

The Woman with the Two Plants

Story collected by Richard Adams

When the Delaware Indians lived near the Eastern Tide Water, there lived with them a woman, whose name was A-le-pah-qua. This woman was much different from other women, having a strong and independent nature, but handsome and stately, and a very bright and searching eye, and had the interest of the Delawares much at heart. Her influence was felt not only among the Delawares, but among neighboring tribes, and by everyone who came in contact with her. Sachems, Chiefs and Warriors, Medicine Men and all loved her and sought to win her favor in any way they could.

She took advantage of her influence over men to control the destiny of her people the best she could, and sent warriors and chiefs on difficult tasks, but always keeping one purpose in view -- the welfare of her tribe. Many wondered as to how she exercised such influence over others and especially over strong men, but were not able to find out, until finally, when she was getting quite old, she revealed the secret of her success to her daughter, with instructions that she should hand it down only to her daughter, and that each generation thereafter should have the benefit of this knowledge as long as a daughter was born therein.

Finally, one who was not discreet as A-le-pah-qua was, revealed the secret, and this is what she said: A-le-pah-qua had a vision when she was a girl, in which the Manitou brought her two plants, one with a beautiful flower, the other with a fragrant leaf and root, and took a small lock of her hair and bound these plants together and handing them to her said: "I give you a great gift. Whenever you call on me, with two plants like this, naming one yourself and the other any man you will, I will bring him to you and make him do whatever you bid him, and will answer the prayers of your children and your children's children, whenever they call on me for help in the same manner, and will bind to you, or to them, the affections of the person as strongly as you bind the two plants together, and whenever you wish to sever that influence, all you have to do is to separate the plants, casting one to the east and the other to the west, and call on me to make the parties forget, and they will."

Sometimes A-le-pah-qua would see or hear of a person whom she wanted to bring under her influence; so she would immediately get the two plants and bind them securely together with her hair, naming one the man she wanted and the other herself. She would carry these plants somewhere on her person, and probably in a day or two, the man would come and want to see her. Perhaps he would send some woman to her, saying that he desired to talk with her, and often the man would confess that he was much in love with her. After the man had made two or three efforts to see her, she would finally grant him audience, and would ask him what he wanted. The man would usually be embarrassed and would tell her that he thought a great deal of her and was ready to serve her in any way

he could. Then she would say to him: "I will give you a chance to prove that what you say is true. I would like to see you do this" -- then she would tell him what she wanted him to do, and the man would always do the best he could to please her and try to carry out her wishes, not knowing himself why he took pleasure in doing so. Even when she was very old and until she died A-le-pah-qua always had a host of friends and lovers, and after her, her daughters and granddaughters had much influence over men when they cared to exercise it.

Finally there was a man who succeeded in learning what plants she had used, and with them he would appeal to the Manitou for the affection of women. Many women loved him, and he married several. He would take one for a wife and after a little while would send her away and take another. Finally a certain woman very earnestly called on the Manitou to punish this man, as he was making bad use of the secret entrusted to him; so after that no woman would have anything to do with him, and he finally died, when quite an old man, with no friends nor kindred around him.

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