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Homer Tolstoy Whitman  
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# **Indian Why Stories Sparks from War Eagle's Lodge-Fire**

Frank Bird Linderman

# Imprint

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INDIAN WHY STORIES

SPARKS FROM WAR EAGLE'S LODGE-FIRE

FRANK B. LINDERMAN

[CO SKEE SEE CO COT]

I DEDICATE THIS LITTLE BOOK TO MY FRIEND  
CHARLES M. RUSSELL  
THE COWBOY ARTIST  
GEORGE BIRD GRINNELL  
THE INDIAN'S FRIEND

AND TO ALL OTHERS WHO HAVE KNOWN AND LOVED OLD  
MONTANA

FOR I HOLD THEM ALL AS KIN  
WHO HAVE BUILDED FIRES WHERE NATURE  
WEARS NO MAKE-UP ON HER SKIN

## PREFACE

The great Northwest—that wonderful frontier that called to itself a world's hardiest spirits—is rapidly becoming a settled country; and before the light of civilizing influences, the blanket-Indian has trailed the buffalo over the divide that time has set between the pioneer and the crowd. With his passing we have lost much of the aboriginal folk-lore, rich in its fairy-like characters, and its relation to the lives of a most warlike people.

There is a wide difference between folk-lore of the so-called Old World and that of America. Transmitted orally through countless generations, the folk-stories of our ancestors show many evidences of distortion and of change in material particulars; but the Indian seems to have been too fond of nature and too proud of tradition to have forgotten or changed the teachings of his forefathers. Childlike in simplicity, beginning with creation itself, and reaching to the whys and wherefores of nature's moods and eccentricities, these tales impress me as being well worth saving.

The Indian has always been a lover of nature and a close observer of her many moods. The habits of the birds and animals, the voices of the winds and waters, the flickering of the shadows, and the mystic radiance of the moonlight—all appealed to him. Gradually, he formulated within himself fanciful reasons for the myriad manifestations of the Mighty Mother and her many children; and a poet by instinct, he framed odd stories with which to convey his explanations to others. And these stories were handed down from father to son, with little variation, through countless generations, until the white man slaughtered the buffalo, took to himself the open country, and left the red man little better than a beggar. But the tribal story-teller has passed, and only here and there is to be found a patriarch who loves the legends of other days.

Old-man, or Napa, as he is called by the tribes of Blackfeet, is the strangest character in Indian folk-lore. Sometimes he appears as a god or creator, and again as a fool, a thief, or a clown. But to the Indian, Napa is not the Deity; he occupies a somewhat subordinate

position, possessing many attributes which have sometimes caused him to be confounded with Manitou, himself. In all of this there is a curious echo of the teachings of the ancient Aryans, whose belief it was that this earth was not the direct handiwork of the Almighty, but of a mere member of a hierarchy of subordinate gods. The Indian possesses the highest veneration for the Great God, who has become familiar to the readers of Indian literature as Manitou. No idle tales are told of Him, nor would any Indian mention Him irreverently. But with Napa it is entirely different; he appears entitled to no reverence; he is a strange mixture of the fallible human and the powerful under-god. He made many mistakes; was seldom to be trusted; and his works and pranks run from the sublime to the ridiculous. In fact, there are many stories in which Napa figures that will not bear telling at all.

I propose to tell what I know of these legends, keeping as near as possible to the Indian's style of story-telling, and using only tales told me by the older men of the Blackfeet, Chippewa, and Cree tribes.

