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The Great White Bear

Maud Lindsay

Once upon a time the tailor of Wraye and the tinker of Wraye went to the king's fair together; and when they had seen all the sights that were there they started home together well pleased with their day's outing.

The sun was going down when they left the fair and when they came to the Enchanted Wood through which they had to pass the moon was rising over the hill. And a fine full moon it was, so bright that the night was almost as light as day.

"There are some people who would not venture in this wood at night even when the moon is shining," said the tinker; "but as for me I do not know what fear is."

"Nor I," said the tailor. "I would that every one had as stout a heart as mine."

And it was just then that Grandmother Grey's old white sheep that had wandered into the wood that eve came plodding through the bushes.

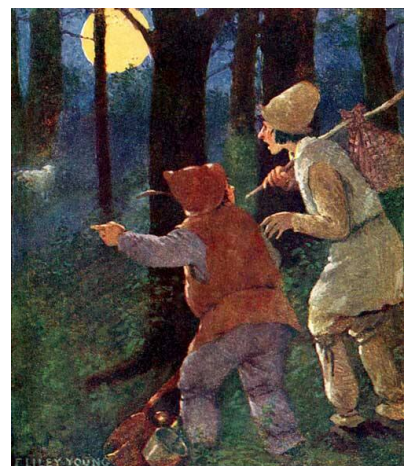
"Goodness me! What is that?" said the tinker clutching his companion's arm.

"A bear!" cried the tailor casting one frightened glance toward the bushes. "A great white bear! Run, run for your life."

And run they did! The tailor was small and the tinker was tall, but it was a close race between them, up hill and down hill, and into the town.

"A bear, a great white bear!" they called as they ran; and everybody they met took up the cry: "A bear, a bear!" till the whole town was roused.

The mayor and his wife, the shoemaker and his daughter, the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker, the blacksmith and the miller's son—indeed, to make a long story short, everybody who was awake in the town of Wraye—came hurrying out of their houses to hear what the matter was. There was soon as large a crowd gathered about the two friends; and the tailor and the tinker talked as fast as they had run, to tell their thrilling tale.



"We were just coming through the wood," said the tailor, "when there, as close

to us as the shoemaker is to the blacksmith, we saw——"

"A terrible creature," interrupted the tinker. "'Tis as large as a calf, I assure you——"

"And white as the mayor's shirt," cried the tailor. "It is a marvel that we escaped and if it had not been that I——"

"I saw it first," said the tinker; "but I stood my ground. I did not run till the tailor did."

The two would have been willing to talk till morning had not all the others determined to go to the wood at once and kill the bear.

"I cannot answer for the safety of the town till it is done," said the mayor; so every one ran for a weapon as fast as his feet could carry him.

The mayor brought his long sword that the king had given him, and the carpenter a hatchet, the blacksmith took his hammer, and the miller's son a gun; and the rest of the men whatever they could put their hands on.

The women went, too, with mops and brooms to drive the bear away should he run toward the town; and one little boy who had waked up in the stir followed after them with stones in his hands.

They very soon came to the wood, and then the question was who should go first.

"Let the tinker and the tailor lead the way," said the mayor, "and we will come close after."

"Oh, no, if you please, your honor," said the tinker and the tailor speaking at the very same time. "That will never do. We cannot think of going before you."

"I will go first if the mayor will lend me his sword," said the shoemaker.

"Aye, aye, let the shoemaker go," cried some.

"No, no, 'tis the mayor's place. The king gave the sword to him," said others.

"I could kill the bear while you are talking about it," said the miller's son.

Every one had something to say, but at last it was all settled and the miller's son with the mayor's sword by his side and his own gun in his hand was just slipping into the wood when out walked the old white sheep!

"Baa, baa," she cried, as if to ask, "Pray tell me what the stir's about. Baa, baa!"

"A sheep, a sheep, a great white sheep!" cried the miller's son; and then how the people of Wraye did laugh!

They laughed and they laughed and they laughed, so loud and so long that their laughter was heard all the way to the king's fair and set the people to laughing there.

But whether the tailor and the tinker laughed or not, I do not know.

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