Old-One and the Brothers

James Teit, “The Shuswap” in Franz Boas. Ed. *The Jesup North Expedition: Memoir of the American Museum of Natural History* Vol II, Part VII: EJ Brill/New York: GE Stechert, 1909 at 643

Once when Old-One, or Chief, was travelling over the earth, he came to a place where four brothers were living.





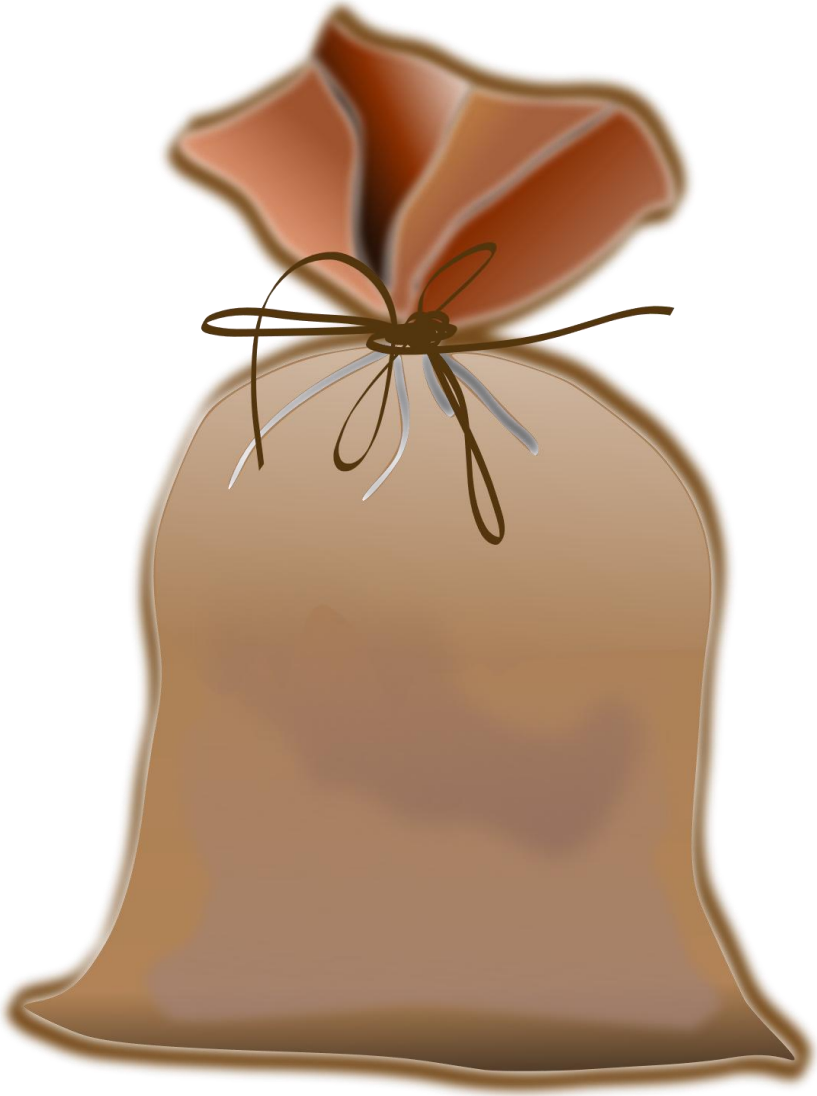
The brothers were about to make a canoe; and that day the eldest had taken some food on his back and an axe.



He had gone into the woods to pick out a good canoe-tree and to fall it.



While wandering around in the woods, he met Old-One, but did not recognize him. Old-One told him he was hungry, and asked if he could give him something to eat.



The man answered, “I have nothing to eat myself.” They separated; and the man, finding a nice straight tree, felled it and then went home.

