

## RAINBOW CROW (MÀNÀKA'HAS)

Long, long ago, before our Lenapé ancestors walked the Earth, the weather was always warm and the animals lived in happiness.

Then one day, the Earth suddenly became cold, and white, sparkling flakes fell from the sky, covering the Earth with its white softness. The animals, seeing snow for the first time, were not afraid.

Soon, the snow grew deeper and Axpo'kwès, the Mouse, disappeared. All that could be seen was the tip of his tail, and the other animals began to get worried.

Then Chèmà'mès, the Rabbit, disappeared. All that could be seen were the tips of his ears, and by now the animals were really worried. So the animals met in Council, gathering together in a clearing deep in the forest, to discuss the situation. They decided that what was needed was for a messenger to travel up to the home of Kishelamàkânk, the Creator, and ask him to stop the snow. They asked among themselves, "Who is willing to make such a journey, to the twelfth heaven, that distant dwelling place of the Creator?"

Wapink, the Opossum, said, "Kukhus, the Owl, is the wisest. Perhaps he should be the one to go." "But no," the animals whispered. "He might get lost in the light of day. So Owl shouldn't go!"

Then Tamakwa, the Beaver, said, "Perhaps Naxànum, the Raccoon, should go." "No!" the animals argued. "He might follow his tail instead of his nose. So Raccoon should not go."

Then Shikak, the Skunk, said, "Perhaps Tàme'tut, the Coyote, should go." "No!" the animals shouted. "Coyote is clever and loves to play tricks. He might chase the clouds or swallow the wind. So Coyote should not go."

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Then the animals made all kinds of noise. They screeched and howled, hooted and growled, because they couldn't decide who should make the journey to the dwelling place of the Creator and ask him to stop the snow.

In the meantime, the snow got deeper and deeper. The small animals climbed on top of the taller animals so that they wouldn't disappear.

Just as the animals were in their greatest despair, from the top of a tall tree, MÀNÀKA'has, the Rainbow Crow, flew down among them. In the sweetest voice they had ever heard from a bird, Rainbow Crow said, "I will go, I will go!"

The animals were so happy to have a messenger that they sang many songs of praise to him.

Then Rainbow Crow flew high up into the sky, above the snow and the winds, beyond the clouds, the moon and the stars.

For three days he flew, until at last he arrived at the twelfth heaven, the dwelling place of the Creator; but the Creator was too busy to notice him. So MÀNÀKA'has, the Rainbow Crow, began to sing. Upon hearing the singing, the Creator stopped to listen. Never before had he heard such a sweet voice singing or such a beautiful song. Upon seeing MÀNÀKA'has, the Creator said, "Such a gift of song as you have given to me, I now give a gift to you. Tell me what you would choose to have." Rainbow Crow knew that far below, on the Earth, the snow was getting so deep that soon all of the animals would disappear. So he asked Kishelamàkânk, the Creator, to stop the snow.

The Creator replied, "No, MÀNÀKA'has, I cannot stop the snow, for the snow has a Spirit of its own. When the Snow Spirit leaves the clouds to visit with his friend, the Wind Spirit, the snow will stop, but Earth will still be cold."

So MÀNÀKA'has asked the Creator to stop the cold, but the Creator said, "No, MÀNÀKA'has, I cannot stop the cold. All I can do is give you the gift of fire. Fire will keep you warm and will melt the snow so that your friends will be content until warm weather returns."

The Creator picked up a stick, and set it on fire by sticking it into the Sun. Then he handed it to MÀNÀKA'has, saying, "I

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will give you this gift only once. Now hurry! Fly back to the Earth before the fire goes out!"

Off flew Rainbow Crow.

On the first day, as he was flying down to the Earth, sparks from the fire burnt and darkened his tail feathers.

On the second day, the fire burned brighter and the stick grew shorter, and all of Rainbow Crow's feathers became blackened with soot.

On the third day, the stick of fire was so short, and the fire so hot that smoke and ash blew into his mouth, and his voice became cracked and hoarse. "Caw, caw," he croaked.

Upon returning to the clearing in the forest where Mânàka'has had left the other animals, they were nowhere to be seen. Only the tops of the tallest trees were above the snow. So, Mânàka'has flew down close to the snow, and around and around he went until the fire had melted the snow and his animal friends were safe.

The stick of fire that Rainbow Crow had brought to Earth as a gift from the Creator, became the grandfather of all fires, and for this all the animals gave thanks to him. They danced and sang songs praising Rainbow Crow.

But Mânàka'has flew alone to a distant tree, where he wept. For now he was no longer beautiful, and could no longer sing sweet songs. His rainbow-colored feathers were gone forever.

When the Snow Spirit emptied the clouds and joined the Wind Spirit, the snow stopped. Crow was still weeping. No longer was he Rainbow Crow, but just a plain black Crow. Alas, Crow is what he has been called ever since.

Now Kishelamàkânk, the Creator, heard Crow in his despair and came down from the sky. When he saw Crow, he said, "Soon man will appear on the Earth. He will take the fire and be master of all but you. For being so brave and unselfish, I now give you the gift of freedom. Man will never hurt you, for your meat tastes like fire and smoke. Man will never capture you, for your beautiful voice is now crackly and hoarse. Man will never value your feathers, because your rainbow colors are now black. But your black feathers will shine and reflect all the colors. If you look closely you will see."

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Crow looked, and he saw many tiny rainbows shining in his black feathers, and so he was satisfied.

The Creator returned to his dwelling far above the sky, and Crow returned to his friends in the forest, happy and proud that he was now just a black Crow, with shining feathers full of tiny rainbows.

## THE SUGAR MAPLE (AXSÌNAMÌNSHI)

Long ago, Axsìnamìnshi, the Sugar Maple, was suffering from an intense itching caused by grubs and beetles burrowing beneath his bark. Though he had many arms and fingers, he could not scratch himself. The itching became unbearable, and all that he could do was to writhe in discomfort and torment. He could do nothing by himself to relieve his suffering!

Finally, unable to bear the itching any longer, he called out to the squirrels, porcupines and beavers to help him, but they were concerned only with their own affairs and did not offer any help. All they did was to offer their sympathy.

Next, Sugar Maple called to the birds. They too, felt sorry for him, but could do nothing.

Then, Papa'xès, Woodpecker, came along, and he said he could help. So, he brought his cousins, Ulikwàn, Flicker; and Titàs, the Downy Woodpecker. All of them worked very hard and finally were able to pick up every pest from Sugar Maple's bark, and his itching stopped! What a relief! Axsìnamìnshi thanked Woodpecker and his cousins most happily, and they thanked Sugar Maple for the good meal of grubs and beetles.

Years later, Papa'xès was in distress. Not knowing what to do, he at last came to Axsìnamìnshi, who he hadn't seen in a long time, and he related a sad story to him. Due to a long period without rain, Papa'xès was dying of thirst, and asked Sugar Maple if he might help.

Sugar Maple, remembering the help he had received from Woodpecker, told him, "Go to my trunk and drill some holes and they will fill up with my sap."

Woodpecker flew down and pecked away at the trunk, making

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many holes. The holes then filled up with sap, and Woodpecker drank and joyfully slaked his thirst. Woodpeckers have been drinking from trees ever since.

It was from the Woodpecker, that our Lenape'wàk learned that trees give sap and can be tapped.