

Cassiopeia (kass-e-o-pe-uh) - The Elkskin (Quileute Tribe)



☆ Best seen in November (can be seen all year).

Myth

One bright autumn day, four brothers went elk hunting upriver in their canoe. The fifth and youngest brother did not go hunting that day but stayed home.

After they had gone a long way upriver, the eldest brother said, "This should be far enough."

"We should be able to find elk here!" said another.

Packing what they would need for lunch and for their hunting, the brothers set off on foot in search of elk.

Before they had traveled very far on the prairie, they saw a big man walking toward them. He greeted them and asked, "Where are you going?"

"We are elk hunting, Man of the Prairie," they replied.

"I know how you can find all the elk you want," he told them. "If you hide, I will drive elk down this ravine and you can kill them."

Now, this man was a very clever trickster. As he began to walk away, he looked back and told the brothers that he would trade their poor arrows for the good ones he had been saving. Since they were already in his power, they readily agreed. Soon they gave up their arrows for fine-looking but weak ones. The Man of the Prairie told them he was going off to find the elk for the brothers.

Soon, a big elk with huge antlers charged down the ravine toward the four brothers. Because their arrows were worthless, the elk was able to kill all four brothers. Then he turned himself back into the Man of the Prairie.

When his four older brothers did not return, the youngest brother went out looking for them. Before long, he found their empty canoe near the prairie. Like a good hunter, he followed his brothers' footsteps. Just as he came to the place where his brothers had met the big man, the Man of the Prairie came walking toward him.

The Man of the Prairie tried to trick the fifth brother just as he had the four others. The youngest brother, however, was a medicine man and had powerful magic of his own. The Man of the Prairie could not persuade the fifth brother to trade away his arrows; he was ready for such a trick. He could see how worthless the arrows were. "This must be how he fooled my brothers," he thought.

"I will not trade with you!" he shouted to the big man.

The Man of the Prairie turned to go away and the youngest brother hid behind a tree. Soon the man changed himself into a huge elk and came charging after the fifth brother just as he had charged the four brothers. He shot four arrows - one for each of his brothers - into the huge elk. Then he wrestled him to the ground and killed him. When he had skinned the elk, he stretched the skin and found it was even bigger than the prairie. He quickly threw the elkskin up into the sky.

And so it is still there, where you can see it on any clear night. Stars make the holes where the fifth brother had driven in stakes while stretching the skin. Other stars are the elk's tail.