a casual application to a known and neighboring circumstance goes further than any amount of explanation.

THE BASKET WOMAN FIRST STORY

THE BASKET WOMAN

The homesteader's cabin stood in a moon-shaped hollow between the hills and the high mesa; and the land before it stretched away golden and dusky green, and was lost in a blue haze about where the river settlements began. The hills had a flowing outline and melted softly into each other and higher hills behind, until the range broke in a ragged crest of thin peaks white with snow. A clean, wide sky bent over that country, and the air that moved in it was warm and sweet.

The homesteader's son had run out on the trail that led toward the spring, with half a mind to go to it, but ran back again when he saw the Basket Woman coming. He was afraid of her, and ashamed because he was afraid, so he did not tell his mother that he had changed his mind.

"There is the mahala coming for the wash," said his mother; "now you will have company at the spring." But Alan only held tighter to a fold of her dress. This was the third time the Indian woman had come to wash for the homesteader's wife; and, though she was slow and quiet and had a pleasant smile, Alan was still afraid of her. All that he had heard of Indians before coming to this country was very frightful, and he did not understand yet that it was not so. Beyond a certain point of hills on clear days he could see smoke rising from the campoodie, and though he knew nothing but his dreams of what went on there, he would not so much as peak in that direction.

The Basket Woman was the only Indian that he had seen. She would come walking across the mesa with a great cone-shaped carrier basket heaped with brushwood on her shoulders, stooping under it and easing the weight by a buckskin band about her forehead. Sometimes it would be a smaller basket carried in the same fashion, and she would be filling it with bulbs of wild hyacinth or taboose; often she carried a bottle-necked water basket to and from the spring, and always wore a bowl-shaped basket on her head for a hat. Her long hair hung down from under it, and her black eyes glittered beadily below the rim. Alan had a fancy that any moment she might pick him up with a quick toss as if he had been a bit of brushwood, and drop him over her shoulder into the great carrier, and walk away across the mesa with him. So when he saw her that morning coming down the trail from the spring, he hung close by his mother's skirts.

"You must not be afraid of her, Alan," said his mother; "she is very kind, and no doubt has had a boy of her own."

The Basket Woman showed them her white, even teeth in a smile. "This one very pretty boy," she said; but Alan had made up his mind not to trust her. He was thinking of what the teamster had said when he had driven them up from the railroad station with their belongings the day they came to their new home and found the Basket Woman spying curiously in at the cabin windows.

"You want watch out how you behaves yourself, sonny," said the teamster, wagging a solemn jaw, "she's likely to pack you away in that basket o' her'n one of these days." And Alan had watched out very carefully indeed.

It was not a great while after they came to the foothill claim that the homesteader went over to the campoodie to get an Indian to help at fence building, and Alan went with him, holding fast by his father's hand. They found the Indians living in low, foul huts; their clothes were also dirty, and they sat about on the ground, fat and good-natured. The dogs and children lay sleeping in the sun. It was all very disappointing.

"Will they not hurt us, father?" Alan had said at starting.

"Oh, no, my boy; you must not get any such notion as that," said the homesteader; "Indians are not at all now what they were once."

Alan thought of this as he looked at the campoodie, and pulled at his father's hand.

"I do not like Indians the way they are now," he said; and immediately saw that he had made a mistake, for he was standing directly in front of the Basket Woman's hut, and as she suddenly put her head out of the door he thought by the look of her mysterious, bright eyes that she had understood. He did not venture to say anything more, and all the way home kept looking back toward the campoodie to see if anything came of it.

"Why do you not eat your supper?" said his mother. "I am afraid the long walk in the hot sun was too much for you." Alan dared not say anything to her of what troubled him, though perhaps it would have been better if he had, for that night the Basket Woman came for him.

She did not pick him up and toss him over her shoulder as he expected; but let down the basket, and he stepped into it of his own accord. Alan was surprised to find that he was not so much afraid of her after all.

"What will you do with me?" he said.

