

"It Seemed Like A Great Idea At The Time..."

The Delirium Threemen
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"It Seemed Like A Great Idea At The Time..."

The shaggy-haired boy stood knee-deep in the remnants of a water-starved pond while the heat of the summer sun beat down on him. He had managed to evade his mother after lunch thus dodging one of her home haircuts. He stood motionless waiting for signs from the 'little ones' he was after. His rubber boots had already fallen victim to the mucky outer edges of the pond. Finally, he spotted a pair of eyes rise just above the water's surface and then the little boy moved stealthily, quickly imprisoning the small creature in his hands.

"It's okay little one. I'm not going to hurt you. I'm only gonna hold ya' for ransom that's all," he said as he waded to the pot at the mucky edge of the pond. Once he secured the tiny body in his one hand, he lifted the lid of the pot up slightly and slipped the slimy, green *wasin* inside.

"Don't worry little fellas," he said into the pot, "and ...err little ladies, I'll return you back to your home when your parents come to their senses."

Johnny had overheard his father and grandfather discussing the drought that had plagued their area over the last couple of months. If they didn't get a good rain soon the farms might not get a good yield on their crops. Some of the local rivers became tricklings of water and many of creeks had turned to muck or dust. Those raising livestock also needed water for their animals drink and rain for lush, grassy pastures to graze on.

The seven-year-old had come up with a plan this morning to bring water to the reservation, just as the Coyote did when he freed the waters from the Frog People. ***That clever Coyote had tricked the Frog People with a bone that looked like a large clamshell in exchange for a drink of water. Instead of taking a drink, Coyote dug a hole under the dam they had built. After the Coyote had finished his 'drink' the dam gave way. The water flowed freely to the valley creating the creeks, rivers, and waterfalls. The Coyote had made the water available for everyone and nobody had to go barter with the Frog People if they needed water.***

Well, I haven't seen much bones lying around that look like shells, and I doubt the Frog People would fall for that scam again, Johnny mused to himself.

He wholeheartedly agreed with the Coyote; it wasn't right for the hoggish Frog People to have all the water. Everyone should be able to share it. He wondered if he was the only one on the reservation that suspected the Frog People were the ones responsible for the shrinking ponds, receding rivers, and streams. *Perhaps they have a special net in the sky to catch the rain too. I wouldn't put it past them,* Johnny said to himself. Johnny believed he had come up with the perfect plan to free the water again from the Frog People.

Soon, I'll have enough of your children captive and you'll have no choice but to free the water. Johnny wondered if he would become a legend just like the Coyote. Johnny couldn't help contemplating the

stories that would be told about him. *I bet stories about the boy who held the Frog Children for ransom will be passed on down for hundreds and hundreds of years to come. Yes, I would be the boy who made the waters flow freely again.*

He spent another hour under the hot sun capturing the tiny, green water creatures. Finally, he had enough 'children' to ransom off and it was time to head home. Tomorrow he would follow the stream by his grandfather's place until he found the Frog People. He went to lift the pot that contained a dozens of frogs in it and found it wouldn't budge. He tried scooping some of the mud from around the pot, but it only seemed to sink deeper in.

"Uh-oh, this isn't good," he muttered to himself as he tried vainly for several more minutes to try to lift the pot out of the mud which had formed a tight suction around it. "Oh DRAT! Mom's not gonna be happy about this."

He felt the panic building up inside of him. He didn't see the harm at the time of 'borrowing' his mother's large cooking pot without her knowledge. The pot was perfect for holding his green hostages, but now it was stuck in the muck and his plan was disintegrating right before his eyes. Instead of freeing the waters and being heralded as a hero, he was looking as some sort of punishment for getting his rubber boots and Mom's pot stuck in the mud. He knew who to go to for help. *Yes, Grandfather always knows what to do*, he thought.

"I suppose first things first," he said to himself as he took the lid off the pot and began to scoop out the green captives he had planned on using for his 'negotiations' with the leader of the Frog People. *This really didn't turn out to be such a great idea after all.* He slowly made his way out of the pond, each step making a slurping sound. There were a few moments where he was sure he was going to meet the same fate as the pot and his boots. Johnny finally made it to the water-starved sweetgrass that surrounded the pond. He wiped off as much mud as he could from his scrawny legs onto the grass before using them to run towards his grandfather's place.

