



## The Legend of Weasel

Kayas, long ago, Chief Big Nose, Mahkikotew, noticed that his beautiful young daughter had come of age to marry. This was a day that all fathers dread but as a chief, he knew it was his duty to allow all the braves of the Sagaw Neeheow, Woodland Cree, to compete for the right to marry the princess. Mahkikotew loved his daughter dearly and didn't want to have her marry and leave him and his woman. He devised a plan to try to make sure she could not be won by the braves. He called all the braves of the Sagaw Neeheow together and made an announcement.

"Tansi Onotin-keysta-masewak, hello warriors! It is time for okimaw-skweesis, the princess, to be married. I have decided to let every one of you compete for her hand in marriage. Whoever among you can guess what her secret name is may have her hand with my blessing!" Mahkikotew announced. The warriors all looked at each other with concern, for how were any of them supposed to know what her secret name was. They knew they would have four days to figure it out so they all set about trying to figure out her secret name.

Meanwhile, Wesahkechak, the Trickster, had learned that the princess was ready to marry and she was so beautiful that he wanted to marry her himself. He was there among the warriors when Mahkikotew made his announcement.

He thought to himself, "Now how is anyone supposed to win this contest? How are we supposed to know what her secret name is? After all, it's a secret isn't it!" It was then that Wesahkechak noticed that Kohkominow, a spider, was walking nearby on a tree branch. He walked close to Kohkominow and spoke in a quiet voice. "Tansi Kohkominow. Would you be able to help me?" Kohkominow looked at Wesahkechak. "Tansi Wesahkechak. Of course I will help you with whatever you need. Just tell me what you need."

Wesahkechak looked to make sure no one was listening before speaking again to Kohkominow. "I really want to marry the beautiful princess but there is no way anyone will be able to guess her secret name. Mahkikotew knows this and he thinks he outsmarted everyone but with your help we can show him. I need you to climb up on his tipi and climb in through the smoke flaps. Sit there as long as you need to and listen until you hear him say her secret name, he has to slip up eventually!"

When you figure out what her secret name is, I need you to come to my tipi in the next village and tell me so I can come win her hand. Remember, we need to get this done before the four days are up or it will be too late!" Kohkominow agreed and set about climbing the side of Mahkikotew's tipi.

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Kohkominow had hid in the smoke flaps all evening and was about to give up for the night when she spied Mahkikotew calling to his daughter the princess. "Astum nitanis. Come my daughter." He hugged his daughter and spoke to her further. "I have made it so none of the warriors will be able to take you away from me and your mother. There is no way any of them can win the contest and you will be able to live with us for a lot longer. There is no way I could let you go right now my see-kwee-sta-kwan, messy hair. How could any of them guess that such a beautiful princess could have such a name! Hahaha!"

Kohkominow couldn't believe her ears! She had heard the secret name! See-kwee-sta-kwan! That's what it was. She quietly slipped out of the smoke flap and crawled down the side of the tipi. She quickly set about heading to Wesahkechak's camp.

Kohkominow had walked throughout the night and was near exhaustion when daylight broke. She knew that even though she had walked all night she had not covered very much ground at all for she was so tiny. She thought about the great distance and knew that there was no way she was going to make it to Wesahkechak's camp before the four days were up.

She sat on a log resting and feeling helpless. It was then that Kohkominow noticed that Sihkos, weasel, was sitting on the same log enjoying the morning sun. Kohkominow called to him, "Sihkos! Astum. I need to talk to you." Sihkos got up, stretched, walked close, and looked down at Kohkominow. "Tansi, Kohkominow. What's so important that you disturb my morning rest?" Sihkos said.

"I need to ask you a favour. I am trying to go see Wesahkechak in the next camp but it too far for me to make it there. I need to get a message to him right away! It's very important. I am so tiny it would take me days to get there. Can you go give him a message for me? I only need you to tell him one word. It would mean so much to both of us if you could. I know you are swift and would get there in no time!" Kohkominow said.

Sihkos looked a bit bored. "Sure Kohkominow, why not. I had no other plans today and I can get there before nightfall. Tell me the word and I will go tell it to Wesahkechak."

Kohkominow looked grateful. I just need you to tell him that I said this one word. See-kwee-sta-kwan."

Sihkos began laughing. "See-kwee-sta-kwan? Sounds silly to me but alright. I'll run over there and say it to Wesahkechak!"



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With that, Sihkos was off and running, leaving Kohkominow to rest on the log. Sihkos hadn't run far before he turned around smiling, for he too was at Mahkikotew's tipi the day before and he heard the contest that Mahkikotew had put forward. Sihkos too was in love with the princess and wanted her hand in marriage. He quietly headed back toward Mahkikotew's camp.

On the fourth day, Mahkikotew once again gathered all the braves to compete for the princess's hand and one by one they guessed wrong and were turned away. Mahkikotew was getting very confident now as most of the braves had already guessed and were turned away. Then it was Sihkos' turn. He smiled at Mahkikotew and said, "Hmmm, let me guess Mahkikotew. Could her secret name be...see-kwee-sta-kwan?" Mahkikotew couldn't believe his ears! How had Sihkos known? He was a great and honourable chief though and knew he must follow through and allow Sihkos to have his daughter's hand.

He reluctantly agreed to have them married the following day.

The next morning, Kohkominow arrived at Wesahkechak's camp, eager to see her friend and congratulate him on his marriage. She arrived at his tipi to find him sitting by the fire having tea and staring into the flames.

"Tansi n'toteem. Why are you just sitting there? I thought you'd be celebrating your marriage already!" Kohkominow exclaimed.

Wesahkechak looked confused. "My marriage? Why would I be getting married? You didn't do as we agreed and I didn't know her secret name. It was Sihkos who guessed her secret name. They're to be married this evening!"

A look of shock spread across Kohkominow's face. "What? Sihkos! It was Sihkos who was supposed to come tell you her secret name three days ago. I knew I'd never make it in time and Sihkos agreed to rush over here to tell you the name! I trusted him and look what he has done!"

A dark look came across Wesahkechak's face and he quickly stood up and started running in the direction of Mahkikotew's camp.

Wesahkechak reached the camp a short time later and went straight to Mahkikotew's tipi. Sihkos had seen him enter the camp and watched him intently. He saw the dark look on his face and he knew he had been caught. He quietly snuck out of the camp, for Wesahkechak was not a character anyone wanted angry at him.



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Sihkos hadn't gotten far before he heard a voice like thunder echoing through the bush. Wesahkechak shouted, "Sihkos, when I get my hands on you, you will pay for your treachery! I will hunt you till the end of time until I catch you and I will do terrible things to you! We will never forget what you have done and all men and creatures in the bush will hunt you down forever!"

This terrified Sihkos and he began running, darting about and hiding everywhere he could, trembling in fear for he didn't want anyone to catch him and do terrible things to him. To this day, Sihkos is still darting about, hiding from man and animal alike, afraid to get caught. If you are very quiet and watch Sihkos, even today you will see that he still trembles all the time, still scared from his treachery all those years ago.

Ekosi Maka