"I will show you Indians as they used to be," said she.

Alan could feel the play of her strong shoulders as they went out across the lower mesa and began to climb the hills.

"Where do you go?" said the boy.

"To Pahrump, the valley of Corn Water. It was there my people were happiest in old days."

They went on between the oaks, and smelled the musky sweet smell of the wild grapevines along the water borders. The sagebrush began to fail from the slopes, and buckthorn to grow up tall and thicker; the wind brought them a long sigh from the lowest pines. They came up with the silver firs and passed them, passed the drooping spruces, the wet meadows, and the wood of thimble-cone pines. The air under them had an earthy smell. Presently they came out upon a cleared space very high up where the rocks were sharp and steep.

"Why are there no trees here?" asked Alan.

"I will tell you about that," said the Basket Woman. "In the old flood time, and that is longer ago than is worth counting, the water came up and covered the land, all but the high tops of mountains. Here then the Indians fled and lived, and with them the animals that escaped from the flood. There were trees growing then over all the high places, but because the waters were long on the earth the Indians were obliged to cut them down for firewood. Also they killed all the large animals for food, but the small ones hid in the rocks. After that the waters went down; trees and grass began to grow over all the earth, but never any more on the tops of high mountains. They had all been burned off. You can see that it is so."

From the top of the mountain Alan could see all the hills on the other side shouldering and peering down toward the happy valley of Corn Water.

"Here," said the Basket Woman, "my people came of old time in the growing season of the year; they planted corn, and the streams came down from the hills and watered it. Now we, too, will go down."

They went by a winding trail, steep and stony. The pines stood up around and locked them closely in.

"I see smoke arising," said Alan, "blue smoke above the pines."

"It is the smoke of their hearth fires," said the Basket Woman, and they went down and down.

"I hear a sound of singing," said the boy.

"It is the women singing and grinding at the quern," she said, and her feet went faster.

"I hear laughter," he said again, "it mixes with the running of the water."

"It is the maidens washing their knee-long hair. They kneel by the water and stoop down, they dip in the running water and shake out bright drops in the sun."

"There is a pleasant smell," said Alan.

"It is pine nuts roasting in the cones," said the Basket Woman; "so it was of old time."

They came out of the cleft of the hills in a pleasant place by singing water. "There you will see the rows of wickiups," said the Basket Woman, "with the doors all opening eastward to the sun. Let us sit here and see what we shall see."

The women sat by the wickiups weaving baskets of willow and stems of fern. They made patterns of bright feathers and strung wampum about the rims. Some sewed with sinew and needles of cactus thorn on deerskin white and fine; others winnowed the corn. They stood up tossing it in baskets like grains of gold, and the wind carried away the chaff. All this time the young girls were laughing as they dried their hair in the sun. They bound it with flowers and gay strings of beads, and made their cheeks bright with red earth. The children romped and shouted about the camp, and ran bare-legged in the stream.

"Do they do nothing but play?" said Alan.

"You shall see," said the Basket Woman.

Away up the mountain sounded a faint halloo. In a moment all the camp was bustle and delight. The children clapped their hands; they left off playing and began to drag up brushwood for the fires. The women put away their weaving and brought out the cooking pots; they heard the men returning from the hunt. The young men brought deer upon their shoulders; one had grouse and one held up a great basket of trout. The women made the meat ready for cooking. Some of them took meal and made cakes for baking in the ashes. The men rested in the glow of the fires, feathering arrows and restringing their bows.

"That is well," said the Basket Woman, "to make ready for to-morrow's meat before to-day's is eaten."

"How happy they are!" said the boy.

"They will be happier when they have eaten," said she.

