

THE ESKIMO AND HIS FOX WIFE

(Labrador Native)

Far up in the cold North, where winds blow sharply and snow falls thickly, an Indian hunter lived all alone. His only friends were Sun, Wind, Snow and Stars. When he got up in the morning, he had to prepare his own food and clean his house. When he came home, he had to scrape his own skin-clothing and his skin-boots and hang them out to dry. And he had to do his own cooking and washing. It was not an easy life for him.

One day, when daylight was sinking into darkness, he came home and stopped at his door. To his great surprise, everything was in order as it had never been before. The earthen floor was swept and the food in the pot was steaming hot and ready to eat. Everything was in order as if a good wife had done it. Who had done it? He looked all over - everywhere - inside and outside. There was no one around. He ate the good food and lay down to sleep, wondering who had done this good deed for him.

The next morning he went out to hunt as he always did, and when he came home...he found his home all in fine order again, and his food ready for him - just as the day before. His skin-clothing was scraped and his boots were hanging up to dry. Again he looked and looked to find who was so kind to him, but he couldn't find tracks anywhere. He just couldn't understand it. Day after day the hunter found his house and clothes cared for. Then he said to himself, "I must find out who does all these things for me. Only a good wife would do it and I have no wife. Who can it be? I must find the person."

Next morning he went out hunting as he always did, but he only went a little distance and then turned back and hid near the house to watch. Pretty soon a sleek fox with a long red tail came loping along. It ran right up to the house and went in.

"That fox is going into my house to steal my food," the Indian said to himself.

He crept up to his house and looked in, ready to slay the fox. But when he saw what was there, he stopped in great surprise. Right in the middle of the room there was a beautiful girl, dressed in the finest skin-clothes he had ever seen. And on the wall he saw hanging...the skin of a fox!

"Who are you?" the Indian cried. "What are you doing here? Why do

you clean my house? Did you cook my food? Is it you who cleaned my skins and boots?"

"Yes, I have cleaned this house and cooked your food. I have scraped these skins and dried your boots. I have done what I do well," the beautiful girl said. "Now you see how life can be made easier. I hope you are pleased. I do what I can do well. Then I feel happy and proud." "I am pleased," said the hunter. "Will you stay with me all the time? I would be proud to share this life and my home with you. Then I too could do what I do well." "Very well, I will stay. But you must promise never to complain about me, or to ask from where I came."

The hunter promised. From then on, they were happy to be together as husband and wife. He did the hunting while she prepared the skins and took care of their home. Everything was fine. They were good and hard workers.

One day, the man smelled a strange, musky odor that he did not like. "Woman," the man said, "there is a strange, musky odor in the house since you have come here. You must have brought it with you."

"Yes, it came with me, and it is a good smell.

"Where have you brought it from?" asked the hunter. "You have broken the promise you made! You said you would not complain about me. And you promised not to ask from where I came. Now I must leave you." The woman threw away her skin-dress and put on her fox skin that had been hanging on the wall. Then she slipped out of the house as a fox. From that time on, the man lived alone. He had to do everything himself, just as before the Fox Woman had come to him. And she never returned.

