

WEE RABBIT SELLS A BAG OF MAIZE

WEE RABBIT one day found himself without money to buy food for his loving wife and numerous children. In vain he racked his brain for a scheme that might put him in funds. He lost so much flesh from worrying all day that his clothes were too big for him and his bright eyes became dim from loss of sleep, for he often lay awake most of the night thinking, busily thinking.

Wee Rabbit, knowing the scarcity of maize, said over and over to himself, "If I only had a bag of maize, I could sell it for a big price." Then he would rub his hands together, scratch his head, slap his thigh and ask, "How can I get this bag of maize?"

One bright moonlight night as he lay wide awake, the idea of selling a bag of maize he didn't have occurred to him, and it seemed so easy that Wee Rabbit wondered why he had not thought of it before.

At the third crowing of the cock he rose and hastily dressing himself, went forth in search of customers. First he came upon the hen busily looking for worms. "Good day, Aunt Hen!" he cried, then added gallantly, "I kiss your feet." But not until he had inquired for each member of her family did he offer to sell her a bag of hard yellow maize. "To be sure I'll buy it," said the hen, "and glad of the chance to do so, for though this morning I left a warm white egg in the nest and cackled as no hen ever cackled before, the woman gave me only three grains of maize, not enough to support one who like me always does her duty; so please excuse me if I go on scratching, for I'm very hungry." "Excuses are needless," said Wee Rabbit, bowing low, "for I am only your humble servant." The hen cackled her thanks for the polite talk and asked Wee Rabbit when she might go to his house for the maize.

"I have an engagement this morning," answered the rabbit, "but I shall be pleased to see you at my house—No! No! Not my house," he hastily added, "but yours, whenever you choose to honor it by your presence—at three o'clock this afternoon." The hen said she would be there on time and willingly gave the rabbit half the price of the maize, as he declared he needed the money urgently,

being on his way to the village to make some very necessary purchases. Then the hen began again her interrupted search for worms, singing merrily all the while, and Wee Rabbit went in search of the coon, who also paid something in advance on the maize, and the rabbit after telling him to call at his house for it a little after three o'clock said good-bye and walked away, and he walked and walked until he came upon a dog lying in the road.

"Good day to you, Uncle Dog," said Wee Rabbit in a hearty happy voice. "I'm at your feet." "Good day to you, Wee Rabbit," gruffly answered the dog, "I'm at your feet also, though I can hardly stand on my own." When Wee Rabbit asked what was the matter the dog said, "I am just back from a successful hunting expedition with my master. We went to the pleasant plains beyond the big mountains, but this morning the woman who grinds the maize gave me instead of my usual liberal allowance, only three small very thin tortillas, so I'm hungry as well as footsore." This was just the moment to offer the maize and the dog was so delighted at the idea of having a bag full of it all for himself that he gave Wee Rabbit half its price almost before he had finished asking for it, and Wee Rabbit, after telling him to go to his house to receive the maize between three and four o'clock, said good-bye and walked away listening to the jingle of the coins in his bag until he came to the river Hux, where a tiger was sharpening his claws on a great big stone.

"Well, well, Uncle Tiger!" joyfully exclaimed Wee Rabbit, "of all the people in the world you are the one I most wanted to see and all because it lies in my power to do you a favor." The tiger was hungry too, just as hungry as the hen, the coon and the dog, and consequently not in a good humor, so he asked in a gruff voice, "To do me a favor or to practice some more of your little pranks?" "I regret most sincerely," declared Wee Rabbit, "if my little jokes of the past caused you the slightest inconvenience and I am now come in all sincerity to offer you a big bag of hard yellow maize at a very low figure." "And gladly will I buy it," said the somewhat mollified tiger, "for I have not a grain of maize left." Then the tiger went on sharpening his nails and Wee Rabbit, seating himself on a little stone that lay near by, took the coins from the netted bag that hung from his shoulder and placing them in a row on the ground at his feet counted them over and over, and after each count he sighed so deeply and looked so sorrowful that at last the tiger asked, "What's the matter, Wee Rabbit?"

"Oh! nothing, really nothing," answered the rabbit carelessly, as if he were not thinking of what he said. Then hastily gathering up the coins and dropping them into the bag he added sorrowfully, "That is, nothing that can be remedied." The tiger was so delighted to see the rabbit in trouble and his curiosity was so excited that he insisted on knowing the cause of so many sorrowful sighs.

"Well, if you must know," said Wee Rabbit, getting up as if about to depart, "I sighed because——" Here he paused a long time, so long in fact that the tiger with ill-concealed interest said, "Because is no reason." Then Wee Rabbit repeated, "I sighed because——" and waited until he saw his uncle was ready to speak again, when he hastily added, "because I'm sad." "Sadness is the usual cause of a sigh," said the tiger, giving an extra touch on the stone to his longest and sharpest claw. "I always sigh when I'm sad. What I want to know is why you are sad." Here Wee Rabbit put his hand in his bag and jingling the coins said, "The truth of the matter is, uncle, that I may not, after all, be able to let you have the bag of hard yellow maize and the thought of your disappointment made me sad." "Well, you are a nice fellow!" growled the tiger. "And why can't you let me have the maize? That's what I want to know, and quickly, too."