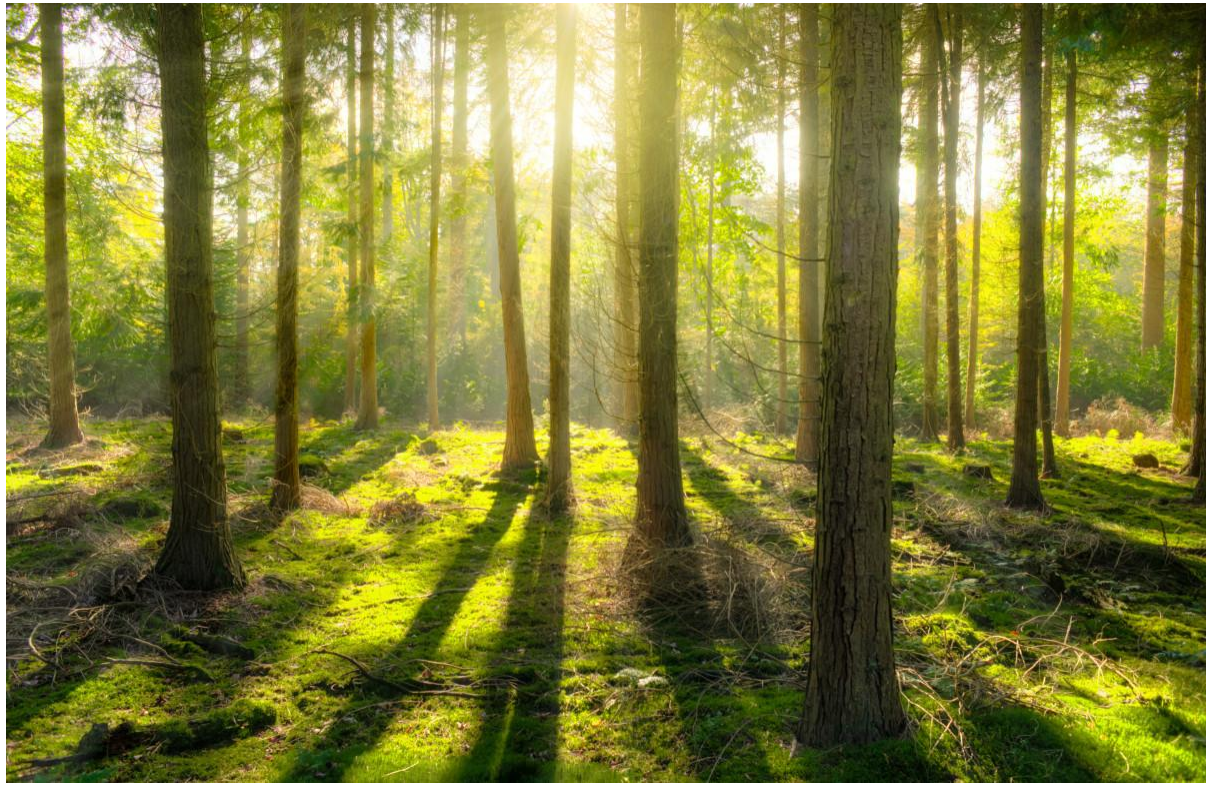






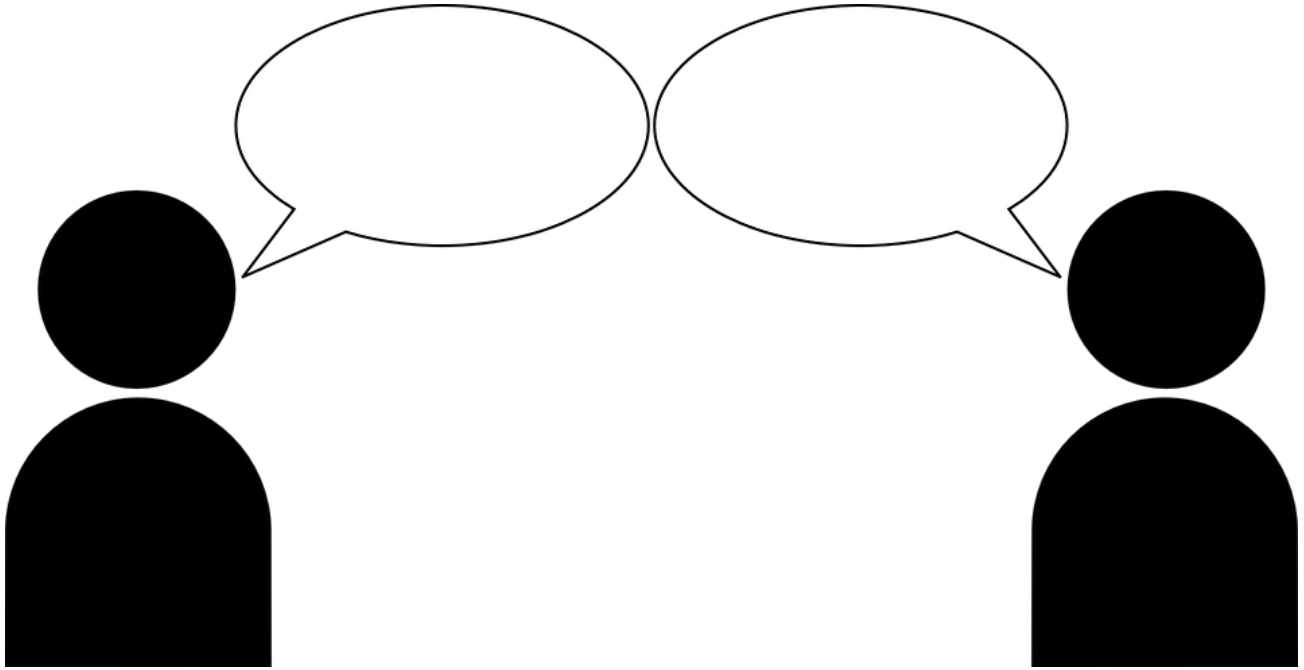
Next morning, when he came to work the tree, he found that it was crooked. This frightened him. He went home and told his brothers what had happened.

