

Sparrow's Search for the Rain

Canadian Fairy Tales

Canadian Native American North American

Intermediate

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Long ago, in a village near the sea, many Indian people were living. Among them was a very nice old warrior who had been given great power at his birth, and who, therefore, could do many wonderful deeds. There was nothing that was beyond his understanding, for he knew all things. His wife had long been dead, but he had one daughter. She was very beautiful and gentle, and she was as nearly perfect as any woman could be. She took no interest in frivolous things and she lived a very quiet life, but all the people liked her well, and she was always welcome wherever she went. Her old father was very proud of her, and he said boastfully, "She has inherited much of my wisdom, and some day she will marry a great man." But the girl on her part had little thought of marriage or of men, for she said they had small minds, and she would rather live alone than listen always to their boastfulness and their foolish chatter.

Soon the daughter's fame spread far and wide through the sea-coast villages, and many suitors came seeking for her hand. But her father said, "I have nothing to say. She will make her own choice. She must please herself. For today children please themselves and not their parents."

And she said, "I will marry only some one who can amuse me and interest me and keep me company. I have scant liking for dull people." One day Loon came to see her. He was very good looking although he was somewhat tall and skinny, and his neck was a bit longer and more scrawny than ordinary, but he wore good clothes and he had great skill as a fisherman. He came because he thought he was very handsome, and he believed that his good looks would win the maiden. But she had no love for Loon, for he had not a word to say.

When she talked to him he only stared, and at last he burst out into loud and foolish laughter. Then the maiden said, "You have a small mind like the others," and in disgust she withdrew from his presence.

Then Fox came in an effort to win the maiden as his wife. And for a whole day he cut capers, and chased his tail round and round in a circle, trying to amuse the serious girl. But he did not succeed very well, and like Loon, he departed in despair. And many others came, but they met the same fate, and at last the girl decided to see no more of them, but to live alone with her father. The young men of the village were all very angry because the girl had spoken of them all so scornfully, and often they talked among themselves of her proud and haughty air.

"She calls us Scattered-Brains," said one.

"She says we have small minds," said another.

"She must pay for these insults," said a third. So they vowed that they would somehow break her proud spirit and bring her sorrow because of her ideas and her decision to stay single all her life. One of the great men of the village was Whirlwind. He could make himself invisible, and he was often guilty of many wicked pranks.

So the young men went to him and asked his aid in humbling the pride of the haughty maiden. As they were talking to him, they saw the girl approaching not far off. And quite unawares, Whirlwind rushed towards her and knocked her down in the mud and tore her hat from her head and swept it into the sea. The young men looked on at her plight and they all laughed loudly, and the girl was very much ashamed. She went back home and told her father what had happened, and showed him her soiled clothes and her blown hair falling about her face. Her father was very angry, and he said, "Whirlwind must pay for this. He shall be banished at once."

Then her father went to the Chief and made complaint against Whirlwind, and the Chief decreed that Whirlwind must leave the village at once. He did not consider very carefully what the result of this decree might be, and he acted hastily and without thought, for he feared to differ from the wise man. So Whirlwind prepared to leave the place. Now his best friend was Rain. Rain had been born without eyes. He was completely blind, and Whirlwind always had to lead him along wherever he wished to go.

So Rain said, "If you are leaving the village, I want to leave it too, for I cannot live here without you. I will be helpless if I have no one to lead me." So the two set out together, Whirlwind leading old Rain along by his side. Where they went no man knew, for they had told nobody of their destination. They were gone for many months before the people missed them very much. Then their absence began to be felt in all the land, for there

was no wind and there was no rain.

At last the Chief summoned a council, and the decree of banishment against Whirlwind was revoked. The people decided to send messengers to the two wandering ones to tell them what had happened and to bring them back. So they first sent Fox out on the quest. Fox went through the land for many weeks, running as fast as he could over many roads, in and out among marshy lake shores and over high wooded mountains. He searched every cave and crevice, but he had no success. Not a leaf or a blade of grass was stirring, and the country was all parched and the grass was withered brown and the streams were all getting dry. At last, after a fruitless search, he came home and shamefully confessed that his quest had failed.

