

## THE THUNDERBIRDS AND THEIR NIECE

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Once upon a time, long ago, there was a young girl who lay asleep, not knowing anything. All at once she came to consciousness. Not having any parents she merely woke and knew her beginning. She rose and looked around. Then she started away walking along and wondering. She came to a river and stood there and gazed at the stream and by its current she realized what direction it was flowing. She chose to follow upstream, and try to find some living people, as she knew there must be someone alive. As she followed up along the bank she came to a stump, and examined it and kicked at it, until it fell over, being so rotten, and she knew it was cut long ago. She kept on walking till she came to another stump which looked fresher to her. She tried to turn it over but found it more solid; then she thought, "There are some people living nearby."

She walked on a whole day till she came to another stump, and because this one was new or fresh she went further on her journey. On the bank of the river she saw some deer guts lying in the water, so she pulled them out to take along with her. She squeezed the dung out of them and took them with her. At last she came to another place where offal had been thrown into the stream. She saw they looked fresh, so she pulled them out to take along, and threw the first lot away. She kept on till she came to more offal that was thrown into the water. This lot looked new to her, as if it had been thrown in a few minutes ago. She took these and cleaned them, and threw away the others. Still she walked on further till she came to a landing with a trail leading from the river.

She followed this trail on and on till she came to a long, long lodge, which looked very old. In approaching it she was in fear yet she was eager to know, and see more. She got to the door, which was covered with a *kapata* or door blanket, and quietly peeped in and she saw a young boy seated nearby. The boy saw her peeping through, and he said to her, "Oh come in, it is I who caused you to come and find me here. You are my little niece." So she came in and he said to her, "Sit down," and she did.

Then he began to tell her: "There are ten of us here who belong to this lodge and we are all brothers. We are your uncles. The others are all out on their hunt and will soon arrive here. They will come in one after another at intervals, a few minutes between each, and according to their ages following on to the youngest, who will enter behind. Now the oldest of us all will enter first, and this will be Mudj'ekiwis. After him in age each one will enter this lodge and he will see you already sitting with the youngest of us all, Little Pot Belly, Pe'pakitcise."

Every time one came in he was astonished to see the young girl visitor and as each one came in he kissed both of them, the girl and the tiny boy. As each came in he laid his game down inside their great lodge. This lodge was well made, covered from the ground up with mats made of bulrushes. It was well stored with many bags of corn and dried meats stored with many all along the sides for the entire length of the lodge.

Besides being nicknamed Pe'pakitcise, the youngest one of the ten brothers was named Mosanase. In the evening when all had arrived, they ate their supper together, as they sat round in a row in the center of the oblong lodge. The oldest one, Mudj'ekiwis, gave orders to his young

brothers to smoke together, and while so doing, Mud'jekiwis asked his brothers, "What shall we be in relationship to this young girl, who luckily came here and who had pity on our tiny young brother because he was always lonesome and by himself and wanted our lodge?" They all the brothers said alike, "Let us be uncles to her as this is the greatest relationship in the whole world. The niece is the most highly considered and honored; and let it remain with us as our little brother started it."

At this time these brothers had only their bows and arrows, striking clubs and lances. Spears were used sometimes to kill sturgeon. Early each morning they went to hunt for game, returning at night, each with a load on his back. These brothers kept fetching game into their long lodge and when it was pretty well filled Mud'jekiwis commanded that while they were together they should make a sacrifice. All agreed with him. Then they called for Oskaupawis or "hero servant" to come and attend them and take charge of this feast; to do the cooking of the sacrifice, and also to cut up into chunks the old-fashioned tobacco, enough to fill their pipes to be consumed in smoking at the fast. This was prepared and done and the feast cooked and dished up and ready to eat.

Then Mud'jekiwis, the eldest, said to all and to their tiny niece who was seated alongside the door of the lodge, that their feast would sicken her, and when they began to eat it the smell would injure her, so they told her to lie down flat on her face, and cover her head so she would not get any of the odor. Then her uncles began to eat and she heard the bones rattle in falling to the ground. After the meat was eaten the girl heard the bones rattle so much that she peeped through her coverings to spy what was going on. She saw her uncles were large birds with crooked bills of copper or brass. After they got through eating, they changed back to their first appearance like men.

Then autumn came, and these men began to think of departing to where it was warm. Mud'jekiwis first said, "Where shall we leave and who shall keep our little niece? We must consult each other about this." Then the ten brothers called very loudly for their Oskaupawis or "servant hero," to come and prepare and arrange sacred tobacco to sacrifice to all of the large bird kind and to ask them who would take care of their beloved niece.

All bird kind arrived, and were asked in the council. Mud'jekiwis asked them, "Who is it that is able to take good care of our niece?"

