

Arctic Survival—

Boy Amazes Parents with 'Jack and the Beanstalk' Tale

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Times Editor

"Mother, I don't like that mother of yours keeping you up late every evening," Aunt Mumangeena said impatiently.

Though I was a boy twelve years old, she always called me "mother". I had been named after my grandmother, beloved mother of Aunt Mumangeena.

"And here it is bedtime already. I don't get to see much of you anymore," she complained.

"But, Aunt Mumangeena, for a long time now mother keeps wanting me to stay evenings and tell her stories," I said to her with a satisfied feeling that I had a good excuse.

"I'll tell that woman she is interrupting the training I'm giving you. If she keeps interfering, you'll never become a great hunter, but you will be if you mind me. I'll have to tell her a thing or two one of these days. She cannot interfere with your future," Mumangeena continued with some grinning in her voice.

She had been subjecting me to become aware of the rigors of my future hunting career even to make me comfort myself first thing in morning out of the sod igloo in the dead of winter without clothes. I had passed this successfully without whimpering, something I wasn't allowed to do if I were to be a good hunter. She had hugged me affectionately when I passed the test and had said, "Now I'm sure you'll be a great hunter."

In A Rut

I was also going to school and I was then in sixth grade of a school operated by the Bureau of Education. Previously I had gone to mission school administered by the Episcopal Saint Thomas Mission. During that time, I had lost some years because of my ignorance that I was supposed to advance.

The mission kept changing teachers every year for a time. When the constant turnover began, I had been in second grade. When a new teacher took over in the fall, he asked what grade I was in and I answered unhesitatingly, "Second grade."

This went on for three school seasons. By the time I was in my

third season as a second grader, I was so good that I could just about memorize all my lessons. I was considered very bright by my teacher on my third year so he advanced me to third grade. By this time, my parents and myself realized that I was supposed to advance to third grade two years before.

Exhilarating Experience

Now that I was in sixth grade I had learned to read and write well. It was an exhilarating experience when I finally learned to understand the books I was studying, especially the books about fairy tales. This new experience was so exciting to me that it was difficult to keep it to myself. I had to share it with someone, or everyone.

I was living with Aunt Mumangeena and Uncle Nayukuk at the time but I had gotten into the habit of going to my parents home, which was only about a block from the school, before going to mine at Aunt Mumangeena and Uncle Nayukuk's sod igloo.

One late November afternoon after school, I ran to my parent's home. Even though it was getting dusky Weyahok, my father, had not yet come home from hunting and mother, Keshoma, was alone with my youngest sister Kaipuk, who was still a baby. My brothers and a sister were still out visiting and playing.

The Query

The room had an appetizing aroma of meat mother was cooking for dinner. My little sister, who was a little over a year old waddled over and greeted me with a great smile. Mother hardly noticed me even though I came in hurriedly but she asked quietly, "Why are you hurrying so?"

I hesitated not knowing exactly what to say but I asked uncertainly, "Mother, can—can I tell you a story tonight?"

"Story about what, son?"

"A story from this book. See? This one," I answered holding up my McGuffey's Reader.

Mother looked incredulous and unbelieving.

"You mean there is a story in that thing?" she asked with a grimace on her face. "I think what you're really after is an excuse to eat with us tonight."

"But, mother, there are some real fine stories in this book," I said anxiously. "May I tell one story tonight? If you don't like it, I will not tell another one after that."

"I still think this is an excuse you're using to eat with us. All right, son, you can tell the story and it better be good. You should be going home to do chores for your aunt and uncle," Keshorna agreed reluctantly.

It would be about an hour or so before dinner was served. I made up my mind that I should do something for mother so she wouldn't get impatient with me, but before I could volunteer, she said, "There is some wood to saw out there and be sure and split it up when you get through sawing."

Made Self Useful

I got busy and made myself useful while anticipating my storytelling session. Soon the whole family was home. Father had caught two seals which I helped drag home.

When we were all in the house, my older sister Ahkniachak, looked sharply at me and said to mother, "Mother, you know what Howard does? He eats here and eats again when he gets home."

"Never mind that, Ahkniachak. He's going to tell a story tonight," mother said half sarcastically but smiling with amusement.

Ahkniachak looked at me a moment. She opened her mouth but nothing came out. She turned around and started to help mother set the low table on the floor.

We all sat down to eat and I had my usual generous share while fighting off a partial guilt imposed by my sister, and now by my younger brother, Kakairnok, who complained, "Look mother, Howard got a big piece of meat and mine is a little one. Look!"

