

Stories of the Cahto Tribe

Yellow-Hammer's Deeds

The moon trained the initiates in a dance-house. Robin, mountain-robin, bluejay, raven, chicken-hawk, owl, hummingbird, mountain-quail, valley-quail, grouse, sparrow-hawk, ground squirrel, grey-squirrel, red squirrel, heron, kingfisher, crane, duck, otter, mink, fox, and many others were being trained. Among these were grosbeak, thrasher, red-winged blackbird, meadow-lark, sandpiper, gopher, mole, scoter, seagull, pelican, woodcock, woodpecker, another woodpecker, duck, goose, bluefronted bluejay, white owl, mud-hen, western bluebird, russetbacked thrush, buzzard, condor, long-billed curlew, wren, chipmunk, wood-rat, polecat, raccoon, skunk, and flying-squirrel.

The moon used to sew up the mouths of the initiates that they might not break the taboos; he would then go away to hunt, leaving them by themselves. He would bring home several deer whole, in his sack.

"My little ones, that very bad moon who sews up people's mouths is coming back. I am going to throw at him with my sling," said an unknown benefactor. Already he had unfastened some of their mouths. He had undone half of them when it was night. "Moon is coming, my little ones. Now I will throw at him with my sling."

He had a sack filled with deer. As Moon was coming through the entrance-way from the west he threw some white gravel stones at him. Water burst out of him as he fell. Raven tore his mouth open. "Well, do it. I am dying from thirst and hunger." "You did the right thing to him."

He undid their mouths. He undid them all. "Make them bring in water. Have the people he has nearly killed drink much water," he directed. "Undo yellow-hammer's mouth who sits there so patiently," he told someone. "I undid his mouth long ago." "He nearly killed us. All night I will keep on undoing your mouths. The night is long, it will soon be day and I am undoing them yet. Cook food for the people. They are hungry. It was a good thing I did to him. I have undone your mouths. When you were all afraid, I killed him. Butcher the deer for the people to eat. All of you pound acorns and prepare mush that the people may have a meal. Some of you go for mussels. Some of you cook food."

Pelican went. Humming-bird went with his slender mouth. Sandpiper also went with his slender mouth. They all flew away in pairs. Humming-bird, bluejay, grouse, duck, scoter, seagull, wren, robin, wood-cock, chicken-hawk, mocking-bird, kingfisher, sandpiper, blackbird, owl, barn-owl, varied

robin, flew to the north. To the east flew grouse, thrasher, sparrow-hawk, russetback thrush; junco, yellow-hammer, bluejay, heron, blackbird, bluejay, curlew, and one of the owls. To the east also went frog, salamander, lizard, water-snake, bull-snake, grass-snake, rattlesnake, long lizard.

To the south went milk-snake, eel, day-eel, trout, sucker. black salmon, hook-bill salmon, spring salmon, "red fish," "blue fish," devil-fish, and abalone.

All the various kinds went north. All the various kinds went east. All the various kinds went south. All the various kinds went west.

Yellow-hammer was lying in the eastern side of the dancehouse alone. Two women said to him, "Well, come with us to the beach." "Yes, I will," he replied. "Go on," he told the two children. The women dug mussels near the sandy beach. There was a small fire there. The women brought up the mussels and poured them down by the fire. When the mussels were opened they said, "Well, eat them."

When they had finished the women said to him, "Come, let us go home." "Yes," he said. The two women and the two children went up toward their home. The women looked back from a bank of earth and saw him go down to the water and take a small canoe out from somewhere. Into this canoe he led longeared mouse, his grandmother. He poured into it a quantity of soil that they might have a fire in the canoe.

"Tancowe, tancowe, tancowe, 'tcin' " sang Yellow-hammer.

"Be on your guard, keep away from the disturbed water and the shoals of fish," cautioned his grandmother.

"Tancowe, tancowe, tancowe, 'tcin' " he sang. Now fog gathered as he drove the canoe through the water. "Tancowe, tancowe, tancowe, 'tcin' " he sang. "Tancowe, tancowe, tancowe, 'tcin' " he sang.

"Be on your guard against the disturbed water," said the grandmother. He went on far toward the west.

"Tancowe, tancowe, tancowe, 'tcin' " he sang.

The little boat went fast. Soon they were in the middle of the ocean.

"Tancowe, tancowe, tancowe, 'tcin' " he sang. It rained. The feather he had put in his hair was nearly gone. It was swollen with the dampness. There were water drops in the fog now. He went on. He did not give out but drove the boat along.

"Tancowe, tancowe, tancowe, 'tcin' " he sang.

"Be on your guard, my grandchild, take the boat along," said the grandmother.

"Build the fire again, my grandmother, it is going to rain," said Yellow-hammer.

"Tancowe, tancowe, tancowe, 'tcin' " he sang. They were wet.

"Take the boat along carefully, my grandchild, keep away from the shoals of fish," cautioned the grandmother.

"Tancowe, tancowe, tancowe, 'tcin' " he sang. It was evening. He took the boat along through the darkness. "Tancowe, tancowe, tancowe, 'tcin' " he sang. Only the backbone of the feather in his hair was left. Now he heard the breakers. "We are near, my grandmother," he said.

"Paddle fast, my grandchild," said the old woman.

