



Legend of Eclipse

How Coyote Snared the Sun

We are told, as nēhiyawak, Cree people, that mēstacākanis, coyote, was always a sneaky, sort of sly fellow, always sneakily doing things. We are told that on this particular day kāyas, long ago, mēstacākanis was out trying to get some sleep in the middle of the day and the sun was shining. It was a really hot, hot day and mēstacākanis couldn't find anywhere cool to sleep in the shade and it was starting to irritate him. He was thinking, "Well, how am I supposed to sleep with that sun shining bright all day and just heating up everything?"

It was just one of those days when everything was starting to annoy him because it was just too hot. So mēstacākanis came up with a plan and he thought, "Well, I'm a trapper and I know how to trap. I know how to snare and trap, tāpwēwin (that's right). So, I'm going to figure out a way how I can lure the sun to come into it and I'm going to snare him. I'm going to get him out of the sky so it'll get nice and dark and cool."

So he thought about it for a while, thinking, "How am I going to get pīsim, the sun, to come down from the sky?"

He had known through legend that pīsim ekwa tipikawpīsim, the sun and his sister, grandmother moon, that pīsim was always wanting to see his sister but was only allowed to see her once a year. They were allowed to meet for one day and they were allowed to visit. He knew that pīsim, the sun, was yearning to see his sister because he missed her. They were always on opposite sides of the sky so they could never talk or never visit.

So he thought, "I know what I'm going to do. There's this little pond here and I'm going to clear it right out, but I'm going to add some charcoal in there from the fire to make it so it's black water. What'll happen is pīsim will see his reflection in the water, but because of the charcoal, it'll make it look like tipikawpīsim is there instead of his own reflection. So he'll think that's tipikawpīsim, his sister."

He thought, "This is going to work. I'm gonna snare this pīsim."

So he went and dug out a whole pile of spruce roots and he wove them together to be nice and strong so that once he did put his snare out, that pīsim, the sun, would get stuck in there.



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He made this huge, huge snare, nakwākan, and he thought, "I'll make it big enough so that when pīsim comes down to that water, he'll think it's his sister. He'll get low enough. I'll just set it above the trees. He'll pass through there and I'll snare him and then I'll tie him to the ground and I'll cover him with branches so it'll be dark out and he'll be out of the sky."

"This is going to work," mēstacākanis thought.

So he went about making his snare, setting it in place, getting all the charcoal he could find from the fires that had burnt out, ground it all up into a powder, and threw it into this water so it was more like a mirror, or a dark reflection. And he sat, and he waited and he waited. Finally, pīsim noticed that reflection in that water and he said, "Oh, tipikawpīsim, my sister! I can see my sister!"

He started to come down out of the sky towards what he thought was his sister, tipikawpīsim, closer and closer, and finally he was above the trees and he was starting to get a little suspicious because something didn't look right. But it was too late and he got caught in this nakwākan that mēstacākanis had set, this big snare he had set.

Right away, mēstacākanis grabbed it, pulled, pulled his snare, caught pīsim, started pulling him to the ground, finally wrestled him to the ground, and tied his snare around a tree. Pīsim couldn't get out. He was trying to move, but the snare was holding him down. Finally, mēstacākanis quickly started throwing all these branches to cover him. And it got darker and darker and darker. Even though it was the middle of the day, it was pitch black outside. Dark! Mēstacākanis was finally happy. Oh, it was cooling off and he thought, "Oh, now I can finally get some sleep. This heat will go away." He went and sat down under a tree, nice and cool, and went to sleep.

Meanwhile, all of the other creatures were wondering what was going on because it was the middle of the day. Makikway pīsim; there's no sun anywhere. This was starting to bother them and they were like, "What's going on? Where's taniwa pīsim? Where's the sun? What's going on here? This is not right. It's supposed to be the middle of the day."

This was starting to worry them and all of the animals finally tracked down Trickster. Trickster woke up from his nap and he looked up, too and said, "Mah! Wācistakâc, this is crazy! Taniwa pīsim? What's going on here? What happened to the sun?"



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The creatures were telling him, “We don’t know what happened. We can’t find the sun.”

Trickster was a master tracker. So, he started tracking, looking for pīsim and trying to find him. Finally, through the darkness, he could see this very faint glow, a little bit of light poking through some bushes and he went walking towards it. As he got closer, he could see a big pile of willows and branches on top of something. He got there and he started to take the branches off and sure enough, there was pīsim, all covered up, struggling, caught up in this snare that mēstacākanis had put up. So he asked, “Sun, what happened?”

The sun replied to him, “I don’t know what happened. I thought I saw my sister here and I was coming to visit her and all of a sudden I was tied up and I was being pulled to the ground.”

Of course, Trickster, being a master tracker, noticed right away tracks all over the place and he recognized the tracks of mēstacākanis. So he started calling, “Mēstacākanis! Āstam kwēyāho (come here quickly).” Mēstacākanis woke up. He could hear Trickster and he knew Trickster was angry but he knew better than to run away because Trickster would get even angrier and be able to track him down.

Mēstacākanis put his head down out of the bush and said, “Tanisi, Trickster. What’s going on?”

“Mēstacākanis, are you responsible for this?”

Mēstacākanis knew he couldn’t lie because Trickster had noticed all his tracks and said, “Yeah, it was me. It was too hot. So I thought I’d hide the sun for a while so I could sleep.”

Trickster shook his head and said, “You’re so selfish that you’d do that? Now look. It’s the middle of the day and there’s no sun up here. You let pīsim go right now. Let go of that snare. Let him loose.”

Mēstacākanis, worried, kept looking at Trickster and thought he was gonna hit him. He chewed through the rope and let pīsim go. Pīsim went back into the sky and again light and heat filled the earth again.

Trickster was very angry with mēstacākanis and he told him, “Never ever do that again or the next time, there’s going to be trouble. To make sure that everyone remembers this, every now and then, pīsim is going to disappear during the middle of the day to remind them of what happened here so nobody will ever forget how selfish mēstacākanis was, thinking only of himself.”



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Every time p̄sim disappears during the day we'll be reminded of this story of what you did m̄stacākanis, to make sure you're ashamed of your selfishness for all time."

So, as n̄hiyawak, we're told, that even today this happens to us. We call this an eclipse, when our sun disappears during the day and everything goes dark and at that time, we are told as n̄hiyawak, that's when we're reminded of the story of how m̄stacākanis snared p̄sim and we had darkness during the day. So, this is the story of eclipse and m̄stacākanis.

Kinanaskomitinawah kahkiyaw, thanks to you all.

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