



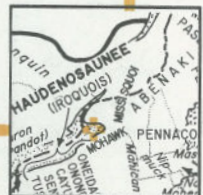
Something unusual was happening.

The Rabbit Dance

Long ago, a group of hunters were out looking for game. They had seen no sign of animals, but they went slowly and carefully through the forest, knowing that at any moment they might find something. Just ahead of them was a clearing. The leader of the hunters held up his hand for the others to pause. He thought he had seen something. All of the men dropped down on their stomachs and crept up to the clearing's edge to see what they could see. What they saw amazed them. There, in the center of the clearing, was the biggest rabbit any of them had ever seen. It seemed to be as big as a small bear!

One of the hunters slowly began to raise his bow. A rabbit as large as that one would be food enough for the whole village. But the leader of the men held out his hand and made a small motion that the man with the bow understood. He lowered his weapon. Something unusual was happening. It was best to just watch and see what would happen next.

The rabbit lifted its head and looked toward the men. Even though they were well hidden on the other side of the





clearing, it seemed as if that giant rabbit could see them. But the rabbit did not take flight. Instead, it just nodded its head. Then it lifted one of its feet and thumped the ground. As soon as it did so, other rabbits began to come into the clearing. They came from all directions and, like their chief, they paid no attention to the hunters.

Now the big rabbit began to thump its foot against the ground in a different way. Ba-pum, ba-pum, pa-pum, pa-pum. It was like the sound of a drum beating. The rabbits all around made a big circle and began to dance. They danced and danced. They danced in couples and moved in and out and back and forth. It was a very good dance that the rabbits did. The hunters who were watching found themselves tapping the earth with their hands in the same beat as the big rabbit's foot.

Then, suddenly, the big rabbit stopped thumping the earth. All of the rabbits stopped dancing. BA-BUM! The chief of the rabbits thumped the earth one final time. It leaped high into the air, right over the men's heads, and it was gone. All of the other rabbits ran in every direction out of the clearing and they were gone, too.

The men were astonished at what they had seen. None of them had ever seen anything at all like this. None of them had ever heard or seen such a dance. It was all they could talk about as they went back to the village. All thought of hunting was now gone from their minds.

When they reached the village, they went straight to the longhouse where the head of the Clan Mothers lived. She

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was a very wise woman and knew a great deal about the animals. They told her their story. She listened closely. When they were done telling the story, she picked up a water drum and handed it to the leader of the hunters.

"Play that rhythm which the Rabbit Chief played," she said.

The leader of the men did as she asked. He played the rhythm of the rabbits' dance.

"That is a good sound," said the Clan Mother. "Now show me the dance which the Rabbit People showed you."

The hunters then did the dance while their leader played the drum. The Clan Mother listened closely and watched. When they were done, she smiled at them.

"I understand what has happened," she said. "The Rabbit People know that we rely on them. We hunt them for food and for clothing. The Rabbit Chief has given us this special dance so that we can honor its people for all that they give to the human beings. If we play their song and do their dance, then they will know we are grateful for all they continue to give us. We must call this new song The Rabbit Dance and we must do it, men and women together, to honor the Rabbit People.

So it was that a new social dance was given to the Iroquois people. To this day the Rabbit Dance is done to thank the Rabbit People for all they have given, not only food and clothing, but also a fine dance that makes the people glad.