## CONTENTS

WHY THE CHIPMUNK'S BACK IS STRIPED  
HOW THE DUCKS GOT THEIR FINE FEATHERS  
WHY THE KINGFISHER ALWAYS WEARS A WAR-BONNET  
WHY THE CURLEW'S BILL IS LONG AND CROOKED  
OLD-MAN REMAKES THE WORLD  
WHY BLACKFEET NEVER KILL MICE  
HOW THE OTTER SKIN BECAME GREAT MEDICINE  
OLD-MAN STEALS THE SUN'S LEGGINGS  
OLD-MAN AND HIS CONSCIENCE  
OLD-MAN'S TREACHERY  
WHY THE NIGHT-HAWK'S WINGS ARE BEAUTIFUL  
WHY THE MOUNTAIN-LION IS LONG AND LEAN  
THE FIRE-LEGGINGS  
THE MOON AND THE GREAT SNAKE  
WHY THE DEER HAS NO GALL  
WHY INDIANS WHIP THE BUFFALO-BERRIES FROM THE  
BUSHES  
OLD-MAN AND THE FOX  
WHY THE BIRCH-TREE WEARS THE SLASHES IN ITS BARK  
MISTAKES OF OLD-MAN  
HOW THE MAN FOUND HIS MATE  
DREAMS  
RETROSPECTION

## INTRODUCTION

It was the moon when leaves were falling, for Napa had finished painting them for their dance with the North wind. Just over the ragged mountain range the big moon hung in an almost starless sky, and in shadowy outline every peak lay upon the plain like a giant pattern. Slowly the light spread and as slowly the shadows stole away until the October moon looked down on the great Indian camp—a hundred lodges, each as perfect in design as the tusks of a young silver-tip, and all looking ghostly white in the still of the autumn night.

Back from the camp, keeping within the ever-moving shadows, a buffalo-wolf skulked to a hill overlooking the scene, where he stopped to look and listen, his body silhouetted against the sky. A dog howled occasionally, and the weird sound of a tom-tom accompanying the voice of a singer in the Indian village reached the wolf's ears, but caused him no alarm; for not until a great herd of ponies, under the eyes of the night-herder, drifted too close, did he steal away.

Near the centre of the camp was the big painted lodge of War Eagle, the medicine-man, and inside had gathered his grandchildren, to whom he was telling the stories of the creation and of the strange doings of Napa, the creator. Being a friend of the old historian, I entered unhindered, and with the children listened until the hour grew late, and on the lodge-wall the dying fire made warning shadows dance.



## WHY THE CHIPMUNK'S BACK IS STRIPED

What a splendid lodge it was, and how grand War Eagle looked leaning against his back-rest in the firelight! From the tripod that supported the back-rest were suspended his weapons and his medicine-bundle, each showing the wonderful skill of the maker. The quiver that held the arrows was combined with a case for the bow, and colored quills of the porcupine had been deftly used to make it a thing of beauty. All about the lodge hung the strangely painted linings, and the firelight added richness to both color and design. War Eagle's hair was white, for he had known many snows; but his eyes were keen and bright as a boy's, as he gazed in pride at his grandchildren across the lodge-fire. He was wise, and had been in many battles, for his was a warlike tribe. He knew all about the world and the people in it. He was deeply religious, and every Indian child loved him for his goodness and brave deeds.

About the fire were Little Buffalo Calf, a boy of eleven years; Eyes-in-the-Water, his sister, a girl of nine; Fine Bow, a cousin of these, aged ten, and Bluebird, his sister, who was but eight years old.

Not a sound did the children make while the old warrior filled his great pipe, and only the snapping of the lodge-fire broke the stillness. Solemnly War Eagle lit the tobacco that had been mixed with the dried inner bark of the red willow, and for several minutes smoked in silence, while the children's eyes grew large with expectancy. Finally he spoke:

"Napa, OLD-man, is very old indeed. He made this world, and all that is on it. He came out of the south, and travelled toward the north, making the birds and animals as he passed. He made the perfumes for the winds to carry about, and he even made the war-paint for the people to use. He was a busy worker, but a great liar and thief, as I shall show you after I have told you more about him. It was OLD-man who taught the beaver all his cunning. It was OLD-man who told the bear to go to sleep when the snow grew deep in winter, and it was he who made the curlew's bill so long