George Eaglehorse Gage had set two three-legged iron pots onto the fire to boil at the back of his house a short while ago. One pot contained the yellow blossoms of dandelions, while the other contained the roots of the plant. He moved the pots away from the heat of the fire and let them cool down. Once the two concoctions cooled down, he strained the dandelion blossoms from the one pot and the root particles from the other into two smaller pots.

The wool he had painstakingly spun into lengths of yarn in the spring was now ready to be dyed. It was no small task to convert freshly shaven wool from his small herd of sheep into yarn. Burrs, dirt, and other debris had to be removed first from the wool. To remove any oily residue from the wool he would fill a large kettle filled with soapy water to wash and rinse the wool afterwards. Afterwards, he would then pull the wool over nearby bushes too dry and strengthen. Once the wool had dried, he would spin it into yarn. He was preparing to weave the wool into blankets and throws.

Before he could dye the wool, he needed to soak it first in a mordant. He hung a caldron over the fire from a trammel. He placed the yarn into the mixture of water and soapweed yucca which would allow

the color to set into the yarn. He headed into the house to fix himself something to eat while he waited for the mordant to simmer. Twenty minutes later, he took the mordant off of the fire and set it on the ground to cool before wringing out the yarn and rinsing it in hot water.

He divided the hanks of yarn between the two pots of dye and hung them over the fire again until they both came to a low boil. He removed the pots from the fire and set them a few feet away on the ground to cool. He would let the wool sit in them for several hours before removing them. This was the first time he had tried using dandelions as a base for his dyes. He couldn't wait to see how the colors from the two pots of dandelion dyes would turn out. Would he end up with a vibrant yellow or a pale shade from the blossoms, a deep red, or purple from the roots? In the past he would use St. John's Wort to produce a golden-yellow, and blackberries he used to create vibrant purples or light lavenders, and the beets from his small garden tended to produce a reddish-purple color. His favorite shade of green came from Black-Eyed Susan's and for browns he used acorns.

Over the next several days he planned on dying feathers for the dreamcatchers he was planning on making. Even at his mature age George preferred to live by his terms, growing his own food or hunting for it, and earning his own money through the labors of his hands. *Keeping my hands busy keeps me out of trouble*, he chuckled to himself. He often heard comments on his obduracy from his son and other members of the tribe.

George headed out to his small barn to begin tend his livestock of a dozen sheep, few dozen chickens, and three barn cats. Once he was finished with those chores he headed back to his house to enjoy the quiet afternoon. He noticed the heat weary plants in the small garden beside his house. The small stream that ran through his property had receded several inches. *Yes, the rain was going to come soon*, he thought to himself. He could feel the weight of moisture in the air and knew that the rain that was on its way praying for its generous arrival.

The swoosh of one of the pot's contents spilling onto the ground and the clatter of it being knocked over only meant one thing, George's grandson was now in the vicinity. He waited for next sound that normally followed his one of his grandson's noisy arrivals, the impatient knocking on the front door and small voice calling for him to let him in. When it didn't come George opened the front door and walked to the end of his porch. There was no sign of his grandson anywhere. He stepped off the porch went to check on his pots of dye to investigate the damage left in the wake of the 7-year-old tornado.

George set the pot upright and picked up the wool from the damp ground. He took it into the house and rinsed it off in cold water before setting it back outside to dry. *Hmmm, I guess I'm stuck with light red*, he thought. He knew the most likely place little Johnny headed off towards, the cottonwood tree near the stream. *He really needs to learn to not run away from his troubles*, George thought as he headed towards Johnny's hiding place.

George always thought of his wife whenever he looked at the cottonwood tree by the stream. It was in the nearby woods during spring where he proposed to Mary Littlefeather on a white mantle of cottony seeds beneath the blooming cottonwood trees. White balls of tufts clung here and there on the trees like snowball ornaments.

This particular tree by the stream held many fond memories for George; it was under this cottonwood tree where Mary announced to him that she was carrying their son. Memories of her and Roderick sitting underneath its shade while he caught fish in the stream rushed over him. His beloved Mary had succumbed to septicemia caused by a throat infection when their son was only three. George never could bring himself to remarry. *"If not for love, then a mother for your child,"* was often suggested by well-meaning relatives and tribesmen.

