# The Song-Bird and the Healing Waters

Once when the snow lay very deep on the ground and the days were grey with frost, there was great sorrow in an Indian village. A dreadful plague had come upon the place and had carried away many of the people. Neither old nor young were proof against its ravages, and the weak and the strong fell helpless before its power. The people tried every means to get rid of the plague, but they had no success. And they prayed to all their good spirits to help them, but no help came. In the tribe was a young warrior who had lost his parents and all his brothers and sisters because of the dreaded disease. Now his young wife fell sick, and he was in great sorrow, for he thought that she would soon follow his parents into the Land of the Shadows. And so he went about in great fear, not knowing when the end would come.One day he met an old woman in the forest. "Why do you look so sorrowful?" she asked him. "I am sad because my young wife is going to die," he answered; "the plague will carry her off like the others." But the old woman said, "There is something that will save your wife from death. Far away in the East is a bird of sweet song which dwells close to the Healing Waters. Go until you find it. It will point you to the spring, the waters of which alone can heal." And the young man said, "I must find the Healing Waters. Wherever they may be upon the earth, I must find them." So he went home and said good-bye to his friends, and set out eastward on his quest.All the next day he searched eagerly for the Waters, listening always for the bird of the sweet song. But he found nothing. The snow lay deep in the forest and he moved along with difficulty. He met a rabbit in his path and he said, "Tell me where I shall find the Healing Spring?" But the rabbit scurried away over the snow and made no answer. Then he asked a bear, but he met with the same rebuff. Thus for many days and nights he wandered on, crossing rivers and climbing steep hills, but always without success.Then one day he emerged from the snow country and came to a land where the airs were warmer and where little streams were flowing. Suddenly he came upon the body of a dead man lying across his path. He stopped and buried the body, for he thought that it was not right to leave it lying bare upon the ground for the birds to peck at. That night as he went along in the moonlight he met a Fox in his path. "Hello," said the Fox. "What are you looking for so late at night in the forest?" And he answered, "I am looking for the bird of the sweet song, who will show me the way to the Healing Waters." And the Fox said, "I am the spirit of the man you buried yesterday by the forest path, and in return for your kindness to me I shall do a kindness to you. You have always been good to the animals and the birds, and you have never killed them needlessly, nor when you did not require them for clothing or for food. And you have always been careful of the flowers and the trees, and you have often protected them from harm. So now they want to be good to you, and I am going to guide you. But first you must rest, for you are tired from your long journey."Then the young man lay down to sleep and the Fox stood guard beside him. As he slept he dreamed. And in his dream he saw his wife pale and thin and worn, and as he looked he heard her singing a song of wonderful melody. Then he heard a waterfall rippling near him and it said, "Seek me, O warrior, and when you find me your wife shall live, for I am the Healing Waters." In the morning the Fox led him but a short distance through the forest and on the branch of a tree he heard a bird singing a song of wonderful melody, just as he had heard in his dream of the night before. He knew now that this was the bird of the sweet song of which the old woman in the forest had spoken. Then, as he listened, he heard the sound of a waterfall rippling not far away. He searched for it, but he could not find it. And Fox said, "You must seek it; you must not despair; it will not come to you unless you search." So he searched again, and soon he thought he heard a voice speaking beneath his feet. "Release us," it called, "set us free and your wife and your people shall be saved." He seized a sharp stick and dug rapidly into the earth where he had heard the voice. He worked eagerly and quickly, and he had not dug far when the spring gushed forth and boiled upwards carrying to the world its healing power. And the young man knew that at last he had found the cure for his ills. He plunged into the spring and bathed himself in the water, and all his weariness left him and he was strong again.Then the young man moulded from the soft earth a large pot. He baked it in the fire until it was quite hard. "Now," said the Fox spirit, "I will leave you. Your kindness has been rewarded. You will need me no more, for you have found the Healing Waters." And he disappeared as mysteriously as he had come. The young man filled his clay pot with the sparkling water and hastened back to his home, running through the forest with the speed of the wind, because of his renewed strength.When he reached his native village, the people met him with sad faces, for the plague was still raging and they told him that his young wife was about to pass to the Land of the Shadows. But he hurried to his home, and he forced some of the Healing Waters between his wife's parched lips, and bathed her hands and her brow until she fell into a deep slumber. He watched by her side until she awoke, and when sleep left her she was well again. Then with his Healing Waters he cured all the people in the village, and the cruel plague left them and there was no more sickness in the land. And since that time no plague has spread among his tribe. In this way the Mineral Springs, the places of Healing Waters, came upon the earth, bearing health and happiness wherever they rise, and accompanied always by the songs of birds.

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