

Great Heart and the Three

Tests

Canadian Fairy Tales

Canadian Native American North American

Intermediate

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Somewhere near the sea in olden times a boy was living with his father and mother. He had no brothers or sisters. His father was a great hunter and the boy inherited something of his power, for he was always very successful in the killing of game. And his mother said, "Some day he will be a great man, for before his birth a vision came to me in the night and told me that my son would win wide fame. And fairy gifts were laid by the fairies in his cradle." And his father, listening to her boasting, said, "Time will tell; time will tell; but if he is to be a great man it is his own deeds and not your boasting that must prove it."

As the boy grew up he became strangely beautiful and he had great strength. And his father said, "It is time he set out to seek his fortune. I was in the forest doing so myself when I was no older than he."

And his mother said, "Wait a little and be not so impatient. He is yet young and there is yet much time." So the boy remained at home a while longer.

Now it happened that far away in a distant village there lived a young girl of very great beauty and grace. Her father had been a great Chief, but he was now dead. Her mother too was dead, and she was all alone in the world. But her parents had left her vast lands and a great store of goods and many servants, and because of her treasures and her great beauty she had many suitors. But she was not easily pleased by men and on all who

came to seek her hand she imposed severe feats of skill to test their sincerity and their worth. She was carefully guarded by an old woman and many servants who kept troublesome and meddlesome people away.

Soon the fame of the girl's wealth and beauty spread through all the land. It reached the sea coast village where the young man dwelt. His father thought to himself, "Here is a good chance for my son to prove his worth." So he called his boy to him and said, "It is time you were setting out to seek your fortune in the world and to find a wife, for your springtime is passing and your summer of life will soon be here, and before you know it your autumn will be upon you and your winter will be near. There is no time to lose. Seek out the beautiful girl of the rich treasures in the distant inland village and try to win her as your wife." And his mother gave him the fairy gifts which had been laid in his cradle at his birth, and he said good-bye to his parents and set out on his long journey. He had no misgivings, for he was very vain of his beauty and he was sure, too, of his strength.

As he travelled inland he came one day upon a man clad in scarlet sitting on the side of a rocky hill tying stones to his feet. "Hello," he said to the man, "why are you tying these heavy rocks to your ankles?"

"I am a hunter," replied the man, "but when I follow the deer I run so fast that I am soon far in front of them instead of behind them, and I am putting heavy weights on my feet so that I will not run so rapidly."

"You are indeed a wonderful man," said the boy; "but I am alone and I need a companion. Let us go along together."

"Who are you?" said the man. "I am Lad of the Great Heart," said the boy, "and I can do great deeds and I can win for you great treasure." So the Scarlet Runner went along with him.

Towards evening when they were now far inland, they came to a large lake. Among the trees on the fringe of the lake a large fat man was lying flat on his stomach with his mouth in the water drinking as hard as he could. For some time they watched him, but still he drank and the lake grew smaller and smaller and still his thirst was not quenched. They laughed at such a strange sight, and as they approached him the boy said, "Hello! Why do you lie there drinking so much water?" "Oh," answered the fat man, "there are times when I cannot get enough water to drink. When I have drunk this lake dry I shall still be thirsty."

“Who are you?” asked the boy. “I am Man of the Great Thirst,” said the fat man. “That is well,” said Great Heart, “we two need a third companion. We can do great deeds and we can win for you great treasure.” So the three went along together.

They had not gone far when they came to a wide open plain where they saw a man walking along with his face raised upwards, peering at the sky. He moved along rapidly and seemed to find his way without his eyes, for he gazed steadily at the heavens. “Hello,” said Great Heart as the sky-gazer rushed past him and almost knocked him over, “what are you looking at so intently?”

“Oh,” said the man, “I have shot an arrow into the sky and I am waiting for it to fall. It has gone so far that it will be some time before it drops.”

“Who are you?” asked the boy. “I am the Far-Darter,” said the sky-gazer.

“We three need a fourth companion,” said the boy. “We can do great deeds and win for you much treasure. Come along with us.” So the four went along together.

They had gone but a short distance across the plain to the edge of a forest when they came upon a man lying down at full length with his head upon his hand. The edge of his hand was on the ground and it was half closed around his ear, which rested upon it. As he saw the four men approaching him he placed a finger of his other hand upon his lips and signalled to them to keep quiet. “Hello,” said Great Heart in a whisper, “what are you doing there with your ear to the ground?”

“I am listening to the plants growing far away in the forest,” he answered. “There is a beautiful flower I wish to find, and I am trying to hear it breathing so that I may go and get it. Aha! I hear it now.” So saying he rose from the ground.

The boy said, “Who are you?”

“I am Keen Ears,” said the listener.