After supper the Indians gathered together for singing and dancing. The old men told tales one after the other, and the children thought each one was the best. Between the tales the Indians all sang together, or one sang a new song that he had made. There was one of them who did better than all. He had streaked his body with colored earth and had a band of eagle feathers in his hair. In his hand was a rattle of wild sheep's horn and small stones; he kept time with it as he leapt and sang in the light of the fire. He sang of old wars, sang of the deer that was killed, sang of the dove and the young grass that grew on the mountain; and the people were well pleased, for when the heart is in the singing it does not matter much what the song is about. The men beat their hands together to keep time to his dancing, and the earth under his feet was stamped to a fine dust.

"He is one that has found the wolf's song," said the Basket Woman.

"What is that?" asked Alan.

"It is an old tale of my people," said she. "Once there was a man who could not make any songs, so he got no praise from the tribe, and it troubled him much. Then, as he was gathering taboose by the river, a wolf went by, and the wolf said to him, 'What will you have me to give you for your taboose?' Then said the man, 'I will have you to give me a song.'"

"'That will I gladly,' said the wolf. So the wolf taught him, and that night he sang the wolf's song in the presence of all the people, and it made their hearts to burn within them. Then the man fell down as if he were dead, for the pure joy of singing, and when deep sleep was upon him the wolf came in the night and stole his song away. Neither the man nor any one who had heard it remembered it any more. So we say when a man sings as no other sang before him, 'He has the wolf's song.' It is a good saying. Now we must go, for the children are all asleep by their mothers, and the day comes soon," said the Basket Woman.

"Shall we come again?" said Alan. "And will it all be as it is now?"

"My people come often to the valley of Corn Water," said she, "but it is never as it is now except in dreams. Now we must go quickly." Far up the trail they saw a grayness in the eastern sky where the day was about to come in.

"Hark," said the Basket Woman, "they will sing together the coyote song. It is so that they sing it when the coyote goes home from his hunting, and the morning is near.

"The coyote cries ...
He cries at daybreak ...
He cries ...
The coyote cries" ...

sang the Basket Woman, but all the spaces in between the words were filled with long howls, – weird, wicked noises that seemed to hunt and double in a half-human throat. It made the hair on Alan's neck stand up, and cold shivers creep along his back. He began to shake, for the wild howls drew near and louder, and he felt the bed under him tremble with his trembling.

"Mother, mother," he cried, "what is that?"

"It is only the coyotes," said she; "they always howl about this time of night. It is nothing; go to sleep again."

"But I am afraid."

"They cannot hurt you," said his mother; "it is only the little gray beasts that you see trotting about the mesa of afternoons; hear them now."

"I am afraid," said Alan.

"Then you must come in my bed," said she; and in a few minutes he was fast asleep again.

THE BASKET WOMAN SECOND STORY

THE BASKET WOMAN

The next time Alan saw the Basket Woman he was not nearly so much afraid of her, though he did not venture to speak of their journey to Pahrump. He said to his mother, "Do you not wish the Indians could have stayed the way they were?" and his mother laughed.

"Why, no, child," she said, "I do not think that I do. I think they are much better off as they are now." Alan, however, was not to be convinced. The next time he saw the Basket Woman he was even troubled about it.

The homesteader had taken his family to the town for a day, and the first thing Alan saw when he got down from the wagon was the Basket Woman. She was sitting in a corner of the sidewalk with a group of other mahalas, with her blanket drawn over her shoulders, looking out upon the town, and her eyes were dull and strange.

A stream of people went by them in the street, and minded them no more than the dogs they stepped over, sprawling at the doors of the stores. Some of the Indian women had children with them, but they neither shouted nor ran as they had done in the camp of Corn Water; they sat quietly by their mothers, and Alan noticed how worn and poor were the clothes of all of them, and how wishful all the eyes. He could not get his mind off them because he could not get them out of his sight for very long at a time. It was a very small town, and as he went with his mother in and about the stores he would be coming face to face with the mahalas every little while, and the Basket Woman's eyes were always sad.

His mother, when she had finished her shopping, gave him a silver dime and told him that he might spend it as he wished. As soon as Alan had turned the corner on that errand there was the Basket Woman with her chin upon her knees and her blanket drawn over her shoulders. Alan stopped a moment in front of her; he would have liked to say something comforting, but found himself still afraid.