"Now don't get angry, dear uncle," pleaded Wee Rabbit in his most winning voice, and reseating himself on the small stone he said that Mrs. Rabbit, like all the women folks, was so fond of dress that in spite of the hard times he had promised to buy her a new one of a very expensive kind. "But, dear uncle," he added, "I am in a bit of a fix, for I found on counting my coins that I lack a peso of having enough to pay for the dress, that is, for the particular one that Mrs. Rabbit wants, unless you give me a peso in advance." Here the tiger stopped sharpening his claws and looked very grave, for he didn't want to lend Wee Rabbit one quartillo, much less the sixteen that go to make up a big round peso, so after thinking a while he asked, "Well, suppose—just suppose, mind you—that I do not care to advance you the peso?" "Dear uncle, I have not asked you to do so," responded Wee Rabbit, making a sweeping bow, "nor is it necessary that you should do so, for I am sure that if I go to the hut of the hunter and offer him the maize he will advance even two pesos."

"To the hut of the hunter, indeed," growled the tiger. "To the house of a fool who does not know enough to lay a snare for a

cub, much less an old wise one like me. This fool keeps a trap set for me all the time, for he wants my beautiful skin!" Here the tiger looked over his shoulder at his nice black and yellow coat. "It would not be very good for you if at last he got it," remarked Wee Rabbit carelessly as he chuckled to himself. "Perhaps not," consented the tiger, "but as these hard times have forced many to live without eating, some of us might learn to get on without skins." Wee Rabbit liked to hear his dear uncle talk, so he sat down on the little stone again and kept quiet while the tiger said, "To the hut of the hunter you will go then and offer him a bag of maize just as if you did not know that he is the greatest enemy of all us folks. I know full well that he would like to skin me, and no doubt even your ugly little fur would not come amiss and I hope he gets it if you go there." "Be that as it may," said Wee Rabbit, "I must run the risk," and rising, he was just about to say good-bye, when the tiger took a peso out of his pocket and said, "Don't go there; here's the amount you require and I'll call for the maize at four o'clock." But Wee Rabbit waved his hand and said, "Put up your money, uncle, for you took it grudgingly from your pocket, and it is a rule of mine never to accept what is unwillingly offered; so good-bye, I must be off!" and he walked briskly away, but before he had gone far the tiger ran after him and begged him to take the money. "Take it," he urged, "if only to please me, for I cannot bear the thought of the cruel hunter getting that bag of hard yellow corn." "Just to please you, just to please you, then," said Wee Rabbit, taking the coin from the tiger's extended hand and dropping it into his bag. "Just to please you," he repeated, "whom I would do anything to oblige, indeed I would," he added. "Until four o'clock, then," said the tiger, turning to depart. "That hour will suit me admirably," declared Wee Rabbit, "but don't come before that time," he added, "for I can't get back sooner from the village." But Wee Rabbit didn't go to the village. He went to the hunter's hut and before he left there he had another peso in his bag and the hunter had agreed to go to his house a little after four o'clock to kill a great big tiger. Wee Rabbit had to hurry to carry out his plan, so he took a short cut to the nearest of his many houses and he ran so fast that he was there in time to fill a bag with gravel, tie it up with a bit of bark and stand it by a big hollow log that lay in one corner of his house before the hen arrived.

"Well! Well! You are just on time!" said Wee Rabbit,

greeting her, "but I was waiting for you. See," he continued, pointing to the bag, "there is your hard yellow maize." The hen was filled with delight which changed to dismay when the rabbit added, "but there is a little complication, for Uncle Coon, whom I know to be an enemy of yours, has just sent me word that he is coming immediately to visit me and if you start home with the maize now you'll be sure to meet him." "To be sure I shall," said the disturbed hen. "And next to the opossum he is the one I most fear. Where shall I hide?" she continued, completely losing her head. "Fly up on a beam and sit quietly there until he goes," said Wee Rabbit. "No! no!" cried the hen, "for each of my feathers would stand on end the moment I caught sight of him and from sheer fright I should fall into his clutches." "Even now he comes," cried the rabbit, looking down the road and wringing his hands. "Hide! hide quickly, Aunt Hen," he implored, and the hen, seeing the hollow log, ran into it just a moment before the coon entered. "You are punctual," said the rabbit, greeting the coon, "but not more so than I, for there is your bag of hard yellow corn," but just then the deep barking of the dog was heard and the coon rushed into the hollow log, where he was glad to find a nice fat hen.

Before the rabbit and the dog had time to exchange greetings the tiger came roaring along and the dog too sought safety in the hollow log much to the coon's dismay.

When the tiger entered and demanded his maize, the rabbit, pointing carelessly to the bag, said, "There it is, Uncle Tiger, and as you see it is good measure, for the bag is full to bursting." But just as the tiger was about to take it on his back, he lifted his great nose into the air and sniffed. "What is the matter, uncle?" asked Wee Rabbit, just as innocently as if he did not know that the tiger smelt the hunter who was so near that the tiger lost no time in getting into the log too. "Well, Wee Rabbit, where's the tiger?" asked the hunter. "Over there in the log," answered the rabbit and while the hunter was sharpening his machete the rabbit with the netted bag hanging from his shoulder ran away to the one of his many houses where Mrs. Rabbit and the children lived and he was so well supplied with funds that he not only bought Mrs. Rabbit a new dress but a beautiful tupui (headdress) as well and sandals for all the children, and there was still so much money left that the whole family had cheese and white bread to eat with their black beans for ever so long.