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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Talking Grass

Carolyn Sherwin Bailey

Once upon a time when there were only Native Americans and animals in our land, there was a green hill covered with long talking grass. The four winds of heaven brought the grasses news of what was going on in the world, and of the coming of hunters. Then the grasses whispered this news to their friends, the little red Fox, the Hare, the Deer, and the Wolf. If the animals were too far away to hear the soft voices of the grasses, they gave the messages to the Butterflies. The hill was the refuge of these animals, and the talking grasses were their friends.

One day a great band of hunters came from their camp in the valley, up the hill. They were armed with bows and arrows. They planned to kill enough game to give them food for a long time. But the grasses knew that the hunters were on their way. They warned the animals, who hid at once. When the hunters reached the hill, they saw nothing but green grass waving in the wind. Many bright butterflies flew above it.

The hunters listened and heard the grasses talking to one another. They saw, too, the trails of the animals as they had passed through it. They guessed at once what had happened.

"The grasses have told the animals to flee and hide from us," they said. "We must kill them. To-night we will rest and sleep among them, for we are tired with our long journey. But to-morrow we will tear every blade of grass up by its roots."

At these cruel words the grasses became still. They loved their life on the hill, with their roots in the earth and their green blades reaching up to the sunshine. Now they knew that they were going to die in the morning. They could neither sing nor talk any more. But the Butterflies knew the grasses' peril. They flew away, one by one, so that the hunters would suspect nothing, until they came to the Fox's den. They told him of the great danger of the talking grasses. They begged him to do anything that he could to save them.

The Fox set off at once. He did not stop until he came to a dark cave on the side of a mountain. Here the Fire Manito lived. Few dared speak to him, for he was a very mighty Manito. He was able to destroy man or beast at his will. But when he saw the eager, trembling little Fox, waiting outside, the Fire Manito asked him

his errand. The Fox told him that the grasses were to be killed in the morning, unless something was done to save them.

The Manito went to the back of his cave and brought out a heap of black stones. There was no light in them. He told the Fox about them.

“They came from the depths of the earth,” he said. “The Great Spirit mixed a million sunbeams in each. Then he hid them in the earth until they should be needed to give heat and light to man. Now we will use the black stones to save the grasses.”

The Manito heated the stones in his wood fire and they glowed like red rubies. He sent the Fox ahead to tell the grasses to be brave. He, himself, followed with his arms full of the glowing stones which did not burn him because he was the Fire Manito.

The hunters had arisen early and waited at the foot of the hill, ready to rush up and tear up the grasses. But the Manito laid the brightly burning stones in a circle about the hill. The hunters were not able to get through. It was a ring of fire and it frightened them. They had never seen burning coals before. They went back to their camp and the grasses were safe, for the coals burned to ashes without touching them.

The grasses soon found their voices again, and they have been talking to their friends, the animals, ever since. In the summer they tell the Field Mouse and the Hare where to hide safely. In the spring they tell the Deer that they are fresh and green for his food. When it is winter, a few of the grasses stand up, stiff and tall, above the snow as the lone gray Wolf runs by. They guide him to food. In the fall the whispering of the dry grasses helps the Fox to double his trail so that no one may catch him.

Who of you have heard the voices of the grasses?



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