Her eyes looked on beyond him, blurred and dim; he supposed she must be thinking of the happy valley, and grew so very sorry for her that, as he could not get the courage to speak, he threw his dime into her lap and ran as fast as he could away. It seemed to him as he ran that she called to him, but he could not be sure.

That night, almost as soon as he had touched the pillow, she came and stood beside him without motion or sound, and let down the basket from her back.

"Do we go to Corn Water?" asked Alan as he stepped into it.

"To my people of old time," said the Basket Woman, "so that you need not be so much sorry."

Then they went out by the mesa trail, where the sage showed duskily under a thin rim of moon. It seemed to Alan that they went slowly, almost heavily. When they came to the parting of the ways, she let down the basket to rest. A rabbit popped, startled, out of the brush, and scurried into the dark; its white tail, like a signal, showed the way it went.

"What was that?" asked Alan.

"Only little Tavwots, whom we scared out of his nest. Lean forward," she said, "and I will tell you a tale about him." So the boy leaned his head against the Basket Woman's long black hair, and heard the story of Little Tavwots and How He Caught the Sun in a Snare.

"It was long ago," said the Basket Woman. "Tavwots was the largest of all four-footed things, and a mighty hunter. He would get up as soon as it was day and go to his hunting, but always before

him was the track of a great foot on the trail; and this troubled him, for his pride was as big as his body and greater than his fame.

"'Who is this?' cried Tawwots, 'that goes with so great a stride before me to the hunting? Does he think to put me to shame?'

"'T'-sst!' said his mother, 'there is none greater than thee.'

"'Nevertheless,' said Tawwots, 'there are the footprints in the trail.' The next morning he got up earlier, but there were always the great footprints and the long stride before him.

"'Now I will set me a trap for this impudent fellow,' said Tawwots, for he was very cunning. So he made a snare of his bowstring and set it in the trail overnight, and in the morning when he went to look, behold, he had caught the sun in his snare. All that quarter of the earth was beginning to smoke with the heat of it.

"'Is it you?' cried Tawwots, 'who made the tracks in my trail?'

"'It is I,' said the sun. 'Come now and set me free before the whole earth is afire.' Then Tawwots saw what he had to do, so he drew his knife and ran to cut the bowstring. But the heat was so great that he ran back before he had done it, and was melted down to one half his size. Then the smoke of the burning earth began to curl up against the sky.

"'Come again, Tawwots,' cried the sun. So he ran again and ran back, and the third time he ran he cut the bowstring, and the sun was set free from the snare. But by that time Tawwots was melted down to as small as he is now, and so he remains. Still you may see by the print of his feet as he leaps in the trail how great his stride was when he caught the sun in his snare.

"So it is always," said the Basket Woman, "that which is large grows less, and my people, which were great, have dwindled away."

After that she became quiet, and they went on over the mountain. Because he was beginning to be acquainted with it, the way seemed shorter to Alan than before. They passed over the high barren ridges, and he began to look for the camp at Corn Water.

"I see no smoke," said Alan.

"It would bring down their enemies like buzzards on carrion," said the Basket Woman.

"There is no sound of singing nor of laughter," said the boy.

"Who laughs in the time of war?" said she.

"Is there war?" asked Alan.

"Long and bitter," said the Basket Woman. "Let us go softly and come upon them unawares."

So they went, light of foot, among the pines until they saw the wickiups opening eastward to the sun, but many of them stood ruined and awry. There were only the very old and the children in the camp, and these did not run and play. They stole about like mice in the meadow sod, and if so much as a twig snapped in the forest, they huddled motionless as young quail. The women worked in the growing corn; they dug roots on the hill slope and caught grasshoppers for food. One made a noose of her long black hair plucked out, and snared the bright lizards that ran among the rocks. It seemed to Alan that the Indians looked wishful and thinner than they should; but such food as they found was all put by.

"Why do they do this?" asked the boy.

