

Rabbit and the Grainbuyers

Canadian Fairy Tales

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Once, long ago when the Indians lived in Canada before the white men came, Rabbit was very lazy. He had worked long for Glooskap, the great ruler of the people, as a forest guide, but his toil was not appreciated or rewarded. He saw all the other animals idling their time away, taking their ease all day long, and doing nothing but filling their bellies with food, and sleeping all the afternoon in the hot sunshine. And he said, "Why should I work for other people when nobody works for me? I will take mine ease like all the other animals."

So he sulked in his little house for a long time and could not be coaxed or driven to do any work. But as he was a lonely fellow who always lived by himself with very few friends in the world except little children, he soon got tired of this lazy life. For by nature, he was industrious and energetic and he always liked to be doing something or prowling alone in the forest. So he said, "I must find some work to do or I shall surely lose my wits. But it must be labour that brings profit to myself and not to other people."

For a long time Rabbit puzzled his brains thinking of a business or a profession to follow. But nothing seemed to be to his liking. At last one day he saw some Indians trading skins and knives. One was selling and others were buying and they seemed to be making a great deal of money without doing very much work. Rabbit thought that here indeed was an easy way to make a living. Then he saw Duck coming along carrying a basket of eggs. He said to Duck, "How do you get along in the world? You seem to do nothing but eat and cackle and swim in the pond. You never seem to work."

And Duck said, "I lay eggs and sell them in exchange for corn. Why don't you lay eggs? It is all very easy." But

Rabbit knew that Duck was only laughing at him, and that he was not meant to make a living in that way.

Then he met Bee on the forest path and he said, "How do you make a living, you wandering bee? You do nothing but gad about all day long, going from flower to flower dressed in your good clothes of yellow and black and always singing your tuneless song?"

And Bee said, "I make honey and wax and sell them. I have a great store for sale now. Why don't you do as I do? I am always happy. I always sing at my work, and what's more, my song is not tuneless. And just for your impudence, take that." And so saying he stung Rabbit on the nose and went on his way, singing his droning song. Rabbit rubbed his nose in the earth to ease his pain and he swore vengeance on Bee, for he knew that Bee too was only laughing at him. But he could think of no way to make an easy living, for he had nothing to sell but his coat, and he could not very well barter that, for winter would soon be coming on. He was very angry and troubled and he envied Duck and Bee their good fortune because of their eggs and honey and wax.

At last he thought of the Indians he had watched buying and selling skins. "I have it," he cried, "I have it. I will become a great merchant. I will be a great trader. I will live on a farm where they grow corn and vegetables, and I will steal them and sell them to the other animals and thereby make a great store of money. I shall be very rich in a short time." So, very happy, he went to a field near which was a vegetable garden. And in it were growing Indian corn and all kinds of grain, which he knew the other birds and animals would gladly buy. So he made a sign and put it up in front of his house, and it said, "Buy Rabbit's corn, the best in all the land; it will grow without rain; there is only a small quantity left. Orders taken here." Then he sat in his house and waited.

Soon many buyers began to arrive. They were curious, and they wanted to see what kind of a merchant Rabbit would make. Rabbit explained to them that he was only an agent, that they must pay him their money, and he would take it to the farmer, and deliver their grain at his house one week from that day. The buyers paid him the money and went away, for they were afraid the farmer would kill them if they went themselves for the corn. They left a great store of money with Rabbit. That night when the moon rose over the hills Rabbit went to the field of corn nearby. But the farmer had spied him thieving that afternoon, and he had placed around his corn a fence of strong netting which poor Rabbit could not get through. And he had also placed around the field many watchdogs which growled and snarled and frightened thieves away. Night after night Rabbit tried to slip into the field, but without success, and the week passed and still he had no corn for the customers who, he

knew, would soon be arriving for their goods. And meanwhile he had spent all their money and he knew they would all fall upon him and kill him if he failed to keep his word and deliver their purchases.

At last when the day agreed on arrived, he saw his customers coming for their grain. And he hoped that his tricks would save him as they had saved him many times before. He sat in his yard playing his flute, when Earth-Worm, the first customer arrived. "Good day," said Rabbit. "Good day," said Earth-Worm, "I have come for my corn, for a week has gone by."

"Very good," said Rabbit, "but first we shall have dinner. It will be ready in a few minutes. You must be hungry after your long journey." As they sat waiting for their dinner they saw Duck, another customer, waddling up the path with her basket on her neck. And Rabbit said, "Will not old Duck who comes here want to eat you up?"

And Earth-Worm said, "Yes, yes, where shall I hide?" and he was much excited. "Hide under this clam-shell," said Rabbit. So Earth-Worm crawled under the clamshell and sat very still, trembling for his life.

When Duck arrived, Rabbit said, "Good morning." "Good morning, Mr. Merchant," said Duck, wishing to be polite. "I have come for my corn, for it is the appointed day of delivery."

"True, true," said Rabbit, "but first we shall have dinner. It will be ready in a few minutes. It will be an honor for me to have you dine with me." As they sat waiting for their dinner, Rabbit said, "Would you care to eat an Earth-Worm before your dinner? It would be a good appetizer for you."