Then the second brother went out; and he also met Old-One, who asked where he was going and what he would do. He answered, “I am looking for a good tree. I intend to make a canoe.”



Old-One asked him if he could give him something to eat, for he knew the man carried food in his sack, but the man answered that he had nothing to eat himself.





They separated; and the man found a fine straight tree, which he chopped down. On the next morning it was bent and twisted in all directions.

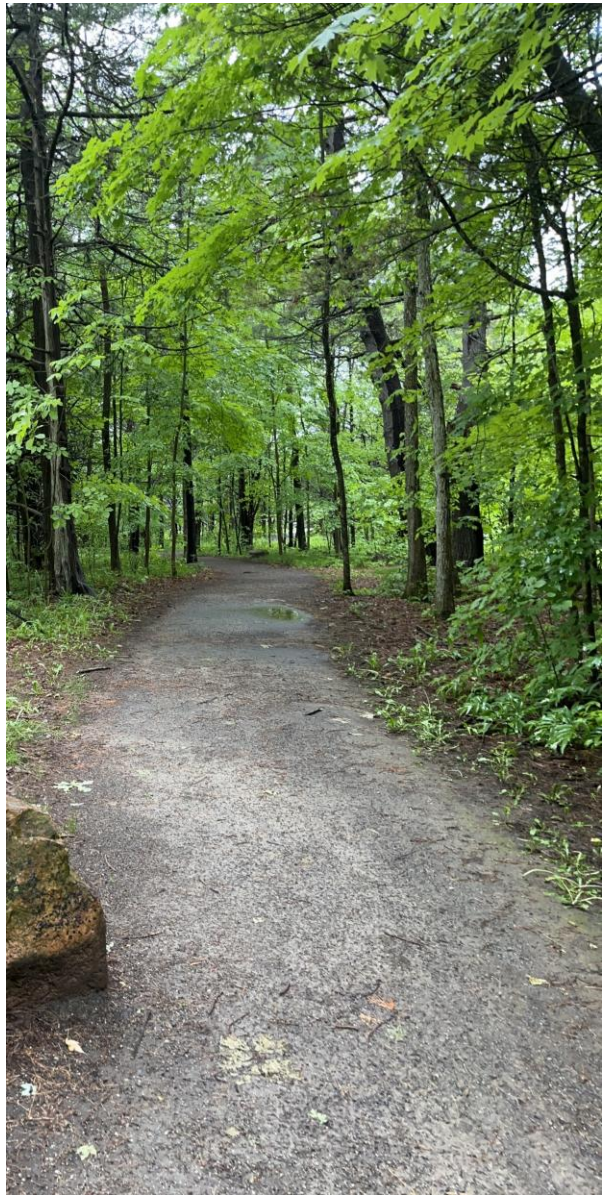


This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC


This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA-NC

After this, the third brother went out in search of a tree, and the same thing happened to him.

At last the youngest brother went out. He was despised by all the others. After he had been travelling some time, and when it was about noon, he met Old-One in the forest, and was asked the same questions.





