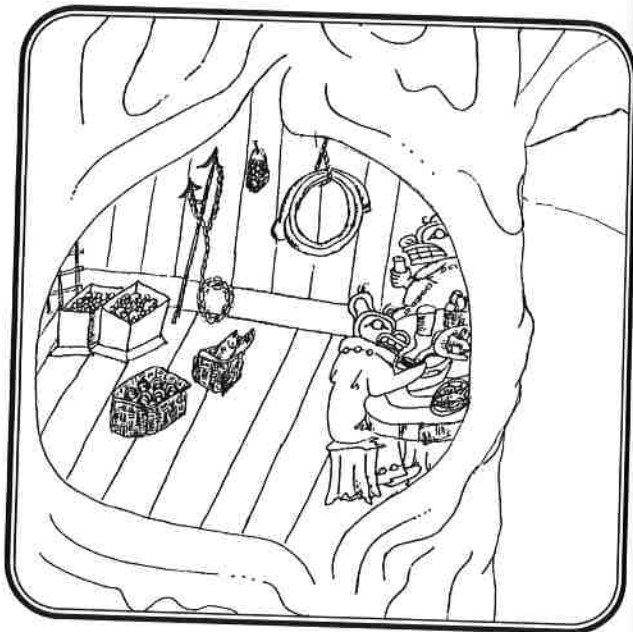


## Txamsem Fools Squirrel Woman



## TXAMSEM FOOLS SQUIRREL WOMAN

One day Txamsem was wandering about in the hills. Nature had put on a fine display this sunny, mild day but Txamsem did not notice anything. He did not see the tiny pink twin flowers, the bracken ferns nor the whispering cedars. He did not notice the chipmunks and rabbits that scampered away at his approach and he did not hear the screaming of the dark-headed jays nor the soft chirps of the juncos under the pines. Txamsem could only concentrate on his hunger for it had been days since he had eaten a proper meal.

As he followed a trail on the side of the cliff overlooking the sea, he heard a voice float high above the forest floor. Txamsem stilled the rumbling of his stomach long enough to hear a woman crying, "Oh, my son! Oh, my son!"

Txamsem then caught a glimpse of a tiny figure sitting on a spruce branch. It was Squirrel Woman, mourning her missing child. "Oh, my son! He must be dead," she lamented. Her small body shook with grief and tears ran in streams down her cheeks.

But Txamsem's heart was as empty as his stomach. He felt no sympathy for Squirrel Woman and her loss. Instead, Txamsem, that devious trickster, set his mind in motion. He knew that Squirrel Woman had plenty of food. For it is well known by all that each year she gathers nuts, seeds and berries and stores them in caches for the winter ahead. What trickery could Txamsem use to take advantage of this situation?

Magically, he transformed himself into a small squirrel with sleek red sides and a quivering, bushy tail. He would pretend to be the squirrel child, knowing that the mother would take him in and feed him. Txamsem scampered to the foot of the spruce and called, "Don't weep, Mother. For here I am, safe from harm!"

Sure enough, Squirrel Woman was overjoyed to see her child alive, and she ran down the tree trunk and gave the impostor a big hug. Now tears of happiness sprang from her eyes as she patted and petted her lost son. "Come my child, come into our house." And Txamsem scampered nimbly up the tree and through the front door into the dim hollow interior.

Squirrel Woman's house in the spruce tree was full of many different foods. Carved cedar boxes held stores of dried berries and mushrooms. Tightly woven baskets with intricate designs held seeds and grains. Under the floorboards were caches of hazelnuts and acorns. Open baskets held fresh seafood. Txamsem's mouth watered as Squirrel Woman busied herself preparing a wonderful meal for her "son". When he had devoured every bit, Txamsem patted his full stomach and relaxed. However, he was not content.

Txamsem wanted to have all the food to himself. The next day when Squirrel Woman left for her daily food gathering, Txamsem spat in the fire and made a wish, "It will be well if Hawk would catch Squirrel Woman."

All through that long day, Txamsem repeated this wish. As the afternoon sun blazed,



murderous shrieks reached his ears and put an end to his wishing. As he looked outside, he saw a huge hawk flying out of the clearing with something ragged and limp clutched in its deadly talons. Txamsem smiled in the knowledge of Squirrel Woman's fate. Then he finished all the food that Squirrel Woman had worked so hard to gather for the coming winter.

