



Owl with the Great Head and Eyes

Canadian Fairy Tales

Canadian Native American North American

Intermediate
15 min read

Long ago, when Glooskap was the ruler of the Indians in Eastern Canada, and when the animals all worked for him and talked like men, Wolf was one of Rabbit's enemies. On the surface they seemed to be friends, but each was afraid of the other and each suspected the other of treachery. Rabbit was very faithful to his work as the forest guide who showed people the way to far places. But he was also a great trickster, and he delighted to play pranks on every one he met. He liked more than all to pester Wolf, for he had a hatred for his cruel ways, and he was always able to outwit him.

It happened that Rabbit and Wolf lived close together, deep in the Canadian forest. Some distance from them, in a little house, lived a poor widow woman who had only one daughter. She was a very beautiful girl, with hair as black as the raven's wing, and with eyes like the dark of the underwater. Rabbit and Wolf each fell in love with her, and each in his own way sought her as his wife. Rabbit tried hard to win her love. When he went to her house he always dressed himself in a soft brown coat, and he put a bangle around his neck and bells upon his feet. And often he played sweetly on his flute, hoping to charm her with his music, for he was a great player upon the Indian pipe. And he tried to grow a mustache to hide his split lip; but he had little success, for his whiskers would not grow thick, and he has the thin scraggy mustache of a few hairs to this day. But no matter what Rabbit did to adorn himself, the girl gave him cold looks, and old Wolf seemed to be deeper in her favour,

for she liked his willowy form and his sleek and bashful ways. And poor Rabbit was sore distressed.

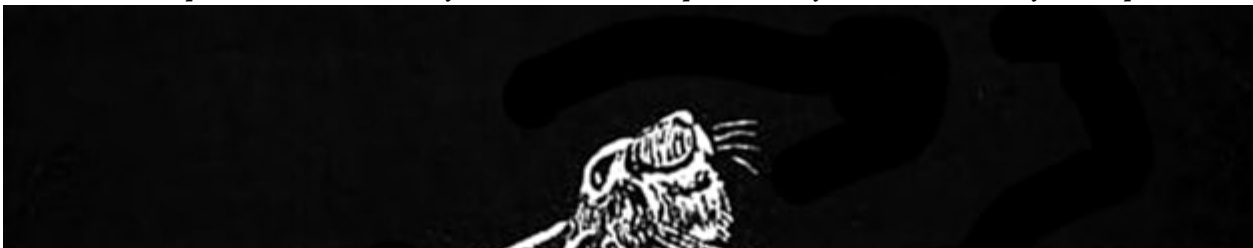
One fine day in the spring-time, Rabbit came upon the girl and her mother gathering May-flowers among the moss. He crept close to listen to their talk. He heard the mother say, "I have no stomach for little Rabbit, but Wolf pleases me well. You must marry Wolf. They tell me he is a great hunter, and if you marry him we shall never want for food."

When Rabbit heard this he was very sad; he determined that on no account should Wolf marry the widow's daughter, and that he must use all his power to prevent it. That night he went alone to the girl's house. He spoke sneeringly of Wolf, saying with a bitter frown, "Wolf is no hunter; he never catches any game because he is lazy and has no brains; I always have to feed him to keep him from starving; he is but a beast of burden; I always ride upon his back when I go to a far country, for he is good for nothing else."

The girl's mother wondered greatly, and she was very startled by this news, for she did not want her daughter to marry a good-for-nothing; but she was not sure that Rabbit spoke the truth, for she had heard that sometimes he told great lies. So she said, "If you will ride Wolf over here I will believe you, and he shall not marry my daughter, and you shall marry her yourself." And Rabbit went home well pleased and sure of a happy ending to his trick.

The next day Rabbit purposely met Wolf in the forest, and he said, "Let us go together to see the widow's daughter." And Wolf was glad to go. They had not gone far when Rabbit began to cry. Then he lay down on the ground, and rolled and moaned and rubbed his belly as if in great distress. "I have a sharp pain in my belly," he sobbed, "I cannot walk any farther. If I walk I shall surely die, and I cannot go on unless you carry me on your back."

