

# *How Rabbit Deceived Fox*

Canadian Fairy Tales

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*Intermediate*  
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Long ago in Indian days in Canada, when Rabbit worked for Glooskap as his forest guide, he was a great thief. He liked most of all to steal by moonlight, and he crept quietly into gardens and fields where Indian vegetables were growing, for he was very fond of cabbage and lettuce and beans. Not far from his home there lived alone an old widow woman who had no children. She could not hunt game because she was a woman, and she had never been trained to the chase, so she kept a little garden from which she made a good living. All day long from dawn until sunset, she toiled hard, tilling her little garden, watering her vegetables and keeping them free from weeds. And she grew green cabbages and red carrots and yellow beans and big fat pumpkins and Indian corn, which she traded with Indian hunters in return for fish and meat. In this way she always had plenty of food, and she lived very well on good fare.

But Rabbit, going his rounds one day, discovered her garden, although it was deep in the forest, and every night by moonlight or starlight he robbed it, and grew sleek and fat from the results of his thefts. And morning after morning the old widow woman found that many cabbages and carrots were missing and that much harm had been done to her plants. She had an idea that Rabbit was the pilferer, for she had heard that he was a great thief, but she was not very sure. She watched many nights, but she was never able to catch the robber, so stealthily did he come, and it was not easy to see him in the shadows. So she said to herself, "I will set up a scarecrow, a figure in the shape of a little man, and I will place it at my garden gate, and it will frighten away the robber, whoever he may be, for I must save my vegetables or I shall starve when the cold winter comes."

She picked from the spruce and the fir trees close by a great store of gum and balsam. This she formed into a figure in the shape of a little man. She made two eyes from glass beads that would shine like fire in the starlight, and a nose from a pine cone, and hair from the corn tassels and yellow moss. Then she placed the figure at the entrance to the garden where she knew the robber would come. "Now," she thought, "I will scare away the thief."

When night fell and the moon rose above the trees, Rabbit came along, as was his custom, to steal his nightly meal. As he came near the garden very softly, he saw in the moonlight what he thought was a man standing in the path by the garden gate. The moon hung low over the forest, and there was a thin grey mist on the earth, for it was near to autumn and the nights were already cool; and the figure of the little man looked larger than human in the misty light, and it cast a long black shadow like that of a giant on the grass. Rabbit was much afraid and he trembled like an aspen leaf, but he stood quiet behind a tree and watched the strange figure. For a long time he stood still and watched and listened. But the strange figure did not move, and not a sound did Rabbit hear but the chirp of a cricket. Then with great caution he came closer. But still the figure did not move. Then his fear left him and he grew bolder, for he was very hungry, and he could smell the vegetables and the wild honeysuckle in the still night air.

So he walked bravely up to the little dummy man and said, "Get out of my way and let me pass." But the man did not move. Then Rabbit struck the man a sharp blow with his fist. But still the figure did not move. Rabbit's fist stuck fast in the gum and he could not pull it away. Then he struck out with his other fist, and it too, like the other, was held firm. "I shall kick you," said Rabbit in a rage. "Take that," and he struck out wildly with his foot. But his foot, like his fists, stuck fast. Then he kicked with the other foot, but that too was held in the gum. Rabbit was now very cross, and in his anger he said, "Now I shall bite you," but when he bit the little man, his teeth, like his feet and hands, stuck fast. Then he pushed with his body with all his might, hoping to knock the little man down, but his whole body stuck to the dummy figure.

He cried out loudly, for he was now beside himself with fear, and the old woman, when she heard his yells, came running out of her house. "Aha!" she said, "so you are the robber who has been stealing from my garden. I will rid the world of a pilfering pest, for I will kill you this very night." Then she pulled him away from the gum figure and put him in a strong bag and tied the mouth of the bag with a stout string. She left the bag on the

path by the garden gate and went to look for her axe to kill Rabbit. While Rabbit lay there wondering how he was going to escape, Fox came prowling along. He stumbled over the bag, for he did not see it in the shadows, and he plunged forward headlong to the ground with a great thud. He got up and rained kicks upon the bag. He was mad because he had been tripped. He kicked poor Rabbit's back until Rabbit cried in pain.

"Who are you in the bag?" asked Fox when he heard the cries.

"I am your friend Rabbit," was the answer.

"What are you doing, hiding in the bag?" asked Fox. Then Rabbit suddenly thought of a way of escape. He knew that Fox had long been looking for a wife, but that no one would have him as no one trusted him because his fame for treachery and slyness was so great.

"I am not hiding," he said. "The old woman who owns this garden wants me to marry her grand-daughter, and when I refused to do it she caught me and shut me up in this bag; she has just gone to bring the girl from her house, for she is determined to make me marry her here in the moonlight this very night. I don't want to marry her, for she is very big and fat, and I am very small and lean."