"That the men who go to war may not go fasting," said the Basket Woman. "Look, now we shall have news of them."

A young man came noiselessly out of the wood, and it was he who had sung the new song on the night of feasting and dancing. He had eagle feathers in his hair, but they were dragged; there was beadwork on his leggings, but it was torn with thorns; there was paint on his face and his body, but it was smeared over red, and as he came into the camp he broke his bow across his knee.

"It is a token of defeat," said the Basket Woman; "the others will come soon." But some came feebly because of wounds, and it seemed the women looked for some who might never come. They cast up their arms and cried with a terrible wailing sound that rose and shuddered among the pines.

"Be still," said the young man; "would you bring our enemies down upon us with your screeching?" Then the women threw themselves quietly in the dust, and rocked to and fro with sobbing; their stillness was more bitter than their crying.

Suddenly out of the wood came a storm of arrows, a rush of strange, painted braves, and the din of fighting.

"Shut your eyes," said the Basket Woman, "it is not good for you to see." Alan hid his face in the Basket Woman's dress, and heard the noise of fighting rage and die away. When he ventured to look again on the ruined huts and the trampled harvest, there were few left in the camp of Corn Water, and they had enough to do to find food for their poor bodies. They winnowed the creek with basket-work weirs for every finger-long troutling that came down in it, and tore the bark off the pine trees to get at the grubs underneath.

"Why do they not go out and kill deer as before?" asked Alan.

"Their enemies lurk in the wood and drive away the game," said the Basket Woman.

"Why do they not go to another place?"

"Where shall they go, when their foes watch every pass?" said she.

It seemed to Alan that many days and nights passed while they watched by the camp; and the days were all sorrowful, and always, as before, the best meat was set aside for the strongest.

"Why is this so?" asked the boy.

"Because," said the Basket Woman, "those who are strong must stay so to care for the rest. It is the way of my people. You see that the others do not complain." And it was so that the feeble ones tottered silently about the camp or sat still a long time in one place with their heads upon their knees.

"How will it end?" asked Alan.

"They must go away at last," said she, "though the cords of their hearts are fastened here. But there is no seed corn, and the winter is close at hand."

Then there began to be a tang of frost in the air, and the people gathered up their household goods, and, though there was not much of them, they staggered and bent under the burden as they went up out of the once happy valley to another home. The women let down their long hair and smeared ashes upon it; they threw up their lean arms and wailed long and mournfully as they passed among the pines. Alan began to tremble with crying, and felt the Basket Woman patting him on the shoulder. Her voice sounded to him like the voice of his mother telling him to go to sleep again, for there was nothing for him to be troubled about. After he grew quieter, the Indian woman lifted him up. "We must be going," she said, "it is not good for us to be here."

Alan wished as they went up over the mountain that she would help him with talk toward forgetting what he had seen, but the long hair fell over her face and she would not talk. He shivered in the basket, and the night felt colder and full of fearsome noises.

"What is that?" he whispered, as a falling star trailed all across the dark.

"It is the coyote people that brought the fire to my people," said the Basket Woman. Alan hoped she would tell him a tale about it, but she would not. They went on down the mountain until they came to the borders of the long-leaved pines. Alan heard the sigh of the wind in the needles, and it seemed as if it called.

"What is that?" he whispered.

"It is Hí-no-no, the wind, mourning for his brother, the pine tree," but she would not tell him that tale, either. She went faster and faster, and Alan felt the stir of her shoulders under him. He listened to the wind, and it grew fierce and louder until he heard the house beams creak, for he was awake in his own bed. A strong wind drove gustily across the mesa and laid hold of the corners of the roof.

The next morning the homesteader said that he must go to the campoodie and Alan might go with him. Alan was quite pleased, and said to his mother while she was getting him ready, "Do you know, I think Indians are a great deal better off as they are now."

"Why, yes," said his mother, smiling, "I think so, too."

