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Seneca Witch Tales

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Collector ~~J. N. B. Hewitt~~ - Jeremiah Curtin

Place

Date

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1913
The Owl and the Two Sisters.

Two sisters lived on the edge of a clearing. The chief lived in the center of the village or opening. The mother of the girls used to pick up deer droppings to put in the hominy for meat - the Indians used deer intestines dried, made meat of them. One day one of the girls asked her mother to let her have some of the droppings to mix with her hominy. The old woman said, "You ought to be ashamed to ask for it, you are a handsome young woman, you should marry the chief's son, then you would have regular meat to eat." ~~And~~ I will go to the chief's son if my sister will go with me, and if he'll take us both, all right. They made bread and when ready to start the elder sister asked her mother how the chief's son looked. "He is handsome," said the mother, "but he has a crooked nose. By the fire in his cabin he has two deer heads, those heads are alive; they open and shut their eyes whenever wood is thrown on the fire. ^{The chief's son} He is a very powerful man. He has many wild deer around his house. You must be careful not to be deceived by his uncle who also has a crooked nose and looks like his nephew. The first large house you see is the one you must go to." The ^{girls} traveled slowly. At last they saw a house. "That's the place" said the elder sister. As they walked along they saw a man running around the old stumps, trying to catch something, he didn't see them coming, ^{the girls} soon he stood up and there was a mouse tail sticking out of his mouth. He saw the girls, and said, "Ho, ho! where are you going?" "We are going to the chief's son." "How does he look?" "Our mother said that he had a hooked nose." "Look at me, isn't my nose hooked?" "Yes," said the elder sister perhaps you are the man." They went with him to his house an ugly, old place. He said, "I must get my deer heads," He got some old ones which his nephew had thrown away. His mother and a little boy sat by the fire; he told them to keep quiet, and they should have some bread. The child said, "Father, give me some ^{too}." "Why don't you call me brother? I am your brother." The old man pushed the boy away and sat down by the girls. The elder ^{sister} said "We want to see the live deer you have around the house". They went outside

His place was near his nephews, he called the deer but they all ran away. Then he said to the girls. "Oh, You are not clean enough, the deer are wise they run away from you." The girls spent the night in the old man's cabin, he had only a few skins, one of the girls asked, "Why don't you have a better bed?" "Oh, my mother is washing the turkey blanket in the creek." "Along in the night some one came to the door and called out "Old man you are wanted at your nephew's house". The man paid no heed, again they called out "Come, your nephew wants you". "I suppose those people have got frightened at something and want me to call a council" said he ^{old man} to the girls, as he started off. After he had gone ^{one of the} sisters said "Let's go over and see what they are doing." When near the house they heard loud laughter. They peeped in and saw the old man dancing before the fire, mice were roasting on spits, as he passed the fire he ~~would~~ pulled up a spit and eat the mouse hot and burning, everybody laughed at this. "The girls ran back, put logs, rotten and full of ants, in their bed, took their basket which still had bread in it and went outside. When the man came they peeped in to see what he would do. He went to the bed between the logs, soon he was bitten and said, "Don't be jealous of your sister", again he was bitten, and said the same. Next time he sprang out of bed, then he found the logs, and began to scold his mother who knew nothing about it. The girls went to the nephew and he took them. Soon after this the old man told the people they must close their smoke holes for great sickness was going around. Then he took a beech stick, sharpened it and carried it along making a great noise saying, "Blue beech is coming, blue beech is coming". When he got to his nephew's house he threw the stick down the smoke hole, it entered the nephew's breast and killed him. The next morning everybody was crying for the chief, and ^{old man} said, "I am chief now, I somebody must marry those girls and keep them here. He called all the young men together but before they could speak, he said, "No you won't do." He asked each one but gave them no chance to answer. Then he said, "I must marry them myself." But the girls wouldn't stay they ran away, went home. The old man was an owl, the nephew was an eagle,

A Seneca Witch Story.