Then he cried "Boo-hoo-hoo" again, and Fox said, "I have been looking for a wife for a long time, and I like fat people. Let me get into the bag in your place, and I will marry the grand-daughter instead, for the old woman will not know me in the shadows." And Rabbit gladly agreed. Then Fox untied the bag and let Rabbit out and got into the bag himself, and Rabbit tied up the mouth of the bag and hurried away as quickly as he could.

Soon the old woman came back, carrying her axe. She sharpened it on a stone and said, "Now I will kill you, and you will thief no more in my garden. A poor woman must live untroubled by such pilfering rogues." When Fox heard these words and the sound of the stone upon the axe, he knew that he had been deceived by Rabbit, and when the old woman opened the bag, he sprang nimbly out with a sudden bound and was away before she could catch him. He swore by the Starlight that he would have vengeance on Rabbit. All night long he searched for him and all the next day, but he could not find him. At last in the gathering twilight he came upon him in an open space in the forest, on the other side of a stream, eating his fill of wild vegetables. Fox tried to coax him across the stream to his side, for he himself was afraid of the water, but Rabbit would not go.

"Why don't you eat some cheese?" said Rabbit; "there is a big round cheese in the stream." Fox looked into the

stream where Rabbit pointed, and there he saw the reflection of the big round yellow moon. He thought it was a round cheese, and he plunged in after it, for he was very fond of cheese. Rabbit hoped he would be drowned, but the stream was shallow and Fox climbed out with no cheese and with only a bad fright and a wet coat for his pains. He was very cross, for he knew that Rabbit wished to do him harm, but he kept his anger to himself. Rabbit was still eating contentedly.

“What are you eating?” said Fox, trying to hold him in talk until he could think of a plan to catch him.

“I am eating good ripe fruit,” said Rabbit. “I am eating Indian melons.”

“Throw me one,” said Fox, for he was hungry. Rabbit threw him a large round wild cucumber all covered with green prickles.

“Swallow it whole at a mouthful,” said Rabbit; “it is very good that way.”

It was night and the moon shone dimly through the trees, and Fox could not see what he was eating. He swallowed the cucumber at one gulp, as Rabbit had told him, but the prickles stuck in his throat and he almost choked to death. And while he was choking and spluttering and trying to cough up the cucumber, Rabbit ran away as fast as he could, laughing heartily to himself. Fox knew that he had been tricked again, and this time he swore he would kill Rabbit as soon as he could find him; he resolved that when next he saw him he would not give him a moment to live.

Rabbit hid among the dry underbrush all the next day. But when the day went down and the sky was red in the west and the wind was very still, he sat on a log, as was his custom, and played softly on his flute, for he was a great player on the Indian pipe. While he was playing, Fox suddenly came upon him unawares. Rabbit saw him watching him through the trees close at hand, but although taken by surprise, he was not to be outdone.

Fox was just about to spring upon him when Rabbit said, “The Chief’s daughter has just been married to a great warrior, and the wedding party will soon be along this way. They asked me to sit here and make music for them with my flute as they pass by. They have promised to pay me well, and they have invited me to the wedding feast. Come and join me and play too, and you will be well paid, and we will go to the wedding feast together and get good things to eat.”

Fox thought he would let Rabbit get the pay he had been promised, for he was a very greedy fellow; then he would rob him and kill him, and he would take his flute and go to the wedding feast alone, and his vengeance would then be complete. So he decided to let his anger cool for a little time. And he said, "I have no flute, and I cannot therefore make music; but I will sit with you to see the wedding guests go by."

But Rabbit said, "Take my flute. I have another at home. I will go and get it, for there is yet time."

So Fox took the flute and began to play loudly, and Rabbit slipped hurriedly out of sight, pretending to go for his Indian pipe. But he resolved to make an end of Fox, for he feared for his own life, and instead of going home, he set the underbrush on fire. He kindled the fire at many places all around the log on which Fox sat. Fox could not hear the fire crackling because of the loud music of his flute, and he thought the light was but the bright light of the moon. And the fire was almost upon him before he knew that he was in danger. Then he tried to get away, but on all sides his escape was stopped by the flames and he could not find an opening. At last, in despair, to save his life, he jumped through the ring of fire.

He escaped with his life, but his eyelids were singed, and his sleek black coat with its silver spots was scorched to a red-brown color. He was in great pain. He concluded that Rabbit was too clever for him to cope with, and he resolved to leave him alone and to forego his revenge, for he was glad to get away with his life. But he decided never again to live on friendly terms with Rabbit. And since that night Rabbit and Fox have never hunted together. And to the present day the descendants of this Fox have red eyes and a red-brown coat, because Rabbit scorched their ancestor in the olden times.

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