



The Tobacco Fairy from The Blue Hills

Canadian Fairy Tales

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Intermediate
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A man and his wife and two little children were living long ago on the shores of a lake surrounded by large trees, deep in the Canadian forest. They lived very happily together, and as game was plentiful, they wanted for nothing. As the children grew up they became each day more beautiful and gentle, until the old women of the tribe said, "They are too good and lovely for this world; their home is surely elsewhere in the West." Before they grew to maturity a cruel plague spread over the land and carried them off with its ravages. Their mother was the next to go, slowly growing weaker, and wasting away before the eyes of her husband, who was powerless to save her.

The man was now left all alone upon the earth. The joy of his life had gone with his wife and children, and he went about in great loneliness and sorrow. Life was long to him and dreary, and often he wished that he too was dead. But at last he roused himself and said, "I will go about doing good. I will spend my life helping others, and perhaps in that way I can find peace." So he worked hard and did all the good he could for the weaker and the poorer people of his tribe. He was held in high esteem by all the people of the village, and in their affection for him they all called him "Grandfather." He grew to be very old, and because of his good deeds he found great happiness. But he was still very solitary, and the days and evenings were long and lonely, and as he grew older and his work grew less, he found it hard to pass away the time, for he could only sit alone and

dream of his vanished youth and of his absent friends.

One day he sat thinking by the lake. Many people of the village were around him, but as usual he sat alone. Suddenly a large flock of birds, looking like great black clouds, came flying from the blue hills in the distance toward the shore of the lake. They wheeled and circled about, and hovered long over the trees, uttering strange cries. The people had never before seen such large birds, and they were much afraid and said, "They are not ordinary creatures. They foreshadow some strange happening." Suddenly one of the birds fluttered for an instant and fell slowly to the earth with an arrow in its breast. No one in the village had shot at the flock, and where the arrow had come from no man knew. The mystery frightened the people still more, and they looked to the old man for counsel, for they knew that he was very wise.

The fallen bird lay fluttering on the ground, seemingly in pain. The other birds circled about it for a short time, uttering loud cries. Then they screamed and called to each other and flew back to the distant blue hills, leaving the fallen bird behind them with the arrow sticking in its breast. The old man was not frightened by the sight. He said, "I will go to the stricken bird; perhaps I can heal its wound." But the people, in great fear, said, "Do not go, Grandfather, the bird will do you harm."

But the old man answered, "It can do no harm to me. My work is ended and my life is almost done. My sky is dark, for I am full of sorrow, and with me it is already the twilight of time. I am alone in the world, for my kindred have gone. I am not afraid of death, for to me it would be very welcome. What matters it if I should die?" And he went to the stricken bird to see if he could help it.

As he went along, his path suddenly grew dark, but as he drew nearer, a bright flame suddenly swept down from the sky to the place where the bird was lying. There was a flash of fire, and when the old man looked he saw that the bird had been completely burned up. When he came to where it had lain, nothing but black ashes remained. He stirred up the ashes with his stick, and lying in the center he found a large living coal of fire. As he looked at it, in a twinkling it disappeared, and in its place was a strange little figure like a little man, no bigger than his thumb. "Hello, Grandfather," it called, "do not strike me, for I have been sent to help you."

"Who are you?" asked the old man.

"I am one of the Little People from the distant blue hills," said the tiny boy. Then the old man knew that the

little fellow was one of the strange fairy people of the mountains, of whom he had often heard. "What do you want?" he asked.

"I have been sent to you with a precious gift," answered the little man. The old man wondered greatly, but he said nothing.

Then the fairy from the blue hills said, "You are old and lonely. You have done many noble deeds, and you have always gone about bringing good to others. In that way you have found peace. And because of your good life, I have been sent to bring you more contentment. Your work is done, but your life is not yet ended, and you have still a long time to dwell upon the earth. You must live out your mortal course. You are longing always for your dead wife and children, and you are often thinking of your youth, and with you the days are long and time hangs heavy. But I have been sent to you with a gift that will help you to pass the time more pleasantly."

Then the little man gave him a number of small seeds and said, "Plant these at once, here, in the ashes from which I have just risen." The old man did as he was told. At once the seeds sprouted and great leaves grew from them, and soon the place where the bird had been burned up became a large field of Tobacco.

The fairy then gave him a large pipe and said, "Dry these leaves and place them in this pipe and smoke them. You will have great contentment and when you have nothing to do, it will help you to pass the time away, and when no one is with you it will be a companion. And it will bring you many dreams of the future and of the past. And when the smoke curls upwards it will have for you many visions of those you loved, and you will see their faces in the smoke as you sit alone in the twilight."

The old man was very thankful for the fairy's gift. But the little man said, "Teach other old men how to use it, so that they, too, may possess it and enjoy it."

Then the fairy quickly disappeared, going towards the distant blue hills, and he was never seen in the village again. And with his pipe and his tobacco the old man went back to his dreaming, more content than before. In this way Tobacco was brought to the Indians in the old days.

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