

THE HUNTER AND THE ALLIGATOR

A long time ago there was a Native American hunter who was very unlucky. The other hunters in his village were always able to bring home deer, but he always had bad luck.

He was strong and fit and he knew the forest very well, but every time he came close to killing a deer, something bad would happen. A bird would cry out and frighten the deer away, he would step on a twig and disturb the deer, or his arrow would somehow be blown off course by the wind and miss the deer. It didn't matter what he did, he just couldn't manage to kill a deer.

One day, the hunter decided to go deep into the swamps to kill a deer. He was determined to bring one back to his village or die trying. He hunted for three whole days but still had no luck.

On the fourth day, he came across a part of the swamp that had dried out. Where there was once a deep pool of water, there was now nothing but a sandy pit. At the bottom of it was an alligator. He was weak from thirst and his skin was so dry, he looked close to death.

"I thought I was having bad luck, Alligator, but it seems you are having worse luck than me," said the hunter.

"Is there any water nearby?" asked the alligator.

"Yes," replied the hunter. "There is a clear pool of cool water just beyond those trees. If you go there, you will survive," he said.

"I can't move by myself," said the alligator. "Will you help me? If you do, I will help you. I will give you the power to kill as many deer as you want."

The hunter agreed right away, as long as he could tie the alligator's jaws to protect himself. The alligator agreed. The hunter carried the alligator on his shoulders to the pool of cool water, put him down, and untied his jaws. The alligator dove into the pool and swam around. When he felt better he came back to the hunter.

"You have kept your word and so I will keep mine," said the alligator. "Here is what you must do. Go into the woods with your bow and arrows. You will meet a small doe. She has not yet grown enough to have young. Do not kill her. Greet her and move on and your power as a hunter will increase. Then you will meet a large doe. She has fawns and will continue to have more young each year. Do not kill her. Greet her and move on and you will be an even greater hunter. Next, you will meet a small buck. That buck will father many young. Do not kill him. Greet him and move on and your power as a hunter will become greater still. At last you will meet an old buck, bigger than all the rest. His time on Earth has been useful and now he is ready to give himself to you. Go close to that deer and shoot it. Then greet it and thank it for giving itself to you. Do this and you will be the greatest hunter ever."

The hunter did exactly what the alligator said and he became the greatest hunter in his village. He told the story to his people and as long as they remembered to follow the alligator's advice, they were never hungry.