This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC

He replied he had little food, and offered the sack with its contents to Old-One, saying, “You may eat all the bag contains. I do not care if I go hungry myself for a time.

“I am young and strong, while you are old and weak.” Old-One took the bag, emptied out its contents, and asked the young man to shut his eyes.



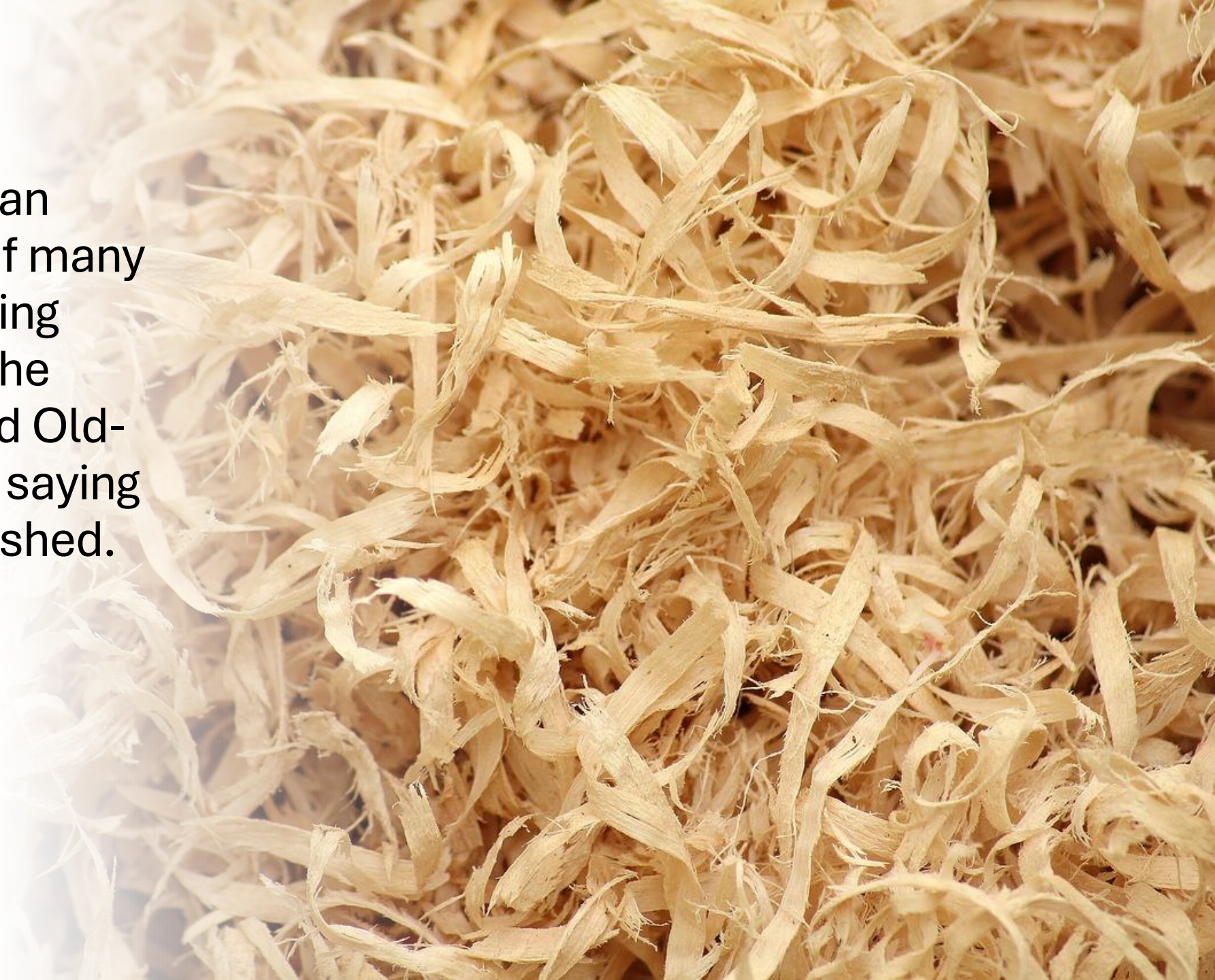
When he opened them again, the food had increased tenfold, and, although they both ate their fill, they were not able to finish it.



