



Cottontail Tames Wood, Water and Rock

A Uintah/Ouray Ute Tale

Cultural Note

The cottontail rabbit was very important to the Ute people in days gone by. It provided delicious meals and its soft fur was used for many things. The fur pelts were used to line cradleboards and moccasins, and the pelts were also sewn together to make blankets and robes.

Vocabulary

bobbed

endured

heaved

pelted

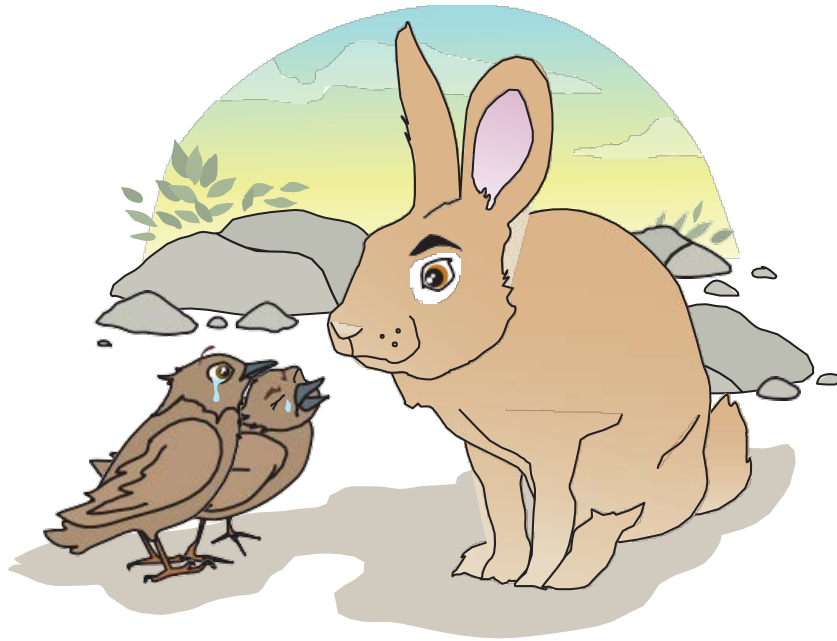
trickling

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A long time ago, there was a dove. She was a beautiful dove, gentle as morning's hush. Her wings were the color of smooth, brown pebbles, and soft, like cattail's fluff. She had two little chicks, and she loved them very much. Each morning she went out to search for food for her little ones.

One morning, just as the sun rose in the eastern sky, Mother Dove went out to search for seeds for her little ones. She gathered the seeds, one by one, and put them into a little pile. She pushed the seeds toward a large rock. She squeezed her body under the rock, making a hole in the soft dirt with her body. The rock would help hide the seeds from other birds.



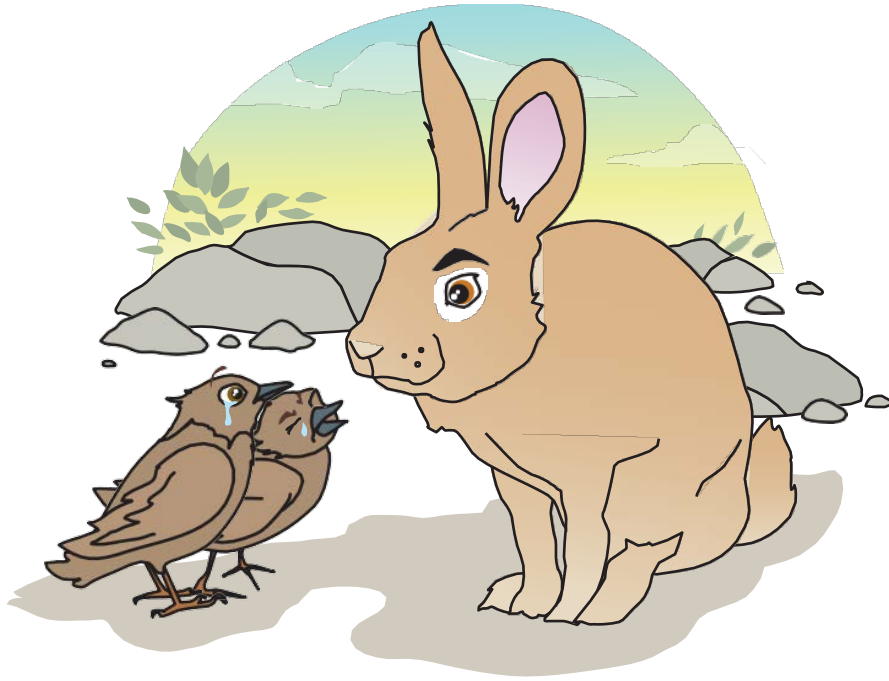
Rock had other ideas. Suddenly, Rock moved to one side, pushing Mother Dove tight against the space in the ground. Rock pushed the dirt on each side, and in an instant, Mother Dove was caught tight. She couldn't move at all. She was held so tight, she couldn't even cry out. But one smooth, brown feather peeked out from under the rock.