and crooked, although it was not that way at first. OLD-man used to live on this world with the animals and birds. There was no other man or woman then, and he was chief over all the animal-people and the bird-people. He could speak the language of the robin, knew the words of the bear, and understood the sign-talk of the beaver, too. He lived with the wolves, for they are the great hunters. Even to-day we make the same sign for a smart man as we make for the wolf; so you see he taught them much while he lived with them. OLD-man made a great many mistakes in making things, as I shall show you after a while; yet he worked until he had everything good. But he often made great mischief and taught many wicked things. These I shall tell you about some day. Everybody was afraid of OLD-man and his tricks and lies—even the animal-people, before he made men and women. He used to visit the lodges of our people and make trouble long ago, but he got so wicked that Manitou grew angry at him, and one day in the month of roses, he built a lodge for OLD-man and told him that he must stay in it forever. Of course he had to do that, and nobody knows where the lodge was built, nor in what country, but that is why we never see him as our grandfathers did, long, long ago.

"What I shall tell you now happened when the world was young. It was a fine summer day, and OLD-man was travelling in the forest. He was going north and straight as an arrow—looking at nothing, hearing nothing. No one knows what he was after, to this day. The birds and forest-people spoke politely to him as he passed but he answered none of them. The Pine-squirrel, who is always trying to find out other people's business, asked him where he was going, but OLD-man wouldn't tell him. The woodpecker hammered on a dead tree to make him look that way, but he wouldn't. The Elk-people and the Deer-people saw him pass, and all said that he must be up to some mischief or he would stop and talk a while. The pine-trees murmured, and the bushes whispered their greeting, but he kept his eyes straight ahead and went on travelling.

"The sun was low when OLD-man heard a groan" (here War Eagle groaned to show the children how it sounded), "and turning about he saw a warrior lying bruised and bleeding near a spring of cold water. OLD-man knelt beside the man and asked: 'Is there war in this country?'

"'Yes,' answered the man. 'This whole day long we have fought to kill a Person, but we have all been killed, I am afraid.'

"'That is strange,' said OLD-man; 'how can one Person kill so many men? Who is this Person, tell me his name!' but the man didn't answer—he was dead. When OLD-man saw that life had left the wounded man, he drank from the spring, and went on toward the north, but before long he heard a noise as of men fighting, and he stopped to look and listen. Finally he saw the bushes bend and sway near a creek that flowed through the forest. He crawled toward the spot, and peering through the brush saw a great Person near a pile of dead men, with his back against a pine-tree. The Person was full of arrows, and he was pulling them from his ugly body. Calmly the Person broke the shafts of the arrows, tossed them aside, and stopped the blood flow with a brush of his hairy hand. His head was large and fierce-looking, and his eyes were small and wicked. His great body was larger than that of a buffalo-bull and covered with scars of many battles.

"OLD-man went to the creek, and with his buffalo-horn cup brought some water to the Person, asking as he approached:

"'Who are you, Person? Tell me, so I can make you a fine present, for you are great in war.'

"'I am Bad Sickness,' replied the Person. 'Tribes I have met remember me and always will, for their bravest warriors are afraid when I make war upon them. I come in the night or I visit their camps in daylight. It is always the same; they are frightened and I kill them easily.'

"'Ho!' said OLD-man, 'tell me how to make Bad Sickness, for I often go to war myself.' He lied; for he was never in a battle in his life. The Person shook his ugly head and then OLD-man said:

"'If you will tell me how to make Bad Sickness I will make you small and handsome. When you are big, as you now are, it is very hard to make a living; but when you are small, little food will make you fat. Your living will be easy because I will make your food grow everywhere.'

"'Good,' said the Person, 'I will do it; you must kill the fawns of the deer and the calves of the elk when they first begin to live.'

When you have killed enough of them you must make a robe of their skins. Whenever you wear that robe and sing—"now you sick-en, now you sicken," the sickness will come—that is all there is to it.'

"'Good,' said OLD-man, 'now lie down to sleep and I will do as I promised.'

