Trickster Stories

The Hoodwinked Dancers

Once Coyote was coming along through the bulrushes on the edge of a lake and he stopped to take a look around. There were all kinds of water birds there, including mallard ducks and those big white swans. They were camping there and they were swimming all around. There were a lot of good-looking fat geese.

Coyote came out of the bulrushes and began walking along where everyone would see him. He had a big bag of some sort on his back.

“Hey, Coyote,” they called. “What are you carrying in there? It looks heavy.”

“Oh, these are my songs.”

“Why do you have so many songs?”

“I have many visions. I get all these songs that way. Besides, I like to dance, so I like to have a lot of songs with me.”

“Well, let’s have a big dance then. You can sing some of these songs.”

“Well, okay. But these are powerful songs. You can’t fool around. You have to do what I say. You can’t act crazy.”

They said they would be good and they made up a big place for dancing.

Coyote began to tell them what to do. He took out his dancing sticks.

“No one may look at anything while I am singing my songs. You must dance with your eyes shut. If you open your eyes you’ll get hurt bad, maybe even killed.”

They agreed to keep their eyes shut and they began to dance. Coyote was a good singer and they danced hard. Coyote was beating on a log with his dancing sticks.

“Remember, brothers, keep your eyes closed. When we are finished maybe I will see about giving you some of these songs.”

While they were all dancing around, Coyote reached into his bag and pulled out a big club. When one fat duck came by he hit it over the head and killed it.

“Stop brothers!” yelled Coyote. “Look at this! Look at what has happened to this person. He opened his eyes and now he is dead. Keep your eyes closed.”

They all began dancing again and even singing some of their own songs, dancing as hard as they could. Coyote grabbed one of the ducks by the throat and it made a bad squawking noise. “That’s right brothers, sing as loud as you can.”

He’d hit almost all the ducks with his club when a black duck who had been listening to all these noises opened up one eye, only a little. He saw what Coyote was doing and called out to the others, “Run away! This is Coyote hitting everyone with a stick.” The birds that were left ran for the water but only a few got away.
Coyote Marries a Man

One time Coyote was going along and he came on a village. There were a lot of people living there and there was plenty to eat so Coyote decided to stay for a while. There was a good-looking man named Not Enough Horses living in the village who wanted to get married but he wouldn’t have anything to do with the girls living there. He said they weren’t the right kind for him, not good enough.

When Coyote heard this he decided to change himself into a woman and get this man for his husband. He changed himself that way and became very beautiful. He came back into the village on a sled with his tipi and other belongings on it and two wolves pulling it. When Not Enough Horses saw her he liked her right away.

Not Enough Horses told his mother, “My Mother, she is handsome. She’s the kind I want. You must invite her over.”

The old woman said she would do this. She went over to where the girl was living.

“Niece, you must come over to my house.”

“Ho, what for?”

“My son wants to see you.”

“I will come then.”

“My son desires to marry you,” said the old woman.

“You know, so many men wanted to marry me I ran away and came here,” said the young woman. ‘My elder brother said to me, ‘Go away’.”

“Oh, my son ran away, too, and came here! There were so many women who wanted to marry him. That is why he ran away and came here.”

“Oh, that is very interesting,” said the young woman. They went to where the old woman lived and there she saw the young man. He was very handsome. They got married and lived together for some time. Young Woman was a good worker and this made the man happy. Then Young Woman decided to go away. She had had children but she had not let anyone see them. When she left, she left the children behind and when the old woman and her son went in to see them they saw they were wolf puppies.

“Oho!” cried the old woman. “That person was Coyote!” She was laughing as she wrapped the wolf puppies up in blankets. These were what Not Enough Horses had got for children. All the people in the village were now laughing at him.

They said, “Truly, this is a great thing this man has accomplished. This conceited young man has managed to take a man for his wife! Now we will have something to laugh about!”

They had such a laugh over all this that the young man left the village. He was ashamed.

While he was traveling along he said to himself, “I don’t care what sort of woman I marry, what she looks like. Coyote has put me to such great shame.”

In a little while he came to a lodge. He stood outside until the woman inside said, “Come in.”

“I have come to take you for my wife,” he said.