Father looked sternly at Kakairnok and he became silent at once.

When the dinner was over, mother told father that I was going to tell a story from a book. Her scepticism of my ability to do it was plainly evident in her attitude but my father's face lit up with an understanding

look. He could read but very little and he used this limited knowledge to read his Bible with the help of a little dictionary which he used with difficulty.

"I have often wished that I had good ability to read books but I never had the opportunity. Perhaps I was too old when I tried to learn. I hope our son has learned enough so he can help me to read my Bible," said father, looking at me, smiling.

"All right son, you may start your story now," mother said casually. Her attitude was that of toleration with little interest.

Fairy Tale

I picked up my McGuffey's Reader and leafed through it. I wanted to tell a story. I stopped on the one that was titled, JACK AND THE BEANSTALK.

There was a total lack of interest among my brothers and sister who bickered and generally made a ruckus.

"Cut out the ruckus you children!" father said sharply. They quieted down.

"Go ahead, son," father directed. I began:

"Taimaguq taimani." (Once upon a time,). And thus I proceeded to interpret Jack and the Beanstalk from English to Eskimo.

Jack and his widowed mother were very, very poor. One day his mother sends Jack to sell their only possession, a cow. After much difficulty, the pitiful little boy finally made a colossal ill-advised sale of the animal for only a few beans.

Very angry, his mother threw the beans out the window. When poor little Jack woke up the next morning, he was greatly surprised to see a huge beanstalk that had grown overnight. He looked up the stalk and the end of it disappeared into the clouds.

"What is a beanstalk?" asked Ahkniachak.

"I don't know," I answered truthfully. "It's something that grows like willows I guess."

"Why did it grow so high and so fast?"

"I don't know. I guess it's something like what ahngatkuqs (medicinen) do. Only in this story the ahngatkuq is a fairy, a sort of a little angel that does good things for good people. If you listen maybe you can find

out," I said.

"Do what he says. Just listen!" mother interjected, leaning forward with apparent interest.

A kindly fairy appeared and told Jack that there was a great castle at the top of the beanstalk. It was owned by a giant who had killed Jack's father and took his riches.

There was an audible gasp from my little audience. I was establishing the picture of Jack's situation in the story.

At the advice of the fairy Jack climbed the stalk and found the great castle. He sneaked in by a back entrance and ran into the giant's cook who gave him some nice things to eat. Soon, Jack heard thunderous footsteps. The giant was coming home!

I looked at my parents for a moment and they looked at me and smiled. Keshorna made an excited chuckle and said, "Don't stop now, son. Continue the story!"

The family had become quiet sometime after the first part of the story but now they were even more quiet. They listened with rapt attention. I had made a successful breakthrough and had won over my family as a most attentive audience.

"FEE FIE FO FUM! I SMELL THE BLOOD OF AN ENGLISHMAN!" roared the giant as he entered his castle.

"What does that mean?" asked Ahkniachak with some excitement in her voice.

"I guess the giant likes the smell of Englishmen's blood and likes to eat them," I answered. "Eerigee!" ("How scary!") Ahkniachak shivered.

Jack who had been hidden by the cook in a closet, cowered. He was sure he would be eaten alive!

The giant sat down at his huge table and asked for his treasures, one of which was a red hen that laid golden eggs.

I had to explain what the red hen was. I told my family that it must have been something like a ptarmigan but it had red feathers. It was hard to explain the golden egg but I said, "The bird just lays golden eggs."

I resumed the story.

The hen laid an egg and cackled. The giant roared with pleasure. Next, he ordered his food and drink to be brought to him. The giant was a great gourmand and he ate great quantities of food as well as huge amounts of wine. Mellowed by the enormous dinner and the great drafts of wine, he fell asleep at his table.

Harp Tattled

While the giant slept and made thunderous snores, Jack picked up the red hen and made his way down the beanstalk.

Jack made two other trips up the beanstalk. On the second trip, he came away with treasures of gold. On the third trip he stole the giant's magic harp.

As Jack ran toward the beanstalk, the magic harp began to scream, "Master! Master!" the giant heard the distress call!

"FEE FIE FO FUM! I SMELL THE BLOOD OF AN ENGLISHMAN!" roared the giant.

As I went along telling the adventures of Jack, I could sense the excitement of my audience. I went on, relishing the mastery of the situation.

The angry giant began to pursue Jack down the beanstalk. Since Jack was so little and the master of the castle was so titanic, the latter began to gain on the boy at an alarming rate. When our hero finally came close to the ground, he shouted frantically to his mother to bring the

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