Back at the dove's nest, the little chicks waited and waited for their mother to return. They were so hungry. They waited, but she never came. They called out to her, but she never answered. They felt so lonely and afraid.

Finally, they peeked out from behind the grass that hid them in their nest. They saw Mother Dove's tracks in the soft soil, but no Mother Dove. The little chicks had never left the nest without her, but they knew they needed to search for Mother Dove.

They found seeds near the big rock. They ate up some of the seeds, for they were very hungry. They saw Mother Dove's feather under the big rock. They called to Mother Dove, but she couldn't answer. Big tears rolled down their faces. Rock laughed at them and said, "Your mother is not here for you any longer. Go away, I say!" They ran away back to their nest, frightened and alone.





Cottontail heard their crying. He found the two little chicks, huddled together, shivering, with big tears running down their faces. He asked, "Little Ones, where is your mother?"

"Rock has trapped her. He told us to go away!" they sobbed.

"Come, Little Ones," said Cottontail. "We shall go together and find Mother Dove. But first, go and gather some sticks so we can build a fire to warm ourselves. I will stay here and think about what must be done."

The little chicks left the nest once again to gather sticks.

But each time they reached for a stick, it jumped up and slapped them on their feet. The wood and sticks hissed at the little chicks. They spat hot sparks at the little chicks. Trembling and afraid, the little chicks ran back to the nest.

When Cottontail saw the blisters and sores on the little chicks' faces, he asked them what had happened. They said, "The bushes and the sticks made funny noises each time we came near them. They jumped at us and hit us!"

Cottontail stretched forth his hands and placed them on the little chicks' heads. "Little Ones," he said, calming them with his words, "you have worked hard and endured much. Please, go and find some water to drink. Then we shall see what must be done."



The little brown chicks bobbed over to the trickling creek. They stretched their necks, eager to drink up the cool, refreshing water. But the water rushed after them, flying high in the air and landing on them. Great big droplets pelted the little chicks' faces. Water would not let them drink a drop! They ran back to the nest.

When Cottontail saw their water-drenched feathers, he asked them what had happened. He grew angry when they told him what Water had done. Rabbit crossed his arms in front of his chest and said, "Enough is enough! I will find Water, Wood, and Rock and teach them a lesson."





He picked up his nah chee turp and went in search of Water, Wood, and Rock. He found the sticks and bush that had been so cruel to the little chicks. He smacked them with his nahcheeturp and in a strong, powerful voice, said, "You are not going to be mean any more. You are no longer going to fly at creatures and harm them." He motioned for the little doves to step forward. Cottontail said, "These sticks will no longer harm you. From now on, even old women will gather them."

The little chicks trembled. Cottontail nodded to them and said, "They have no power to do harm any longer. Go and gather the sticks so that we can make a fire."

The little chicks stepped forward once again. They picked up the sticks and, together with Cottontail, made a fire. "Thank you, Grandfather," they said, for they knew he was to be respected.