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John Seneca was going from his house to a neighbors one winter morning about daylight. There had been a slight snow the night before there was not a track anywhere. Half way on the road he saw woman's tracks. He looked around everywhere to see where they came from, and discovered that they began right on the road where he saw the first track. This was proof positive that the woman had been going through the air. Following the track to Krause's house Seneca went in and told him what he had seen. Krause said that he had seen an ugly looking pig in front of his house about daylight, had fired at it, and it had run. From Krause's on there were pig tracks instead of a woman's. * A woman about a mile farther on died of a gun shot wound a few days later. She was shot in the finger and leg. She had been known to be a great witch. She made woman's tracks after coming through the air, and was shot as a pig then made pig tracks.

Bureau list 64 On the sheet with Seneca Short story 61
Shagodyoweggowa - there is another 64

On the Senesee River there was a ravine called Dedyutgaon,
opening into the Valley. In that ravine lived a number of Shagodyoweggowa.

In this Valley lived also Senecas and they had a friendly agreement
with the Shagodyoweggowa. When anything was to be done, the old
woman who served as intermediary between the two parties went
to a cliff on the edge of the ravine and called these False faces to
appear at whatever place they were needed among the people. Then the
people ^{prepared} ~~would have~~ a ^{pot} ~~pot~~ full of ^{and had} pounded parched corn cooked with
fat and maple sugar; ~~they would have a dance, with masks, and~~
~~would~~ put ashes on their heads. The Shagodyoweggowa ~~would~~ came
to dance and did what was wanted. "Once a thoughtless man went to the
ledge at the side of the ravine and asked the False faces to visit a
certain place. They went to the place but found no one there, then
they went to the thoughtless man's house but he was not at home.
"We know who is to blame for this," said the Shagodyoweggowa, "We
will go away but this man will, ~~soon~~ see our power come back and you will
He will vomit blood." The man came home and immediately began
to vomit blood and ^{he} soon died.

Shagodyoweggowa.

The inhabitants of a village saw an enormous False face approaching.
They were very angry that it could think of coming, and so they got
their bows and arrows ready to shoot. The False face called out, "Your
arrows cannot kill me. I have not come to harm you, I have come for
tobacco, you must gather tobacco and give me all that you can spare."

They did not shoot for they well knew that their arrows would
have no effect, except to make the False face angry and revengeful.
They gathered a quantity of tobacco and gave it to him. Then he left them
with the promise that he would never trouble them again, if during
their tobacco harvest they would always set aside a portion for him.
He kept his promise. He never molested them again.

Snake with Two
Heads.

Seneca Myths
Collected by Jeremiah Curtin.

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In old times there was a boy who used to go out shooting birds. One day he saw a snake about two feet long with a head at each end of its body. The boy gave the snake a bird. Next day he fed him again. ^{then he} made up his mind to do nothing but hunt birds to feed the snake. He went every day and the snake grew wonderfully, he fed it squirrels and larger game as well as birds. One day he took his sister with him, he pushed her towards the snake, it caught her with one of its heads and ate her up. The snake kept growing. At last it circled around the whole village, the two heads came nearly together; they ate up all the people in the village except a man and his sister, who escaped. Then it dragged itself to the top of a mountain and lay there. That night the man who was saved dreamed that he must make a bow and arrows and take hair out of his sister's head and wind around the head of each arrow, then point the end of each arrow with his sister's spittle. He did this and when he got near the mountain he shot off an arrow; it struck the snake and worked into the body, each arrow the man shot did the same. The snake began to throw out what he had eaten. The people all came ^{out} in pieces, heads, arms and bodies, and then came the weapons they had used, bark bowls, arrows, ^{etc} for they had defended themselves with anything they could grasp. The snake twisted and writhed and at last rolled down into the valley dead.

Seneca Myths.
Collected by Jeremiah Curtin.

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Medicine Men.

