

## RAINBOW AND THE AUTUMN LEAVES

by Cyrus MacMillan

In olden days, long before the Indians came to Canada, all the animals talked and worked like men. Every year after midsummer they held a great council at which they were all present. But it happened once in the summer before the council met, that they all wanted to go to the sky to see what the country up there was like. None of them could find a way to go. The oldest and wisest creature on all the earth was Turtle. One day he prayed to the Thunder God to take him to the sky, and his prayer was soon answered. There was a great noise, as if the earth had been split asunder, and when the people next looked for Turtle he was nowhere to be found. They searched everywhere without success. But that evening, when they looked upwards, they saw him in the sky, moving about like a black cloud. Turtle liked the sky so well that he decided to live there always and to send his descendants, later, to the earth. And the sky-people agreed to keep him. They asked him, "Where do you want to dwell?" And he answered, "I should like to dwell in the Black Cloud, in which are the ponds and[Pg 128] streams and lakes and springs of water, for I always dwelt near these places when I was young." So he was allowed to have his wish. But when the Great Council of the animals met on earth in the time of the harvest-moon, he was always present. He came in the Black Cloud, but he always went back to the sky after the Council was ended. And the other animals envied him his good fortune, and they wished that they could go with him.

After a time the animals were greatly distressed and angered by the rumour that a new race of creatures was coming from far over the ocean to inhabit their land. They talked it over very carefully, and they all thought how fortunate it would be if they could all go to the sky with old Turtle, and live like him, free from fear and trouble and care. But they were puzzled to know how to get there, for Turtle had never told any of them the way.

One day Deer, wandering about alone in the forest, as was his custom, came across Rainbow, who often built a path of many colours to the sky. And he said to Rainbow, "Carry me up to the sky, for I want to see Turtle." But Rainbow was afraid to do it, for he wished first to ask the Thunder God for permission, and he put Deer off, and to gain time he said, "Come to me in winter, when I stay for a time on the mountain near the lake. Then I will gladly carry you to the place where Turtle dwells."

Throughout the long winter months Deer looked longingly for Rainbow, but Rainbow did not come. Life was growing harder on the earth, and the animals were in terror of the new race that was soon to come to their land, and Deer was very timid and impatient. At last, one day in the early summer, Rainbow came again, and Deer hastened to meet him. "Why were you false to me?" he asked; "I waited for you all winter long on the mountain by the lake, but you did not come as you promised. I want to go to the sky now, for I must see Turtle." Rainbow answered, "I cannot take you now. But some day, when there is a Fog over the lake, I shall come back to drive it away. Come to me then, and I shall take you to the sky and to the place where Turtle dwells. This time I will not deceive you."

Rainbow consulted the Thunder God, and received permission to do as Deer wished. Soon afterwards the Fog one day rolled in a thick bank across the lake, and Deer hurried out to wait for Rainbow. Sure enough, Rainbow came down, as he had promised, to drive the Fog away. He threw his arch of many colours from the lake to the blue hills far away, and the Fog at once disappeared from the place. And he said to Deer, who stood watching him, "Now I will keep my promise. Follow my many-coloured path over the hills and the forests and the streams, and be not afraid, and you will soon reach Turtle's home in the sky." Deer did as he was told, and soon he reached the[Pg 130] sky. Turtle was glad to see him, and Deer liked the country so well that he decided to stay for ever. And he roamed over the sky

everywhere, moving like the wind from place to place.

When midsummer had passed and the harvest-moon had come and the Great Council again met together, Deer was absent for the first time in his life. The animals waited long for him to appear, for they needed his advice, but he did not come. They sent the Birds out to find him. Black Hawk and Woodpecker and Bluejay all sought him in the forest, but they could not find a trace of him. Then Wolf and Fox scoured the woods far and near, but they came back and reported that he could not be found anywhere. At last Turtle arrived at the meeting of the Great Council, as was his custom, coming in his Black Cloud, in which were the ponds and lakes and streams and springs of water. And Bear said, "Deer is absent from the Council meeting. Where is Deer? We cannot meet without him, for we need his advice." And Turtle replied, "Deer is in the sky. Have you not heard? Rainbow made a wonderful pathway for him of many varied colours, and by that he came to the sky. There he is now," and he pointed to a golden cloud scurrying across the sky overhead.

Turtle advised that the animals should all go to the sky to live until they could be sure that the new race of creatures would bring them no harm. And he showed them the [Pg 131] pathway that Rainbow had made, stretching from the earth in wonderful colours. The animals all agreed at the Great Council to take Turtle's advice. But they were all very angry at Deer for leaving them without warning, for they thought that all the animals should either stay together faithfully on the earth or go all together to the sky. Bear showed the greatest anger and annoyance. Because of his great strength, he had no fear of the new race that was said soon to be coming, and he had always been inclined to look with scorn on Deer's timid and impatient ways. "Deer has forsaken us," he said; "he deserted us in the hour of our danger, and that is contrary to forest laws and to our code of defence." And he thought to himself, "I shall punish him for this when the time comes."

In the late autumn, the time agreed upon came for the animals to leave the earth, and Rainbow again made his bright path for them to the sky. Bear was the first to go up because he was the leader, and because with his great weight he wanted to test the strength of the bridge of burning colours over which they had to pass. When he had almost reached the sky, he met Deer on the path waiting to welcome the animals to their new home. And he said to him in anger, "Why did you leave us behind, without warning, for the land of the Turtle? Why did you desert the Great Council? Why did you not wait until [Pg 132] all could come together? You are a traitor to your comrades, and you have been false to our faith." And Deer answered, also in anger, "Who are you to doubt me or my faith? None but the Wolf may ask me why I came or question my fidelity. I will kill you for your insolence." Deer had grown very proud since he had gone to live in the sky, and he was no longer timid as he had been on earth. His eyes flashed in his fury, and he arched his neck and lowered his antlered head, and rushed madly at Bear to push him from the path.

But Bear was not afraid, for he had often tested his strength with Deer upon the earth. His low, hoarse growls sounded all over the sky, and he prepared to fight. They came together with a shock. For a long time they battled, until the bridge of burning colours trembled and the heavens shook from the force of the conflict. The animals waiting by the lake at the end of the path looked up and saw the battle above them. They feared the results, for they wanted neither Bear nor Deer to die. So they sent Wolf up to the sky to put a stop to the contest. When Wolf reached the combatants, Bear was bleeding freely, for Deer with his antlers had pierced his neck and side. Deer, too, was bleeding where Bear's strong claws had torn a great wound in his head. Wolf soon stopped the battle, and Bear and Deer went away to dress their wounds. Then the other animals went up to the sky over Rainbow's flaming [Pg 133] path. And they decided to live in the sky and to send their descendants back to earth when the new race of creatures should come. And they can still sometimes be seen, like clouds hurrying across the sky, in the

shape they had on earth.

But the blood of Bear and of Deer dropped from them as they moved to the sky from the scene of their battle along the Rainbow road. It fell freely upon the leaves of the trees beneath them, and changed them into varied colours. And every year when autumn comes in the north country, the leaves take on again the bright and wondrous colours given to them by the blood of Bear and Deer when they fought on the Rainbow path ages and ages ago. And Bear and Deer have never since been friends, and their descendants no longer dwell together in peace, as they did in the olden days.

Source:

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