George had chosen to raise Roderick himself, allowing his sister Marjorie to fulfill the mother role for his son. Marjorie had long left the reservation and married into the white man's world by the time Roddy was ten. She still visited at least once a year or sometimes twice. George let his memories drift to the back of his mind like the snow-colored, flossy strings of cottonwood seeds blowing in the wind.

Just like his father before him, his grandson had sought refuge in the branches of the cottonwood tree whenever something troubled him. The only sounds that filled the air was the light gurgling of water running from the nearby stream, the slight rustling of leaves of the tree, and a few snuffles.

"Hummmph, all this time I thought this was a cottonwood tree. Turns out it's a weeping willow," George said loudly and was answered but the noise of shifting branches as his grandson poked his head out from behind the thick trunk he was hiding behind. The tears brimming from the huge brown eyes reminded George of a sad-eyed doe.

The elderly man grunted as he sat down on one of the exposed thick roots of the tree that was sticking out of the ground. "Takoja, I'm getting a little too old to climb trees," George said. He waited for Johnny to scamper down the tree before he motioned for his grandson to sit next to him.

George looked over at his grandson whose head was now hanging between his slumped shoulders. "Takoja, look at me. What did you do that was so bad that you have to hide from me?"

Johnny looked up at his grandfather. "I really got knee-deep into the muck today."

"Knocking over my pot isn't so bad. Nothing I would punish you for."

"Oh...let's just say Mom isn't going to appreciate what I've done with her good cooking pot," Johnny answered sadly as the toe of one foot dug a groove into the dry ground.

George's curiosity was piqued; it never ceased to amaze him the mischief his grandson could get himself into. "What happened with your Mom's good pot," he inquired.

Johnny squirmed a little before answering, "It's kinda stuck in the pond muck between our place and your place."

"And how did it get there?"

There were moments when Johnny was telling his tale that George was hard pressed to keep a straight face. He did stifle a laugh at his grandson's idea of holding frogs for ransom to get the Frog People to

send water. *Sometimes we forget how our young ones can interpret stories too literally*, George thought with amusement. He listened patiently as Johnny finished his tale of misadventure.

"So, once you got the pot stuck in the mud, you decided to run to me for help. After tipping over my pot you decided to go hide up in a tree," George mused. "Takoja, running and hiding doesn't fix things, it sometimes makes them worse."

"I was kind of hoping you'd help me out, but then when I messed up your stuff...maybe if I hid long enough you-Mom would forget about punishing me," Johnny felt a lump form in his throat.

George put an arm around his grandson, "Having to run around looking for you and worrying over you would make things worse. You see that don't you?"

"Yeah, I suppose," Johnny squeaked out in a small voice.

George picked up a twig from the ground and snapped it in half to reveal its pith. He held the broken end towards his grandson to see. "Takoja, do you see what's inside?"

"It looks like a star, Tunkasila," Johnny answered.

"Do you know how it got there?" George asked.

"Didn't a star hide in there so it could be near the people so it could listen to their music, laughter, and kind words?"

George grunted affirmatively, "But there is also another story on how the star got there. One that I only tell to special people."

"AND I bet you're gonna tell it to me," Johnny answered as he felt the ball in his throat dissolve. He always loved hearing stories his Grandfather told him. This was one of his Grandfather's secret stories he would only share with him.

"Close your eyes and listen," George instructed as Johnny snuggled against him and closed his eyes. George began his story...

At one time there was only light on one side of the earth while the dark twilight dominated the other side. The light and the darkness didn't rotate around the earth. The luminance of the stars and moon were the only sources of brightness in the spectral half of the world. The youngest and most curious of those stars wanted to know what lived in the shadows down on the earth. He wondered what made those 'Who-whooooing' sounds or the chirping music. He was even curious about some of the more distressing sounds like the howling cries that sent shivers through him.

"There must be a way for me to make myself sparkle brighter and unshroud the mysterious world below," the Star Child said.

