



The Boy Who Was Called Thick-Head

Canadian Fairy Tales
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*Intermediate
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Three brothers lived with their old Indian mother in the forest near the sea. Their father had long been dead. At his death he had little of the world's goods to his credit and his widow and her sons were very poor. In the place where they dwelt, the game was not plentiful, and to get food enough to keep them from want they had often to go far into the forest. The youngest boy was smaller and weaker than the others, and when the two older sons went far away to hunt, they always left him behind, for although he always wished to accompany them they would never allow him to go. He had to do all the work about the house, and all day long he gathered wood in the forest and carried water from the stream. And even when his brothers went out in the springtime to draw sap from the maple trees he was never permitted to go with them. He was always making mistakes and doing foolish things. His brothers called him Thick-head, and all the people round about said he was a simpleton because of his slow and queer ways. His mother alone was kind to him and she always said, "They may laugh at you and call you fool, but you will prove to be wiser than all of them yet, for so it was told me by a forest fairy at your birth."

The Chief of the people had a beautiful daughter who had many suitors. But her father spurned them all from his door and said, "My daughter is not yet of age to marry; and when her time of marriage comes, she will only marry the man who can make great profit from hunting." The two older sons of the old woman decided that

one of them must win the girl. So they prepared to set out on a great hunting expedition far away in the northern forest, for it was now autumn, and the hunter's moon had come. The youngest boy wanted to go with them, for he had never been away from home and he wished to see the world. And his mother said he might go.

His brothers were very angry when they heard his request, and they said, "Much good Thick-head can do us in the chase. He will only bring us bad luck. He is not a hunter but a scullion and a drudge fit only for the fireside." But his mother commanded them to grant the boy's wish and they had to obey. So the three brothers set out for the north country, the two older brothers grumbling loudly because they were accompanied by the boy they thought a fool.

The two older brothers had good success in the chase and they killed many animals—deer and rabbits and otters and beavers. And they came home bearing a great quantity of dried meat and skins. They each thought, "Now we have begun to prove our prowess to the Chief, and if we succeed as well next year when the hunter's moon comes again, one of us will surely win his daughter when she is old enough to marry." But all the youngest boy brought home as a result of his journey into the game country was a large Earth-Worm as thick as his finger and as long as his arm. It was the biggest Earth-Worm he had ever seen. He thought it a great curiosity as well as a great discovery, and he was so busy watching it each day that he had no time to hunt. When he brought it home in a box, his brothers said to their mother, "What did we tell you about Thick-head? He has now surely proved himself a fool. He has caught only a fat Earth-Worm in all these weeks." And they noised it abroad in the village and all the people laughed loudly at the simpleton, until "Thick-head's hunt" became a by-word in all the land. But the boy's mother only smiled and said, "He will surprise them all yet."

The boy kept the Earth-Worm in a tiny pen just outside the door of his home. One day a large Duck came waddling along, and sticking her bill over the little fence of the pen she quickly gobbled up the Worm. The boy was very angry and he went to the man who owned the Duck, and said, "Your Duck ate up my pet Worm. I want my Worm." The man offered to pay him whatever price he asked, but the boy said, "I do not want your price. I want my Worm."

But the man said, "How can I give you your Worm when my Duck has eaten it up? It is gone for ever."

And the boy said, "It is not gone. It is in the Duck's belly. So I must have the Duck." Then to avoid further trouble the man gave Thick-head the Duck, for he thought to himself, "What is the use of arguing with a fool."

The boy took the Duck home and kept it in a little pen near his home with a low fence around it. And he tied a

great weight to its foot so that it could not fly away. He was quite happy again, for he thought, "Now I have both my Worm and the Duck." But one day a Fox came prowling along looking for food. He saw the fat Duck tied by the foot in the little pen. And he said, "What good fortune! There is a choice meal for me," and in a twinkling he was over the fence. The Duck quacked and made a great noise, but she was soon silenced. The Fox had just finished eating up the Duck when the boy, who had heard the quacking, came running out of the house. The Fox was smacking his lips after his good meal, and he was too slow in getting away. The boy fell to beating him with a stout club and soon killed him and threw his body into the yard behind the house. And he thought, "That is not so bad. Now I have my Worm and the Duck and the Fox."

That night an old Wolf came through the forest in search of food. He was very hungry, and in the bright moonlight he saw the dead Fox lying in the yard. He pounced upon it greedily and devoured it until not a trace of it was left. But the boy saw him before he could get away, and he came stealthily upon him and killed him with a blow of his axe. "I am surely in good luck," he thought, "for now I have the Worm and the Duck and the Fox and the Wolf."

But the next day when he told his brothers of his good fortune and his great skill, they laughed at him loudly and said, "Much good a dead Wolf will do you. Before two days have passed it will be but an foul-smelling thing and we shall have to bury it deep. You are indeed a great fool."

The boy pondered for a long time over what they had said, and he thought, "Perhaps they are right. The dead Wolf cannot last long. I will save the skin." So he skinned the Wolf and dried the skin and made a drum from it. For the drum was one of the few musical instruments of the Indians in those old times, and they beat it loudly at all their dances and festivals. The boy beat the drum each evening, and made a great noise, and he was very proud because he had the only drum in the whole village.

One day the Chief sent for him and said to him, "I want to borrow your drum for this evening. I am having a great gathering to announce to all the land that my daughter is now of age to marry and that suitors may now seek her hand in marriage. But we have no musical instruments and I want your drum, and I myself will beat it at the dance."

So Thick-head brought his drum to the Chief's house, but he was not very well pleased, because he was not invited to the feast, while his brothers were among the favoured guests. And he said to the Chief, "Be very careful. Do not tear the skin of my drum, for I can never get another like it. My Worm and my Duck and my

Fox and my Wolf have all helped to make it.”

The next day he went for his drum. But the Chief had struck it too hard and had split it open so that it would now make no sound and it was ruined beyond repair. He offered to pay the boy a great price for it, but the boy said, “I do not want your price. I want my drum. Give me back my drum, for my Worm and the Duck and the Fox and the Wolf are all in it.”

The Chief said, “How can I give you back your drum when it is broken? It is gone for ever. I will give you anything you desire in exchange for it. Since you do not like the price I offer, you may name your own price and you shall have it.” And the boy thought to himself, “Here is a chance for good fortune. Now I shall surprise my brothers.”

And he said, “Since you cannot give me my drum, I will take your daughter in marriage in exchange.” The Chief was much perplexed, but he had to be true to his word. So he gave his daughter to Thick-head, and they were married, and the girl brought him much treasure and they lived very happily. And his brothers were much amazed and angered because they had failed. But his mother said, “I told you he was wiser than you and that he would outwit you yet although you called him Thick-head and fool. For the forest fairy said it to me at his birth.”

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