She was too skinny and not good-looking at all. It was dark inside the lodge and he couldn’t see well, but he took that woman for his wife. When they slept together he felt very bad because he could feel how bony she was.
In the morning they loaded up her sled with all the things from her lodge and they left that place. They went back toward his village. He was ashamed of the way this woman looked, but he thought at least no one would laugh at him any more for having married Coyote now that he had married this ugly woman. When they got into the village, his wife got out of the sled. But she wasn’t skinny any more. It was Coyote again. He said, “Hey, young man, are you the same one who married Coyote that other time?” Everyone in the village began laughing. Coyote got that young man twice.

from *Winnebago Trickster Cycle*

As Trickster went wandering around aimlessly he suddenly heard someone speaking. He listened very carefully and it seemed to say, “He who chews me will defecate; he will defecate!” That was what it was saying. “Well, why is this person talking in this manner?” said Trickster. So he walked in the direction from which he had heard the speaking and again he heard, quite near him, someone saying: “He who chews me, he will defecate; he will defecate!” This is what was said. “Well, why does this person talk in such fashion?” said Trickster. Then he walked to the other side. So he continued walking along. Then right at his very side, a voice seemed to say, “He who chews me, he will defecate; he will defecate!” “Well, wonder who it is who is speaking. I know very well that if I chew it, I will not defecate.” But he kept looking around for the speaker and finally discovered, much to his astonishment, that it was a bulb on a bush. The bulb it was that was speaking. So he seized it, put it in his mouth, chewed it, and then swallowed it. He did just this and then went on.

“Well, where is the bulb gone that talked so much? Why, indeed, should I defecate? When I feel like defecating, then I shall defecate, no sooner. How could such an object make me defecate!” Thus spoke Trickster. Even as he spoke, however, he began to break wind. “Well this, I suppose, is what it meant. Yet the bulb said I would defecate, and I am merely expelling gas. In any case I am a great man even if I do expel a little gas!” Thus he spoke. As he was talking he again broke wind. This time it was really quite strong. “Well, what a foolish one I am. This is why I am called Foolish One, Trickster.” Now he began to break wind again and again. “So this is why the bulb spoke as it did, I suppose.” Once more he broke wind. This time it was very loud and his rectum began to smart. “Well, it surely is a great thing!” Then he broke wind again, this time with so much force, that he was propelled forward. “Well, well, it may even make me give another push, but it won’t make me defecate,” so he exclaimed defiantly. The next time he broke wind, the hind part of his body was raised up by the force of the explosion and he landed on his knees and hands. “Well, go ahead and do it again! Go ahead and do it again!” Then, again, he broke wind. This time the force of the expulsion sent him far up in the air and he landed on the ground, on his stomach. The next time he broke wind, he had to hang on to a log, so high was he thrown. However, he raised himself up and, after a while, landed on the ground, the log on top of him. He was almost killed by the fall. The next
time he broke wind, he had to hold on to a tree that stood near by. It was a poplar and he held on with all his might yet, nevertheless, even then, his feet flopped up in the air. Again, and for the second time, he held on to it when he broke wind and yet he pulled the tree up by the roots. To protect himself, the next time, he went over until he came to a large tree, a large oak tree. Around this he put both his arms. Yet, when he broke wind, he was swung up and his toes struck against the tree. However, he held on.

After that he ran to a place where people were living. When he got there, he shouted, “Say, hurry up and take your lodge down, for a big warparty is upon you and you will surely be killed! Come let us get away” He scared them all so much that they quickly took down their lodge, piled it on Trickster, and then got on him themselves. They likewise placed all the little dogs they had on top of Trickster. Just then he began to break wind again and the force of the expulsion scattered the things on top of him in all directions. They fell far apart from one another. Separated, the people were standing about and shouting to one another; and the dogs, scattered here and there, howled at one another. There stood Trickster laughing at them till he ached.

Now he proceeded onward. He seemed to have gotten over his troubles. “Well, this bulb did a lot of talking,” he said to himself, “yet it could not make me defecate.” But even as he spoke he began to have the desire to defecate, just a very little. “Well, I suppose this is what it meant. It certainly bragged a good deal, however.” As he spoke he defecated again. “Well, what a braggart it was! I suppose this is why it said this.” As he spoke these last words he began to defecate a good deal. After a while, as he was sitting down, his body would touch the excrement. Thereupon he got on top of a log and sat down there but, even then, he touched the excrement. Finally, he climbed up a log that was leaning against a tree. However, his body still touched the excrement, so he went up higher. Even then, however, he touched it so he climbed still higher up. Higher and higher he had to go. Nor was he able to stop defecating. Now he was on top of the tree. It was small and quite uncomfortable. Moreover, the excrement began to come up to him.

Even on the limb on which he was sitting he began to defecate.

So he tried a different position. Since the limb, however, was very slippery he fell right down into the excrement. Down he fell, down into the dung. In fact he disappeared in it, and it was only with very great difficulty that he was able to get out of it. His raccoon-skin blanket was covered with filth, and he came out dragging it after him. The pack he was carrying on his back was covered with dung, as was also the box containing his penis. The box he emptied and then placed it on his back again.

Then, still blinded by the filth, he started to run. He could not see anything. As he ran he knocked against a tree. The old man cried out in pain. He reached out and felt the tree and sang: “Tree, what kind of a tree are you? Tell me something about yourself!”