Wolf willingly agreed, for he wanted to see the beautiful girl, and he was very sorry for poor Rabbit in his pain; and Rabbit, laughing to himself, climbed on Wolf's back. Wolf ran along, not feeling the load, for Rabbit was very light. They had not gone far when Rabbit cried again and said, "I cannot ride without a saddle, for your bare back hurts me and gives me blisters." So they borrowed a little saddle from a field by the way and put it on Wolf's back. Soon Rabbit said, "This is fine fun; let us play that you are a horse and that I am a great rider. I should like to put a little bridle on you, and to wear spurs on my feet and to carry a whip."



“Wolf trotting along like a little horse, and Rabbit laughing to himself, sitting in the saddle.”

Illustration by Marcia Lane Foster, published in *Canadian Wonder Tales* by Cyrus MacMillan (1922), John Lane

And Wolf, wishing to please Rabbit to make him forget his pain, gladly agreed. So they borrowed a little bridle and spurs and a whip from another field near by, and did as Rabbit asked, and together they went to the girl's home, Wolf trotting along like a little horse, and Rabbit laughing to himself, sitting in the saddle, with his spurs and his whip, holding the bridle reins. When they drew near the house, Rabbit made a great noise so that the mother and her daughter might look out to see where the shouting came from. He called loudly, “Whoa, Whoa.” And the girl and her mother opened the door and looked out at them in wonder. Then as they were looking on, Rabbit, chuckling to himself, struck Wolf a stinging blow with his whip, and stuck his spurs deep into Wolf's sides and called him loudly a lazy beast. Wolf jumped and plunged and kicked because of the prick of the spurs and the sting of the whip; he was very cross, but he said nothing.

Some distance away, Rabbit tied Wolf to a tree, saying, “Stay here and I will send the girl to you.” Then he went to the house, and he said to the woman, “Now you will believe that Wolf is a beast of burden, for I have ridden here on his back.” And the woman believed him. She told him to give Wolf some corn or grass. But Rabbit said, “He doesn't eat corn or grass; he eats only fresh meat,” for he knew well that Wolf would be quite contented if he got a good meal of meat. Then she gave him some fresh meat, which he brought to Wolf. And Wolf was happy, and his anger disappeared, and he forgot the pain of the spurs and the whip, and he thought it was fine fun to get a good meal so easily.

The woman promised that Rabbit should marry her daughter, and when night fell Rabbit went home well pleased, leaving Wolf still tied to the tree. It was so dark that Wolf did not see him leaving the house, and for a long time he thought he was still inside, and he waited long in the starlight. At last he grew tired waiting, for he was hungry and he was cold standing still in the chill night air of early spring. He cut with his teeth the bridle rein that tied him to the tree, and then he went to the woman's house. But the woman would not let him in. She told him to go away, that she never wished to see him again, and she called him a lazy beast of burden. He went home in great anger, for he knew now that he had been tricked, and he swore that he would have vengeance on Rabbit.

The next day Rabbit learned from the woman that she had spurned Wolf from her door, and he knew that Wolf

realized he had been deceived. He was somewhat frightened, for he dreaded Wolf's vengeance, and for several days he hid among the trees. Then hunger drove him out and he went forth to look for food. One evening he entered a garden in search of cabbage, and he was busy robbing it, when the people who owned the garden spied him. And they said, "Here is the thief who has been stealing our vegetables. We will catch him and teach him a lesson."

Before Rabbit knew it, they were upon him, for he was eating heartily, he was so hungry, and they caught him and bound him fast to a tree and went to get scalding water to pour upon his back to teach him not to rob their garden again. But while they were away Wolf came along. He, too, was very hungry, for he had eaten no meal for many days, but he was glad when he saw Rabbit, for now he thought he would have his revenge. Rabbit saw him at a distance, and he resolved to try another trick on him, and to hail him as if he thought he was still his friend. And he cried out to him, "Help me, Wolf! Help me! The people here asked me to eat up a nice little lamb, and when I refused to do it, they tied me up to this tree, and they have gone to bring the lamb to me."

Wolf was too hungry to be cautious, and he forgot all about Rabbit's tricks, for spring lamb was his favorite food. And he said, "I will eat up the little lamb," and he smacked his lips as he spoke, and thought of the nice tender meal he would have. Then Rabbit said, "Untie me and take my place, for the people will soon be here with the lamb." So Wolf untied him, and Rabbit in turn bound Wolf fast to the tree, and laughing to himself because he had again outwitted stupid Wolf, he ran rapidly away.

