

Txamsem Steals Fire



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There was a time when the Allugiyet did not have fire and this caused much suffering. The people could not cook their food, nor could they brighten the long, dark winter evenings. During the freezing weather, they huddled together and thought only of keeping themselves and their children warm enough to survive the bitter days. Many sickened and died, especially the very young and the very old as they were most susceptible to the long winter chill. Life was indeed difficult.

During the endless days, the people spoke in voices full of longing for the wonder that was unknown to them, but which would relieve and brighten the burden of their days. Txamsem, the trickster, had also heard about fire. He knew that one powerful chief had control of fire and that he did not allow anyone to go near its source. By denying them the warmth and light of fire, this chief, who was known as Simoighet Muhl, kept his strength and power over the people year after year. Txamsem wanted this gift of fire which he knew came from the Spirits.

Only one wise old woman had ever seen fire. When spring finally came, Txamsem respectfully approached her. "Grandmother," he said, "it is told that you have been to the long house that belongs to the Master of Fire. Can you tell me about it?"

The old woman seemed to have sparks in her eyes as she remembered that brief time in her youth, when the warmth and joyful light of fire had been hers. Slowly, and then with gathering strength,



as if she herself had been kindled, the old woman replied, "I was there once long ago. I have seen this great light which is called fire and I have felt its heat. It burns day and night in a pit in the centre of the long house."

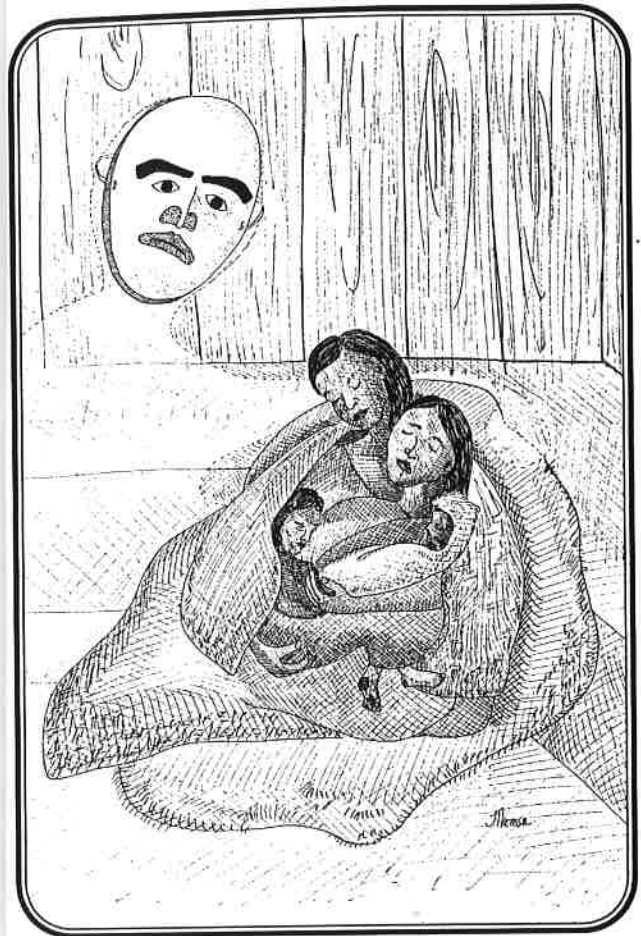
Txamsem asked, "How does the chief guard fire? I want this great light which is called fire, for our people, the Allugiyet."

"Then you must think of a very clever plan," the old woman said. "For not only does Simoighet Muhl jealously and constantly guard fire, he has also deliberately and cleverly devised a way so that no one can get near. Around the fire pit there are several rows of sharp spikes sticking out of the ground. There are as many spikes as trees in the forest. No one can get near fire without piercing his feet on those pointed sticks. But I wish you well. It would be a great thing for our people to have fire."

Txamsem thought about this for many days and then came up with a plan. He schemed to himself, "I will need a disguise to get into the clever chief's long house."

Txamsem reached for a deer hide that he had prepared. The head with the antlers and the long tail were still attached. "This will be perfect," he said. "With this wrapped around me, I will become the Dancing Deer."

Txamsem then sent for Seagull who was one of his attendants. Seagull was clever too and a convincing talker. When he heard what message he was to take to Simoighet Muhl he hopped and flapped with glee. At last, here was a story worthy of his attention and he shrieked with pleasure as he rode the air currents to the powerful chief's long house.



In a grand and important manner he addressed the chief. "Simoighet Mihil, my master, Dancing Deer, sends me with this message. A most excellent and graceful dancer is coming soon to perform in your village." Seagull elaborated, "His powers and skills are so great that he can dance unharmed over the sharp spikes protecting Fire."