A man living at Mount Morris was suddenly taken sick. For several nights the people living near him saw a light approach his house and then disappear. They knew it was a witch and that his breath caused the light. They decided to follow and if possible kill ~~him~~ ^{the witch} and save their friend's life. One man was posted in a ravine near the trail; as soon as he saw the light coming he fired at it; it immediately disappeared. The people got torches and found drops of blood along the path. Two men were selected to follow the tracks and find the witch, if possible. They started at daybreak and soon came to the stump of a tree where they found the witch had sat after being wounded. After traveling ten miles they came to a small house where a young man and his mother lived; the tracks led to this house. The two men went into the house but finding only the old mother they left without asking any questions. Her son was never seen again and the sick man recovered.

Some years later the mother died and a friend of her's told the following story, "The day the witch was shot I had been at Mount Morris, as it was late when I got back as far as the old woman's house, I asked to spend the night and she consented. It was warm and I slept on a bunk outside. Many times during the night the old woman came out and looked around; I could not sleep. At last she went off some distance and was gone a good while. When she came back she said to me, "Bad luck has come to me, my only son is dead. If you will help me bury him and will not speak of what has happened. I will pay you well". I promised and together we buried him. We had just finished the task when the two men, who were tracking him, came to the house.

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Seneca Witchcraft.

About forty-five years ago Big Chief a Delaware, a large man weighing two hundred pounds was going home one night about ten o'clock to a place two miles beyond the present Asylum on the Cattaraugus Reservation. He heard at some distance what seemed a cat's cry, the sound approached. He thought that it was a peculiar cry and to find out what animal was making it he hid behind a stump. When the sound came near he saw that it was made by a woman whose husband's name was Chief Warrior. When she reached the stump he sprang at her and caught her firmly. She jumped at least one rod, pulling him as if he had been a little boy and screamed at him, "I will kill you". He said "Don't kill me, I will pay you" and he gave her a string of wampum beads. She let off, spared him. Next morning he told Hank Johnson of it. The woman's husband didn't know anything about his wife's deeds, didn't believe this story when he heard it, for she used to put him to sleep by laying on of hands and he couldn't wake up till she came back and roused him.

In here

62 / 61 63 + 64 70, 71
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Johnny John himself saw a ghost at the time when the Indians lived at Buffalo Creek. A friend of his, a young man who liked women saw a ghost also, Johnny John says. "I asked him about it. It was a wonder in my mind that such a thing should come to him, I went to his house. He held down his head and said "My friend I did see a ghost, I was coming from Buffalo one evening on horseback passing a place where no people were living I saw a woman, with a blanket over her head, going behind a clump of trees. I got off, tied my horse and followed her, tried to pull the blanket from her head, couldn't. At last I looked into her face by stooping down and holding her head up. It was the face of a person whom I knew well, but she had been dead some time. My horse began to snort and make a great noise. I hurried to him, sprang on his back and off he ran, terribly frightened. I looked around, saw the woman at the horse's tail, she could almost catch the horse running at full speed. I came to a house after a while jumped off the horse and tumbled into the house. The horse ran home. I didn't speak for twenty-four hours, lost all power of speech. My horse died.

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Shagodyowegowa. (False Faces)

A few years ago two young men started for a Shagodyowegowa dance they had their false faces with them in a bundle. On the way they stopped at a white woman's house. She asked "What have you in your bundle?" "Our false faces," they answered, "We are going to a false face dance." "Put on the faces and let me see them, I will give you two quarts of cider" said the woman. They put them on and came in. The woman's child, a boy of six or seven, acted as if he had lost his mind, couldn't speak. The mother sent to Perrysburg for a doctor. He came but could not help the boy. The mother went to an Indian for advice, he said she must get the False faces to cure him. They came and danced and rubbed him with ashes and blew ashes in his face, and he was soon well. The mother had a pot of pounded parched corn boiled with pork and sugar for the False faces according to custom.

Notes The Onondagas say that Shagodyowegowa live in some rocks near their Reservation. They have seen them going along in front of these rocks and entering them through an opening. They believe that False faces live in that place. Shagodyowegowa are the so called False faces of the Iroquois.

The Vampire.

