

The Eternal Maiden - Everett Harre, T.



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Long ages ago, darkness brooded over the frozen world and held in its thrall the unreleased waters of the glacial seas. There was no animal life upon the land, and in the depth of the waters no living thing stirred. Kokoyah, the water god, breathed not; Tornahhuchsuah, the earth spirit, who rules above the spirits of the wind and air, was veiled in slumber. Men had risen like willows from the frozen earth; but, although they lived, they were as the dead. They spake not, neither did they hunt, nor eat, nor did they die. Then the Great Spirit, whose name is not known, placed upon earth a man, in his arms the strength to kill, in his heart the primal urge of love. And in that flowerless arctic Eden, out of its bounteous compassion, the Great Spirit placed also a maiden, her face beautiful with the young virginity of the world, in her bosom implanted a yearning, not unmixed with fear, for love. Gazing upon her, the youth's heart stirred, with desire, the maiden's with virginal terror. The maiden fled, the youth followed. Over the desolate icy mountains the fleet feet of the youth sped with the swiftness of the wind gods, over the silent white seas the maiden with the elusiveness of the air spirits. In the heart of the youth throbbed the passion of love, indomitable, eternal, which the blasting breath of time should never kill. In the maiden's bosom quaked a

reasonless shame, an unconquerable terror. Surrounded by her whirling cloud of hair, the maiden sprang, untiring, across the wild white world. His strength failing, the youth pantingly followed. Thousands of years passed; the breathless pursuit continued; the maiden's nebulous hair became shot with streaks of golden fire, from her eyes beams of light streamed across the expanses over which she exultantly, fearfully bounded; the tremulous faltering youth's face paled until it shone silvery in the darkness, and the beads of perspiration on his forehead glowed with a strange lustre. Reaching, in their mad race, the very edge of the earth, the maiden leaped, fiery, into space, and her hair becoming suddenly molten, she became the sun - the eternal maiden Sukh-eh-nukh, the beautiful, the all-desired. Utterly exhausted, his wan arms yearningly outstretched, the youth swooned after her into the heavens, and was transformed into the moon - the ever-desiring, ever-sorrowing moon. In the smile of Sukh-eh-nukh the seas melted. Walrus and narwhals, seals and whales came into being on the bosom of Kokoyah; on the earth the snows disappeared, and the brow of Tornahhuchsuah was crowned with green grasses and starry flowers. Men hunted game, women laughed for joy; they beat drums, they danced, they sang. By the eternal, unrequited passion of the lovers in the skies, happiness and plenty came upon the earth. But, with Light, came also Death. Jealous of men's happiness, Perdlugssuaq, the Great Evil, brought sickness; he struck men on the hunt, on the seas, in the mountains. He was ever feared. He made the Great Dark terrible. But when the night became bright with the love-lorn glamour of the moon, Perdlugssuaq was for the time forgotten; in their hearts men felt a vague, tender, and ineffable stirring - the lure of a passion stronger and stranger even than death. They gazed upon the moon with instinctive, undefined pity. So, as the years passed, and ages melted and remade the snows, the long day was golden with the Beauty that is ever desired, the Ideal never attained; the night was softly silver with the melancholy and eternal hope of the deathless love that eternally desires, eternally pursues, and is eternally denied. Thus runs the Eskimo legend.

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