Old-One told him to throw away what was left. Then Old-One asked the young man for his axe, and, telling him to wait where he was, he disappeared in the timber.

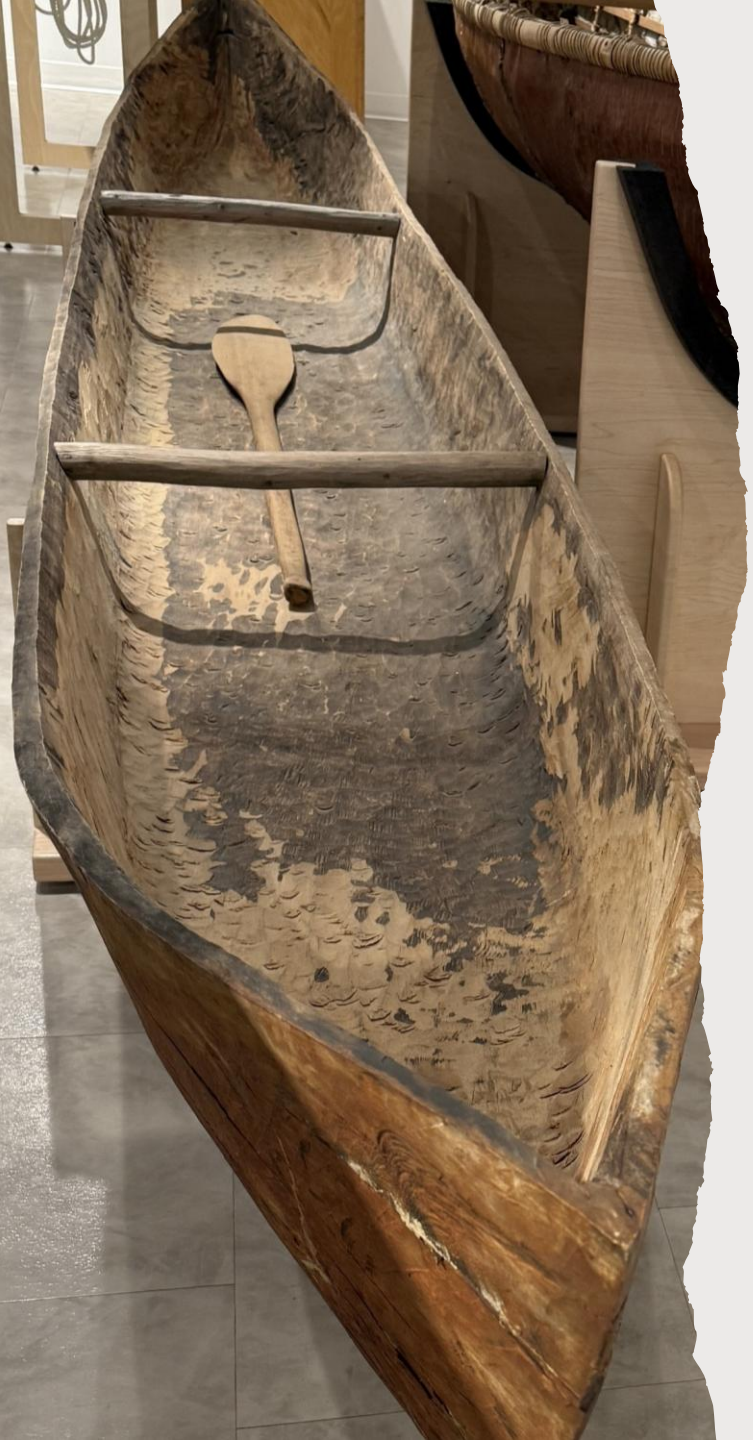


Soon the young man heard a sound as if many people were working wood. Suddenly the sound ceased, and Old-One re-appeared, saying “Your canoe is finished. Come look at it.”



The boy went, and beheld a fine canoe. He thanked Old-One for his help. When the latter left, he gave the young man an iron axe in place of the one made of stone which he had used before.





When the people saw the canoe, they pronounced it the best they had ever seen, and they wondered that the inexperienced youth had been able to make such a fine craft.

The people also wondered at the iron axe because they had only seen axes of stone and antler. The boy's brothers despised him no more. Thus he won much by being kind and hospitable.