THE STREAM THAT RAN AWAY

THE STREAM THAT RAN AWAY

In a short and shallow cañon on the front of Oppapago running eastward toward the sun, one may find a clear brown stream called the creek of Piñon Pines. That is not because it is unusual to find piñon trees on Oppapago, but because there are so few of them in the cañon of the stream. There are all sorts higher up on the slopes, – long-leaved yellow pines, thimble cones, tamarack, silver fir and Douglas spruce; but here there is only a group of the low-heading, gray nut pines which the earliest inhabitants of that country called piñons.

The cañon of Piñon Pines has a pleasant outlook and lies open to the sun, but there is not much other cause for the forest rangers to remember it. At the upper end there is no more room by the stream border than will serve for a cattle trail; willows grow in it, choking the path of the water; there are brown birches here and ropes of white clematis tangled over thickets of brier rose. Low down the ravine broadens out to inclose a meadow the width of a lark's flight, blossomy and wet and good. Here the stream ran once in a maze of soddy banks and watered all the ground, and afterward ran out at the cañon's mouth across the mesa in a wash of bone-white boulders as far as it could. That was not very far, for it was a slender stream. It had its source really on the high crests and hollows of Oppapago, in the snow banks that melted and seeped downward through the rocks; but the stream did not know any more of that than you know of what happened to you before you were born, and could give no account of itself except that it crept out from under a great heap of rubble far up in the cañon of the Piñon Pines. And because it had no pools in it deep enough for trout, and no trees on its borders but gray nut pines; because, try as it might, it could never get across the mesa to the town, the stream had fully made up its mind to run away.

"Pray what good will that do you?" said the pines. "If you get to the town, they will turn you into an irrigating ditch and set you to watering crops."

"As to that," said the stream, "if I once get started I will not stop at the town." Then it would fret between its banks until the spangled frills of the mimulus were all tattered with its spray. Often at the end of the summer it was worn quite thin and small with running, and not able to do more than reach the meadow.

"But some day," it whispered to the stones, "I shall run quite away."

If the stream had been inclined for it, there was no lack of good company on its own borders. Birds nested in the willows, rabbits came to drink; one summer a bobcat made its lair up the bank opposite the brown birches, and often deer fed in the meadow. Then there was a promise of better things. In the spring of one year two old men came up into the canon of Piñon Pines. They had been miners and partners together for many years, they had grown rich and grown poor, and had seen many hard places and strange times. It was a day when the creek ran clear and the south wind smelled of the earth. Wild bees began to whine among the willows, and the meadow bloomed over with poppy-breasted larks. Then said one of the old men, "Here is good meadow and water enough; let us build a house and grow trees. We are too old to dig in the mines."

"Let us set about it," said the other; for that is the way with two who have been a long time together: what one thinks of, the other is for doing. So they brought their possessions and made a beginning that day, for they felt the spring come on warmly in their blood; they wished to dig in the earth and handle it.

These two men who, in the mining camps where they were known, were called "Shorty" and "Long Tom," and had almost forgotten that they had other names, built a house by the water border

and planted trees. Shorty was all for an orchard, but Long Tom preferred vegetables. So they did each what he liked, and were never so happy as when walking in the garden in the cool of the day, touching the growing things as they walked and praising each other's work.

"This will make a good home for our old age," said Long Tom, "and when we die we can be buried here."

"Under the piñon pines," said Shorty. "I have marked out a place."

So they were very happy for three years. By this time the stream had become so interested it had almost forgotten about running away. But every year it noted that a larger bit of the meadow was turned under and planted, and more and more the men made dams and ditches to govern its running.

"In fact," said the stream, "I am being made into an irrigating ditch before I have had my fling in the world. I really must make a start."

That very winter by the help of a great storm it went roaring down the meadow over the mesa, and so clean away, with only a track of muddy sand to show the way it had gone. All the winter, however, Shorty and Long Tom brought water for drinking from a spring, and looked for the stream to come back. In the spring they hoped still, for that was the season they looked for the orchard to bear. But no fruit set on the trees, and the seeds Long Tom planted shriveled in the earth. So by the end of summer, when they understood that the water would not come back at all, they went sadly away.

