



BRINGING BACK ANIMALS

Long ago, in the time of the Elders, a big camp of the People was nearby, on the river. This *meski'k wutan* was a good place, and the People stayed there all the time. They went torch-fishing in the river, from their canoes. At night the whole river was bright with the light of their torches, bobbing up and down, while the People speared salmon and trout and eels.

In the forest on either side of the river were many moose. The People hunted them, dried the meat, smoked it, toasted it over the fire until it was nice and brown.

The river is a good place, and the People live there content.

In this camp are two young men. They have Power. They are *puoinaq*, shamans. Something is calling them. A journey lies before them. They have heard something calling, and they must go.

"We are going to see if there are any other People in the world," they say to all the camp.

"When are you coming back?"

"Ah," they say. "We will come back after we have found some."

These two young men are talking about which way to go.

"South," says one of them. "We will go south."

So they take their weapons, their bows and quivers of arrows. And they walk. They walk and they walk on, going south. They walk for seven days and then they walk for seven days more. Their Power protects them. Nothing can kill them.

Now one of those young men is sitting down. He takes out his stone pipe and packs it full of *nespipaqn* roots. He sucks in the *nespipaqn* smoke and he Listens. He is Listening for signs, he is Listening for sounds. His Power comes up in him as he smokes.

"I taste People somewhere close," he says, blowing smoke out into the air around his head. Slowly he raises his arm, and points. "We must go down that way."

And there before them is a wigwam. These two young men approach it. They call out. "*Pjila'si*," says a voice from within, and so they enter. Inside there is a man and a woman.

"Where are you from?" asks the man, after they have smoked and sat a while. "Where have you come walking from?"

"We have come from a camp where many of the People live, a *meski'k wutan*," says one of the young men. "There are many wigwams there. Here I see only one."

It is a long wigwam, with a door at either end. The man inside that wigwam says, "I have lived here since the world began."

He says, "I have my grandmother living with me. She has been with me since the world was made. This is a wigwam where much is done."

"What kind of work do you do here?" asks one of the young men.

"You will see. You will see this evening, when I begin. I cannot work now," says the man. "It is not yet time."

Then that man turns to his grandmother. He speaks to her. "Grandmother, please cook something for our guests to eat, quickly. The sun is about to go beneath the earth."

The old woman is cooking moose meat and ground-nuts for them. She is hurrying as fast as she can. The man is restless. He urges them to eat, and when they have finished, his grandmother gathers their bowls and spoons, she gathers her pots, and she puts them all away.

"Now, my grandsons," she says to the guests, "you may lie down here, close up against the walls of the wigwam. Do not lie with your feet toward the fire now. We need space. We need room to work." And she puts out the fire.

The sun is going beneath the earth. And the man inside the wigwam begins to beat on bark, and to sing. The sun has gone beneath the earth. He beats on his birchbark drum, and he sings.

He says, "I am Waisisk Ketu'muaji Ji'nm, I am Man Singing For Animals. I am singing for the animals, for all the animals, the *waisisk*, to come alive, to come back to life, from all those parts of them, all those wings, heads, feet, all those bones, meat, marrow, all those parts of them that have not been eaten by the People, all those parts of them that have not been eaten by other animals, all those parts of them that have been thrown away."

He sings. He sings, "*Nekanisunku'l pesikwiaku'l*: what belongs to my feet I am losing." That is how his Song starts. He sings and beats on the bark drum. All night long he sings, as the stars rise and pass across the dark sky above the wigwam, to sink once more beneath the earth.

Now it is morning. The sun has come from beneath the earth. The man inside this wigwam stops singing at daybreak. He says to his visitors, "This is my work every night. I do not like to see the People waste anything, any part of the animals. They should treat those things with respect. They should save everything, they should save eel skins. They should save all the parts of the animals. What they cannot save and use, they should bury with respect. They should not waste any hair or anything."

Then this man rose to his feet. He stretched himself and wriggled around a little bit. "My canoe is down on the shore," he said to his visitors, and they all went down to the shore with him.

"Do you want to see the fish come?" says this man to his two guests. He takes out a whistle, a whistle made of shell, and he begins to play on it. The bottom of the sea here is very clear, and they can see all kinds of fish, coming to hear the music.

"These are my fish," says the man. "They come from all those parts of fish which the People throw away on the shore. I sing for them and they come back."

Then they went back to the wigwam. "Are there any more of the People around here?" they ask this man, and he tells them yes.

"Well," they say to him, "we can go home now. We have found People."

And every night this man is singing. The bones of the animals the People have put in the woods, he is singing for them to come back to life. He puts out the fire, and he sings in the dark. He takes out a moose bone and sings over it. The moose jumps out of the bone, and runs away. He takes out a caribou bone, he beats the birchbark drum, he sings to it. The caribou leaps up and runs away. He takes out the bones of mink and beaver and bear, and while he is singing, these bones burst into animals, and the animals run away. All of them come back to life. This man, Waisisk Ketu'muaji Ji'nm, the Man Who Sings For Animals, the Man Who Brings Back Animals, he makes them all live again.