

MOOIN AND THE SEVEN HUNTERS

MOOIN, THE BEAR, the Micmacs call the four stars of the Big Dipper, or the Great Bear, Ursa Major. The three stars of the handle of the dipper, or the tail of the Bear, they say are the first three of seven hunters who pursue the Bear across the northern sky during the warm summer months: Robin (because it is a reddish star), Chickadee (because it is small like a chickadee), and Moose Bird (Gray Jay). In the constellation Bootes are the four other hunters: Pigeon, Blue Jay (because it is a blue star), Owl (Koo-koo-gwesoo), and Saw-whet—the four that lose the chase as they drop from sight below the northern horizon in the late summer. Above the hunters is Mooin's den the group of stars of Corona Borealis. The tiny star beside Chickadee is his cooking pot which he carries along to cook the meat when Mooin is killed.

For generations on summer evenings the Micmacs watched the four stars of the Bear fleeing across the northern horizon trailed by the seven stars, whom they called the seven hunters. In the cold moons of winter they saw the same four stars of the Bear lying high in the sky. Then, as the earth turned warm in the spring, they watched the four stars descend the steep slopes of the heavens and again flee across the northern sky. The tale of Mooin and the seven hunters is a very old myth of the Micmacs and one which they told and still tell in the present tense because it is always happening.

In the spring Mooin in the sky awakes from her long winter sleep, leaves her den and comes down the steep hills to look for food. Chickadee sees her, but being little he cannot follow the trail alone and he calls for the other hunters. Together they start off with Chickadee and his cooking pot between Robin and Moose Bird. He is so little he might get lost in the great sky if Robin and Moose Bird were not there to look after him.

All summer Mooin runs across the northern sky and the hunters follow. But as autumn creeps into the summer nights the four hunters, Blue Jay, Saw-whet, Owl, and Pigeon, far behind the others, grow weary, and one by one they lose the trail. First Owl, Koo-koo-gwesoo, and Saw-whet drop by the way. But you must not laugh when you hear that Saw-whet fails to share in the meat, and you must not mock his rasping cry, for if you do, wherever you are, he will come in the night with his flaming torch of bark and burn the clothes that cover you. Then, Blue Jay and Pigeon lose the way, and in the crisp nights of autumn only Moose Bird and Chickadee and Robin, the hunters that are always hunting, are on the trail. At last Mooin grows weary of the long chase and is overtaken by Robin.

Brought to bay, Mooin rears to defend herself; Robin pierces her with his arrow, and she falls dead upon her back. Hungry from the long chase, and always thin in the autumn, Robin is eager for Mooin's fat. He leaps on her bleeding body and is covered with blood. Flying to the nearest maple in sky-land he shakes off the blood—all except from his breast. "That," Chickadee tells him, "you will have as long as your name is Robin."

The blood that Robin shakes from his back spatters far