And Duck said, "Thank you very much. I am very fond of Earth-Worms." Rabbit lifted the clam-shell and poor Earth-Worm was quickly gobbled up by Duck. And Rabbit, laughing to himself, thought, "Now I am getting rid of my customers."

As Rabbit and Duck sat talking, they saw Fox trotting up the path. He was another customer coming for his corn. And Rabbit said courteously, "Madam, I see your old enemy Fox approaching. He will probably wish to eat you up; you had better hide."

And Duck with her feathers all ruffled with excitement said, "Yes, yes, where shall I hide?" And Rabbit said, "Hide under this basket." So Duck crawled under the over-turned basket and sat very still.

Fox soon came in and said, "Good day, Rabbit. I have come for my corn, for I am in sore need of it to catch

chickens, and the seven days have passed.”

“You are very punctual,” said Rabbit, “but first let us have dinner. It will be ready in a few minutes. It will make you stronger to carry your heavy load.” As they sat waiting for their dinner, Rabbit said, “Listen, Fox. Would you care to eat a fat Duck now? It would be a tasty bit for you before you dine.”

And Fox said, “You are very kind. I always like to eat a Duck before my dinner.” Rabbit knocked over the basket and Fox quickly devoured poor Duck until not a feather remained. And Rabbit laughed to himself and said, “Surely I am getting rid of my customers very easily.”

As Rabbit and Fox sat talking over old times in the forest, they saw Bear, coming lumbering up the path, tossing his head from side to side, and sniffing the air. And Rabbit said, “Bear is in a bad temper to-day. I wonder what can be the cause.”

And Fox said, “This morning I stole all his honey and he saw me running away.” “He scents you here,” said Rabbit, “will he not kill you if he finds you? Perhaps you ought to hide.” “Yes, yes,” said Fox, “but where shall I hide?” “Hide in this box,” said Rabbit, and Fox sprang into the box, and Rabbit closed down the lid.

When Bear arrived he said gruffly, for he was in a bad temper, “Good day, Rabbit. I have come for my corn and I must have it quickly, for I must be on my way. It is the appointed time.”

“It is indeed the appointed time,” said Rabbit, “but first we shall have dinner. It will be ready in a few minutes and I never let a wayfarer leave my house without first taking nourishment. I have today a dish of fresh fish which you like very well, and we have never yet dined together.” And Bear agreed to wait and his gruffness left him at the thought of his good meal, for he was a great fish-eater, and he talked pleasantly.

Then Rabbit said, “I have a secret to tell you. Let me whisper it.” He put his mouth close to Bear’s ear and said, “Old Fox, the sly thief who stole all your honey this morning is hiding in the box by your side. He came here to boast about his theft and he laughed loudly to me as he told me how easily you were cheated. He called you Lack-Brains.”

Bear was very angry and at once he knocked the lid from the box and killed Fox with one blow of his powerful paw. And Rabbit said to himself, “What luck I am having; there is another of my customers gone.” But he

wondered how he was to get rid of Bear, and he scratched his head in thought.

While Bear and Rabbit sat talking, they saw Rabbit's last customer, the Hunter, coming along. Bear would have run away, but it was too late. "Will the Hunter not want to kill you?" said Rabbit, glad to think that here was the end of poor Bear.

"Indeed, he will," said Bear. "Oh dear, oh dear, where shall I hide?"

"Hide under my bed in my house," said Rabbit. Poor Bear quickly dashed into the house and crawled under Rabbit's bed with great difficulty for he was very fat and the bed was very low and he had to lay himself out flat on the floor, but he was comfortable in the thought that he would soon escape.

When Hunter arrived he said, "Good day, Rabbit, I have come for my corn, for my children need bread."

"You shall have it," said Rabbit. "But first we must have a bite to eat. I have not very much to offer you, but I can give you in a few minutes some hot pancakes and fresh maple syrup." The Hunter was well pleased with the thought of such a good meal and he said he would be glad to wait. Then Rabbit said, "Would you like some bear meat for your children, and a good warm bearskin for your hearth?"

And the Hunter said, "Indeed, I would. But in these days such luxuries are hard to find." And Rabbit said, "Oh no, they are not; under my bed in my house, a good fat bear is hiding. He is lying flat on his back, and you can easily kill him." The Hunter hurried to the house, and sure enough there he found Bear hiding under the bed, flat upon his back. He killed him with a blow and skinned him and cut him up into small pieces and put the meat and the skin into a bag to take home to his children.

But while he was about it, Rabbit slipped away into the forest, saying to himself, "Now I have got rid of all my customers and I am safe. But the life of a merchant is not to my liking. I will not be a trader any more. I will gather corn for myself, but not to sell to others." And he ran quickly away and hid himself in a dense thicket.

When the Hunter went to look for Rabbit, he could not find him, nor was he able to find his grain. And although he thought he had fared pretty well by getting so much bear meat, he swore vengeance on Rabbit for his deceit, and to this day he searches for him, and if he meets him, he will not let him escape. And Rabbit lives by himself and keeps away from the Hunter as far as he can, for he fears him because of the trick he played

upon him in the olden days.

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