

Stories and Heresies
Monsters and Magic

As told by Joseph Bruchac 1985



"Oh, Bear," Chipmunk said, "you are right to kill me, I deserve to die. Just please let me say one word to Creator before you eat me."

Chipmunk and Bear

Long ago when animals could talk, a bear was walking along. Now it has always been said that bears think very highly of themselves. Since they are big and strong, they are certain that they are the most important of the animals.

As this bear went along turning over big logs with his paws to look for food to eat, he felt very sure of himself. "There is nothing I cannot do," said this bear.

"Is that so?" said a small voice. Bear looked down. There was a little chipmunk looking up at Bear from its hole in the ground.

"Yes," Bear said, "that is true indeed." He reached out one huge paw and rolled over a big log. "Look at how easily I can do this. I am the strongest of all the animals. I can do anything. All the other animals fear me."

"Can you stop the sun from rising in the morning?" said the chipmunk.

Bear thought for a moment. "I have never tried that," he said. "Yes, I am sure I could stop the sun from rising."

"You are sure?" said Chipmunk.

"I am sure," said Bear. "Tomorrow morning the sun will not rise. I, Bear, have said so." Bear sat down facing the east to wait.

Behind him the sun set for the night and still he sat there. The chipmunk went into its hole and curled up in its snug little nest, chuckling about how foolish Bear was. All through the night Bear sat. Finally the first birds started their songs and the east glowed with the light which comes before the sun.

"The sun will not rise today," said Bear. He stared hard at the growing light. "The sun will not rise today."

However, the sun rose, just as it always had. Bear was very upset, but Chipmunk was delighted. He laughed and laughed. "Sun is stronger than Bear," said the chipmunk, twittering with laughter. Chipmunk was so amused that he came out of his hole and began running around in circles, singing this song:

"The sun came up,

The sun came up.

Bear is angry,

But the sun came up."

While Bear sat there looking very unhappy, Chipmunk ran around and around, singing and laughing until he was so weak that he rolled over on his back. Then, quicker than the leap of a fish from a stream, Bear shot out one big paw and pinned him to the ground.

"Perhaps I cannot stop the sun from rising," said Bear, "but you will never see another sunrise."

"Oh, Bear," said the chipmunk, "oh, oh, oh, you are the strongest, you are the quickest, you are the best of all of the animals. I was only joking." But Bear did not move his paw.

"Oh, Bear," Chipmunk said, "you are right to kill me, I deserve to die. Just please let me say one last prayer to Creator before you eat me."

"Say your prayer quickly," said Bear. "Your time to walk the Sky Road has come!"

"Oh, Bear," said Chipmunk, "I would like to die. But you are pressing down on me so hard I cannot breathe. I can hardly squeak. I do not have enough breath to say a prayer. If you would just lift your paw a little, just a little bit, then I could breathe. And I could say my last prayer to the Maker of all, to the one who made great, wise, powerful Bear and the foolish, weak, little Chipmunk."

Bear lifted up his paw. He lifted it just a little bit. That little bit, though, was enough. Chipmunk squirmed free and ran for his hole as quickly as the blinking of an eye. Bear swung his paw at the little chipmunk as it darted away. He was not quick enough to catch him, but the very tips of his long claws scraped along Chipmunk's back leaving three pale scars.

To this day, all chipmunks wear those scars as a reminder to them of what happens when one animal makes fun of another.