And the tree answered, “What kind of a tree do you think I am? I am an oak tree. I am the forked oak tree that used to stand in the middle of the valley. I am that one,” it said. “Oh, my, is it possible that there might be some water around here?” Trickster asked. The tree answered, “Go straight on.” This is what it told him. As he went along he bumped up against another tree. He was knocked backwards by the collision. Again he sang:

“Tree, what kind of a tree are you? Tell me something about yourself!”
“What kind of a tree do you think I am? The red oak tree that used to stand at the edge of the valley, I am that one.” “Oh, my, is it possible that there is water around here?” asked Trickster. Then the tree answered and said, “Keep straight on,” and so he went again. Soon he knocked against another tree. He spoke to the tree and sang:
“Tree, what kind of a tree are you? Tell me something about yourself!”
“What kind of a tree do you think I am? The slippery elm tree that used to stand in the midst of the others, I am that one.” Then Trickster asked, “Oh, my, is it possible that there would be some water near here?” And the tree answered and said, “Keep right on.” On he went and soon he bumped into another tree and he touched it and sang:
“Tree, what kind of a tree are you? Tell me something about yourself!”
“What kind of a tree do you think I am? I am the basswood tree that used to stand on the edge of the water. That is the one I am.” “Oh, my, it is good,” said Trickster. So there in the water he jumped and lay. He washed himself thoroughly.
It is said that the old man almost died that time, for it was only with the greatest difficulty that he found the water. If the trees had not spoken to him he certainly would have died. Finally, after a long time and only after great exertions, did he clean himself, for the dung had been on him a long time and had dried. After he had cleansed himself he washed his raccoon-skin blanket and his box.

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Then he continued his wandering. Suddenly he heard something singing:
“Trickster, what is it you are packing? Your penis it is you are packing!”
“My, what an awful thing he is saying, that contemptible person! He seems really to know what I am carrying.” On he went. Shortly after this, and from a definite direction, he again heard singing. It was as if it was just at his side:
“Trickster, what is it you are carrying? Your testicles, these you are carrying.”
“My, who is this that is mentioning these things? He must indeed, have been watching me. Well, now I will carry these things correctly! Thereupon he emptied his box and threw everything out. Then he placed his testicles underneath next to his back. As he was doing this again, suddenly, he heard someone singing right at his side:
“Trickster, what is it you are packing? What is it you are packing? Your testicles underneath, your testicles underneath!”
“My, what a contemptible person it is who is thus teasing me!
He must have been watching my pack.” So again he rearranged his pack. He now put the head of his penis on top. Then he went on but soon, unexpectedly, he heard the singing at his side again:
“Trickster, what is it you are packing? Your penis you are packing! The head of your penis you have placed on top, the head of your penis you have placed on top!”
“My, what an evil one it is who is saying this,” and he jumped towards him. But the one who had been singing ran away, exclaiming, “Tigi! Tigi! Tigi!” It ran into a hollow tree. It was a chipmunk. “I will kill you for this, you contemptible thing,” said Trickster. Thereupon he spoke to his penis, “Now then, my younger brother, you may go after him for he has been annoying you for a long time.”
So he took out his penis and probed the hollow tree with it. He could not, however, reach the end of the hole. So he took some more of his penis and probed again, but again he was unable to reach the end of the hole. So he unwound more and more of his penis and probed still deeper, yet all to no avail. Finally he took what still remained, emptying the entire box, and probed and probed but still he could not reach the end of the hole. At last he sat up on a log and probed as far as he could, but still he was unable to reach the end. "Ho!" said he impatiently, and suddenly withdrew his penis. Much to his horror, only a small piece of it was left. "My, what a great injury he has done to me! You contemptible thing I will repay you for this!"

Then he kicked the log to pieces. There he found the chipmunk and flattened him out, and there, too, to his horror he discovered his penis all gnawed up. "Oh, my, of what a wonderful organ he has deprived me! But why do I speak thus? I will make objects out of the pieces for human beings to use." Then he took the end of his penis, the part that has no foreskin, and declared, "This is what human beings will call the lily-of-the-lake." This he threw in a lake near by. Then he took the other pieces declaring in turn: "This the people will call potatoes; this the people will call turnips; this the people will call artichokes; this the people will call ground-beans; this the people will call dog-teeth; this the people will call sharp-claws; this the people will call rice." All these pieces he threw into the water. Finally he took the end of his penis and declared, "This the people will call the pond-lily." He was referring to the square part of the end of his penis.

What was left of his penis was not very long. When, at last, he started off again, he left behind him the box in which he had until then kept his penis coiled up.

And this is the reason our penis has its present shape. It is because of these happenings that the penis is short. Had the chipmunk not gnawed off Trickster’s penis our penis would have the appearance that Trickster’s had, first had. It was so large that he had to carry it on his back. Now it would not have been good had our penis remained like that and the chipmunk was created for the precise purpose of performing this particular act. Thus it is said.

These selections from “The Winnebago Trickster Cycle” can be found in Paul Radin’s *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (1956—Schocken Books, NY)