

Other Stories

with a Theme of Courage

Story Title: *Racing the Great Bear (Native American; Iroquois)*

Book: Flying with the Eagle, Racing with Great Bear

Author: Joseph Bruchac

Publisher: Bridgewater Books, an imprint of Troll, 1993

Page(s): 15-23

Synopsis: After years of war, the people of the Five Nations—Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca—set down their weapons and begin the Great Peace. One day, some young men from the Seneca tribe go to visit the Onondaga people and do not return. Others go to search for them but they don't return, either. Who is brave enough to go next? Only Swift Runner, a poor, small boy who wears torn clothes and who lives with his grandmother, is willing to go. Before the boy leaves, his grandmother tells him that his father had been a great warrior, and tells him some magic secrets. Deep in the forest, a monster bear rushes at Swift Runner. He calls out some magic words and the beast retreats. For days Swift Runner chases the monster bear until finally he is caught. The monster gives Swift Runner his teeth, which have healing powers, in exchange for the bear's life. When Swift Runner returns to his village, the people are amazed. The small skinny boy is now a man. What's more, the lost men of their tribe had returned home.

Story Title: *Vassillissa the Valiant (Russia)*

Book: The Skull in the Snow and Other Folktales

Author: Toni McCarty

Publisher: Delacorte Press, New York, 1981

Page(s): 40-46

Synopsis: At the Grand Duke's castle, a young man named Staver boasts that his own castle is far more grand and, what's more, that no treasure of the Duke's is greater than his own wife, Vassillissa. The Grand Duke is furious at the insult. Staver is sent to prison and commands that Staver's wife is summoned. Friends manage to warn Vassillissa and she disguises herself as a Tartar. When the Grand Duke's men approach, she says Vassillissa is gone and that she—as the Tartar—is headed to the Duke's castle to collect 12 years tribute owed in gold. When Vassillissa arrives at the Grand Duke's castle to collect the debt, the Duke's wife whispers to her husband that the tax collector is not a man at all but, in fact, is a woman. To find the truth, he engages the visitor in a series of tests with his best men including wrestling, archery, and chess—yet the stranger beats the Duke's men every time. Bored, Vassillissa tells the Duke she will forgive his taxes if he can produce an excellent gusla player (knowing her husband is accomplished in the art). The prisoner Staver is promptly released from prison to perform, the "tax collector" is satisfied, and Vassillissa and Staver ride away, free.