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How The Eagle Went Hungry

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Once upon a time, before there were men on the earth, the Beavers were a family like men. They were thrifty and honest, and spent their time building in the lakes and ponds. They had hands like our hands. They were dressed in gray fur, warm enough for the winters, and dark enough for all the digging which they had to do.

There was no family of all the forest so hard working as the Beavers. The Beaver men had a secret trade of making arrows. They dug flint out of the rocks along the bank and shaped it into arrowheads. These had such magic that the Beavers always had dried meat hanging in their houses.

Most wonderful of all, though, was their skill in building. With no tools but their broad, flat hands, the Beavers built strong dams which made pools in the streams where the fish could hatch. They built their own homes, with many halls and rooms, of the mud at the bottom of the water. All the Beavers worked, even the women and children. Here they lived in honesty and peace and asked nothing of any one.

In the same days the Eagle was a proud warrior, dressed from head to foot in colored feathers. He lived on a mountain top, and when he came down to the forest he wished great honor. The winds blew their trumpets for him, and the thunder beat drums. All the creatures were asked to bow before the Eagle, and he expected fish and berries to be brought him for a feast.

One spring when the ice had gone out of the streams and ponds and the forest had put on new green leaves, the Eagle came down for a sudden visit. He stopped at the edge of a small lake, and there he saw an old Beaver woman digging in the mud. She bent low over her work. With her large, wrinkled hands she was making the clay into bricks for building a new wall for a Beaver house. The Eagle looked at her with scorn.

"I am hungry," he said.

The Beaver woman raised her brown head out of the water, and looked up at the Eagle.

"The Beaver family would be hungry, too, sir," she said, "if we did not work, all of us, to get a living."

"But think of the kind of work you do," screamed the Eagle, going up to the branch of a tree to sit so that he need not step in the mud.

"Look at your hands," he went on. "They are not the hands of a person of rank, like myself, but are stained with earth. You live in houses that are made of mud. You cut down trees with your teeth, and eat weeds and bark. You were made only to wait on others such as myself."

The Beaver woman went on with her work. When the Eagle had finished, she said: "We Beavers are humble, but there are no other workers in the forest like us. We deepen and dam the streams and make them more useful. Our work takes us into the mud. In the mud we must live, but we are honest, thrifty people, sir. What do you want to eat?" she asked.

"Fish," said the Eagle. "Go down and catch some for me."

The Beaver woman wiped her hands and then dived down into the water. The Eagle watched her go, for he was half starved. He longed for a meal of rich, freshly caught fish. He watched the smooth water for some time, but he could see not even a ripple. After he had waited an hour, the water stirred and the brown head of the Beaver woman showed.

"Your feast of fish awaits you, O Eagle," the Beaver woman said.

"But where are the fish?" the Eagle demanded.

"They wait for you on my table, down in the Beaver lodge," she said, and then she went under the water again.

The Eagle went hungry for a long time. Even now, when the Beaver family walks on four feet, and the Eagle is a bird, all go hungry who are too proud to work for their food.



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