Then the Black Raven said: "I. I shall take care of her while you all are away, and this is during the winter time, for I always stay in the north in the woods." Raven said this because the earth here is his dish.

Mud'jekiwis then said, "No, not you. Because you have no shelter or home, you only perch on bushy limbs."

Another made an answer: "I will take care of the niece because I am never hungry." This was Paponana, the Winter Hawk.

Mud'jekiwis said, "Not you. The chances are that you will starve her, and you have no home because you perch wherever night overtakes you."

Another responded, saying, "I shall take care of our niece," and this was Kananaiskapokona, the tiny chickadee, who once was a very large bird, only he cried so much once he reduced himself to a small size. At the time when he said this, in the beginning, he was large.

"Well, then," Mud'jekiwis said, "it shall be you, because you told the truth. You are never in need. You always have plenty and you have a good warm home."

Then the chickadeedee said in praise of himself, "I shall do as I said, for I am not lazy and it is known that when hunters kill deer or any kind of game in the woods, when they skin and dress the deer, they always leave particles of the flesh from the body and bits of fat behind, being sure that the chickadeedee always collects and gets them and takes them home. When he gets these crumbs he stores them away, and each particle becomes large or expands by the power the chickadeedee possesses."

Then Mud'jekiwis said to his niece "Be very good and quiet while you are taken care of. Be a good girl. Should you ever get sad you need only repeat our names, and we shall hear you at once, as if you were near us."

Then Kananaiskapokona started off with his niece to go to his home to live there, during the whole winter, and the ten Thunderers started towards their home directly south, where it is very warm.

Chickadeedee and his niece arrived at his beautiful home, an *upaliwikonor* mat wigwam, well supplied with everything. All kinds of dried meats were collected there. They were hung up on a scaffold. The girl lived there with her uncle all winter. She had only to care for their home and her uncle Chickadeedee hunted all day long and returned in the evening. When her uncle was away hunting she worked through the day making sashes.

The uncle as he departed every day warned his niece to be careful when she was alone at their camp, "Someone might come to you, a power, an unruly man, who always goes about seeking for living people and causes them to die. He tries to catch women, and he may come to you, and if he does he will try you. When he enters our wigwam he will seat himself over on the side where my bench is. He will speak to you in some way, and when he does, never answer him, keep quiet. Three or four times he will ask you questions, and if you make no answer he will leave you alone, and cannot harm you. But if you should answer or speak to him, he will get you. He will lead you by your hand and take you away. He will try different ways in order to fool you, and if you answer him you are gone. So look out for him. He will try you by saying to you, 'Has your uncle gone away?' He has a wife of his own, all the time, but a jealous one. He is likely to take away other men's wives or single women. If he gets one he takes her home to help his wife, and she is good to her only for a short time. She arranges to try to kill the stranger on account of her jealousy. She tells her to go and get some water at the spring nearby, and when she gets there to get water, she falls into the spring and drowns, because the bad man's wife has a brother hidden underneath the spring. He is a Misikin'ubik or black monster hairy snake. He takes her and causes her death."

The bad husband made a visit to this young niece all winter long, every day, while the uncle was away hunting, but she managed never to speak to him, and he failed each time. At last one time he asked the niece about her uncle. She was tired of him and forgot her uncle's warning, so she answered him. He captured her, and took her away to be abused by his wife.

The wife sent the captured woman after dead hemlock bark on dead standing trees, for firewood. Generally such bark has to be loosened from the tree, when it falls to the ground. Most of the bark fell on the women getting it and killed them, from which accident they very seldom escaped. Another scheme was to send a woman to get water at the spring, for when she went

there she fell senseless into the spring. The stream was located at the side of a large rocky mound, the secret home of the brother, Misikin'ubik, who devoured the shades of those he got. If anybody came to the spring, he drew them underneath.

The niece, when sent out for hemlock bark, got clear of the plot because she had power herself. When she went to get the bark she took her pack strap, threw it at the root of the dead tree, and started to the home of her mistress. The load of dry bark with the pack strap on it came after her and, at the door, it almost overtook her.

After this her mistress told her to go and get water at the spring. The niece thought, "Well, this woman has used me well and is kind to me, so I hasten to obey her." Then the girl got the water and dipped it up, and as she turned to come away she heard ringing sounds in both of her ears, and fell into the water hole, as the serpent brother drew her down underneath the spring.

She was there a while and then revived. As she sat up looking around, she found herself seated between a very gray-headed old man and a woman, in what appeared to her like the inside of a wigwam or long lodge. There were there seated in a circular row ten men who were really Misikin'ubikuk, or monster hair snakes. The old couple seated at the door were man and wife. When they saw this young woman inside they said, "Oh my, it is very hard that this woman is brought here. It is known that this woman's uncle is a sacred, powered god. Who can do anything? Now her uncle will kill all of us here!"