5

corrected 1912

From
There was a Seneca village from which a ^{hunter} man and his wife went out a two days journey to hunt. They built a lodge and the man began to look for game. When he had obtained a ^{large} sufficient store of meat ^{amongst} they started for home. They took all the meat they could carry and left the rest at the lodge. They set out in the morning and traveled all day, ^{and} ^{at} ^{sundown} they came to a cabin, in which they found all the people dead. The last person to die was the owner of the house. The people of the village had made a bark box, and put his body into it and placed the box on a shelf. When the man and his wife came ^{at} ^{the} ^{house} it was already dark. The husband thought it better to spend the night there than to continue the journey. He gathered plenty of wood and made a fire. The woman began to cook, she put meat in a kettle over the fire to boil and made a cake of pounded corn which she ^{and} ^{it} put in the hot ashes to bake. The man lay down to rest a while, and ^{soon} fell asleep. While cooking the woman heard a ^{creeping} noise behind her near the place where her husband lay; it sounded like chewing. She began to think ^{about} the corpse on the shelf and remembered that the dead man ^{had been} was a wizard. Putting on more wood, to make the fire blaze up, she looked toward the bunk and saw a stream of blood trickling from it ^{and} she knew her husband ^{had been} was killed by the dead man. Then bread was baked. She then spoke, saying "I must make a torch and bring some water." She made a torch of basswood bark taken from the lodge ^{made} making it long so that it would last till she got home and taking the pail she went out of the ^{cabin} house, once outside of the door she dropped the pail ^{was} quickly and ran through the woods with all her might. She had got more than half way home when the dead man found ^{out} that she had gone. Then he rushed out, whooped and ran after her. She heard him and knew he was following. The whooping came nearer and nearer, for a while she could scarcely move, then she gained strength and ran on; again he whooped and so near that she ^{woman} fell down from fear and exhaustion.

but ^{she} rose again and ran on. Finally she came within sight of a ²
^{lodge} place, near her own village, where ^{people were} dancing. The dead man
was gaining on her and her torch was almost gone, but she ran on and fell
^{reaching} into the lodge where they were dancing - she fainted. When she regained
her senses she told what had happened to her husband. In the morning
men went ~~over~~ to the ^{lodge} and found the bones of her ^{husband}, all
the flesh having been ~~all~~ eaten off. They took down the bark box,
looked at the dead man and found ^{his} face and hands ^{were} covered with
blood. The chief said, "It is not right to leave dead people in that way."
Then they dug a hole and buried the man-eating corpse, ^{men} and ^{carried}
the bones of the other ^{hunter} man home. The chief had them buried and ordered
that after that all dead people should be buried in the ground.

At first ^{in the beginning} the dead were put on scaffolds, but people used to see sights
which frightened them; and the dead would rise up and run after the
living. Then it was resolved to build bark lodges for the dead and to
put the dead on shelves in those lodges. The husband or wife had to
remain in the lodge and look after the dead for a year. At the end of
the year the bones were taken out and fastened to a post in an erect
position and a great dance ^{around them} took place. Sometimes, in
place of building a lodge, they ^{relatives of the deceased} dug ^{a hole} an opening, like a room, into a
hill side and into this, on the ground, they put the corpse. If the
deceased was married, the husband or wife had to care for the corpse.
Every ten days, for a year, relatives brought food to the watcher. If
the watcher lived one year he or she was then brought out and ^{was} became
free to marry again, but they often died in the excavation, for it
was dark and foul.

Once a man was left with the body of his wife, and after a time he heard
an occasional ^{one} noise of crunching and eating. The next time his friends
came with food ^{he} told them of this. They held a council and the chief sent
men to find ^{out what} the cause of this noise. They found that the ^{corpse} body had been
eaten and that ^{there was} a deep hole ⁱⁿ led down under the ground, all about the hole
the ground was smooth. Then they knew that the hole must have been made
by a great serpent. These things caused the Senecas to cease burying
in lodges, and to bury in the ground as they do at present.



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