

Summer Conquers Winter

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Native American

Easy
13 min read

There was a village where it was the habit of the people to fight a great deal; they were warlike. A boy came to that village. He was perhaps four years old. No one knew where he came from. He wandered around staying here and there; first one family kept him a while, then another. The people didn't care for the child or pay much attention to him.

One spring, when the boy was almost a young man, there was a good deal of talk about getting up a party to go on the warpath. Twenty men volunteered. The boy wanted to go; he asked one man and another, but all refused. Then he said, "I will go anyhow."

The twenty started and the boy went with them. When night came, fires were built and two men camped at each fire. The boy built his own fire and sat by it alone.

Several days passed. One night the boy had a dream: A man appeared to him, and said, "If you keep on in the direction you are going you will all perish to-morrow at midday. Tell the head man of the party and ask him to change his course."

They were going south.

When the boy told his dream to the leader of the party, he was angry and said to his men, "I didn't want this

fellow to come; he is a hindrance and a coward. We have come to meet an enemy; why should we turn back even if we knew there was one on our road?"

After eating they went on, paying no heed to the dream.

When the sun was near the middle of the sky, the boy, who was in the rear—the party was going Indian file—noticed that the leader stopped, then the next man stopped and the next. When he came up he found they were looking at a track.

"It is NYAGWAIHE," said the leader. "The bear that kills everyone it meets. It knows when a person looks at its track and no matter how far away it is, it comes back and destroys that person."

The boy listened, then said, "I would like to see this bear." The men said, "No, you wouldn't; nobody wants to see such a terrible creature." But the boy insisted.

Then the leader said, "If you want to see the bear you mustn't follow us. We will turn off here and you can keep on, but if you meet it and run, don't run in the direction we take."

They urged him to go with them, but he wouldn't.

The boy hung his bundle in the crotch of a tree, then went on, and soon, not far ahead, he saw something of enormous size. When nearer, he found it was a great bear and that it sat up on the trail with its back toward him. He crept close and looked at the creature. It had no hair on its body except a little at the end of its tail. He sent an arrow. The bear sprang forward, then turned and ran after him., It got so near that he could feel its breath.

The boy dodged from tree to tree, then darted off and ran swiftly, the bear close behind. He came to a stream that was deep but narrow. He jumped across it; the bear followed him.

The boy sprang back and the bear sprang back. The boy jumped across the stream a number of times; the bear always just behind him.

The boy felt his strength increasing; the bear's strength was failing. To tire the bear the boy made a great circle before he sprang. At last the bear fell behind; as it sprang across, the boy passed it coming back. Soon the bear

had to scramble to get a footing on the bank. The boy shot and the arrow entered the middle of one of the bear's forefeet. The bear scrambled on to the bank, reeled from tree to tree, staggered, fell, rose again, struggled for a time, then rolled over and died.

The boy took three hairs from the bear's whiskers and one tooth from its jaw; went back to where he had left his bundle; took it; followed the trail of the twenty men; ran fast; overtook them, and said, "I have killed the NYAGWAIHE you were so afraid of."

They were astonished, for no man had ever killed a NYAGWAIHE. They said, "If he has done this he must have great power. Let us go and see."

They traveled till sundown; came to where the bear lay and saw it was of immense size. They said, "We'll build a fire and burn the body, then each man can take some of the ashes and a bone for medicine to give him power."

Towards morning, when the fire had burned down, they stirred the ashes till each man found a bone.

The leader said, "You must be careful about taking up the remnants of this bear. Let each man, before he takes up his bone, say what gift he wants, what power."

Most of the men wished to be good hunters and brave warriors; some wished to be fast runners. The tooth and whiskers were good for every purpose; the boy didn't tell the men that he had taken anything. They had changed their ideas of him; they now looked on him as having great power.

The party traveled many days, camping at night. One night the young man had a dream and the dream said, "Tomorrow you will meet an enemy of greater number than your own party. Among them is a large man of immense power. He is so much larger than the rest of the men that you will easily know him. You must all fight him. When you meet the enemy, let every man hang up his bundle and begin to fight."

The young man didn't tell his dream. After eating, the party started on. When the sun was well up, they saw a bear on the trail ahead. It got up, stretched itself, and looked at them.

When they came nearer the bear said, "We have met and we shall get what we want."

Then he turned and disappeared. The bear was one of the enemy's men, sent to challenge the opponent.

The leader said to his men, "Our enemy is near. Be of good courage; we will conquer."

They went on and before long saw the enemy. The enemy saw them; they gave a war-whoop and arrows began to fly.

The young man said, "Let every man hang his bundle on a tree."

They hung up their bundles and began to fight.

