



The Rolling Head

Kayas, there was a family that lived alone in the bush. There was a man, his wife, and two sons. One son was around 7 and the other around 9. Every day the man would leave to go hunting and the wife would be left to look after the home and the two boys. She was responsible for cleaning up, cooking, and gathering firewood.

Things went on like this without incident for some time. It was only after some time that the man gradually noticed that when he'd come back from hunting day after day, the home began to look more and more unkempt and messy. Along with that, he noticed that his wife was also very sleepy all the time and was often sleeping when he came home.

One day he decided to try to find out what was going on. He got ready just as he did every morning and left to go hunting as usual. On this day, he walked across the opening where their camp was and when he came to the bush, rather than continue as usual, he circled back along the bush line to an area where he could clearly watch over the home.

It wasn't very long after he left that he noticed his wife come out of the home carrying an axe. He heard her tell the two boys not to follow, that she was going to the woodpile not far to gather wood.

She left along the path. The man followed her carefully through the bush to where the woodpile was. When she got to the woodpile, he saw her take the axe to an old windblown, hollow tree. She tapped on the tree 4 times with the axe. After the 4th tap, a huge snake came out of a hole in the hollow tree. It wrapped around his wife, and they made love. The snake then returned to the hollow tree and the wife grabbed the axe and went back down the path toward home. When she got home, she fell into a deep sleep.

The man came quietly into the house and told the two boys to follow him outside. When they were outside, he told his sons that they were going to have to grow up early and leave together. He told them that something bad was about to happen and asked that they start making their way to the ocean shore to the East and not to stop for anything. He told them it was important that they leave right away and not to look back. The man also gave the older boy 4 helpers and told him to only use them if he really needed to. The boys set off alone for the ocean shore.

The man went into the house, grabbed the axe and left for the woodpile. When he got there, he tapped on the tree 4 times and as before, the snake came out of the hole in the hollow tree.



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As soon as its head was fully out of the hole, the man chopped it off with the axe. He put the snake's head in a birch basket and carried it home.

When he got home, he woke his wife and showed her the snake's head. The woman went crazy with rage and attacked the man. They fought for a long time before she finally wrapped her hands and legs around him and began squeezing him to death with inhuman strength. As his strength was leaving him, the man swung the axe and chopped his wife's head off. It rolled onto the floor and turned to stare at her body, still squeezing the man.

With his last breath the man shouted "Creator, let my spirit go up into the night sky forever to remind men what happened here today so it will never be forgotten!" With that, the man died. His spirit was taken up into the sky and planted there in the form of 3 stars that lie in a row. These are the same stars that make up what is now called Orion's Belt and they form the shape of the man fighting for his life.

A short time later, the two brothers were headed East as their father had told them. Suddenly they could hear their mother's voice calling to them. Although she sounded a bit strange, the boys stopped and looked back.

They could hear their mother's strange voice call, "Wait for me, my sons. It's me. Mom. I want to give you a big hug. Everything's going to be okay!" The boys could hear a rustling in the trees as their mother's voice came closer. Finally, she emerged from the bush, but the boys could see something was very wrong.

What emerged from the bush certainly looked like their mother, but it was just her head! It was rolling toward them all covered in blood with matted, messy hair! The older brother grabbed his young brother and started to run again, dragging his brother in tow.

He told his brother, "We should have listened to our father and kept running without looking back! We need to keep running and never stop or who knows what that thing will do to us! It's certainly not our mother!" The boys looked straight ahead and ran on toward the East without stopping or looking back!

Behind them in the distance, they could hear the rustling in the woods grow faster, following them, and they could hear the angry voice of what used to be their mother. "My boys! Now you have angered me! Get back here and listen to your mother! I just want to hug you!" The boys continued to run, terrified of the image in their mind of their mother's head rolling after them!



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Although the boys were running non-stop, they could hear the terrible thing chasing them, getting closer to them. The older boy started to panic when he remembered the four helpers his father had given him before they left. He reached in his pouch for one of the helpers, wondering how it could help them. The first helper he grabbed was a small pebble.

He looked at the small pebble in his hand as he ran and wondered how this little thing was going to help them. Even if he threw it at the thing chasing them with all his might, it would just bounce off and anger the rolling head more! While he was glancing down at the small pebble, he stumbled a bit and the pebble bounced in the air, landing behind the boys! The boy looked back to look for the pebble, but it had landed somewhere in the bush behind them.

The boys continued to run when, out of nowhere, the ground trembled behind them and a huge mountain range began to push its way out of the ground where the pebble had hit the ground! The mountain range grew higher and higher behind them and began stretching out for miles along the horizon behind them! The boys finally slowed their pace and began to walk, resting a bit. They could hear the horrible rolling head calling to them from the other side of the newly formed mountain range. "My boys!! What have you done?

Why is this mountain here? Now you are really in trouble! Wait till I catch you boys!" The boys were terrified as they could hear the rolling head growling and screaming and sounding like it was trying to roll up and over the huge mountains! They boys started running towards the East again, fearful the rolling head would find a way over the mountains.

As the boys ran onward to the East, the older boy looked back with a glance and just as he glanced, he could see the rolling head reach the top of the mountain and start to roll down the east side of the slopes toward them! With his brief glance, he could see that the rolling head now looked even more horrible! Although it still resembled their mother, the thing chasing them now had blood, bruises, and torn flesh all around it! What was once their mother's long hair was now filled with sticks, mud and dirt, and was matted and torn!

Before long, the boys could hear the rolling head gaining on them again, closing the distance between them, grunting and groaning the whole time! The older boy once again feared the thing would soon catch them, so he fumbled in his pouch again, this time pulling out a small nipsi, a small willow branch. He looked at it in wonder but remembered how the pebble had helped them, so he put his faith in his father's helper and tossed the little nipsi over his shoulder behind him. They continued to run as fast as they could.



