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How Maple Sugar Came

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Once upon a time there was a little Native American boy named Son-of-a-Brave. He was very fond indeed of going to the lodge of the village medicine man. Here he listened to all the wise stories that the medicine man told about the forest.

This medicine man was very much thought of by the Native Americans and they had made him the best lodge in the village. It stood in that part of the forest where the trees were stately, and old, and straight. The lodge, itself, was covered with the most valuable skins. It was filled with gifts of beads, and drums, and arrow heads, and blankets with pictures woven in them.

Son-of-a-Brave used to gather some of the herbs that the medicine man brewed. In return, the boy was allowed to sit inside the lodge, beside the medicine man's kettle, and listen to his sayings.

"The Native Americans have something to learn from every beast, and fish, and bird of the forest," the medicine man said one day.

Son-of-a-Brave felt very proud, because his father was one of the big chiefs of the tribe. He was proud, too, that he, twelve years old, could shoot an arrow as straight as the young braves. So he found it hard to understand the medicine man.

"What does the clumsy Bear teach us?" Son-of-a-Brave asked.

"The value of sleep," replied the medicine man. "You like to sit up late at night, listening to the talk of your parents around the camp fire. In the morning you have dull eyes and heavy limbs. The Bear comes out from her winter sleep ready to rule the den and fight the whole forest."

"Well, what does the silly Salmon that hurls himself down the rapids teach us?" asked Son-of-a-Brave.

"The greatest lesson of all—that home is the best place," replied the medicine man. "The Salmon swims far away from home, but always comes back to the hatching ground through the rapids."

As Son-of-a-Brave went out through the lodge he was thinking very hard. There had been one question that he had wanted to ask the medicine man, but he had not dared, Of what use was the great stupid Woodpecker that flew from tree to

tree? It ran up and down the trunks like a senseless bird, and pounded like a drum with its huge bill.

There was a Woodpecker now. Son-of-a-Brave could see it, head down, on the trunk of a tree, making a hole. It wore a bright red cap, and its black eyes were as bright as those of a Native American. Its big black claws looked like hands. The boy stopped to watch the odd bird. The Woodpecker bored awhile, standing on its head. Then it righted itself and made the hole larger. Last, it put its bill in the hole and pulling it out, tipped its head back as if it were drinking. This was very strange.

When the Woodpecker flew away, Son-of-a-Brave went up to the tree, for he was curious about it. It was still too early in the spring for the tree to have leaves. There was a little snow left on the ground. But the boy knew what kind of tree it was by its bark. He could find others like it all through the woods. He had a very sharp arrow head stuck in his belt. He took it out and began chipping the hole in the tree trunk which the Woodpecker had started, until it was larger. To the Indian boy's surprise thin sap began to run out of the tree. He put his lips to the hole.

It was sweet sap—as sweet as wild honey!

Son-of-a-Brave stripped some bark from the tree and made a little cup. He filled this with the sweet sap and ran from one lodge to another in the village, asking the braves to taste it. They all said that the sweet sap was good. All the village followed Son-of-a-Brave back to the forest, while he pointed out trees like the one which the Woodpecker had tapped. They bored holes in them, and from each there flowed the first maple syrup. It proved that the medicine man had been right. Even the Woodpecker, who worked upside down, could teach the Native Americans something.

So the Native Americans tell us how maple sugar came. But the story tells us also the great wisdom of our little wild brothers in feathers and fur.



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