"The Person went to sleep and OLD-man breathed upon him until he grew so tiny that he laughed to see how small he had made him. Then he took out his paint sack and striped the Person's back with black and yellow. It looked bright and handsome and he waked the Person, who was now a tiny animal with a bushy tail to make him pretty.

"'Now,' said OLD-man, 'you are the Chipmunk, and must always wear those striped clothes. All of your children and their children, must wear them, too.'

"After the Chipmunk had looked at himself, and thanked OLD-man for his new clothes, he wanted to know how he could make his living, and OLD-man told him what to eat, and said he must cache the pine-nuts when the leaves turned yellow, so he would not have to work in the winter time.

"'You are a cousin to the Pine-squirrel,' said OLD-man, 'and you will hunt and hide as he does. You will be spry and your living will be easy to make if you do as I have told you.'

"He taught the Chipmunk his language and his signs, showed him where to live, and then left him, going on toward the north again. He kept looking for the cow-elk and doe-deer, and it was not long before he had killed enough of their young to make the robe as the Person told him, for they were plentiful before the white man came to live on the world. He found a shady place near a creek, and there made the robe that would make Bad Sickness whenever he sang the queer song, but the robe was plain, and brown in color. He didn't like the looks of it. Suddenly he thought how nice the back of the Chipmunk looked after he had striped it with his paints. He got out his old paint sack and with the same colors made the robe look very much like the clothes of the Chipmunk. He was proud of the work, and liked the new robe better; but being lazy, he wanted to save himself work, so he sent the South-wind to tell all the doe-deer

and the cow-elk to come to him. They came as soon as they received the message, for they were afraid of OLD-man and always tried to please him. When they had all reached the place where OLD-man was he said to them:

"Do you see this robe?"

"Yes, we see it," they replied.

"Well, I have made it from the skins of your children, and then painted it to look like the Chipmunk's back, for I like the looks of that Person's clothes. I shall need many more of these robes during my life; and every time I make one, I don't want to have to spend my time painting it; so from now on and forever your children shall be born in spotted clothes. I want it to be that way to save me work. On all the fawns there must be spots of white like this (here he pointed to the spots on Bad Sickness's robe) and on all of the elk-calves the spots shall not be so white and shall be in rows and look rather yellow.' Again he showed them his robe, that they might see just what he wanted.

"Remember," he said, 'after this I don't want to see any of your children running about wearing plain clothing, because that would mean more painting for me. Now go away, and remember what I have said, lest I make you sick.'

"The cow-elk and the doe-deer were glad to know that their children's clothes would be beautiful, and they went away to their little ones who were hidden in the tall grass, where the wolves and mountain-lions would have a hard time finding them; for you know that in the tracks of the fawn there is no scent, and the wolf cannot trail him when he is alone. That is the way Manitou takes care of the weak, and all of the forest-people know about it, too.

"Now you know why the Chipmunk's back is striped, and why the fawn and elk-calf wear their pretty clothes.

"I hear the owls, and it is time for all young men who will some day be great warriors to go to bed, and for all young women to seek rest, lest beauty go away forever. Ho!"

## HOW THE DUCKS GOT THEIR FINE FEATHERS

Another night had come, and I made my way toward War Eagle's lodge. In the bright moonlight the dead leaves of the quaking-aspen fluttered down whenever the wind shook the trees; and over the village great flocks of ducks and geese and swan passed in a never-ending procession, calling to each other in strange tones as they sped away toward the waters that never freeze.

In the lodge War Eagle waited for his grandchildren, and when they had entered, happily, he laid aside his pipe and said:

"The Duck-people are travelling to-night just as they have done since the world was young. They are going away from winter because they cannot make a living when ice covers the rivers.

"You have seen the Duck-people often. You have noticed that they wear fine clothes but you do not know how they got them; so I will tell you to-night.