Now what happened to the creek of Piñon Pines is not very well known to any one, for the stream is not very clear on that point, except that it did not have a happy time. It went out in the world on the wings of the storm and was very much tossed about and mixed up with other waters, lost and bewildered. Everywhere it saw water at work, turning mills, watering fields, carrying trade, falling as hail, rain, and snow, and at the last, after many journeys, found itself creeping out from under the rocks of Oppapago in the canon of Piñon Pines. Immediately the little stream knew itself and recalled clearly all that had happened to it before.

"After all, home is best," said the stream, and ran about in its choked channels looking for old friends. The willows were there, but grown shabby and dying at the top; the birches were quite dead, but stood still in their places; and there was only rubbish where the white clematis had been. Even the rabbits had gone away. The little stream ran whimpering in the meadow, fumbling at the ruined ditches to comfort the fruit-trees which were not quite dead. It was very dull in those days living in the canon of Piñon Pines.

"But it is really my own fault," said the stream. So it went on repairing the borders with the best heart it could contrive.

About the time the white clematis had come back to hide the ruin of the brown birches, a young man came and camped with his wife and child in the meadow. They were looking for a place to make a home. They looked long at the meadow, for Shorty and Long Tom had taken away their house and it did not appear to belong to any one.

"What a charming place!" said the young wife, "just the right distance from town, and a stream all to ourselves. And look, there are fruit-trees already planted. Do let us decide to stay."

Then she took off the child's shoes and stockings to let it play in the stream. The water curled all about the bare feet and gurgled delightedly.

"Ah, do stay," begged the happy water, "I can be such a help to you, for I know how a garden should be irrigated in the best manner."

The child laughed and stamped the water up to his bare knees. The young wife watched anxiously while her husband walked up and down the stream border and examined the fruit-trees.

"It is a delightful place," he said, "and the soil is rich, but I am afraid the water cannot be depended upon. There are signs of a great drought within the last two or three years. Look, there is a clump of birches in the very path of the stream, but all dead; and the largest limbs of the fruit-trees have died. In this country one must be able to make sure of the water supply. I suppose the people

who planted them must have abandoned the place when the stream went dry. We must go on farther." So they took their goods and the child and went on farther.

"Ah, well," said the stream, "that is what is to be expected when one has a reputation for neglecting one's duty. But I wish they had stayed. That baby and I understood each other."

He had quite made up his mind not to run away again, though he could not be expected to be quite cheerful after all that had happened; in fact, if you go yourself to the cañon of the Piñon Pines you will notice that the stream, where it goes brokenly about the meadow, has quite a mournful sound.

THE COYOTE-SPIRIT AND THE WEAVING WOMAN

THE COYOTE-SPIRIT AND THE WEAVING WOMAN

The Weaving Woman lived under the bank of the stony wash that cut through the country of the mesquite dunes. The Coyote-Spirit, which, you understand, is an Indian whose form has been changed to fit with his evil behavior, ranged from the Black Rock where the wash began to the white sands beyond Pahranaagat; and the Goat-Girl kept her flock among the mesquites, or along the windy stretch of sage below the campoodie; but as the Coyote-Spirit never came near the wickiups by day, and the Goat-Girl went home the moment the sun dropped behind Pahranaagat, they never met. These three are all that have to do with the story.

The Weaving Woman, whose work was the making of fine baskets of split willow and roots of yucca and brown grass, lived alone, because there was nobody found who wished to live with her, and because it was whispered among the wickiups that she was different from other people. It was reported that she had an infirmity of the eyes which caused her to see everything with rainbow fringes, bigger and brighter and better than it was. All her days were fruitful, a handful of pine nuts as much to make merry over as a feast; every lad who went by a-hunting with his bow at his back looked to be a painted brave, and every old woman digging roots as fine as a medicine man in all his feathers. All the faces at the campoodie, dark as the mingled sand and lava of the Black Rock country, deep lined with work and weather, shone for this singular old woman with the glory of the late evening light on Pahranaagat. The door of her wickiup opened toward the campoodie with the smoke going up from cheerful hearths, and from the shadow of the bank where she sat to make baskets she looked down the stony wash where all the trails converged that led every way among the dunes, and saw an enchanted mesa covered with misty bloom and gentle creatures moving on trails that seemed to lead to the places where one had always wished to be.