The young man remembered his dream and looked for the large warrior. When he saw him, he saw that he had a medicine that he held in front of his face to ward off arrows. This defense was larger than the one the young man had—the smaller it was the more power it possessed—and the young man felt sure of success—Stone Coats (Ice and Cold) were born with this power, a tiny hand to be kept on the palm of the hand—the young man was a Stone Coat.

The large man said, "You will get what you deserve, you Stone Coat, I will kill you."

He and the young man watched out, each eager to kill the other; they paid no attention to the rest of the warriors. They fought with clubs. At last the young man snatched his opponent's club, hurled it away and threw him down.

When the enemy saw their leader overpowered, they ran. The big warrior and many of his party were killed, The Northern men piled up the dead and burned them, They had secured a long string of scalps.

When the party went back to the village and told what had happened, the young man was made chief. They thought him a Stone Coat though he didn't look like one.

Another expedition was arranged, many volunteered, but only thirty were chosen. They went South as before, The third night the young chief dreamed that a man came to him, and said, "To-morrow night when you camp, an enemy will camp nearby and you will discover each other [It was not the custom of Indians to attack in the night, they waited till daylight.] Be sure that you make the attack."

The next morning when the chief told his dream, the men believed him. That -night they discovered the enemy not far away. Toward daylight, the chief told his men to be ready. Just as light came, they started. As they stole near, they saw that the enemy was preparing for an attack.

The chief said to his warriors, "We will circle around the camp. When around, I will raise a war-whoop, then let every man whoop, and attack."

The chief saw that one of the enemy's warriors was a much larger man than the others, and that he had a medicine shield to ward off arrows and it was about the size of his own. Then he said to his men, "You must fight desperately. I don't know how this will end."

The big warrior shouted, "You are among these men, are you, Stone Coat? I am going to kill you."

The chief didn't hold up his medicine shield.

When the two met, they used their clubs first, then they grappled. The chief, getting a good hold of the big man, pulled out his arm and threw it off; right away it was back. Then the big man pulled off the chief's arm and hurled it away; in an instant it was back and was as before.

While the two fought, the shouting and noise began to die away. Once in a while there was a shout, but it could be known that many people were being killed.

The chief pulled off the man's head, tore off the flesh and kicked away the pieces as they came back; for if the pieces were kept away till cold their strength died and they couldn't come back. He kept the pieces away till the big man died.

When the fight was over and their enemy conquered, the chief found that fifteen of his men had been killed. Those left went back to their village and for a long time there was no more fighting.

When the chief had passed the prime of life, he said,

I am getting old, I want to go on one more expedition, then I will be satisfied."

Forty men volunteered. They went toward the South, for the people they were to fight with came from the

South. One night the chief dreamed that a man appeared, and said, "I have come to tell you that a very powerful man will be with the enemy. Maybe you will not be able to conquer him, Tomorrow, just before midday, an owl will light on your trail, and say, 'Be ready, the enemy is near.'"

In the morning the chief told his dream. At midday they heard an owl hoot. It flew along the trail, lighted on a tree, and said, "The enemy is near."

The chief said to his men, "Be ready! Hang your bundles on a tree. If the big man throws me twice you had better run."

While they were hanging up their bundles, they heard the enemy's war-whoop. When they were near, the men of the South called out: "We have come to destroy you. You have destroyed our other expeditions, now we will destroy you."

The chief and the strong man met and fought with clubs. Then they threw down their clubs and clinched. They struggled for a time, then the chief was thrown, but he sprang up and threw the strong man, who had barely touched the ground when he was up again.

The second time the chief was thrown, his men ran off some distance, then turned and looked back. The chief was up again, they saw his arm pulled off; it was on again, then his head was hurled away. Some of the men ran toward home, but five hid and remained.

The enemy began to gather up the dead; they thought all of the chief's men had run away. The chief was dead. The men in hiding saw the enemy gather up his limbs and flesh. Then they heard the strong man say, "We will hold a council and give thanks for conquering this man who has killed so many of our people."

They formed a ring and placed in the center the pieces of the chief's body.

They were to give thanks by singing a war-song. A man sang and as he sang he went towards the chief's feet. When the song ended the singer went to the chief's head, and said, "You have been conquered, now we will have peace," and he struck the head with his club, saying, "I will punish you."

That instant the pieces flew together, became the chief again.

He sprang up, killed five men, then lay down and fell apart.

The Southern people said, "Our singer did wrong to abuse a warrior after he was dead; this is why we have lost five men. We had better kill him before he brings us more bad luck."

They cut off the singer's head, then sang the war-song over, but no one raised a club or other weapon.

Of the chief's men ten out of the forty reached home. They said, "The friend whom we depended upon is dead, we must stay at home hereafter."

The tribe lived in peace after that.

This was a battle between Winter and Summer. Summer conquered.

Note: This tale comes from the Seneca nation.

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