“We four need another companion,” said Great Heart. “We can do great deeds and win for you much treasure. Come along with us.” So the four men and the boy went along together, Keen Ears, and Scarlet Runner, and Far Darter, and Man of the Great Thirst, and Lad of the Great Heart. Then Great Heart unfolded to the others his plan to win the beautiful girl who lived with her treasures in the distant village. And they gladly agreed to

help him in his dangerous undertaking.

When they reached the village, the people were all very curious when they saw the five strangers. They marvelled at Great Heart's beauty. But when they heard that he wished to marry the daughter of the former Chief they shook their heads gravely and said, "It will never be. She places hard conditions on all who seek her hand. He who fails in the tests is doomed to death. Many suitors have tried and failed and died." But Great Heart was not alarmed, and with his four companions he went to the girl's home. The old woman who guarded her met him at the door and he made known his wishes. She laughed scornfully when she saw his great beauty, and she said, "You look more like a girl than like a warrior. You cannot endure the tests." But the young man insisted on making the trials.

The old woman said, "If you fail in the tests you will die," and Great Heart said, "It is so agreed." Then the woman said, "If you wish to win the maiden you must first push away this great rock from before her window. It keeps the sunlight from her in the mornings." Then Great Heart, calling to his aid the fairy gifts of his cradle, placed his shoulder against the huge stone which rose higher than the house, and he pushed with all his strength. With a mighty crash it rolled down the hill and broke into millions of pieces. The bits of rock flew all over the earth so great was the fall, and the little pebbles and stones that came from it are seen throughout the world to this day. The sunlight streamed in at the window, and the maiden knew that the first test had been successfully passed by a suitor.

Then came the second test. The old woman and her servants brought great quantities of food and drink and bade the strangers consume it all at one meal. They were very hungry, for they had eaten nothing all day and they easily ate up the food. But when Great Heart saw the great barrels of water, his spirits sank, and he said, "I fear I am beaten."

But Man of the Great Thirst said, "Not so fast, my friend. The spell of great stomach-burning is again upon me. I am very dry as if there was a fire in my belly. Give me a chance to drink." He went from barrel to barrel and in a twinkling he had drained them all of every drop. And the people wondered greatly.

But there was still another test. "You must have one of your party run a race," said the old woman to Great Heart. And she brought out a man who had never been beaten in running. "Who is your choice of runners?" she asked; "he must race with this man, and if he wins you may have the maiden for your wife and all the treasure with her, for this is the final test. But if he loses the race you shall die." Great Heart called Scarlet Runner to the

mark and told the old woman that this was the man selected. Then he untied the rocks from the runner's feet, and when all was ready the race began. The course lay far across the plains for many miles until the runners should pass from sight, and back again to the starting point. The two runners kept together for some distance, talking together in a friendly way as they ran.

When they had passed from sight of the village the maiden's runner said, "Now we are out of sight of the village. Let us rest here a while on this grassy bank, for the day is hot." The Scarlet Runner agreed to this and they both stretched out on the grass. Now this was an old trick of the maiden's runner, who always won by craft rather than by speed. They had not lain down long on the grass when Scarlet Runner fell asleep under the hot sun, just as his rival had hoped. When the latter was sure that his rival was sound asleep, he set out for the village, running as fast as he could. The people soon saw their runner approaching far off on the plains, but there was no sign of the stranger, and they thought that the new suitor for the girl's hand had at last failed like all the others before him.

Great Heart was much puzzled when Scarlet Runner did not appear, and as he saw the maiden's runner coming nearer, he said, "What can have happened? I fear I am beaten."

But Keen Ears threw himself flat on the ground and listened. "Scarlet Runner is asleep," he called; "I hear him snoring on the plains far away." And with his keen sense of sound he located the exact spot where the runner was lying.

"I will soon wake him," said Far-Darter, as he fitted an arrow to his bow-string. The people all thought him mad, for they had never seen an arrow shot so great a distance beyond their sight. But Far-Darter was not dismayed. He quickly shot an arrow from his bow to the spot which Keen Ears had indicated. His aim was so true that the arrow hit Scarlet Runner on the nose and aroused him from his sleep. But when he rose to his feet he found that his rival was gone and he knew that he had been deceived. So in a great rage because of the trick and the pain in his nose, he set out for the village running like the wind. His rival had almost reached the end of the race, but by putting all his strength into his effort, Scarlet Runner quickly over-took him and passed him near the winning-post and won the race. And the people wondered greatly at these great deeds of the strangers.

Then the old woman said to Great Heart, "You have won the maiden as your wife, for you alone have succeeded in these tests." So the two were married with great ceremony. Great Heart gave much treasure to his companions, and they promised to help him always in his need. Then with his wife and her servants and her great store of goods he went back to his native village by the sea. His father and mother were glad to see him

again and to hear of his success, and his mother said, "I told you he would win great fame because of the fairy gifts that were laid in his cradle at his birth." And they all lived together and were henceforth very happy.

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