

Spider Grandmother

Hopi tradition

By: María García Esperón

Adapted by Fishtank Staff

Spider Grandmother,
dearest old woman:
tell me the tale of the stars.
how the owl and the eagle fly,
why the buffalo graze and dream.

Spider Grandmother,
here in our adobe home,
your voice ensnares me:
spin your story, please!

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So long ago that the years are impossible to count, a spirit lived alone in infinite space. He was surrounded by sunbeams, a halo of purest light. So much energy bubbled deep within him in his chest that he knew he must create a world. His name was Taawa, and from his hands burst forth prairies and waterfalls, an immense land full of mountains. In the midst of this world, Taawa carved a vast canyon, through which a river of crystalline waters flowed forever.

But there was no one in those beautiful lands. Taawa then had another idea: he would create a grandmother. So from his hands also emerged Kookyangwso'wuuti—Spider Grandmother. She immediately began to weave an endless web. And from that web came everything that was missing from the world that Taawa had created: clouds and fish, birds and people.

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However, the nights were very dark.

Human beings set out to inhabit that first world. Spider Grandmother gave them advice, never ceasing to weave her web, to which she continuously added some new river or tree. Then down the mountains came a trickster, whose name was Iisawu—Coyote. And Muy'ingwa, a generous spirit, creator of maize.

Treating both with respect, the people lived happily until something happened in their hearts. They lost their way. They began to behave so badly that Taawa crossed his arms over his chest and his crown of sunbeams grew dark.

The people were frightened as the sky broke into pieces and the earth shook. A rain of fire fell from the clouds until a curtain of hail extinguished the flames and buried the houses. The people cried and tried to get to safety, but it was impossible. Taawa had made himself dark to destroy the world and punish the evil that had taken over the humans' hearts.

Spider Grandmother felt compassion for those few who had kept their hearts pure. She descended from her web amid the stars and led the chosen ones toward the Grand Canyon. When all had assembled, a giant, hollow reed burst from the depths of the huge fissure in the ground. Then Spider Grandmother said with a very strong voice:

"My children, the first world is over. I have woven a home for you, with beautiful meadows and blue buffalo, resplendent skies and eagles of majestic flight. That world awaits, but you must strive hard to reach it. You must climb upward inside this hollow reed that the Grand Canyon has gifted. Help one another as you go. After a long night, you will arrive at the land that I, your Spider Grandmother, have promised."

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The last human beings obeyed her. They climbed up the great reed, and at the end of the long night, they emerged through a sipaapu, a portal into their new lives. They awoke on the first morning of the new world. Spider Grandmother took a net that she had knitted and carefully tied dewdrops on. With all her might, she threw that net into the heavens.

And on the first night of the new world, a million stars began to glow.