Then the people called on Bear to continue the search. And Bear went lumbering over the earth, sniffing the air, and turning over logs and great rocks with his powerful shoulders, and venturing into deep caverns. And he made many inquiries, and he asked the Mountain Ash, "Where is Whirlwind?"

But Mountain Ash said, "I do not know. I have not seen him for many months."

And he asked the Red Fir, and the Pine, and the Aspen, which always sees Whirlwind first, but they were all ignorant of his whereabouts. So Bear came home and said, "Not a trace of either of them have I found."

The Chief was very angry because of the failure of Fox and Bear, but the wise man said, "The animals are useless in a quest like this. Let us try the birds. They often succeed where the animals fail." And the Chief agreed, for the land was in great distress. Many fishing-boats lay silent on the sea near the coast unable to move because Whirlwind was away, and the wells and streams were all dry because Rain was absent, and the grass and the flowers were withering to decay.

So they called the birds to their aid. The great Crane searched in the shallows and among the reeds, thrusting his long neck into deep places, and Crow looked among the hills, and Kingfisher flew far out to sea, but they all came back and said, "We, too, have failed. The wandering ones are nowhere on the land or upon the sea." Then little Sparrow took up the search. Before he set out, he plucked from his breast a small down-feather and fastened it to a stick no bigger than a wisp of hay. He held the stick in his bill and flew off.

For many days he went towards the south-land, all the time watching the feather hanging to the stick in his bill. But it hung there motionless. One day, after he had traveled a great distance, he saw the down-feather moving very gently, and he knew that Whirlwind must be not far away. He went in the direction from which

the feather was blowing. Soon he saw beneath him soft green grass and wonderful flowers of varied colours, and trees with green leaves and many rippling streams of running water. And he said to himself, "At last I have found the wanderers."

He followed a little stream for some distance until it ended in a cave in the hills. In front of the cave many flowers were blooming and the grass was soft and green, and the tall grasses were nodding their heads very gently. He knew that those he was seeking were inside, and he entered the cave very quietly. Just beyond the door a fire was smouldering and near it lay Rain and Whirlwind both fast asleep. Sparrow tried to wake them with his bill and his cries, but they were sleeping too soundly. Then he took a coal from the fire and put it on Rain's back, but it spluttered and fizzled and soon went out. He tried another, but the same thing happened. Then he took a third coal, and this time Rain woke up. He was much surprised to hear a stranger in the cave, but he could not see him because he was blind. So he woke up Whirlwind to protect him.

Then Sparrow told them of the great trouble in the north country and of the great hardship and sorrow their absence had brought to the people, and of how sadly they had been missed and of the decision of the council to call them back. And Whirlwind said, "We shall return to-morrow if we are so badly needed. You may go back and tell your people that we are coming. We shall be there the day after you arrive." So Sparrow, feeling very proud of his success, flew back home. But when he arrived after many days, he went first to his own people to tell them the good news.

And the Sparrow-people all gathered together and held a feast of celebration, and they twittered and danced and made a great hub-bub in their excitement because Rain was coming back. Then Sparrow went to the Chief and said, "Oh, Chief, I have found Rain and Whirlwind and tomorrow they will be here," and he told the story of his flight to the south and of his discovery. And the Chief said, "Because of your success, you will never be hunted for game or killed for food."

The next morning the two travelers who had been so long away came back to the land. Whirlwind came first and great clouds of dust foretold his coming, and the sea dashed high against the rocks, and the trees shrieked and tossed their heads, all dancing gaily because of his return. When Whirlwind had passed by, Rain came along following close, because of his blindness. For several days Rain stayed with the people and the flowers bloomed and the grass was green again and the wells and streams were no longer dry.

And since that time Wind and Rain have never long been absent from the Atlantic Coast. And to this day the Sparrow-people know when Rain is coming, and to signal his approach they gather together and twitter and

hop along and make a great hub-bub, just as they did when their ancestor found him by means of his down-feather in the olden days. But the Indians have been true to the Chief's promise, and they will not hunt Sparrows for game, nor kill them for food or for their feathers. For they remember that of all the birds it was old Sparrow who long ago searched successfully for the Rain.

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