# The Toad-Woman

Great good luck once happened to a young woman who was living all alone in the woods with nobody near her but her little dog; for, to her surprise, she found fresh meat every morning at her door. She was very curious to know who it was that supplied her, and watching one morning, just as the sun had risen, she saw a handsome young man gliding away into the forest. Having seen her, he became her husband, and she had a son by him.One day, not long after this, he did not return at evening, as usual, from hunting. She waited till late at night, but he came no more.The next day, she swung her child to sleep in its cradle, and then said to her dog, "Take care of your brother while I am gone, and when he cries, halloo for me."The cradle was made of the finest wampum, and all its bandages and ornaments were of the same precious stuff.After a short time, the woman heard the cry of the dog, and running home as fast as she could, she found her child gone, and the dog too. On looking around, she saw scattered upon the ground pieces of the wampum of her child's cradle, and she knew that the dog had been faithful, and had striven his best to save her child from being carried off, as he had been, by an old woman, from a distant country, called Mukakee Mindemoea, or the Toad-Woman.The mother hurried off at full speed in pursuit, and as she flew along, she came, from time to time, to lodges inhabited by old women, who told her at what time the child-thief had passed; they also gave her shoes that she might follow on. There was a number of these old women who seemed as if they were prophetesses, and knew what was to come long beforehand. Each of them would say to her that when she had arrived at the next lodge, she must set the toes of the moccasins they had given her pointing homeward, and that they would return of themselves. The young woman was very careful to send back in this manner all the shoes she borrowed.She thus followed in the pursuit, from valley to valley, and stream to stream, for many months and years; when she came at length to the lodge of the last of the friendly old grandmothers, as they were called, who gave her the last instructions how to proceed. She told her that she was near the place where her son was to be found; and she directed her to build a lodge of cedar-boughs, hard by the old Toad-Woman's lodge, and to make a little bark dish, and to fill it with the juice of the wild grape."Then," she said, "your first child (meaning the dog) will come and find you out."These directions the young woman followed just as they had been given to her, and in a short time she heard her son, now grown up, going out to hunt, with his dog, calling out to him, "Peewaubik—Spirit-Iron—Twee! Twee!"The dog soon came into the lodge, and she set before him the dish of grape-juice."See, my child," she said, addressing him, "the pretty drink your mother gives you."Spirit-Iron took a long draught, and immediately left the lodge with his eyes wide open; for it was the drink which teaches one to see the truth of things as they are. He rose up when he got into the open air, stood upon his hind legs, and looked about. "I see how it is," he said; and marching off, erect like a man, he sought out his young master.Approaching him in great confidence, he bent down and whispered in his ear (having first looked cautiously around to see that no one was listening), "This old woman here in the lodge is no mother of yours. I have found your real mother, and she is worth looking at. When we come back from our day's sport, I'll prove it to you."They went out into the woods, and at the close of the afternoon they brought back a great spoil of meat of all kinds. The young man, as soon as he had laid aside his weapons, said to the old Toad-Woman, "Send some of the best of this meat to the stranger who has arrived lately."The Toad-Woman answered, "No! Why should I send to her, the poor widow!"The young man would not be refused; and at last the old Toad-Woman consented to take something and throw it down at the door. She called out, "My son gives you this." But, being bewitched by Mukakee Mindemoea, it was so bitter and distasteful, that the young woman immediately cast it out of the lodge after her.In the evening the young man paid the stranger a visit at her lodge of cedar-boughs. She then told him that she was his real mother, and that he had been stolen away from her by the old Toad-Woman, who was a child-thief and a witch. As the young man appeared to doubt, she added, "Feign yourself sick when you go home to her lodge; and when the Toad-Woman asks what ails you, say that you wish to see your cradle; for your cradle was of wampum, and your faithful brother the dog, in striving to save you, tore off these pieces which I show you."They were real wampum, white and blue, shining and beautiful; and the young man, placing them in his bosom, set off; but as he did not seem quite steady in his belief of the strange woman's story, the dog Spirit-Iron, taking his arm, kept close by his side, and gave him many words of encouragement as they went along. They entered the lodge together; and the old Toad-Woman saw, from something in the dog's eye, that trouble was coming."Mother," said the young man, placing his hand to his head, and leaning heavily upon Spirit-Iron, as if a sudden faintness had come upon him, "why am I so different in looks from the rest of your children?""Oh," she answered, "it was a very bright, clear blue sky when you were born; that is the reason."He seemed to be so very ill that the Toad-Woman at length asked what she could do for him. He said nothing could do him good but the sight of his cradle. She ran immediately and brought a cedar cradle; but he said:"That is not my cradle."She went and got another of her own children's cradles, of which there were four; but he turned his head, and said:"That is not mine; I am as sick as ever."When she had shown the four, and they had been all rejected, she at last produced the real cradle. The young man saw that it was of the same stuff as the wampum which he had in his bosom. He could even see the marks of the teeth of Spirit-Iron left upon the edges, where he had taken hold, striving to hold it back. He had no doubt, now, which was his mother.To get free of the old Toad-Woman, it was necessary that the young man should kill a fat bear; and, being directed by Spirit-Iron, who was very wise in such a matter, he secured the fattest in all that country; and having stripped a tall pine of all its bark and branches, he perched the carcass in the top, with its head to the east and its tail due west. Returning to the lodge, he informed the old Toad-Woman that the fat bear was ready for her, but that she would have to go very far, even to the end of the earth, to get it. She answered:"It is not so far but that I can get it;" for of all things in the world, a fat bear was the delight of the old Toad-Woman.She at once set forth; and she was no sooner out of sight than the young man and his dog, Spirit-Iron, blowing a strong breath in the face of the Toad-Woman's four children (who were all bad spirits, or bear-fiends), they put out their life. They then set them up by the side of the door, having first thrust a piece of the white fat in each of their mouths.The Toad-Woman spent a long time in finding the bear which she had been sent after, and she made at least five and twenty attempts before she was able to climb to the carcass. She slipped down three times where she went up once. When she returned with the great bear on her back, as she drew near her lodge she was astonished to see the four children standing up by the door-posts with the fat in their mouths. She was angry with them, and called out:"Why do you thus insult the pomatum of your brother?"She was still more angry when they made no answer to her complaint; but when she found that they were stark dead, and placed in this way to mock her, her fury was very great indeed. She ran after the tracks of the young man and his mother as fast as she could; so fast, indeed, that she was on the very point of overtaking them, when the dog, Spirit-Iron, coming close up to his master, whispered to him—"Snakeberry!""Let the snakeberry spring up to detain her!" cried out the young man; and immediately the berries spread like scarlet all over the path, for a long distance; and the old Toad-Woman, who was almost as fond of these berries as she was of fat bears, could not avoid stooping down to pick and eat.The old Toad-Woman was very anxious to get forward, but the snakeberry-vines kept spreading out on every side; and they still grow and grow, and spread and spread; and to this day the wicked old Toad-Woman is busy picking the berries, and she will never be able to get beyond to the other side, to disturb the happiness of the young hunter and his mother, who still live, with their faithful dog, in the shadow of the beautiful wood-side where they were born.

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