



Ririro

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Sparrow's search for the rain

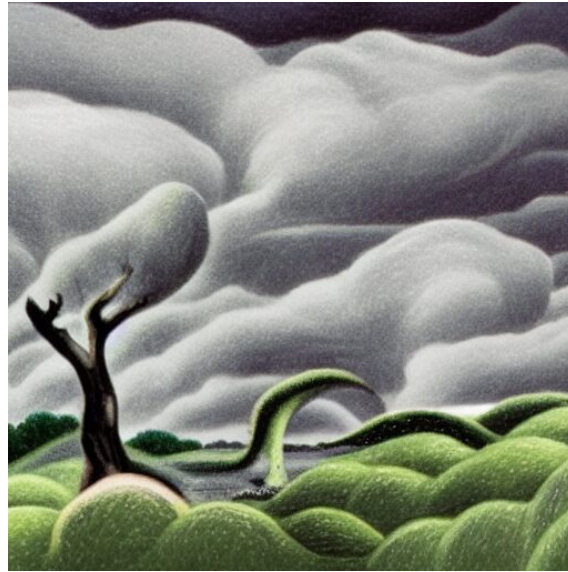
Ririro

Long ago, in a village near the sea, many Indian people were living. Among them was a very nice old warrior who had been given great power at his birth, and who, therefore, could do many wonderful deeds. He had one daughter. She was very beautiful and gentle. She took no interest in frivolous things and she lived a very quiet life, but all the people liked her, and she was always welcome wherever she went. Her old father was very proud of her, and he said boastfully, "She has inherited much of my wisdom, and some day she will marry a great man." But the girl on her part had little thought of marriage or of men, for she said they had small minds, and she would rather live alone than listen always to their boastfulness and their foolish chatter.

Soon the daughter's fame spread far and wide through the sea-coast villages, and many suitors came. But her father said, "I have nothing to say. She will make her own choice." And she said, "I will marry only some one who can amuse me and interest me and keep me company. I don't like dull people." One day Loon came to see her. He was very good looking, he wore good clothes and he had great skill as a fisherman. He came because he thought he was very handsome, and he believed that his good looks would win the maiden. But she didn't like Loon, because he had nothing to say. When she talked to him he only stared, and at last he burst out into loud laughter. Then the girl said, "You have a small mind like the others." And she walked away.

Then Fox came in an effort to make the girl fall in love with him. And for a whole day he chased his tail round and round in a circle, trying to amuse the serious girl. But he did not succeed very well, and like Loon he departed in despair. And many others came, but they met the same fate, and at last the girl decided to see no more of them, but to live alone with her father. The young men of the village were all very angry because the girl had spoken of them so badly, and often they they gossiped about her. "She says we have small minds," said one. "She must pay for these insults," said another. So they vowed that they would somehow break her proud spirit and bring her sorrow. One of the great men of the village was Whirlwind. He could make himself invisible, and he was often guilty of many wicked pranks. So the young men went to him and asked his help. As they were talking to him, they saw the girl walking. Whirlwind rushed towards her and knocked her down in the mud. The young men looked and they all laughed loudly, and the girl was very much ashamed. She went back home and

told her father what had happened, and showed him her dirty clothes. Her father was very angry, and he said, "Whirlwind must pay for this. He shall be banished at once."



Her father went to the Chief and made a complaint against Whirlwind, and the Chief decided that Whirlwind must leave the village. He did not consider what the result of this choice might be. So Whirlwind prepared to leave the place. Now his best friend was Rain. Rain had been born without eyes. He was blind, and Whirlwind always had to lead him along wherever he wished to go. So Rain said, "If you are leaving the village, I want to leave it too, for I cannot live here without you. I will be helpless if I have no one to lead me." The two set out together, Whirlwind leading old Rain along by his side. Where they went no one knew. They were gone for many months when people started to miss them very much. Their absence began to be felt in all the land, for there was no wind and there was no rain.