There were nights where the moon seemed to glow a bit brighter that the star noticed he could catch glimpses of some of these creatures. He could tell that some of them walked on four legs while others had two legs and flew in the air. The animal that made the 'Who-whooping' sound was a two-legged flyer while the larger howling beasts were four-legged with tails. He still had yet to catch a glimpse of the musical chirpers and the one that carried a foul stench.

"Perhaps, if I used some of the moon's beams I might be able to direct some of its light onto these beings so I could see them." It was at that moment the Star Child formed a plan to capture some moonbeams.

He decided he needed a container to catch the moonbeams in and thought his mother's small and large long-handled pots would suit this purpose nicely. Now, all he needed to do was to get the moon to shoot some beams at him. Sometime when the moon would play with the stars he would playfully spurt moonbeams at them. He noticed that when one of his fellow stars got hit by one it would brighten for a brief moment. They tickled when you were hit by them. Other times when some of the stars pestered the moon he would fire off some moonbeams to chase them away.

The young star decided to pitch some space rocks at the moon. Perhaps, when the moon is annoyed or mad the moonbeams he throws are more powerful, he thought as he began pelting the moon with them. The moon became very angry someone was throwing things at him for no apparent reason. He spotted the child star and hurled a moonbeam at him. The star caught it in the small pot. "Is that the best you can give me," the Star Child taunted the moon. The moon began flinging many strong moonbeams his way while the star caught them in the two pots he had 'borrowed' from his mother.

The moon pitched one strong and powerful moonbeam at the tiny star hoping it would chase him off once and for all. Instead, the powerful beam hit the little star and sent him plummeting to the earth.

"Wow, he knocked me clear out of the sky," the Star Child exclaimed in amazement. His flickering glow lit up the surrounding area. The animals were hiding underneath the trees. They were afraid of the brightness that had just invaded their world.

"Please, come into the light so I can see you," the Star Child asked. His voice only frightened them more and some quickly burrowed into the ground while others went deeper into the sheltering darkness of the forest.

The child star frowned and looked up his brothers and sisters in the sky and then he noticed the glowing outlines of his mother's pots; one small handled pot and one larger handled pot. "Oh no, Mother Star is going to be very upset with me, her pots are now stuck up in the sky," he cried out.

He panicked when he heard the voice of his mother calling him and hid in the nearest tree trunk. He only planned to stay there until his mother was no longer angry with him. A few hours turned into days, a few days turned into a week, and a few weeks turned into a month. The child star had finally decided that he had enough of hiding and it was best to go home and face whatever punishment his mother had in store for him. He tried to leave the tree but could not.

"Please release me," the Star Child asked the tree, but got no answer.

Meanwhile, the Mother Star searched the night sky for her wayward child. The moon regrettably told the Mother Star that he had hit her child with a powerful moonbeam that made it fall to the earth below. She saw her two pots nearby, fused into the sky by the power of the moonbeams. She had a pretty good idea now why her child had not called out for help from the earth below. "He's afraid I'm going to punish him," she said to herself.

The Mother Star and the other stars searched around the dark earth below until they were exhausted. The Mother Star finally went to the Sun and asked her for her help in searching for her missing child star. The Sun agreed to move to the dark side of the world for a short period of time to light it up to help look for the missing child star. The Mother Star and the other stars traveled the light side of the earth to rest while the Sun searched their side of the world for her son.

Soon this became a pattern, half the day the Sun light up each half of the world and then traded places with the night stars during the evening. Days, months, and years went by, but neither the Sun nor the Evening Stars found the missing star child. To this very day the Sun and the Stars trade places while they continue to look for that missing star.

Now, the little star is still trapped in this tree and he has no way of letting anyone know where he is. He realized that by hiding from his troubles in the tree had cost him greatly. He had lost his twinkle and over time had become one with the tree.

And during the night you can still see the two pots stuck up in the sky.

"Guess it's not such a great idea to run and hide from your troubles," Johnny said as his grandfather finished his story.

"You'll lose your sparkle like the Star Child did." George looked down at his grandson. "Never be afraid of facing your troubles. A person needs to fess up to their mistakes and accept responsibility for them."

Johnny thought on those words for a moment. "I guess I better head home and tell Mom what I've done with her pot."

