



The Children with One Eye

Canadian Fairy Tales

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Intermediate
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Two little children, a boy and a girl, lived long ago with their widowed mother in the Canadian forest. The woman was very poor, for her husband had long been dead and she had to work very hard to provide food for herself and her children. Often she had to go far from home in search of fish and game, and at times she was absent for many days. When she went on these long journeys she left her children behind her, and thus they were allowed to grow up with very little oversight or discipline or care. They soon became very unruly because they were so often left by themselves and when their mother returned from her hunting trips, she frequently found that they would not obey her, and that they did pretty much as they pleased. As they grew older they became more headstrong and disobedient, and their mother could do very little to control them. And she said, "Some day they will suffer for their waywardness."

One day the woman went to visit a neighbour not far away. She left a large pot of bear-fat boiling on the fire. And she said to the children, "Do not meddle with the pot while I am gone, for the fat may harm you if it catches fire." But she was not gone long when the boy said to the girl as they played around the pot, "Let us see if the fat will burn." So they took a burning stick of wood and dropped it into the fat, and stood looking into the large pot to see what would happen.

The fat sputtered for an instant; then there was a sudden flash, and a tongue of flame shot upwards from the pot into the faces of the children. Their hair was burned to a crisp and their faces were scorched, and they ran from the house crying with pain. But when they reached the outer air, they found that they could not see, for

the fire had blinded their eyes. So they stumbled around in darkness, crying loudly for help. But no help came.

When their mother came home she tried every remedy she thought might restore their sight. But all her medicine was unavailing, and she said, "You will always be blind. That is the punishment for your disobedience." So the children lived in darkness for a long time. But they were no longer headstrong and unruly, and although they could no longer see, they were less trouble to their mother than they were when they had their sight, for they did not now refuse to do her bidding.

One day, when their mother was far away hunting in the forest, an old woman came along and asked the children for food. And they brought good food to her as she sat before the door. After she had eaten, she said, "You are blind, but I can help you, for I am from the Land of the Little People. I cannot give you four eyes, but I will give you one eye between you. You can each use it at different times, and it will be better than no sight at all. But handle it with great care and do not leave it lying on the ground." Then she gave them an eye which she took from her pocket, and disappeared. So they used the one eye between them, and when the boy had the eye and the girl wished to see anything, she would say, "Give me the eye," and her brother would carefully pass it to her. When their mother came home she was very glad when she found that they had now some means of sight.

One day when their mother was away again, the boy went into the forest with his bow and arrows. He carried the eye with him. He had not gone far when he saw a fat young deer, which he killed. The deer was too heavy for him to carry home alone. So he said, "I will go and get my sister, and we shall cut it up and put it in a basket and carry it home together." He went home and told his sister of his good fortune, and he led her to where the deer lay, and they began to cut up the body. But they had forgotten to bring a basket or a bag. He called to his sister saying, "You must weave a basket into which we can put the meat to carry it home."

And his sister said, "How can I make a basket when I cannot see? If I am to weave a basket, I must have the eye." The boy brought the eye to her and she made a large basket from green twigs.

When she had finished making the basket the boy said, "I must finish cutting up the meat. Give me the eye." So she brought him the eye, and he proceeded to chop up the meat and to put it in the basket. Then he said, "Why can we not have a meal here? I am very hungry." His sister agreed that this was a good idea, and he said, "You cook the meal while I pack the meat."

The girl made a fire, but she was afraid she would burn the meat, so she said, "I cannot see to cook. I must have the eye." By this time her brother had finished packing the meat into the basket, and he brought her the eye

and she went on with her cooking. The fire was low and she said, "I must have some dry wood. Bring me some dry pine." The boy wandered off into the forest in search of wood, but he had not gone far when he stumbled over a log and fell to the ground. He called to his sister in anger, saying, "You always want the eye for yourself. How can I gather dry pine when I cannot see? Give me the eye at once."

His sister ran to him and helped him up and gave him the eye. She found her way back to the fire, but as she reached it she smelled the meat burning on the spit. She shouted, "The meat is burning and our dinner will be spoiled. Give me the eye at once, so that I may see if the meat is cooked." The boy was some distance away, and in his anger he threw the eye to her, saying, "Find it. I am not going to walk to you with it if you are too lazy to come and get it." The eye fell to the ground between them, and neither of them knew where it lay. They groped for it among the dead leaves, but as they searched for it, a wood-pecker, watching from a branch of a tree nearby, swooped suddenly down and gobbled it up and flew away.

As they were still searching for it, the old woman who had given it to them came along. She had been hiding among the trees, and she had seen the wood-pecker flying away with her gift. She said, "Where is the eye I gave you?"

"It dropped from my head," answered the boy, "and I cannot find it in the grass."

"Yes," said the girl, "it dropped from his head, and we cannot find it."

"You have lied to me," said the old woman, "and you have disobeyed, and for that I shall punish you." And with her magic power she changed the boy into a mole and the girl into a bat, and said, "Now live blind upon the earth, with only your sense of sound to guide you." At once the boy and the girl were changed. And so the Mole and the Bat appeared upon the earth.

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