



The Trials and Death of Inchworm

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Native Americannorth American

Easy
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INCHWORM lived in a little dirt cabin in the center of a big forest. He had plenty of meat and provisions of all kinds. One morning a messenger came to his cabin and said, “They want you to come to Dry Island, two days from now, to be present at a meeting.”

“I will be there,” said the old man, but, after the messenger had gone, he began to wonder what the meeting was for, and if he ought to go.

Two days later, Inchworm, starting before sunrise and traveling very fast, at midday reached a large lake. He stood near the water and looking around asked in his mind, “Where is Dry Island?” After a while he saw, off in the western part of the lake, a small island. He walked along the shore till he was opposite the island, then went into the water and swam till he came to it. He went ashore, looked around and thought, “Well, where are the people? I can’t stay here long; it’s too dry. But I have promised to be at the meeting.”

Then he saw, at the northern end of the island, a crowd of people. He went to the place and when the chiefs saw him they called out, "All are present. Now we will begin."

The four chiefs: Meteor, Rabbit, Raven and Fox, sat down and began to talk about Inchworm. They were of one mind; they wanted Inchworm to move away from the forest where his home was.

Inchworm didn't want to go away from a place where he had lived a long time, he said, "I am satisfied with my home. I like the country around there. Why should I leave it?"

The chiefs tried to make him consent to move, but he wouldn't, his answer was always, "I am satisfied with my home. Why should I leave it?"

The chiefs were losing patience and getting angry with him when all at once they heard a noise at the southern end of the island; they heard Mud Turtle coming and he was scolding. When he came to where the people were assembled, he said, "I want you to leave my island."

"Be quiet!" said one of the chiefs. "Don't drive my people away, they are peaceable people."

"I won't be quiet," said Turtle. "This is my island, I do as I please here. I don't want you around. Go away!"

"We will go across the lake," said the chief.

Turtle followed the crowd to the edge of the lake. There everybody jumped into the water, and swam away. When they came out on mainland one of the chiefs said, "We will sit down here."

The People sat down, and again the chiefs tried to make Inchworm say that he would leave his place in the woods when he refused they talked to him and scolded till they saw a dark object coming toward them, then they stopped talking and watched. At last Rabbit -said, "That is an enemy of ours; that is Blue, Lizard. I am going. I don't want him to chase me."

He stood up and called to the people to come with him. All went, except Inchworm. He thought, "Lizard doesn't want to kill me; I'll stay here."

When Blue Lizard came up he asked, "Where is the council?"

"The chiefs have gone to the other side of the lake," said Inchworm.

"I thought I would come to the meeting," said Lizard,

"I am friendly, I don't want to kill anybody. Why did they go away?"

"They are afraid of you," said Inchworm. "I don't like those chiefs. I can't say anything to them; they won't listen; they want me to leave the forest where I live."

"Why do they want you to leave your home?" asked Lizard. "I think you had better go back to your cabin and stay there. I will stay here till they come again and if they are cross, because I have sent you back to the woods, I will fight them. It won't do to drive a person out of the place where his home is; that's why I want you to go back. Don't be afraid of those people. I will fight them!"

Inchworm went home and Blue Lizard waited for the people to come back.

When Inchworm got home he cooked some meat, ate it, and then went to sleep. While sleeping he dreamed that somebody came to his cabin, and said, "I am here to tell you that trouble is coming and to tell you what to do. If you want to live, pile up meat on your couch and under it, then start off. Go north till you come to a high cliff; climb the cliff and stay there till morning, your life depends upon this." The voice stopped.

Inchworm piled meat on to the couch, and under it, threw his blanket over the couch, and started off, going toward the North. When he came to a cliff he climbed it and lay down where there was nice green grass, and soon he was asleep.

The council sent NYAGWAIHE (the Ancient of Bears) to kill Inchworm. He went into Inchworm's cabin, pulled the skin blanket from the couch and saying in his mind, "Here is the man I'm to kill," he ate all the meat, thinking he was eating Inchworm. Then he went back to the council, and said, "Inchworm is dead; I've killed him."

The next morning Inchworm woke up and started for home. When he got there, he found that the meat he had put on the couch and under it had been eaten, not even a bone was left. He cleaned his house, cooked, and after

he had eaten he said in his mind, "I'll go to Dry Island and say a few words to Turtle, but first I'll send a messenger to tell him that I am coming."

He called Yellowbird and sent him to tell Turtle that he would be there in two days, that he wanted to say a few words to him.

Yellowbird did as he was told. Turtle said, "Let him come. This is the way to do; when a person wants to talk with me, he should send a messenger to tell me that he is coming."

After two days Inchworm started. He reached the lake and swam across to the island, then looked around for Turtle's house. Soon he saw an underground house in the middle of the island and going to it knocked on the door. When Turtle got up to open the door he began to scold and he scolded till he came out of the house. Inchworm was frightened and backed away. Turtle laughed, stopped scolding, and said, "Come back, I am ready to talk."