Since all this was so, it was not surprising that her baskets turned out to be such wonderful affairs, and the tribesmen, though they winked and wagged their heads, were very glad to buy them for a haunch of venison or a bagful of mesquite meal. Sometimes, as they stroked the perfect curves of the bowls or traced out the patterns, they were heard to sigh, thinking how fine life would be if it were so rich and bright as she made it seem, instead of the dull occasion they had found it. There were some who even said it was a pity, since she was so clever at the craft, that the weaver was not more like other people, and no one thought to suggest that in that case her weaving would be no better than theirs. For all this the basket-maker did not care, sitting always happily at her weaving or wandering far into the desert in search of withes and barks and dyes, where the wild things showed her many a wonder hid from those who have not rainbow fringes to their eyes; and because she was not afraid of anything, she went farther and farther into the silent places until in the course of time she met the Coyote-Spirit.

Now a Coyote-Spirit, from having been a man, is continually thinking about men and wishing to be with them, and, being a coyote and of the wolf's breed, no sooner does he have his wish than he thinks of devouring. So as soon as this one had met the Weaving Woman he desired to eat her up, or to work her some evil according to the evil of his nature. He did not see any opportunity to begin at the first meeting, for on account of the infirmity of her eyes the woman did not see him as a coyote, but as a man, and let down her wicker water bottle for him to drink, so kindly that he was quite abashed. She did not seem in the least afraid of him, which is disconcerting even to a real coyote; though if he had been, she need not have been afraid of him in any case. Whatever pestiferous

beast the Indian may think the dog of the wilderness, he has no reason to fear him except when by certain signs, as having a larger and leaner body, a sharper muzzle, and more evilly pointed ears, he knows him the soul of a bad-hearted man going about in that guise. There are enough of these coyote-spirits ranging in Mesquite Valley and over towards Funeral Mountains and about Pahranaagat to give certain learned folk surmise as to whether there may not be a strange breed of wolves in that region; but the Indians know better.

When the coyote-spirit who had met the basket woman thought about it afterward, he said to himself that she deserved all the mischance that might come upon her for that meeting. "She knows," he said, "that this is my range, and whoever walks in a coyote-spirit's range must expect to take the consequences. She is not at all like the Goat-Girl."

The Coyote-Spirit had often watched the Goat-Girl from the top of Pahranaagat, but because she was always in the open where no lurking-places were, and never far from the corn lands where the old men might be working, he had made himself believe he would not like that kind of a girl. Every morning he saw her come out of her leafy hut, loose the goats from the corral, which was all of cactus stems and broad leaves of prickly-pear, and lead them out among the wind-blown hillocks of sand under which the trunks of the mesquite flourished for a hundred years, and out of the tops of which the green twigs bore leaves and fruit; or along the mesa to browse on bitterbrush and the tops of scrubby sage. Sometimes she plaited willows for the coarser kinds of basket-work, or, in hot noonings while the flock dozed, worked herself collars and necklaces of white and red and turquoise-colored beads, and other times sat dreaming on the sand. But whatever she did, she kept far enough from the place of the Coyote-Spirit, who, now that he had met the Weaving Woman, could not keep his mind off her. Her hut was far enough from the campoodie so that every morning he went around by the Black Rock to see if she was still there, and there she sat weaving patterns in her baskets of all that she saw or thought. Now it would be the winding wash and the wattled huts beside it, now the mottled skin of the rattlesnake or the curled plumes of the quail.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.