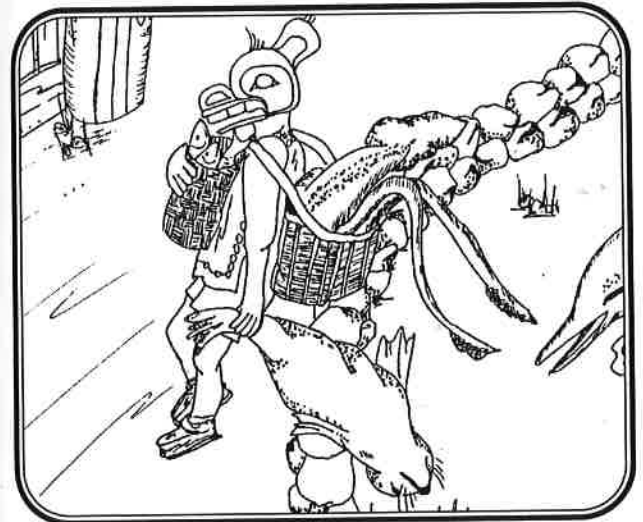
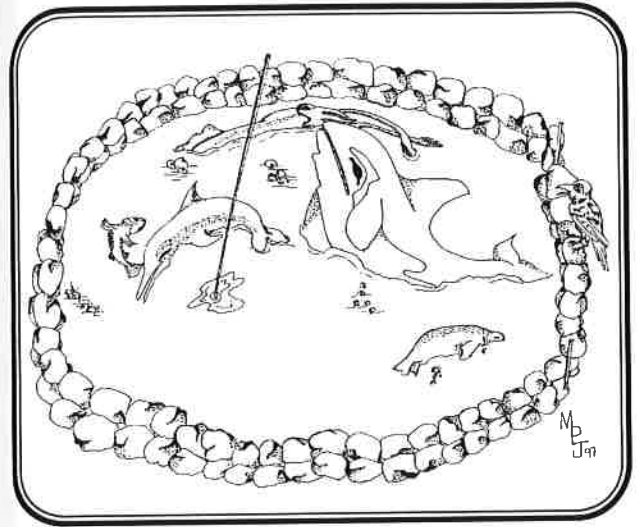
Before long, however, Txamsem was hungry again. As he lifted all the floorboards and peered into baskets for the twentieth time in the faint hope of finding an overlooked morsel, Txamsem set his mind to scheming once again.

With some regret for the fine feasting that he had had there, Txamsem left Squirrel Woman's tidy little nest and moved into an abandoned house at the bottom of the cliff on the seashore. The remnants of an old stone weir that reached out into the bay gave Txamsem an idea, and another plot to save himself from starving grew in his cunning brain.

Txamsem decided he would host a great feast and invite all the Beings of the Sea. There would be much dancing and music. But first he would have to get his house ready.

He called all his Raven nephews to his house and he asked them to gather resin from the trees. Together they melted the resin, and used it to patch all the cracks in the walls. They sealed the house very tightly.

They then went to work on the weir. They added new stones, filled in gaps and repaired the stone trap so that it was once more like new. Nothing could get through the walls, not even the sea.



Txamsem then sent his eldest nephew as a messenger to invite the Beings of the Sea. "Tell them they are invited because I am holding a memorial feast for my mother, Squirrel Woman." Txamsem went on, "Clever nephew, let them know that her death was the fault of the Animals of the Hills. Tell them that I will need the help of the Beings of the Sea to retaliate for the grief I have suffered because of Squirrel Woman's death."

The clever Raven did as he was instructed and flew far and wide over the sea. Two days later the invited guests appeared off the shore where Txamsem's house stood. He gloated and smacked his lips as he saw seals, sea lions, blackfish, sharks, whales, squid and many others arrive.

Txamsem walked down to the water's edge. In his powerful voice he commanded, "Come dancing in my guests." At first the Beings of the Sea did not seem to understand, so he repeated, "Come dancing in my guests."

A little porpoise in the group thought he knew what Txamsem meant and said, "Our host tells us we should all dance together as we swim towards the shore." Little did they know that they were dancing into the trap that Txamsem and his nephews had prepared.

When the last of the Sea Beings came through the gate of the stone weir, the Raven nephews rushed to close off the opening. They worked quickly and well and soon not even a drop of water could escape.

At the same time, Txamsem ran out carrying a stick which he forced into the ocean floor. From

morning to night he worked away boring a huge drain hole. No one suspected anything as he swayed to and fro as if he, too, were dancing. The Beings of the Sea were having a great time dancing with their host. The whales leaped energetically and caused great splashes, the seals clapped their flippers and kept a lively rhythm going and the acrobatic porpoises entertained everyone with their antics.

Suddenly, the water started to drain away. Looking behind them they realized their way to the ocean was blocked off. They knew then that they were to be the feast and not the feasted. How stupid they had been to have been so easily tricked. Their host had never meant to retaliate against the Animals of the Hills.

Txamsem slaughtered his innocent guests, taking back to his house all that he could carry. He felt very satisfied to see many weeks of food just lying there. "How easy life will be," he laughed to himself.

In the load Txamsem carried from the beach was a small stump. He decided to throw it on the fire and use it to cook his supper. However, every time he threw the stump on the fire it would roll off. For it was not an ordinary piece of wood but the child of a Supernatural Being.

Txamsem finally threw the piece of dry wood in the corner. "You rotten, no-good piece of wood!" he yelled.



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When the Supernatural Being heard her child being insulted, she was very angry. She attacked Txamsem's house with the aid of Thunder and Lightning and made the waters rise all around it. The water kept rising but could not come in the house because it was tightly sealed with resin.

"Give me my child that you have taken," a voice thundered. Txamsem felt very afraid for he knew he had something live in his house. At first he didn't know what it was. However, when he saw the little stump, who could feel the water rising, starting to float about in the air, he knew.

Txamsem grabbed the little stump and threw it out of the smoke hole. Immediately, the waters lowered and in no time everything was dry again.

As soon as Txamsem had recovered from his fright, he rushed down to check on the animals in the stone weir. However, they were all gone. The Supernatural Being had given them life again and they had swam away during the flooding of the waters.

Txamsem's plans were foiled again.