Inchworm said, "I came to talk about the council that was here, and to ask you to be my friend. You are of the same mind that I am: you want to keep your home as long as you live. Those chiefs say that I must leave the forest where I have always been. I don't want to leave, I want you to be my friend so we can hold the places where we live."

Turtle said "I like what you say, and I will help you. I will tell you what to do. Whenever you want to come here wend a messenger to say that you are coming."

"Now I am going," said Inchworm. When he got to the lake, he ran on the water, he didn't swim as he had when coming. He traveled quickly and was soon at home.

Some days later Inchworm heard, off in the East, a loud noise, then he heard it again and nearer his house. "Well," said he in his mind, "my friend said he would tell me what to do if an enemy came. I don't think that noise is made by anyone coming to fight with me." But he stayed in the cabin and watched. Soon he saw NYAGWAIHE so near the cabin that there was no chance to run away from him. Then Inchworm thought, "It must be that the end of my life has come."

NYAGWAIHE came in, but Inchworm wasn't afraid. He laughed, and said, "You are a fine looking man, I will

give you a name that will help you always. I will call you SHAGÓYA´DOGÉDAS (He drives them away).”

“I don’t like that name, I never act in that way.”

“I will call you SHAGÓNOGES (He torments them).”

“I don’t want that name.”

“I will call you DAEnDZONGO (Soaked with Earth).”

“That will do, I’ll take that name.”

(Inchworm didn’t know that each night the chiefs held a council to devise a way to kill him.)

NYAGWAIHE went off and soon Inchworm heard the voice that had spoken to him in the night. It was the voice of GÉHA (Wind) and the voice said, “I am here to help you. People are coming to kill you. I will tell you how to overpower them. At the northern end of this forest you will find a weed called awéondágon; gather that weed and plant it around your house; get four white flint stones and put one stone at each corner of the house, outside. Then bring wood and pile it up around the house. On the tenth day set fire to the wood. That day the chiefs will come to kill you. This is all.”

“Why do the chiefs want to kill me,” asked Inchworm. The voice didn’t answer.

Inchworm put on his best clothes, took his bow and arrows and went for the weed. In the woods he couldn’t walk very fast. Before he got far, night came. He looked around for a hollow tree, found one, and crept into it. The next morning he went on, traveled all day asking in his mind, “When will I get to the end of my journey?”

Another night came. He looked around for a hollow tree, found one and crawled into it. When almost asleep he heard a noise like footsteps. He listened. The steps came nearer and he heard two men talking, one said, “I think this is a hollow tree,” the other said, “Let’s crawl into it, but first we must know how big the hole is. Pound on the tree and find out.”

Inchworm backed into the hole as far as he could, and kept still.

The two men were of the Woodcock people. They crawled into the hole, and soon one of them said, “It seems to

me there is somebody in here.”

“I don’t think there is anyone here, but ourselves,” said the other man.

The next morning the two men got out of the tree and went off toward the West. Soon after Inchworm crawled out and looked around. When he saw the two men he whooped; they heard him and one asked the other, “Who is that whooping? Let’s go back, maybe it’s the man we are hunting for.”

They found Inchworm sitting on the ground near the hollow tree.

“Where did you come from?” asked one of the men.

“From Broken Land.”

“Do you know the man who lives in the woods?”

“I don’t know him.”

“Why are you here? Where are you going?”

“I’m traveling through the forest to see how the country looks where the sun goes down.”

“We are going to that country,” said one of the men. “We will go with you.”

“I am not going now. I must stop and hunt for game.”

“We will stay with you; maybe we can help you. Where will you camp?”

“I will look around and see where there is a good place. You can look for one too.”

Inchworm went in one direction, the two men in another. When Inchworm got out of sight, he started off toward the North.

At midday the two men came back to the hollow tree, but Inchworm wasn’t there.

Just at midday Inchworm reached the edge of the forest and began to look for the weed. He found it and in a short time gathered a big bundle of it, then he started for home. Near sunset he came to the hollow tree and

found the two men there; they had killed game and were roasting some of the meat. When they saw Inchworm, one asked, "Where have you been all day?"

"Oh, around here, not far away," said Inchworm.

"We have plenty of meat," said the man. "Come and eat with us."

Inchworm put his bundle down, ate, and rested. The next morning when the men began to cook, Inchworm said, "I will go into the woods a little way, I will be back before you are through eating." And, taking his bundle, he started off toward the East. When out of sight, he ran as fast as he could and was at home before midday. He put down his bundle of weeds and went for the white flint, found the stones and took them to the cabin.

The next morning he went into the forest to look for dry boughs and pieces of wood. When he had gathered a large pile he carried it home, a load at a time, and put it down near the cabin. At the end of six days he said in his mind, "I have enough wood, now I will plant the awéondágon."