The powerful chief scoffed, "Ha! That is a good story. We shall see how truthful your master is. No one has ever been able to walk through these stakes which are as sharp as the thorn on the rose bush and survived to tell about it. Tell your master he is welcome to try. If he ends up as meat on a stick, he will be cooked over our barbecue pit. I am looking forward to this performance very much and to dinner."

Gossip flew throughout the village as to who this powerful dancer could be. An old man whispered, "I heard Seagull say that this dancer is a powerful magician who can perform feats that we ordinary people can't."

An old woman laughed, "I heard that this stranger is really Txamsem —that liar and big bag of wind."

Another man allowed, "Whoever he is, he must be very brave to challenge the Master of Fire."

The next night, the people of the village gathered in the long house belonging to Simoighet Mihil. Soon the walls were lined with expectant, eager watchers. Everyone was there to witness the event, for it had been a long time since anything had happened to make them so curious or excited. The rustling of the people's robes could barely be heard as the fire crackled, hissed and exploded. The Master



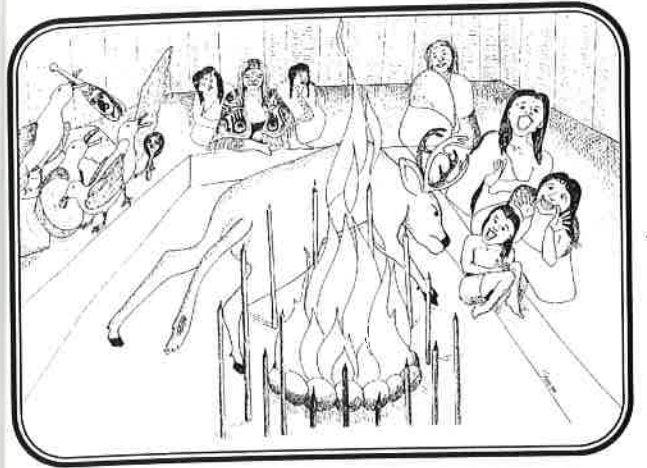
of Fire wanted to make sure the fire was especially spectacular this night and the flames burst high towards the smoke hole in the roof as drops of grease were added to them.

The powerful chief placed himself ceremoniously and pompously on the raised platform at the side. His dignified family, relatives and servants quickly grouped themselves around him.

As Seagull began to drum rhythmically, a band of singers chanted and others joined in with clappers, sticks and rattles. All eyes swung to the entrance as Dancing Deer entered. He pranced with his cloven hoofs clattering. He whirled around, moving towards the back of the house. He leaped and jumped and all the time his long tail swayed with the movement. Screams and laughter erupted from the audience as the deer, with his head down, pretended to charge those standing against the walls. No performance had ever been so exciting. Dancing Deer proudly tossed his head in the air and pranced in front of Simoighet Muhl and his family.

The chief taunted the graceful and energetic deer, "You have entertained us well. But you have not approached the Fire. Yet you say you can dance through the sharp points and we have not yet seen this. Make good your boast!"

The points were many and very close together but Txamsem sang as he leaped over and through the spikes. With his slender little hooves, he could squeeze his feet between the spikes. The chief suddenly became very excited as he watched what he believed could not be done. The audience held its breath. As the clever deer jumped and hopped, he sang this song,



I dance among the sharp points!
I dance among the sharp points!
I dance among the sharp points!
Unharméd, unharméd, unharméd!

With this last word, Txamsem flicked his long tail into the fire. A piece of pitch that had been tied to the end of it burst into flames. With one great leap, Dancing Deer sprang over the rows of spikes guarding the fire. Then, before the stunned and silent audience, he bolted out the door, his tail ablaze with the forbidden flame.

Simoighet Míhl exploded with anger, "Stop that deer! He has stolen fire! Capture him and kill him!"

Swiftly the people pulled themselves together and hurried after the deer. But the clever trickster was too fast and he soon outdistanced the quickest of his pursuers. Txamsem dashed through the forest, his tail burning. He beat his tail against a rotten stump. He ordered the stump, "Stump, your punky wood will smoulder forever in the fire bags of our people."

He dashed on, his tail still burning. Through the forest he went until he stopped by a fir tree. Igniting the fir he said, "Tree, you will burn easily and kindle the fires of our people!"

On and on he went, giving instructions to every kind of tree in the forest. By this time his tail was nothing more than a charred stump. But from that day on, all deer have short tails and all wood burns. And that is how the Allugiyet obtained fire.