"It was in the fall when leaves are yellow that it happened, and long, long ago. The Duck-people had gathered to go away, just as they are doing now. The buck-deer was coming down from the high ridges to visit friends in the lowlands along the streams as they have always done. On a lake OLD-man saw the Duck-people getting ready to go away, and at that time they all looked alike; that is, they all wore the same colored clothes. The loons and the geese and the ducks were there and playing in the sunlight. The loons were laughing loudly and the diving was fast and merry to see. On the hill where OLD-man stood there was a great deal of moss, and he began to tear it from the ground and roll it into a great ball. When he had gathered all he needed he shouldered the load and started for the shore of the lake, staggering under the weight of the great burden. Finally the Duck-people saw him coming with his load of moss and began to swim away from the shore.

"'Wait, my brothers!' he called, 'I have a big load here, and I am going to give you people a dance. Come and help me get things ready.'

"'Don't you do it,' said the gray goose to the others; 'that's OLD-man and he is up to something bad, I am sure.'

"So the loon called to OLD-man and said they wouldn't help him at all.

"Right near the water OLD-man dropped his ball of moss and then cut twenty long poles. With the poles he built a lodge which he covered with the moss, leaving a doorway facing the lake. Inside the lodge he built a fire and when it grew bright he cried:

"Say, brothers, why should you treat me this way when I am here to give you a big dance? Come into the lodge,' but they wouldn't do that. Finally OLD-man began to sing a song in the duck-talk, and keep time with his drum. The Duck-people liked the music, and swam a little nearer to the shore, watching for trouble all the time, but OLD-man sang so sweetly that pretty soon they waddled up to the lodge and went inside. The loon stopped near the door, for he believed that what the gray goose had said was true, and that OLD-man was up to some mischief. The gray goose, too, was careful to stay close to the door but the ducks reached all about the fire. Politely, OLD-man passed the pipe, and they all smoked with him because it is wrong not to smoke in a person's lodge if the pipe is offered, and the Duck-people knew that.

"Well,' said Old-man, 'this is going to be the Blind-dance, but you will have to be painted first.

"Brother Mallard, name the colors—tell how you want me to paint you.'

"Well,' replied the mallard drake, 'paint my head green, and put a white circle around my throat, like a necklace. Besides that, I want a brown breast and yellow legs: but I don't want my wife painted that way.'

"OLD-man painted him just as he asked, and his wife, too. Then the teal and the wood-duck (it took a long time to paint the wood-duck) and the spoonbill and the blue-bill and the canvasback and the goose and the brant and the loon—all chose their paint. OLD-man painted them all just as they wanted him to, and kept singing all the time. They looked very pretty in the firelight, for it was night before the painting was done.

"Now," said OLD-man, "as this is the Blind-dance, when I beat upon my drum you must all shut your eyes tight and circle around the fire as I sing. Every one that peeks will have sore eyes forever."

"Then the Duck-people shut their eyes and OLD-man began to sing: 'Now you come, ducks, now you come—tum-tum, tum; tum-tum, tum.'"

"Around the fire they came with their eyes still shut, and as fast as they reached OLD-man, the rascal would seize them, and wring their necks. Ho! things were going fine for OLD-man, but the loon peeked a little, and saw what was going on; several others heard the fluttering and opened their eyes, too. The loon cried out, 'He's killing us—let us fly,' and they did that. There was a great squawking and quacking and fluttering as the Duck-people escaped from the lodge. Ho! but OLD-man was angry, and he kicked the back of the loon-duck, and that is why his feet turn from his body when he walks or tries to stand. Yes, that is why he is a cripple to-day.

"And all of the Duck-people that peeked that night at the dance still have sore eyes—just as OLD-man told them they would have. Of course they hurt and smart no more but they stay red to pay for peeking, and always will. You have seen the mallard and the rest of the Duck-people. You can see that the colors OLD-man painted so long ago are still bright and handsome, and they will stay that way forever and forever. Ho!"

## **WHY THE KINGFISHER ALWAYS WEARS A WAR-BONNET**

Autumn nights on the upper Missouri river in Montana are indescribably beautiful, and under their spell imagination is a constant companion to him who lives in wilderness, lending strange, weird echoes to the voice of man or wolf, and unnatural shapes in shadow to commonplace forms.