Then the ten serpents became hungry to eat up the woman. One of the sons repeated, "What are you growling about so much? He or anyone else can't break this house. It is a solid rock hill. How can they break through this heavy mound of rock?"

The old woman who was the mother of the ten hairy snakes took the young woman out of this dismal den. But the wicked wife of her captor was the only sister that these ten hairy serpents had, and she had power to cause all women caught by her husband to die. The old woman decided to protect the girl because In'amakiwuk were her uncles. Soon she carefully led the niece out through the door of the rock for fear that the Thunderers might come and kill all of her sons.

She took her to a place about a half mile from the snakes' den. There she built a campfire to last all day long. In those days this kind of fire was called by the ancestors, *kaposfika*, meaning "Setting fire to a standing stub," or a whole standing tree. All day long they stayed here, then in the evening both returned to the Devil's Hole. They made these trips several times. At last the young woman remembered about her uncles, the Thunderers, and what they had promised her, and when the old woman said, "Let us now return," she replied, "Well Grandma, you go ahead and I will start a little later."

After the old lady left, the young woman commenced to cry so her uncles could hear her. Then she sang the sacred songs about her powerful uncles and the Thunderers heard right off. Then Mud'jekiwis said, "Listen! What is the matter with our little niece? Something is wrong with our niece below," and they heard her crying. Then he said to his younger brothers, "Hurry up and get ready!" Mud'jekiwis then started out and tried to find his sacred club, for when he struck anything with it, it broke in two.

Meanwhile, the ten serpents said to their old mother, "Why did you leave the young woman behind? Go hurry back after her and fetch her inside here."

Then Mud'jekiwis hurried to make a new striking club, or *pasahanaku*. Mosanase, or

Pep'aketise, the youngest of them all, was terrified and provoked. He stared at the center of the fire. The Thunderers declared, "We wonder who is so great with power as to cause our niece to cry?" They knew themselves to be the greatest in power over the whole earth. Then all the Thunderers, hearing that their beloved niece was in distress and trouble, went where their niece was heard crying, Mud'jekiwis taking the lead.

Soon they arrived at the high mound rock where the monster Misikin'ubikuk were living. He soon struck it with his lightning and his brothers aided. Mud'jekiwis struck and his first blow bounced back from the solid rock; the other brothers likewise rained blows on the same spot but they flew without a scar seen, until it came to the last and youngest one, Mosanase. His stuck the rock and splintered the den to atoms.

Then there was a terrible time. Lightning struck and thunder reverberated. Mud'jekiwis shouted out to his respective brothers, "Take it easy and be careful lest you hit our little niece down there. Look carefully and see who is holding her so that she may not be killed by us.

Mosanase finished the powerful rock mound which he broke all to pieces. Then the ten monster serpents lay in there struggling and trying to escape. Then Mud'jekiwis told his brothers not to kill the old couple with one of their sons, for they had protected the girl. Nine of the black horned snakes were killed outright. Then the Thunderers took their niece from the place and removed her to where Chickadeedee had his home.

In the meantime Chickadeedee had cried almost to death. When the Thunderers came back he was only kicking at the fireplace with on tiny leg. He had disturbed the ashes so much by his kicking that they fastened to him, so that he now carries them in the color of his feathers.

When the Thunderers saw this they said to him, "Now stop your crying, we have brought back our beloved little niece and we saved her."

This Chickadeedee was once a large man or big fowl but this was previous to his taking care of the girl. When she was taken away from him he cried so much that he shrank to a tiny size, but he was still powerful.

Then the Thunderers again counseled among themselves as to who should keep their little niece. They chose to place her in a growing tree that had a crotch. They put her there and said to her, "This place shall be your permanent home till the end of the world. You shall be perched here to sing, and when you sing we shall hear you every time. We shall come from the west and it shall commence to rain. Every time you are heard it shall be a sign of rain. You now shall be a very tiny silken green creeping toad, always up in the trees and on the leaves, but never on the ground."

There are two kinds of these, which look nearly the same but are not. One is blue like sky color, and the other is tiny green and is a common one. For a long time the Indians have been using the tiny one for great medicine and it is yet so used. This one was the niece or the tiny young woman. The Thunderers spoiled her, having changed her and put her into the tree crotch and left her there. When this niece was crying for her uncles, the Thunderers, it was the latter part of the winter, which gives us the reason why the Thunderers come with their lightning about February or March, for she had arranged it that way. Then we all came away.