

THE HUNTER AND THE SNOW

Chief Shunien Josette (Silver, 1827-†), Menominee
Chief Niopet Oshkosh (Four in a Den, 1829-†), Menominee

A man who had dream power lived with his family. He hunted in the winter and had his lodge pitched a little distance from the neighboring wigwams. One day in the spring when he was hunting through the woods and over the plains, it was very hot, and the snow began to melt. As he traveled, he heard the melting lumps make a noise like “pssht! pssht!” with a zipping sound, and so he said to it, “*Aha ha ha, tsik, tsik, tsik! kina itamipa!*” (Ha ha ha, there, there, there, take it, you’re getting it. That’s why you say it, you’re catching it).

The man thought nothing of it when he made fun of the snow for fleeing before the sun, but immediately a voice replied, “Oh no, you shouldn’t say that to me! That’s not so! I come here only because my master, the North, sends me here for a while only, and I have to obey him. When I am done, the sun helps me disappear, but just because you have said this to me, I’ll give you a trial because I am a power too, even if a greater power did send me here to cover your ground in the winter. Next winter, you be ready.” The Indian paused, gaped, and stared and listened in surprise, but he could see no one. “You and I will have a contest; we will see who is greater, you or I,” he heard.

No more was said, and the Indian left his hunt and fled home at top speed. He reached his house and told his wife and children. Then he went to the next lodge, where a very old man resided with several other ancients. “I came to tell you what I have heard just now on my hunt,” he said. “I wondered at it so much that I stopped hunting and came to tell you.” So he told them what had happened. “Well,” said the old man, “if you heard the power speak to you, what he said will be just so.”

The old man heard him and said, “It’s no wonder that it was angry if you said what you say you have to the snow. You will be punished; it will be so with you, since the snow has made something of the nature of a bet with you. My grandchild, go right now and prepare for it; all your time get ready to meet him.”

“What shall I do, in what way?”

“If you begin to hunt now and save all the game that you kill, buffalo, deer, and all large animals that are fat, preserving all their grease and oil in your receptacles, putting the fat from each one into its own bladder, or tripe or skin and store it all away, that will be of aid to you. Then you will have to gather good wood, full of pitch, gummy wood, and knots and heap it in a great pile; this will be your work. Cut notches in the pine trees while the sap is soft and let it run into the holes, take this and daub it over the wood, and then build your wigwam with the door facing the south, make your scaffold for storage at one side, near by, and inside make one, with another opposite, for you and your friend to lie on. Your contest will be hard and long; you cannot get too much.”

“All right, Grandfather.” said the man. The poor fellow got busy and spent all the year hunting at night and preparing wood and oil by day. He made grease and tallow cakes and bars of all sizes. When winter approached, he began to tremble with fear, and at last, when he was nearly ready, he called his wife and said, “Now, dear wife and children, you know I am in trouble on account of what I said about the snow and the north. I shall leave you, and you need not fear for it will be natural winter with you. Don’t worry about me, for I shall attempt the trial. Do not trouble yourselves, whatever happens, but care for yourself and our children as well as you can while I am

gone. Moreover, dear wife, I tell you this: in the spring, when the snow is left in only a few pieces, you may come yonder where I heard that voice and look for me there. If I'm alive, you'll find me. Goodbye, I go now, and don't any of you come before the time I told you."

Then he left and lived by himself, making a small fire only to eat by. By and by, as the cold weather drew near, one night a great wind rose, "Boooo!" it sounded four times as he lay on his bed place, and the man thought in his heart, "He is coming now." He thought over his own power and begged his dream guardian to help him. Meanwhile the wind was blowing, blowing, blowing, and he began to feel very cold, and so he made a rousing fire. He could hear the bushes and trees outside snapping and cracking, louder and louder, as the fiercest wind tore through them. He kept expecting something, but nothing appeared.

"I wonder who he is, and how he looks," he thought, "and though I consider myself now as lost and dead, I will try my best." He stirred up the fire, and the cold grew worse and worse. The time appeared very short to him, but it was already midwinter. At last, in his tightly pitched and chinked lodge, with its tiny smoke hole and tight mat door, the man saw a manlike object of snow walking. At one moment, it seemed almost like smoke, and then it appeared like snow and ice. It brushed by him and sat down opposite. Just the instant it came in, the fire started to die out.

Then the man rose and said to himself, "The power that helps me, hold me and my relatives." So he threw on wood of the poorer sort, keeping back the best.

Meantime, the object opposite sat and glared at him. It grew colder and colder until he shook and the image shrank, yet he remembered his orders and tried to remain conscious as he piled on more wood. Although it was really all winter, the contest seemed to last for four days; those four days were the coldest ever known on earth. They were moderate, medium, hard, and terrible successively, and yet he increased the fire until at last he nearly roasted himself.

Beginning with the second day the snow god groaned as the man stirred the fire, and it turned over restlessly. This encouraged the man, and so he piled on more and heaped grease and fat on the flames, and "phhh!" it blazed and filled the lodge with heat. Still the ice man lay there, not human, but fashioned like a man, looking old and powerful.

The Indian sweated himself, and when it was nearly the fourth day and still growing colder, he looked at the stranger, and, behold, the snow person was gasping and growing smaller. Then the man threw on his pitch and fat. "All right," he thought, "he's getting it. I will still try as a man, and he as a god." In desperation and rage, he poured on his oil, and soon only a little lump of ice was left. When it was nearly morning, he heard it speak. "Ho! Grandchild. Surely you are a god power too; you've outdone me; you are greater than I. I give up to you. I am conquered." The man was nearly consumed himself, but still he piled on more, lest the cold smother the fire.

"Now, Grandchild, cease. You may be greater. I am done. You have spoken the truth. Now I will return; it is all over. Before I go I must tell you what you've gained because you won this trial. I have power in the north. I shall be there always. I am a servant, and I was put there. I will give you power to outlive four generations; you shall outlive four old men. You shall see your own gray hairs at the third generation and be old at the fourth. I give it also to your wife and children, because you have outdone me. You shall always live here at this place; so go and get your family. I must also tell you that you will have abundant game here, and it shall come to your door. Bring all your relatives; they will never be in want. But think of me from time to time and do not forget me. In winter your wife and children may run about barefoot, and the snow will not hurt them, for I will protect you, and your name from now on shall be Kapi'ponokao ('the one who mastered the winter')."

This is a sacred story.