He planted the weed; put a white flint stone at each corner of the cabin outside, and piled up the wood around the cabin.

The next morning Inchworm said in his mind, "At midday the chiefs will come." Just before midday he set fire to the wood; it blazed up quickly, made a great fire.

When the chiefs came Rabbit said, "Inchworm's house is burning up."

GÁSYONDETHA (Meteor) said, "Let us find out which one of us has the greatest power," and he sprang into the fire. The burning was not as wide as he thought; he came down between the fire and the cabin and straight on to a sharp flint stone, he was impaled and couldn't move. He saw that the cabin was not burning, that there were beautiful plants growing around it, and they were covered with bright red blossoms. He began to cry and he cried louder and louder.

Inchworm said, "Somebody is crying; I'll go and see who it is."

When he saw Meteor he asked, "What are you doing there?"

The man was crying so hard that at first he couldn't answer, but after a while he said, "I came here to visit you."

"Where are the other chiefs?"

"They are in the fire." They had jumped in to test their power, and not able to get out had burned to death.

Inchworm said, "You came here to kill me," and he reproached Meteor till the man gave up his enmity, and said, "I will be your friend and give you my power." Then Inchworm stopped his reproaches.

"Let us go into the cabin," said the chief.

Inchworm was angry; he asked, "Do you think this is your cabin?"

"No."

"Then why did you say, 'Let us go in?'"

"I just said it, that's all. I didn't mean anything wrong."

"Well, we will be friends," said Inchworm. He went into the cabin and, looking back, thought, "Where is my friend?" He went out and found Meteor standing on the flint stone; he couldn't move. Inchworm took him by the hand and pulled him from the flint. Then they went into the cabin and sat down and talked, and became good friends.

Just at sundown the fire around the cabin went out. The weeds that Inchworm had planted kept the cabin from burning.

One morning after Meteor had made Inchworm a long visit, he said, "I am going home now," and he started off.

Inchworm was alone, but he had plenty to eat and was happy. One morning he heard footsteps outside; he sat still, but he said in his mind, "Meteor is coming again."

He listened and when some one knocked on the door, he called out, "Why don't you come in?"

The door opened slowly; Inchworm watched sharply, soon a beautiful woman of the Blackbird people came in

and said to him, "I have come to marry you, my old folks' sent me here."

Inchworm hung his head, "What shall I do?" thought he, then he looked up, and asked, "Will trouble come of this?"

"No," said the woman, "I want to live in peace."

"I'll marry you," said Inchworm.

Some days later the woman began to scold; she scolded all day.

Toward night Inchworm said, "I am tired. You scold all the time, you must go home."

"I'll stop scolding," said the woman.

"I don't believe you. It won't be quiet with you here, you must go."

He went to where she was sitting, took her by the hair, dragged her to the door and pushed her out. When she was outside he said, "Now go away, and never come back to this cabin."

She went away, crying.

One morning, a few days later, Inchworm sat on the flint stone at one corner of his house, and said to himself, "I feel weak this morning." He looked around in the woods and thought, "I wish my wife were here, I am sorry that I drove her away."

He thought about it all day. Towards night a man came, and said, "I have come with a message from your friend, who lives on Dry Island. He wants to visit you."

Inchworm said, "Tell him to come two days from now."

Two days later, Inchworm, forgetting that Turtle was coming, said in his mind, "I'm going East this morning." He traveled along till at midday he came to the end of the forest and off in the distance saw a village. He went to the village, but every house was empty. At last, at the east end of the village he saw smoke and going toward it found a hut. In the hut was a very old woman. When she heard some one come in she stood up and raised a mallet. Inchworm saw the mallet and hurried out of the hut as fast as he could. Outside he stood around to see

what would happen. Just, then he remembered about Turtle's visit.

"I must go home," thought he. "My friend is coming to-day, but first I'll burn this old woman's hut. I don't like the way she has acted toward me."

He burned the hut with the old woman in it, then ran home as fast as he could, but when he came to the clearing where his cabin had been there was nothing there but a pile of dead coals.

"My friend has burned my house," said he. "I'll kill my friend. If I can't kill him, I'll punish him in some way," and he hurried off to Dry Island.

When he came to Turtle's house in the middle of the island he jumped into it, but no one was there. He went outside, set fire to the place and waited around till only dead coals were left, then he went to the other side of the lake. As he stood on the bank, listening, he heard some one scolding; Turtle had come back to Dry Island and found his house burned. He was mad and kept saying, "I'll kill my friend! I'll kill my friend! He crossed the lake and went to where Inchworm was waiting for him. Right away they began to fight. They fought all day and all night, fought five days and five nights, and then their bodies were gone, only their heads were left. The heads fought till the seventh morning, then, worn out, both died at the same time.

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