

Rabbit and The Moon-Man

by Cyrus MacMillan

Once, long ago, Rabbit lived with his old grandmother deep in the Canadian forest, far from all other people. He was a great hunter, and all around, far and near, he laid snares and set traps to catch game for food. It was winter, and he caught many little animals and birds. He brought them home daily to feed himself and his old grandmother, and he was well pleased with his success. But after some weeks had passed he was unable to catch any game. He always found his traps and snares empty, although many tracks were always around them, and there were many signs that animals were prowling about. He knew then that he was being robbed nightly, and that a thief was pilfering his traps. It was very cold and the snow lay deep in the forest, and Rabbit and his old grandmother were in dire need of food. Every morning Rabbit rose very early and hurried off to his traps, but always he found them empty, for the thief had been ahead of him. He was greatly puzzled, for he could not think who the thief was.

At last one morning, after a new fall of snow, he found the mark of a long foot near his traps, and he knew it was the foot of the game-robber. It was the longest foot-print he had ever seen, long and narrow and very light, like a moonbeam. And Rabbit said, "Now I shall rise earlier in the morning, and I shall go to my traps ahead of the thief and take my game, so that they will all be empty when he comes." Each morning he rose earlier to catch the thief, but the man of the long foot was always there before him, and his game was always gone. No matter how early Rabbit got up, the thief was always ahead of him and his traps were always empty.

So Rabbit said to his old grandmother, "The man of the long foot, who robs my traps, is always up ahead of me, no matter how early I rise. I will make a snare from a bow-string, and I will watch all this night, and I will surely catch him." He made a trap from a stout bow-string and set it beside his snares, and took the end of the bow-string some distance away to a clump of trees, behind which he hid. He hoped that the thief would step into the trap; then he would pull the bow-string and tie him fast to a tree. He sat very quiet, waiting for the man of the long foot to appear. It was moonlight when he set out, but soon it grew very dark in the forest. The Moon suddenly disappeared. But the stars were all shining on the white snow and there were no clouds in the sky, and Rabbit wondered what had happened to the Moon. He waited very still and a little frightened in the starlight.

Soon he heard some one coming, sneaking stealthily through the trees. Then he saw a white light which dazzled his eyes. The light went towards the snares, until it stopped just at the trap Rabbit had set. Then Rabbit pulled the bow-string, closed the trap as he had hoped, and tied the string fast to a tree. He heard sounds of a struggle, and he saw the white light move from side to side, but he knew that he had his prisoner fast and that the man of the long foot was caught at last. He was much afraid of the white light, and he ran home as fast as he could and told his old grandmother that he had caught the game-robber in the trap, and that he did not know who he was, for he was too frightened to look. And his grandmother said, "You must go back and see who it is, and tell him he must stop robbing your snares." But Rabbit said, "I do not want to go until daylight, for the Moon has gone down and the forest is very dark." But his grandmother said, "You must go." So poor Rabbit, although he was very frightened by what he had seen, set out again for his traps.

When he drew near to his snares he saw that the white light was still shining. It was so bright that his eyes were dazzled and he had to stop far from it. Then he approached nearer, but his eyes soon

became very sore. There was a stream flowing beside him, and he bathed his eyes in the cold water, but it brought him no relief, and his eyes felt hot and red, and tears fell from them because of the dazzling light. Then he took great handfuls of snow and threw snowballs at the light, hoping thereby to put it out. But when the snowballs came near to the light they melted and fell down like rain. Then, with his eyes still smarting, Rabbit in his rage scooped up great handfuls of soft black mud from the bottom of the stream, and forming it into balls, he threw them with all his force at the white light. He heard them strike something with a dull thud, and he heard loud yells from the prisoner—the man of the long foot—behind the shining light. Then a voice came from the light, saying, "Why did you snare me? Come and untie me at once. I am the Man in the Moon. It is near to the morning, and before dawn I must be on my way home. You have already spotted my face with mud, and if you do not loose me at once I shall kill all your tribe."

Poor Rabbit was more frightened than before, and he ran home and told his old grandmother what had happened. And his grandmother was also very frightened, for she thought that no good could come of it. And she told Rabbit to go back at once and untie the Man in the Moon, for the night was almost spent, and the dawn would soon be breaking. So poor Rabbit, trembling in his fear, went back to his traps. From a great distance he cried, "I will untie you if you will never again rob my snares, and if you will never come back to earth." And the prisoner in the trap promised, and said, "I swear it by my white light." Then Rabbit approached very carefully. He had to shut his eyes and grope his way because of the bright light, and his lip quivered because of the great heat. At last he rushed in and cut the bow-string snare with his teeth, and the Man in the Moon hurried on his way, for he could already see the dawn in the East. But Rabbit was almost blinded while he was about it, and his shoulders were badly scorched. And ever since that time Rabbit blinks and his eyelids are pink, and water runs from his eyes when he looks at a bright light; and his lip always quivers; and his shoulders are yellow, even when he wears his white winter coat, because of the great light and heat on the winter night long ago when he loosed the Man in the Moon from the snare. And since that night the Man in the Moon has never come back to earth. He stays at his task in the sky, lighting the forest by night; but he still bears on his face the marks of the black mud which Rabbit threw at him. And sometimes for several nights he goes away to a quiet place, where he tries to wash off the mud; and then the land is dark. But he never succeeds in cleaning himself, and when he comes back to his work the marks of Rabbit's mud-balls are still upon his shining face.

Source:

MacMillan, Cyrus. "Rabbit and The Moon-Man." *Canadian Fairy Tales*. Toronto: S.B. Gundy, 1922. 134 – 139. Electronic.