

ENGLISH



SHOULD WIZARD HIT MOMMY

~Summary~

-by John Updike

Theme of Jack's Story

Jack, Joanne's father, told her a story every evening, and it had now become almost a custom. Jack started narrating stories to Jo when she was just two years old. Over the years, he had started to run out of ideas. Every story was a variation of the basic tale: a small animal, usually named Roger, had some problem. He went to the wise owl, and the owl advised him to go to the wizard.

The wizard solved Roger's problem and asked for a fee. Roger didn't have the required amount, but the wizard told Roger where and how he could get the money. Roger found the money, paid the wizard, went home and had a lovely dinner with his family.

The Roger Skunk Story

It was a Saturday evening and time for Jo's usual naps. Jack asked Jo about the new lead in the story. Jo wanted it to be a 'Skunk'. Having a fresh hero momentarily stirred Jack to creative enthusiasm. Jack started narrating the Roger Skunk story.

Roger smelt very bad. Other creatures loathed him and would run away from him. They teased him by calling him 'Stinky Skunk'. So Roger felt very bad. He had no friends. Jo had not foreseen this and became upset.

Jack was happy to get an unexpected reaction from her, as his stories had now become much too predictable for Jo.

The Owl and Wizard Help Roger

While narrating the story, Jack heard a chair scrape downstairs. He realised he must go down to help Clare, his wife, paint the woodwork. Clare was pregnant. But he continued with the story.

Roger Skunk went to the wise old owl who lived at the top of a very big tree. The enormous owl advised Roger to visit the wizard.

At this point, Jo shot a question and looked at Jack. She asked if magic spells were real. Her inquisitive behaviour had begun a month ago. She had started asking questions like whether spiders really ate bugs and if God was present everywhere, and so on.

Jack didn't like the question, as it made him "miss a beat in the narrative". However, he answered her that magic spells were real in stories.

Roger Skunk reached the wizard's home. The wizard asked him not to come close, as Roger smelt very bad. He asked Roger what he wanted to smell like. Roger said that he wanted to smell like roses. The wizard chanted a magic spell and Roger started smelling like roses.

Jack mistakenly referred to Roger Skunk as Roger Fish. Jo immediately pointed out the mistake.

The Intriguing Twist to the Story

The wizard asked Roger to give him seven pennies, although Roger only had four. The wizard told him where to find the remaining three pennies. Roger Skunk had to go to the end of the lane and turn around three times and look down the magic well. Roger did so and found the pennies, and gave them to the wizard. Now all the other creatures liked to play with Roger because he smelled so good.

Roger Skunk was very happy and reached home. His mother got very angry. She found the new smell of roses 'awful'. She scolded Roger and told him that he didn't smell like a skunk anymore. She took Roger back to the wizard. She hit the wizard over his head and asked him to give Roger Skunk his original smell back.

Jo was surprised. She felt that Roger Skunk would again be lonely. According to her, Mother Skunk was wrong and the wizard should hit her back.

Jo's Ending to the Roger Skunk Story

Jack continued with the story. Both mother and son returned home. Mother Skunk was very happy because Roger smelled like a skunk again. Eventually, all the animals got used to his smell and didn't mind it at all.

Jo still could not relate to the story. She called Mother Skunk stupid. She asked Jack to tell her a story in which the wizard hits Mother Skunk. Jack tried to reason with her and told her that Roger Skunk loved his mother very much and Mother Skunk knew what was right for her baby.

Jack told Joanne to go to sleep and went downstairs to his wife. He felt guilty, looking around at the work she had completed. He found himself stuck in an ugly middle position. He could not convince his daughter and now his wife seemed to be upset with him.

Toward the end of the story, we get a glimpse of the marital tension between Jack and Clare. Though Jack watched his wife work, he did not help her. He felt that both of them were caged together. He did not want to speak with her, work with her or touch her.