



The Boy Who Snared the Sun

A deep-crueted snow covered the earth and sparkled in the light of the wintry moon. The wind had died away and it was very cold and still. The only sound that could be heard was the cracking ice of the big sea waters called Gitchee Gumee, which we now call Lake Superior.

Inside the wigwam it was warm from the bear skins that lined the walls for sleeping blankets. Morning Glory and her little brother Eagle Feather waited for the old man to speak.

Suddenly, a white-footed mouse crept from his nest in a corner and sat up on his hind legs. Eagle Feather raised his hand in a threatening way but Morning Glory caught him by the arm. "No! No! You must not do any harm to him. See how friendly he is and not afraid either. There is enough game in the forest to kill without harming this little animal. Do not use your strength on this weak little mouse."

Eagle Feather, pleased with anything that seemed like a praise of his strength, let his hand fall. "Your words are true, Morning Glory. It is better that I should measure my hunting skills against Amik (Beaver) or Waawaashkeshi (Deer)."

The old man interrupted, "There was a time when a thousand boys would have been no match for the mouse he used to be."

"When was that grandfather?" the children asked.

"That was in the days of the great Dormouse. In those days, there were many more animals than men on the earth and the biggest of all the animals was the Dormouse. But something strange happened. To begin with, you must understand that the world was different than it is today. People did not eat the flesh of animals. They lived on berries and roots and Gitchi Manido (Great Spirit) had not yet given corn to man and there was no fire for cooking or heating. Far away, there was a small fire that was watched continuously by two old magical women who would not share it with anyone."



Grandfather continued, “The people were very hungry because animals also ate berries and roots and there were not enough to go around for everyone. The animals ruled the earth and the biggest of those animals was Bosh-kwa-dosh, the mastodon. He was higher than the trees and had an enormous appetite. But he did not stay long on the Earth or there would not be enough food for the other animals.”

“I thought you said Dormouse was the biggest animal,” Eagle Feather interrupted.

Ignoring the comment, Grandfather continued his story. “At that time, the only two humans left on earth were a girl like you, Morning Glory, and a boy like you, Eagle Feather. Winter was coming, and the girl needed to teach the boy how to keep warm by making a coat of grasses and how to use a bow and arrow to entertain himself when she would leave for long trips. As the boy was working on his coat of grasses, he saw a flock of geese fly overhead and thought to himself, ‘I wonder how I could use this bow and arrow to shoot down the goose and use his feathers for his coat.’ No one had ever used a bow and arrow like this. The boy thought that his coat would be much warmer with feathers in it. However, he had not learned how to shoot the arrow straight and he missed the snow bird. He tried again and missed the second time. He tried a third time, and missed again. The birds took fright and flew away. Each day he practiced by shooting his arrow at a tree. At last, he killed a goose, then another, and another. When he had shot ten birds, he felt he had enough. ‘See sister,’ he said, ‘I am not going to freeze this winter because I will make my coat from the feathers and skins of these birds.’ So the sister sewed the skins together to make her brother’s coat.

“The boy was very proud and strutted around in his new coat. I think I will see what else I can shoot with my bow and arrow, he announced and off he went into the hills to hunt. He walked and walked and soon became tired, so he lay down to sleep under a large tree.

“As he slept, the sun played a trick on him. It was a mild winter and the bird skins that he used for his coat were still fresh and tender. Under the glare of the sun, the skins began to shrivel and shrink. The coat became tighter and tighter. The boy woke up and felt his coat. He became angry and rose to stamp his feet and yell to the sun, “See what you have done!! You have spoiled my new bird



coat. You, Sun, think you are beyond my reach, but I will have my revenge. Just wait and see!”

“Grandfather,” interrupted Eagle Feather, “What about the Dormouse you were telling us about?”

“I know. We are getting to that part of the story, but first you need to hear how the young boy devised a plan to catch the Sun with a noose. The boy asked his sister to make a rope of twisted grass. However, the sister thought it would not be strong enough, so she made him a rope out of her braided hair. That would be much stronger. When the boy saw it, he was so pleased that he kissed the rope and it turned into a material as strong as metal. He climbed to the top of a hill with the rope wrapped around his waist. Then he waited for the sun to rise. When the sun began to rise, the boy captured the sun with his rope and pulled it down. Darkness fell upon the earth. This darkness was cold and put all of the animals in distress. The animals got together and had a meeting.

“In the meeting, they decided they needed one of the animals to cut the snare that bound the sun to the earth and stopped it from rising each morning. Then, Eagle stepped forward and announced that he had the authority given to him from the other birds to fly to the sun because it was he who flew closest to the sun every day. But Eagle could not get close enough. When he tried, he singed his feathers and fell back to the earth. When Eagle fell, he landed on Dormouse who was fast asleep. Dormouse kept on sleeping. Eagle said, ‘There must be something wrong with Dormouse. My fall did not even wake him.’

“ ‘There is only one way to wake him,’ said Wolf. ‘We need to ask Animikii (Thunderer) to come and help.’

“Soon thunder could be heard. Boom! Boom! When he shouted into the ear of Dormouse, the biggest beast on earth rose to his feet. He was as big as a mountain when he stood up. Eagle spoke up and said, ‘Because you are so tall, you need to go and release the sun. You are so big that if part of you is burned by the sun, you will still be large.’



“Dormouse may have been large, but he was not as smart as Eagle. This sounded like a good idea to him, and he wanted to help the other animals. So, up the hill he walked to where the little boy had snared the sun. He found the noose and started to nibble on the rope. As he nibbled, his back grew hotter and hotter. Soon it began to burn away his flesh into big piles of ashes. When he finally cut the rope with his teeth and set the sun free, he was only the size of an ordinary mouse. That is why the dormouse is the size he is today.”