"Come, my grandsons," said Cottontail, "let us settle the matter with Water now." They moved near the trickling creek. Cottontail raised his nahcheeturp high in the air, then brought it down, slapping the water with it. He said in a strong, powerful voice, "You will never be mean again after this. Your unkindness to these poor little ones is not a good thing. From now on, you will allow anyone to drink you." He motioned for the little doves to step forward. Cottontail said, "Come, my grandsons, drink. This water will no longer harm you. From now on, even old women will come and gather this water."

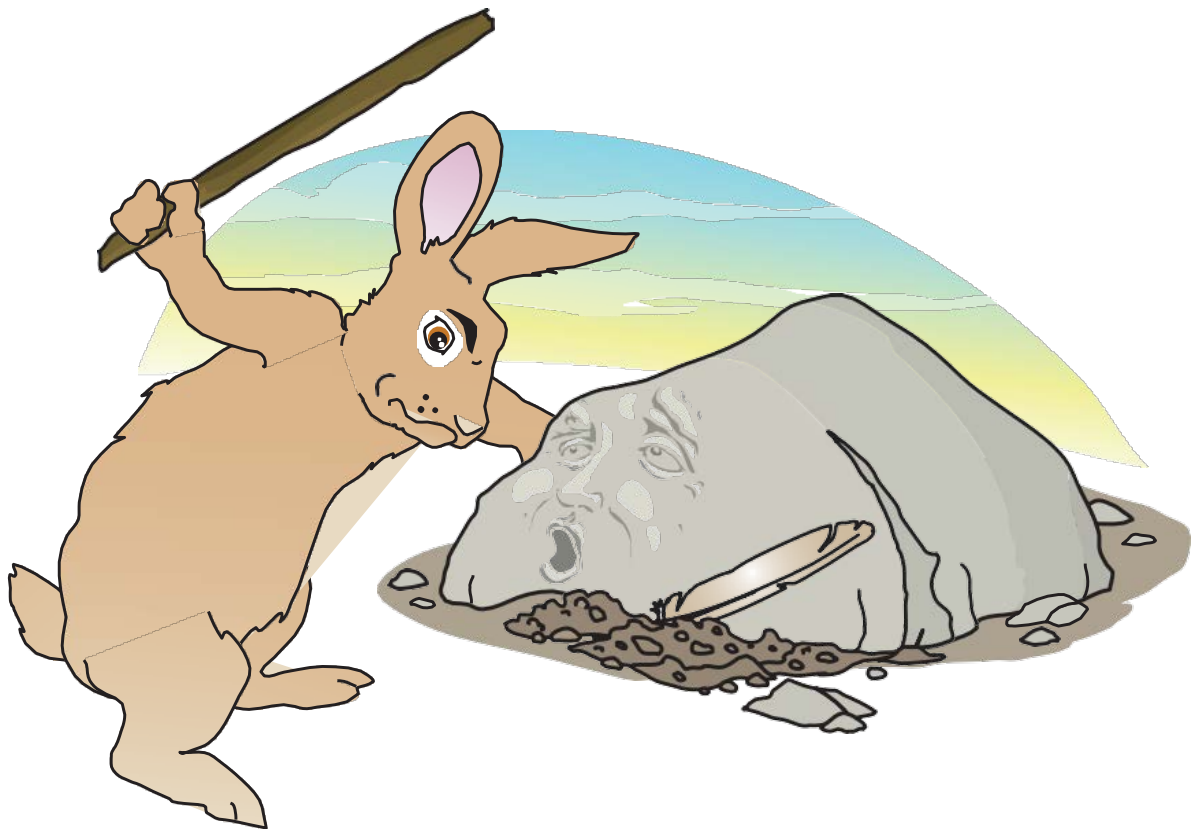
The little doves drank deeply. They looked up and said, "Thank you, Grandfather," for they knew he was to be respected.

