

The Boy Who Set a Snare for the Sun

by H. R. Schoolcraft

At the time when the animals reigned on the earth, they had killed all the people but a Girl and her little brother; and these two were living in fear in an out-of-the-way place. The Boy was a perfect little pigmy, and never grew beyond the size of a mere infant; but the Girl increased with her years, so that the task of providing food and shelter fell wholly upon her. She went out daily to get wood for the lodge-fire, and she took her little brother with her that no mishap might befall them, for he was too little to leave alone. A big bird of a mischievous disposition might have flown away with him. She made him a bow and arrows, and one day she said to him: "My little brother, I will leave you behind where I have been gathering the wood; you must hide yourself, and you will soon see the snowbirds come and peck the worms out of the logs which I have piled up. Shoot one of them and bring it home."

He obeyed her, and tried his best to kill one, but he came home unsuccessful. His sister told him that he must not despair, but try again the next day.

She accordingly left him at the gathering place of the wood, and returned to the lodge. Toward nightfall she heard his little footsteps crackling through the snow, and he hurried in and threw down, with an air of triumph, one of the birds which he had killed. "My sister," said he, "I wish you to skin it, and stretch the skin, and when I have killed more I will have a coat made out of them."

"But what shall we do with the body?" said she; for they had always up to that time lived upon greens and berries.

"Cut it in two," he answered, "and season our stew with one half of it at a time."

It was their first dish of game, and they greatly relished it.

The Boy kept on in his efforts, and in the course of time he killed ten birds, out of the skins of which his sister made him a pretty little coat. As he was small, there was one bird skin to spare.

"Sister," said he, one day, as he marched up and down before the lodge, dressed in his new coat and fancying himself the Greatest Little Fellow in the World—as he was, for there was no other beside him—"My sister, are we really alone in the world, or are we making believe? Is there nobody else living? And tell me, was all this great broad earth and this huge big sky made for a little boy and girl like you and me?"

"By no means," she said. And then she explained to him that there were many folks very unlike a harmless girl and boy, such as they were, who lived in another part of the earth, and that if he would live blameless and not endanger his life, he must never go where they were. This only served to inflame the Boy's curiosity, and he soon took his bow and arrows and went in that direction. After walking a long while and meeting no one, he became tired and stretched himself upon a high, green knoll, where the day's warmth had melted off the snow.

It was a charming place to lie upon, and he fell asleep. While he slept the Sun beat so hot upon him that it singed his bird-skin coat and so shrivelled and shrunk it upon his body as to wake him up.

When he saw the mischief the Sun's fiery beams had played with the coat he was so proud of, he flew into a great rage and scolded the Sun in a terrible way for a little boy no higher than a man's knee. "Do not think you are too high for me to get you," said he; "I shall revenge myself, oh Sun. I will have you for a plaything yet."

When he reached home he told his sister how unfortunate he had been, and bitterly bewailed the spoiling of his new coat. He would not eat, not so much as a single berry. He lay down, like one who fasts, without changing his position for ten days, nor could his sister persuade him to get up. At the end of ten days he turned over on the other side and lay in that position for ten days.

When he got up he was very pale, but very determined. He ordered his sister to make him a snare, as he meant to catch the Sun. She said she had nothing, but presently she brought forward a deer's sinew, which their father had left, and made it into a string suitable for a noose. The moment she showed it to her brother he said it would not do, and angrily bade her find something else. She said she had nothing else, but presently remembered the bird's skin that had been left over when the coat was made, and this she made into a string. With this the Boy was more vexed than over the other. "The Sun has had enough of my bird skins," he said; "find something else."

She did not dare to say again that she had nothing, so she went out of the lodge murmuring to herself, "Was there ever so obstinate a boy?" Luckily she thought of her hair, and pulling out some of it here and there from among her beautiful black locks, she quickly braided it into a fine cord and handed it to her brother.

The moment his eye fell on it he was delighted, and immediately began to run it back and forth through his hands, trying its strength. Satisfied that the long, glossy coil was strong enough, he wound it around his shoulders and set out from the lodge a little after midnight, his object being to catch the Sun before he rose.

Having fixed his snare firmly at a place where the Sun must strike the land as it rose above the earth, he waited patiently. The instant it appeared he drew the cord tight, so that the Sun was held fast and could not rise.

Soon there was a great commotion among the animals who ruled the earth. They had no light, and ran to and fro, calling out to each other and asking what had happened. They called together a council to discuss the matter. An old Dormouse, suspecting what was the trouble, proposed that some one should be appointed to go out and cut the cord. This was a bold thing to do, as the rays of the Sun would surely burn whoever ventured near them. No one seemed willing to run the risk, so the Dormouse himself undertook to go. The Dormouse was, at this time, the largest animal in the world. When he stood up he looked like a mountain.

He made haste to the place where the Sun lay ensnared, and as it came nearer and nearer its back began to smoke and burn with the heat, and the whole top of its huge body was turned in a very short time to enormous heaps of ashes. The Dormouse did succeed, however, in cutting the cord with its teeth, and the Sun blazed up into the high, blue sky, as beautiful as ever.

The poor Dormouse paid the price of his bravery. So great was the heat of the Sun, that he found himself, when it was all over, shrunk to a little bit of a thing, and that is the reason why the Dormouse is one of the tiniest creatures on the earth.

The Little Boy returned home, when he discovered that the Sun had escaped his snare and devoted himself entirely to hunting. “If the beautiful hair of my sister would not hold the Sun fast, nothing in the world could,” he said. “I was not born, a little fellow like me, to look after the Sun. It takes some one greater and wiser than I to do that.”

Whereupon he went out and shot ten more snowbirds, for at that he was very expert, and had a new bird-skin coat made, which was prettier than the one he had worn before.

Source:

Schoolcraft, H.R. “The Boy Who Set a Snare for the Sun.” *The Junior Classics, Volume 2, Fairy Tales and Myths*. Ed. William Patten. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1912. 460 – 464. Electronic.