"I guess you better," George answered.

"Do you think she'll punish me really bad?" Johnny asked.

George laughed, "Your parents will probably give you some extra chores around the house to keep you out of trouble."

"I promise not to hide anymore when things go wrong. I wouldn't want to lose my twinkle like the star did," Johnny added with grin.

George smiled proudly at his grandson. "Never be afraid to shine brightly, Takoja."

George stood up and helped his grandson to his feet. "Why are you running around barefoot?"

Johnny looked down at his feet which were filthy with mud and grass. "My boots are also stuck in the mud along with Mom's pot."

"Come on, let's go back to the pond and I'll see if I can get your boots and Mom's pot unstuck," George offered and then added, "Takoja, it's also okay to ask for help when you find yourself in a fix."

Johnny wrapped his arms around his grandfather's waist as the two of them headed to the pond. George removed his moccasins and rolled up his pant legs and walked towards the two little boots sticking out from the mud. It took a couple of good pulls to free them and toss them onto the grass. He made his way to the stuck pot and after a couple of strong pulls it came free with a loud wet sounding popping noise as he freed it from the suction hold of the mud. He carried the pot and picked up the little boots while Johnny held his moccasins. George figured they could use the water pump outside of his son's house to clean up the mud that clung to their lower legs and feet.

"What's going to happen if we don't get rain soon? Will all crops shrivel up?" Johnny asked.

The snow-white clouds in sky had started to turn grey as they as they made the two of them walked across the grassy field. "See the sky, it has started to darken, that means rain is on its way," George pointed out to Johnny.

Johnny wasn't quite convinced, "Not always, sometimes it passes over us."

As the two of them entered the yard, George stopped and pointed to a patch of dandelions in the grass. "The dandelions tell me it's going to rain. See how their blossoms have closed up," George indicated.

"Do they always close when it's going to rain?"

"Always, haven't you ever noticed that before?"

Ellen Gage stood out on the porch to see if there was any sign of her seven-year-old son anywhere. *He should have been home a half-hour ago. Hmmmm, I wonder if he knows anything about my missing pot,* she thought. Roddy was due home any moment and she was keeping supper warm on the stove. She was about to go back inside when she spotted her father-in-law and son in the grassy pasture walking towards the house.

It wasn't until the two of them entered the backyard that Ellen noticed what George was carrying. "What on earth are you two doing with my good cooking pot," she asked as she tapped her foot impatiently on the wooden back porch.

Johnny broke stride with his grandfather and ran up to the porch. "I borrowed it without asking," he informed his mother. He noticed the furrow deepen in his mother's brow as he explained why he had taken her pot.

"We'll talk about the pot later. Go to the water pump and rinse of," Ellen said firmly. "That goes for you too," she looking George sternly in the eyes. "Neither one of you is setting foot into this house until you clean off all that mud."

George stifled a chuckle, "Yes, ma'am." He began priming the pump and motioned for Johnny to come over as the water began to flow from its spout.

Ellen walked back into the house and to set the kitchen table while her son and father-in-law cleaned up. She had just putting everything onto the table when she heard Roddy's pickup truck pull into the drive way. A few moments later she heard the clomping of his work boots coming up the steps of the back porch. He greeted her with a quick kiss before sitting at his spot at the table.

"You're staying for supper, Dad," Ellen said more as an order than a request. "You could use a little more meat on your bones," she added as she gave him a peck on the cheek.

George and Johnny sat down while Ellen dished out dinner before she joined everyone at the table. Roddy had married Ellen shortly after returning home from the war. George had to admit a part of him was afraid of losing his son to the white man's world when he first brought Ellen home. He knew he was hard on his daughter-in-law in the beginning, but over time he softened towards her. He supposed that it was her willingness to learn and adapt their culture that eventually won him over. George knew his grandson was going to be a child of both worlds.

"What are your plans for tomorrow?" Roddy addressed his dad as they finished their meal.

"I'll probably head over to Betty White Bear's in the morning," George answered.

Ellen raised an eyebrow towards her husband which prompted him to further inquire about his father's business with the widow, "Really, I didn't know you were..."

"Don't expect any announcements," George said curtly to his son. "Nothing but business between me and Betty."