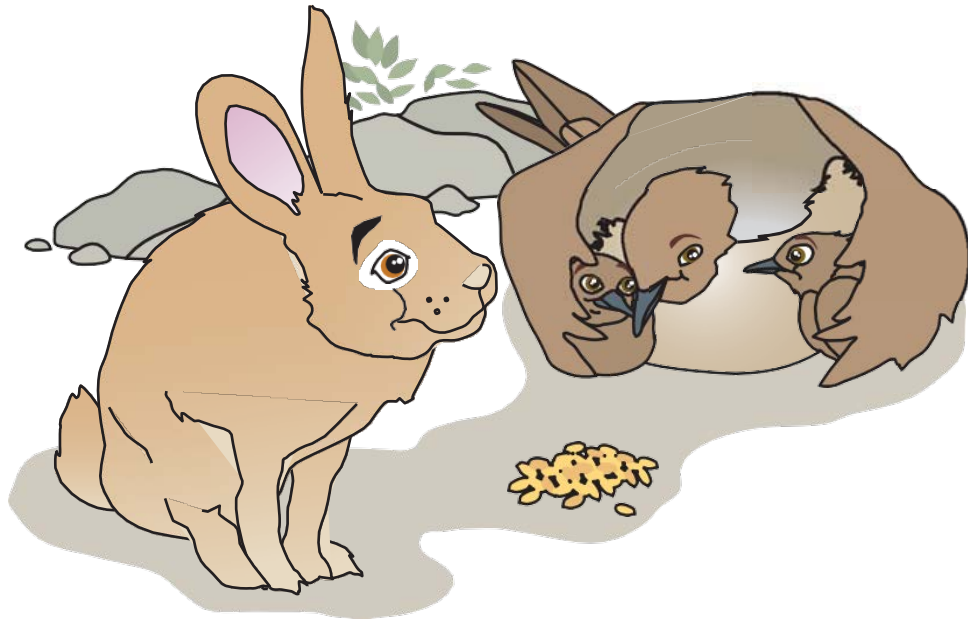
While they all drank and rested, Cottontail thought things over. "It is time for one last thing," thought Cottontail. "Come, my grandsons. Show me the place where Rock hides your mother."

The little chicks cried big tears as they led Cottontail to the spot where the feather lay trapped under the big rock. He raised his nahcheeturp high in the air and struck the big rock. In a strong, powerful voice, he said, "Rock, you have done a very mean thing. You have kept a mother from her children for no good reason. From now on, you will never move around, but stay in one place always."

Cottontail pressed his shoulder against the big rock.

He pushed and heaved and groaned. Finally, he lifted the rock and tossed it aside.





The little chicks scrambled to their mother's side. They shook her gently. Tears fell from their eyes onto their mother's feathers. She lay there, still at first, but then she took a small, quick breath. The little chicks moved closer, listening, waiting. Mother Dove's eyes fluttered open several times, and then she sat up, stretching her wings. "It feels as if I've been asleep!" she exclaimed. She gathered her little chicks underneath her wings and cooed gently to them.

Cottontail stepped forward and said, "Come, eat of the seeds you have gathered. This rock will no longer harm you. From now on, even old women will come and gather rock for grinding corn."

The little doves cried out together, "Thank you, Grandfather!"

To this day, thanks to Cottontail, Rock, Water, and Wood can't harm anything, and even old women can gather them.

Glossary

eeveech - wood

lyouvf - dove

nahcheeturp - cane

pah - water

toopeech - rock

Reading Suggestions

- Have you ever seen a dedication page in a story you have read? Many writers' lives have been touched by other people, such as parents, teachers, or friends. If this book were going to be dedicated to someone, it would have to be to LeeAnn Parker's sister-in-law Laura Graves and her children, Kaleb, Kelsey, and Cameron. They were killed in a tragic accident while she was working on adapting this tale. Laura's husband often described her as the mother quail or dove, always taking care of her little covey. When you write your next story, post a dedication to those people who inspire and encourage you to write.
- Go outside and collect some rocks and then paint faces or sayings on them.

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