He tried to beach the boat. It floated back and forth for a long time. "The water is rough, my grandmother, the water is rough, my grandmother," he said. He drove it ashore. He ran over the moulding acorns on the beach. He caught the boat and dragged it out with his grandmother in it. He stood the boat on end.

"Build a fire for me, my grandchild, I am cold," said the old woman.

"Put just one acorn in the fire," he told his grandmother. "I am going," he told her.

"Yonder is someone walking along, my father." "It must be my son-in-law from CeLciiyetooduN. No one has sung for him. I will look at my son-in-law." He died. "Well this time I must have died, I who bragged that I have seen all sorts of things." Yellow-hammer doctored him with a feather. When he went into the house his mother-in-law also died. He doctored her in the same manner. "I must have died," she said.

The two wives got up and took out of the ashes the roasted front third of a whale. "Come and eat," they said to him. "My daughters, take my son-in-law along with you. Yesterday the fish were running. The fish were so big the sand stood in ridges. When he appears it he must give the fish-spear back to you. Let him bring it out of the water alone. You women build a fire," the father told them.

"It is going to swim down," said Yellow-hammer. "No," they said, "that is not a fish. That is our father." They beat his (their father's) head with a firebrand. "That one is a fish that is swimming along. Spear it. You must give us the fishspear." He speared it. He gave the women the spear. He took it out of the water. He beat its head. "Well, we will go home," he said. They put their hands in its mouth and picked it up. They brought it into the further house of the village.

"You must have made a mistake, my son-in-law, that is a pin-trout. I will cook its head." He took it down to the water. He washed it and took it out of the water. He buried it in the ashes. He took it out of the ashes. He split the head open and placed it before him. Yellow-hammer attacked it in every way in vain. The women split it up. He ate from it.

"Go after acorns, my daughters. Take my son-in-law along. Let him knock them off alone. Let him crack them. Let him throw down two of them. You must carry them," said the old man.

He climbed the tree with a stick. He struck over their heads. The women shouted. "Why do you beat our heads? We look like acorns." He came down from the tree. He threw down two acorns. He put one of them in a burden-basket. It was full. He put the other in another burden-basket. That was full. The women carried them. They brought them into the house. "What is the matter?" he asked. "Nothing. He had taken a stick up the tree without our knowing it." "You ought to have told him."

Someone came from the south. "My son-in-law has come." "You must bring him soon. When it is evening let him dance. We will watch him," said the new-comer. "Yes, we will come soon," said the old man. Yellow-hammer came. They all went out to the dance-house and watched him. They all died. He took the feather out of his hair and waved it over them. Every one of them got up.

"Come, you dance, so my son-in-law may watch you."

"We danced long ago. Let him dance." They danced. The dance was finished.

"Well, you dance, Yellow-hammer," they said.

"Yes, I will dance," he said. He danced. The ocean came along here. He danced. The ocean came into the entrance-way. "It never did that before. I am afraid of the ocean. I am afraid of the ocean." He kept on dancing. The ocean came in. The people floated about in the house. It was full of water. Yellow-hammer flew against the center post. "TciN," he said as he clung to it. When he had caught it the ocean went away again.

"It is certain you are brave, my son-in-law."

"Take him home." They took him home.

When they had brought him into the house he told them he was going home the next day. "I will go with you tomorrow," said one of the women. "I, too, will go with you," said the other woman. In the morning he started back.

Some distance away long-eared mouse had put an acorn in the fire. The fire had gone out. "I told you to put only one acorn shell in the fire," he said. "I am going home, my grandmother." "Yes, we will go back," she said. Long-eared mouse had stolen acorns, tarweed seeds, grass seeds, flowers, black oak acorns, white oak acorns, sweet oak acorns, buckeyes, chestnuts, sugar-pine nuts, wild cherries, and hazelnuts."

"I will put the canoe back in the water," he said. He pushed it in. "Well, sit in it, my wife. You, too, sit in it. It is far. It is raining. The canoe goes back fast."

"Tancowe, tancowe, tancowe, 'tcin' " he sang. Fog came up.

"Paddle it back quickly from the west, my grandchild," said long-eared mouse.

At the middle of the ocean one of the women was gone. He looked back. She was not there. The other woman was sitting in the boat. "It is a long way. Where is your sister?" he asked her.

"One woman is not here. She went home. We are fog women," she replied.

It rained at the middle of the ocean. When they reached the shore the other woman had gone back. He went up out of the water. He caught the canoe and drew it out of the water.

"Come out quickly, my grandmother, and sit here. I will go back alone, " he said. " I will see the children."

He went back to the dance-house, entered it, and lay down, The two boys came to the upper entrance of the dance-house and looked in. They ran back, saying "My mother, it looks a little as if father were lying in the corner of the dance-house. It was only his foot we saw. Do not get excited but come and look." "Yes, I will look," she said. She looked at him. She went in. "My husband, you have come back," she said to him. The heads of both of the women had been shorn. Their foreheads had been smeared with pitch. The foreheads of the boys had also been smeared. They were all in mourning.

"Well, come into the house," they said. Both of the women cried. They had a meal.

"May my back be of june-berry wood. May my kidneys be round stones. May my spleen be a flat stone. Throw me this side. Throw me that side, " he said.

That is all.

(Based on Cahto oral traditions and beliefs)