

LITTLE GROWLING BIRD AND WINDIGO LAND



Early one morning Nokomis and Big Bear set out for a distant part of Windigo Land to get a fresh supply of salt from a Salt Cave in the Medicine Mountains—where the Giant Windigos were supposed to live. Before leaving, she put up a basket of nice lunch for the children, which they carried out to the woods, intending to have a little picnic under the trees. Of course, Little Bear and Aundak, the Crow, were invited!

Little Growing Bird picked out a nice dry spot under some big trees, near the place where he had shot Geb-wan-uh-see, the Wicked Hawk, the week before. (This time, however, Yellow Hair left the Dolly safe at home in the Wig-wam!) They took the clean, white cloth that covered the lunch and spread it on the grass. Then they unpacked the good things the basket contained and set them out on little plates made of basswood. There was "Indian bread," or Corn Cakes, spread with Maple-Syrup instead of Butter; there was jerked Venison, and cakes of Acorn Meal; Maple-Sugar, Raspberry Pie, and a jar of Huckleberry Jam; while Aundak had a bowl of boiled corn. All at once there came a sound of "cooing" from the biggest tree, and all looked up in surprise—except Little Bear, who was too busy just then.

Aundak was the first to discover the cause, and cried out: "Hullo, O-me-me, the Pigeon! Why are you hiding in that hollow tree?" It was pretty Pigeon, and he was half-hidden in a round hole in the tree-trunk. But when he saw Growing Bird he knew that it was safe to come out, because the little boy never hurt the harmless birds—only the bad ones. So Pigeon fluttered down and perched on his hand; then he told this tale:



"I am one of Nanna-bozhoo's Pet Pigeons," said he. "I fly all over Windigo Land in the daytime, and in the evening, when I return to Nanna-bozhoo's lodge, I tell him all that's going on in the woods. Last week I hurt my left wing, and, as I was resting it, Geb-wan-uh-see, the "Pirate Hawk," swooped down on me and seized me by the sore wing, and tried to kill me! I managed to get away and fluttered into that small hole in the tree. He couldn't get in, but I've been afraid to come out all week for fear he was waiting around to pounce on me. If it hadn't been for a small hoard of beechnuts a squirrel had stored in the hollow tree I'd have STARVED! As it is, I'm nearly dead for a drink," said Pigeon. Growing Bird gave him some water in a cup and then told him that the Wicked Hawk was dead.

As Pigeon's wing was now quite strong again he was anxious to get home, but, because Yellow Hair said she would like to send a message to Nanna-bozhoo, he waited a while. She tore off a thin strip of bark, from a birch tree that stood nearby, and proposed to Growing Bird that they write him a letter and send it by O-me-me, the Pretty Pigeon. "If I had some ink and a quill pen I could write a fine letter on this nice, smooth bark," said Yellow Hair. Growing Bird knew how Huckleberry Juice stains the lips and fingers, so he easily provided the ink. He just mixed some water with the Huckleberry Jam, and, lo and behold, there was a half-cupful of fine purple ink! When Little Bear heard a quill pen mentioned, he, too, had a bright idea! (You can see by the picture above what the idea was—AND HOW HE PROVIDED THE PEN!)



Because Yellow Hair had gone to school when she lived with the Paleface People, she could write pretty well. So SHE did the writing, while Growing Bird humped his back to make a "desk" for her to write on. But he had to stand very still, because Yellow Hair had placed the cup of ink on his head—to be within reach—and if he "joggled" or "jiggled" it was likely to spill all over his hair! This is what she wrote:
"DERE NANNY BOZHOO—
 Me and Groling berd send you our best-lov and hope You will com and see us agans evry Soon from your
FANNY YELLOH HAIR AND GROLING-BERD HIS MARK X

Then they rolled up the light birch-bark letter in a small roll—so not to impede his flight—and tied it to Pretty Pigeon's leg. Then, after bidding the children good-bye and promising to come again and visit them, O-me-me darted away toward the Medicine Lodge of Nanna-bozhoo. (Meanwhile, Little Bear gobbled up the rest of the lunch!) And when he was alone about that the SWIFTEST of the O-me-me's, or Pigeon People, are made to carry messages. But they will carry them ONLY one way, because, no matter how far they are taken from their home lodge, they always seem to know their way back, and, because they are set free, they FLY HOME very swiftly in an almost STRAIGHT LINE. Because they have such a habit of flying in such a hurry to get there, the Paleface People call them "Homing Pigeons" I. A. T. C.