Roddy and father headed out on the back porch to talk after supper with their plates of plum cake while Johnny helped his mother clear the table. The sound of rumbling came from the sky. Johnny smiled, his grandfather was right it was going to rain soon. He headed out onto the back porch to join his father and grandfather as the first drops of rain began to fall. Ellen came out on the porch to join them. The four of them talked and watched the rain for a spell before Ellen ushered Johnny into the house as she gathered the empty plates and followed behind him. Roddy insisted on driving his father home.

"What do you have to see Betty White Bear about?" Roddy prodded his father as they rode down the wet, dirt road.

George grunted before answering, "If you MUST know, I want her to make a Star Quilt for Johnny's birthday."

George had decided he was going to dye the material that Betty would use for the quilt using coreopsis, goldenrod, bloodroot, marigolds, and dandelions to get a variation of oranges and yellows. He wanted the star quilt to remind his grandson that stars should never hide in trees that they needed to be out in the open if they are to shine brightly.

Dandelion Facts or Myths:

Dandelions are not native to North America and were introduced here by European settlers. Dandelions are amongst many plants that can be used as a natural dye for materials. The yellow blossoms can be used as a yellow dye while the roots of the plant can be used to create red dyes. In no way am I trying to imply that dandelions have always been a part of Native American culture, but they did make use of them as a medicinal and food source once they were introduced to North America. Dependent on their region, tribes used different plants to make natural dyes and paints.

In the dying process, you use a mordant to make the colorfast the dye with the material. The most common mordant to use is alum, but yucca glauca (soapweed yucca) is another natural mordant that can be used when dying materials. Alum is a more popular mordant among those that create natural dyes today.

When it rains or threatening to rain, you will notice that the yellow blossoms of a dandelion close up. You may also notice that in the mornings when dew is present as well.

Author's Notes:

Takoja –Grandchild (Lakota)

Tunkasila – Grandfather (Lakota)

Wasin - Frog (Lakota)

When sheep were introduced to North America by the Europeans many Native Americans switched from cotton fibers to wool for weaving cloth (there were also many other fiber sources Native American used for making cloth and clothing besides cotton fibers). There are records at the San Fernando Mission where Native Americans processed the wool from sheep and wove it into cloth.

The legend "The Coyote Takes Water From The Frog People" can be found on a few sites on Indian legends including the Keeper of Stories site. I did some rewording to fit into the rational or logic of how a 'young' Johnny would recall or interpret it. In the Kalapuya legend Coyote finds a rib bone as a dentalia shell while the Sioux legend Coyote finds a bone shaped like a large clamshell. Coyote in many legends is considered a trickster or a 'noble' trickster as in this particular legend.

Interesting note on dentalia shells, they are from ocean mollusks that rare tubular in shape and can be several inches in length. They are often used to make baskets, fashion necklaces, etc. They were considered valuable and a symbol of wealth by many tribes.

The cottonwood tree is also known as the 'tree of life' amongst the Lakota and is used in their Sun Dance ceremony because of the star-shape found in its pith (center) which represents the Great Spirit. It is also the tree that 'taught' them how to make teepee's based on the conical shape of the trees leaves.

Cottonwood trees were also used by Native American tribes of the Pacific Northwest for canoe making, firewood, ropes, fish traps and baskets. The Lewis and Clark Expedition used canoes carved from cottonwood trees. The Hopi carved their Kachina dolls out of cottonwood. The sap of the tree was often used for waterproofing and even glue. The cottonwood tree was also a food source and medicinal source for Native Americans. The bark and leaves of the tree were used to make poultices to relieve swelling, treat wounds, and cure headaches. There is a salicin (salicylic acid) content in the tree.

There is a Native American legend (haven't been able to determine the tribe) about a curious little star that hid in a cottonwood tree so it could always be near the people on earth and listen to their beautiful music, their laughter, and the kind words they say to one another. The Arapaho and Cheyenne tribes believed this is where the stars in the sky come from. The wind sends the stars to the sky from the trees. There is also another legend that the stars hide in the cottonwood trees during the day. I haven't been able to locate an actual 'stories' on these particular legends.

The Star Child story is NOT an Indian legend, it is my own fabrication.