

## THE SECRET OF THE ANIMALS

### A Canadian Tale from the Huron People of Quebec

A long time ago two orphan brothers lived together in poverty. The oldest came up with a plan to keep them from starving and perhaps help them find a suitable home to live in. He suggested putting out youngest brother's eyes. He thought people would give him money out of pity. This logic worked on youngest brother who agreed to let his brother blind him. His one condition was that oldest brother take care of him for the rest of his life. Oldest brother agreed.

And so it was that the oldest boy blinded his younger brother so they could make money for food and shelter. After seven years the boys had made so much money they were set for life. At this point in time the oldest brother became tired of taking care of his little brother. One day when they were walking next to a river, oldest brother pushed his brother into the water.

The strong current carried little brother quickly away. He struggled in the fast moving water. Fortunately, the boy came to a shallow spot where he was able to get back onto land. He was exhausted. He was also lost, and it was getting late. He

climbed a nearby tree and made himself a bed of interwoven branches.

After the sun set, bear, lion and wolf came along. They sat beneath the tree that youngest brother was resting in. They thought they were alone. So, they began telling each other secrets.

Lion told his friends that the king of all the land around was sick. No one had been able to cure him. Lion also said that the king could be cured by removing the enchanted frog that was living beneath his bed.

Bear told the others that the enchanted frog was really the fairy that drank the town's water. Splitting her stomach open would cause the water to be returned to all the dried up wells, ponds, lakes, streams and rivers.

In addition to being sick himself, the king's only son was blind. Wolf told his friends that the blind prince could see again if his eyes were rubbed with leaves from the tree they were standing under.

Youngest brother heard all three of the animal's secrets. He regained his own eyesight after rubbing a leaf from the special tree over his eyes. He then put a few leaves into his pocket and headed for the king's palace. Once there, youngest brother told the guards he could heal the prince if they let him in. They

did. Youngest brother rubbed the special leaves over the prince's eyes. The prince was able to see again and began calling youngest brother, "Healer."

Prince asked Healer if he could cure his ailing father. Healer said he could but needed privacy. (He did not want anyone to see him remove the frog from beneath the king's bed.)

As soon as the frog was removed from where it was living, the king began feeling better. When Healer tossed the frog out the castle window it got caught on a sharp weather vane. This caused it to split open. Water gushed out of the frog. It filled all the dried up wells, ponds, lakes, streams and rivers. The whole town cheered.

The king rewarded Healer with as much money as he wanted. Youngest brother took only what would fit into his pockets, yet that was enough to keep him living well for the rest of his days. About a week later Healer left the castle and began walking home. Low and behold, he ran into his older brother who was surprised that his brother could see again. He saw that his brother had lots of money and asked where it came from. Healer told his brother about the tree of secrets.

Greedy older brother went to the tree and waited in its branches for good things to happen to him. Shortly after dark, bear, lion and wolf came along. They were angry that someone learned their secrets. They were also angry that their friend, frog had

died. Older brother moved, which made the tree branches he was sitting in make noise. Hearing the branches move caused the animals to look up. Thinking that older brother was the one who heard their secrets made the three animals angrier than they were before. They climbed the tree and ate up oldest brother.

Fortunately, youngest brother lived out his days wanting for nothing.

Adapted by Kathleen Simonetta. Inspired by the tale “Secret of the Animals” found in More ready-to-tell tales from around the world. Edited by David Holt and Bill Mooney. Little Rock: August House Publishers, Inc., c2000, pp. 172-176.