The moon had not yet climbed the distant mountain range to look down on the humbler lands when I started for War Eagle's lodge; and dimming the stars in its course, the milky-way stretched across

the jewelled sky. "The wolf's trail," the Indians call this filmy streak that foretells fair weather, and to-night it promised much, for it seemed plainer and brighter than ever before.

"How—how!" greeted War Eagle, making the sign for me to be seated near him, as I entered his lodge. Then he passed me his pipe and together we smoked until the children came.

Entering quietly, they seated themselves in exactly the same positions they had occupied on the previous evenings, and patiently waited in silence. Finally War Eagle laid the pipe away and said: "Ho! Little Buffalo Calf, throw a big stick on the fire and I will tell you why the Kingfisher wears a war-bonnet."

The boy did as he was bidden. The sparks jumped toward the smoke-hole and the blaze lighted up the lodge until it was bright as daytime, when War Eagle continued:

"You have often seen Kingfisher at his fishing along the rivers, I know; and you have heard him laugh in his queer way, for he laughs a good deal when he flies. That same laugh nearly cost him his life once, as you will see. I am sure none could see the Kingfisher without noticing his great head-dress, but not many know how he came by it because it happened so long ago that most men have forgotten.

"It was one day in the winter-time when OLD-man and the Wolf were hunting. The snow covered the land and ice was on all of the rivers. It was so cold that OLD-man wrapped his robe close about himself and his breath showed white in the air. Of course the Wolf was not cold; wolves never get cold as men do. Both OLD-man and the Wolf were hungry for they had travelled far and had killed no meat. OLD-man was complaining and grumbling, for his heart is not very good. It is never well to grumble when we are doing our best, because it will do no good and makes us weak in our hearts. When our hearts are weak our heads sicken and our strength goes away. Yes, it is bad to grumble.

"When the sun was getting low OLD-man and the Wolf came to a great river. On the ice that covered the water, they saw four fat Otters playing.

"'There is meat,' said the Wolf; 'wait here and I will try to catch one of those fellows.'

"'No!—No!' cried OLD-man, 'do not run after the Otter on the ice, because there are air-holes in all ice that covers rivers, and you may fall in the water and die.' OLD-man didn't care much if the Wolf did drown. He was afraid to be left alone and hungry in the snow—that was all.

"'Ho!' said the Wolf, 'I am swift of foot and my teeth are white and sharp. What chance has an Otter against me? Yes, I will go,' and he did.

"Away ran the Otters with the Wolf after them, while OLD-man stood on the bank and shivered with fright and cold. Of course the Wolf was faster than the Otter, but he was running on the ice, remember, and slipping a good deal. Nearer and nearer ran the Wolf. In fact he was just about to seize an Otter, when SPLASH!—into an air-hole all the Otters went. Ho! the Wolf was going so fast he couldn't stop, and SWOW! into the air-hole he went like a badger after mice, and the current carried him under the ice. The Otters knew that hole was there. That was their country and they were running to reach that same hole all the time, but the Wolf didn't know that.

"Old-man saw it all and began to cry and wail as women do. Ho! but he made a great fuss. He ran along the bank of the river, stumbling in the snowdrifts, and crying like a woman whose child is dead; but it was because he didn't want to be left in that country alone that he cried—not because he loved his brother, the Wolf. On and on he ran until he came to a place where the water was too swift to freeze, and there he waited and watched for the Wolf to come out from under the ice, crying and wailing and making an awful noise, for a man.

"Well—right there is where the thing happened. You see, Kingfisher can't fish through the ice and he knows it, too; so he always finds places like the one OLD-man found. He was there that day, sitting on the limb of a birch-tree, watching for fishes, and when OLD-man came near to Kingfisher's tree, crying like an old woman, it tickled the Fisher so much that he laughed that queer, chattering laugh.