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To the boys' relief, where the nipsi hit the ground a huge tangle of willow bushes began to spring up, growing larger and larger for miles behind them, running along the foothills of the new mountains. The willows grew thick and tangled, and the rolling head was quickly tangled up in them! The rolling head began to scream again, this time angrier than ever. "My boys!!! Now I'm angry! You've upset me and just wait till I catch you two! You will pay for not listening to your mother!!!"

The willows spread out for miles, tangled and twisted, and the boys could hear the rolling head struggling to get through getting more and more distant from them. They slowed their pace and again allowed themselves to take a little break from running. It wasn't long before they looked back to see the willows shaking as the rolling head slowly made its way through the willows. They could hear the mumbles and snapping of teeth as the rolling head pushed and chewed its way through the willows! The boys began to run again. They hadn't run for long when they heard the rolling head scream in triumph at pushing its way through the tangle of willows.

This time, after running only a short while the older boy decided he needed to try the 3rd helper and he reached inside his pouch. This time, he pulled out a small piece of flint.

He looked at it briefly before tossing it over his shoulder confidently, knowing something was going to happen when the flint hit the ground.

As soon as the flint hit the ground, a spark flew up, igniting everything near it into flames! The flames grew quickly and spread to the surrounding areas at an amazing speed! Soon everything was ablaze in a huge fire that stretched out for miles, burning everything in its path! The rolling head stopped completely when it came upon the wall of flames. It shouted in anger at the boys, but they cared not to look back and continued running toward the East as their father had directed them to do.

Soon after, the boys could hear a massive, long scream and they could imagine the rolling head finally getting frustrated and lunging through the flames! They could only picture in their worst nightmare what the rolling head would look like after rolling through the massive flames! Without even wanting to look back, they ran on.

Once again, after a short time they could hear the rolling head screaming in the distance, gaining on them as it made it through the fires. The older boy once again reached in his pouch to take out the 4th and final helper his father had given him. He hoped this last one would work and they would be safe at last.



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He investigated his open hand and saw a pihew, prairie chicken, food pouch that was dried and filled with water. He looked at it curiously before preparing to throw it over his shoulder behind them as they ran. In his haste, he stumbled on a branch as he was about to throw the helper and tripped, sending the pihew pouch flying forward ahead of them.

To the boys' horror, when the helper hit the ground, it broke open, splashing the water onto the rocks. Where the water landed, the ground immediately started to open, forming at first a small pond then growing larger and larger, causing the boys to quickly back away! After only a few moments, the terrified boys could see a lake had formed that was farther than the eye could see! It seemingly went on forever! The boys looked at each other in terror as the way to the East was now blocked to them, covered in water for miles!

The older brother knew he had to act quickly as he could hear the rolling head coming closer in the distance! Suddenly, there in the water, the older boy noticed a huge old swan swimming nearby. He called to the swan and the old water bird swam over to them. "My friend, could I bother you for a minute? We are needing to cross this water somehow as our father told us we must get to the East as quick as we can."

The old swan thought for a moment and looked at the two boys as they looked truthful and desperate. "I think I can help. I am very old and my back bothers me a lot, but I'll let you carefully crawl up on my back and I'll swim you both across this strange newly formed lake. You need to promise not to move a muscle while you're on my back, for if you move it'll hurt me and I'll throw you off in the middle of the water!" The boys agreed and carefully climbed onto the swan's back. The swan began to slowly swim to the other side of the water with the boys on his back.

Once on the other side of the water, the boys thanked the old swan and collapsed on the sand and rested. They kept an eye out across the water as far as they could see to make sure the rolling head wasn't following. To their horror, they could see the old swan swimming toward them with the rolling head perched on its back! They watched in disbelief as they moved closer to them.

The rolling head was trying to be careful not to move on the old swan's back, but it started to get excited when it caught sight of the two boys on the far shore. It began to get agitated and hollered at the swan to swim faster. The old swan could feel the strain on its old back and warned the rolling head not to move or it would throw it off in the water! The rolling head was growing angry now and started bouncing on the swan's back, telling it to move faster.



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The swan had enough and although it hurt greatly, it threw up its chest and dumped the rolling head in the water! The rolling head began to sink, screaming and cursing as it disappeared under the water!

The boys watched in joy and relief as they saw the rolling head splash in the water and disappear from sight beneath the water, leaving only a swirl of bubbles where it sank. The boys watched for hours as the bubbles grew less and less until finally after a great while, the water was calm and flat once again. The boys waited a while longer before moving on, making sure the rolling head was finally gone forever. After what seemed a lifetime, the boys finally could put the horrible ordeal behind them and fulfill their father's directions to go to the East shores where they would be safe.

They finally arrived on the East shores and set about making a new life for themselves.

The older boy is the being we as Cree peoples now know as Ne-aneemse and his younger brother is the being we now know in legend as Trickster! This story, we are told, marks the beginning of the long epic legends of both brothers that we now share in story today from generation to generation.

From this story we are also told that the four helpers the boys had in their journey formed the land we now call home. The 1st helper, we are told, formed the Rocky Mountains we know today. The 2nd helper formed the massive willow groves on the eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains stretching far into Alberta. We are told the huge fire caused by the 3rd helper formed the massive prairies stretching out for miles across Alberta, Saskatchewan, and into Manitoba. The 4th and final helper, we are told, formed what we now know as the Hudson's Bay, where it is told that to this day is the final resting place of the horrible rolling head!

Ekosi Maka