

Stith Thompson - The folktale - p 67-68

4. MAGIC AND MARVELS

A. MAGIC POWERS

IN A very large proportion of folktales wherever they may be found magic plays a considerable part, and it is almost universal in some form in all those stories we know as wonder tales. In an important group of these stories the possession of such powers and objects serves as the crucial point in the narrative.

A good example of such a tale is that known as The Lazy Boy (Type 675).

Just as in the story of The Two Brothers (Type 303), the hero catches a large fish, usually a salmon, and when he agrees to throw the salmon back into the water the latter gives him the power of making all his wishes come true. He has but to say, "By the word of the Salmon." Among his other accomplishments he makes a saw that cuts wood of itself and a self-moving boat or wagon. His arrival in the royal city in his strange conveyance and the sight of his marvelous saw at work causes the princess to laugh at him. In his anger, he wishes her pregnant. When in due time she has a child an inquiry is made as to who the unknown father may be and all the probable men are gathered together. The child picks the hero out as his father, and the parents are then joined in marriage. In his anger, the king has the hero and princess abandoned in a glass box in the sea or in a cask in the mountains. The hero still has his magic power, which he uses to make a great castle next to the king's. He then invites and humbles his father-in-law.

This is one of the few very well-known European tales which do not appear in the great collection of Grimm. It has been known, however, for a long time, since it is found in the *Nights of Straparola* in sixteenth century Italy and a hundred years later in the *Pentamerone* of Basile. It is disseminated rather evenly over the whole of Europe and extends eastward far into Siberia. It does not appear to be known in India or Africa, but two versions have been reported from Annam, and it has been carried to New Guinea and to America. The Cape Verde Island version told in Massachusetts is obviously from Portugal, and the Missouri French and the American Indian tales told by the Maliseets of New Brunswick and the Ojibwas of Michigan are clearly from France.

I am not a collector of folktales, but this happens to be one of the few which I have taken down in the field. The story in question is such a good example of the way in which a tale entering an alien culture may be changed that I cannot forbear making special mention of the story as told me by an Ojibwa Indian on Sugar Island, Michigan, in the summer of 1941. He had been telling us stories of the Ojibwa culture hero. Suddenly he asked, "Did you ever hear the tale about Rummy and his little Ford car?" He proceeded then to tell what is undoubtedly the present story, though confused with some other French tales. Rummy was clearly the hero of these French tales, René, and the little Ford car was Mr. Joseph's idea of the self-moving wagon. The automatic saw played its part, and the experience with the princess was exactly as we have outlined it above. From other tales he brought in the story of the magic tablecloth which produced food of itself and the tabu against looking backwards, which he repeated frequently but apparently did not understand or actually make use of in the story.

No one has investigated this tale systematically, but a casual listing of the versions country by country suggests the strong probability of origin in southern Europe and of the predominant influence of the literary treatments of the two famous Italian tale-tellers of the Renaissance.