Far off he hid behind the trees to see what would happen. Soon the people came back, carrying the pots of scalding water. Wolf saw them coming, and he was in high spirits, for he thought the lamb he was to eat was in one of the pots. It was moonlight, and in the shadow of the great tree the people could not see very clearly, and they thought Wolf was Rabbit, still bound fast where they had left him. So they poured the scalding water on his back and kicked him and knocked him on the head with a big stick, and they said, "Now, thief, we have taught you how dangerous it is to rob gardens in the spring moonlight." Wolf howled with pain, for his back was blistered and his head was sore, and Rabbit heard him, and he sat on a log and shook with laughter because of the success of his prank.

Then the people untied Wolf and let him go. He went away wearily among the trees. And he again swore vengeance on Rabbit, and he resolved to kill him as soon as he set eyes upon him, for he knew he had been tricked a second time. For several days he searched for his enemy. At last, one night of bright moonlight, he came upon Rabbit sitting in a patch of Indian tobacco plants, eating his fill and contentedly chewing the

tobacco leaves. Rabbit's mouth was full of tobacco, but he laughed loudly when he saw Wolf's back bound in bandages because of the blisters, and his sore head tied up in a cloth. But when he saw Wolf's angry eyes, he was frightened, and he ran away into the woods. The moon was shining in the forest, and Wolf could catch a glimpse now and then of his brown coat among the trees, and he chased him for a long time.

Rabbit tried all his tricks to shake him from his tracks, but without avail. At last, when Rabbit was almost worn out, he took refuge in a hollow tree, into which he slipped through a small hole, where Wolf could not follow him. And Wolf said, "Now I have him in my power. I will kill him; but first I must go home to get my axe to cut down the tree and chop off his head." Then he looked around for some one to keep watch over the tree while he was gone, so that Rabbit could not escape. At last he saw Owl sitting quietly on a branch near. He called to him and said, "Watch by this hole until I get back, and do not let Rabbit get away." So Owl came down and sat by the hole and promised to keep guard over the prisoner, and Wolf went away to look for his axe.

But Rabbit was not caught yet; he had another trick left. After Wolf had gone away, he called to Owl sitting by the hole, and said, "Owl, come and see what a nice little room I have here in the tree." But Owl replied, "It is too dark, I cannot see." Then Rabbit said, "Open your eyes wide and put your face close to the hole, for I have a light here and you can see easily." Owl did as he was told, for he was a curious fellow. Rabbit had a great mouthful of tobacco juice from the Indian tobacco leaves he had been chewing, and when Owl put his face close to the hole he squirted the juice into Owl's eyes. Owl screamed loudly, for his eyes were smarting and he was blinded by the juice; he ran around the tree and stamped and shrieked and rubbed his eyes, trying to relieve them of their pain. And while he was about it, Rabbit slipped out of the hole and ran away, and Owl did not know he was gone.

Soon Wolf came back, carrying his big sharp axe. And he said, "Now I shall kill him at last." And Owl was afraid to tell him about his sore eyes; they were still open wide, and he could not close them. At once Wolf chopped down the hollow tree. Then he split it open from end to end. But there was no sign of Rabbit. Wolf then thought Owl had tricked him, and that he had helped Rabbit to escape. But Owl said he had not. He sat with his eyes wide open, staring stupidly and moaning and making strange noises because of his pain. Wolf thought he was laughing at him and taunting him, for he did not know the meaning of Owl's strange cries, and in his rage he fell to beating him over the head with his axe-handle until poor Owl's head was swollen to a great size. And Owl cried, "Hoot, Hoot, Hoot," and his eyes stared from his swollen head even larger than before.

Then Wolf went on his way, resolved to keep away from Rabbit. And since that time Owl has cried "Hoot, Hoot,

Hoot” at night, for he still remembers his pain; and his head is still swollen and bigger than that of other birds because of the beating Wolf gave him with his axe-handle; and his eyes are still large and they stare stupidly, and he cannot look at the light, and he is blind in the daylight because of the tobacco juice Rabbit squirted into his eyes. And since that night Rabbit and Wolf have avoided each other, and they have not lived in the same place, and they have never since been friends.

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