At last the Chief summoned a council and Whirlwind was allowed to come back. The people decided to send messengers to the two wandering ones to tell them what had happened and to bring them back. They first sent Fox out on the quest. Fox went through the land for many weeks, running as fast as he could over many roads and over high wooded mountains. He searched every cave and crevice, but he had no success. Not a leaf or a blade of grass was stirring, and the country was all parched and the grass was withered brown and the streams were all getting dry. At last, after a fruitless search, he came home and shamefully confessed that his quest had failed.

Then the people called on Bear to continue the search. And Bear went lumbering over the earth, sniffing the air, turning over logs and great rocks with his powerful shoulders, and venturing into deep caverns. And he made many inquiries, and he asked the Mountain Ash, "Where is Whirlwind?" But Mountain Ash said, "I do not know. I have not seen him for many months." And he asked

the Red Fir, and the Pine, and the Aspen, which always sees Whirlwind first, but they didn't know. So Bear came home and said, "I can't find them."

The Chief was very angry because of the failure of Fox and Bear, but the wise man said, "The animals are useless in a quest like this. Let us try the birds. They often succeed where the animals fail." And the Chief agreed, for the land was in great distress. Many fishing-boats lay silent on the sea near the coast unable to move because Whirlwind was away, and the streams were all dry because Rain was absent, and the grass and the flowers were withering. So they called the birds to their aid.



The great Crane searched in the shallows and among the reeds, thrusting his long neck into deep places, and Crow looked among the hills, and Kingfisher flew far out to sea, but they all came back and said, "We, too, have failed. The wandering ones are nowhere on the land or upon the sea." Then little Sparrow took up the search. Before he set out, he plucked from his breast a small down-feather and fastened it to a stick no bigger than a wisp of hay. He held the stick in his bill and flew off. For many days he went towards the south-land, all the time watching the feather hanging to the stick in his bill. But it hung there motionless. One day, after he had travelled a great distance, he saw the down-feather moving very gently, and he knew that Whirlwind must be not far away. He went in the direction from which the feather was blowing. Soon he saw beneath him soft green grass and wonderful flowers of varied colours, and trees with green leaves and many rippling streams of running water. And he said to himself, "At last I have found the wanderers." He followed a little stream for some distance until it ended in a cave in the hills. In front of the cave many flowers were blooming and the grass was soft and green, and the tall grasses were nodding their heads very gently. He knew that those he was seeking were inside, and he entered the cave very quietly. Just beyond the door a fire was smouldering and near it lay Rain and Whirlwind both fast asleep. Sparrow tried to wake them with his bill and his cries, but they were sleeping too soundly. Then he took a coal from the fire and put it on Rain's back, but it spluttered and fizzled and soon went out. He tried another, but the same thing happened. Then he took a third coal, and this time Rain woke up. He was much surprised to hear a stranger in the cave, but he could not see him because he was blind. So he woke up Whirlwind to protect him.

Then Sparrow told them of the great trouble in the north country and of the great hardship and sorrow their absence had brought to the people, and of how

dearly missed they were and of the decision of the council to call them back. And Whirlwind said, "We will return tomorrow if we are so badly needed. You may go back and tell your people that we are coming. We will be there the day after you arrive." So Sparrow, feeling very proud of his success, flew back home. Sparrow went to the Chief and said, "I have found Rain and Whirlwind and tomorrow they will be here." And the Chief said, "Because of your success, you will never be hunted for game or killed for food."

The next morning the two travellers came back to the land. Whirlwind came first and great clouds of dust foretold his coming, and the sea dashed high against the rocks, and the trees shrieked and tossed their heads, all dancing gaily because of his return. When Whirlwind had passed by, Rain came along following close, because of his blindness. For several days Rain stayed with the people and the flowers bloomed and the grass was green again and the streams were no longer dry. And since that time Wind and Rain have never long been absent from the Atlantic Coast. And to this day the Sparrow-people know when Rain is coming, and to signal his approach they gather together and twitter and hop along and make a great hub-bub. And the Indians have been true to the Chief's promise, and they will not hunt Sparrows for game nor kill them for food or for their feathers. For they remember that of all the birds it was old Sparrow who long ago searched successfully for the Rain.

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