



## Hadiwënoda:je's (Thunder Beings)

Hi:'nö' (The Thunderer)

*These stories were collected by John Napoleon Brinton Hewitt was one-quarter Tuscarora, and he worked with Ermine Smith in recording Iroquois stories in 1880. Hewitt published these stories in 1903 and 1928.*

### **A Man Entertained by The Thunderers**

*Another tale of the how the Thunder Beings passed on their knowledge to the Skarure, collected by J.N.B. Hewitt in 1888.*

A Skarure man was so busy picking ears of corn from his field he tired himself out, hoping to finish as quickly as he could. He was so focused on his task that he did not notice the dark clouds gathering on the horizon. The storm built quickly and suddenly, with a loud clap of thunder, a tornado came crashing upon him.

Startled by the tornado, he rushed to look for shelter, but slipped and cut his foot on the sharp rocks. He struggled to find a safe place in the nearby tress and bushes so that he could dress his wound. While he was busy cleaning and bandaging the injured foot, the storm continued. It was caused by *Hineh*, the Thunder Being, who made it rain and spoke with a loud roar of thunder.

Just as he finished wrapping his foot, a lightning bolt struck a tree next to the injured man and knocked him senseless. He was unconscious for a while, but came to and slowly made his way home after the rain let up.

The man was a good hunter and he usually went to a secret hunting place in a distant region where he would hunt alone. He would not tell anyone where his favorite hunting spot was as he wanted to keep the plentiful game to himself. In order to get to that hunting ground he had to take a canoe many miles up a large river. When he finally reached the special place, he would conceal his canoe so no one would see where he was hunting. It was unusual to find one man so selfish.

He would go off into the woods and find plenty of animals to hunt. It would not take him long to get more meat than he could carry. He would pack it on his back and head back to his canoe, where he would fill the canoe full of meat and head down stream back to his village.

On one of his trips, he fell asleep as he drifted down stream. He does not know how long he was sleeping drifting in the river. When he finally awoke, he was greatly surprised to find his canoe moving swiftly across a great expanse of water, but that there was no current to carry his canoe forward. He looked up to see that he was headed for a large



island. From the dense woods on that island smoke spiraled upward. He found the smoke reassuring as it meant that someone must be living on that island. When his canoe hit the shoreline, he jumped out of his canoe onto the island.

He carefully moored his canoe so that it would not float away. Suddenly a man appeared, welcoming him to the island. The island man invited the hunter to go to his house. As he entered the house he was surprised to see it was the home of the Thunderers. The eldest Thunderer, an old man, welcomed the hunter and told him that it was he who brought the hunter to the island while he slept.

The hunter looked around and saw three other Thunderers. They were broiling a green lizard for a feast. These large lizards, about fifteen feet long and as big as a man, had invaded the Skarure from time to time. They were powerful and destructive. It was the job of the Thunderers to chase the lizards down and kill them in order to protect the humans. The lizards were said to be as swift as a deer and could carry a man in their mouths.

The Thunderers removed the lizard from the broiling sticks and made themselves ready for their feast. The old man Thunderer asked the Hunter to join in the feast. The Hunter, not wanting to offend his host, sat to eat, but was not anxious to try the lizard meat. To his relief, the old man Thunderer told the others, "Prepare some deer meat for this man as human beings cannot eat what we can."

The old man Thunderer then turned and pulled some ears of parched corn from under his bed and offered them to the Hunter. He motioned toward one of the younger Thunderers and spoke to the Hunter, "This young man here (pointing to the young Thunderer) has a human mother and he knows what you humans can eat."

The other Thunderers placed fresh cooked deer meat in front of the Hunter and he ate heartily. As they feasted, the Thunderers explained that it was this half-human Thunderer who had struck the tree next to the Hunter when he was attending to his injured foot. The other Thunderers said that the half-human Thunderer could not shoot straight and that is why his lightning bolts were always hitting trees and houses rather than what he was aiming at. They also said that his voice was different from theirs, and his was sharp and crackling and only served to terrify humans and animals.

They explained how it was that he had become to be a half-human Thunderer and that together, they had destroyed nearly all of the reptilian monsters which had been devouring humans. They only left the ones that the humans themselves could kill or escape from.

After the feast, the old man Thunderer then told his sons to take the Hunter back to where they had found him. Sadly, he bade his new friends farewell and headed back across the great water in his canoe. When he arrived back at his village he was anxious to tell what had happened to him on his hunting trip. The Hunter finally realized that in order for



them to believe him, he had to reveal where his beloved hunting grounds were located.

### **The Horned Serpent Runs Away With A Girl** **Who Is Rescued By The Thunderer**

There was a Thunderer named Hi''no<sup>n</sup> who often hovered about a village where he sought to attract the attention of a certain young woman. He was a very friendly man and would have nothing to do with witches. He hated all kinds of sorcery and his great chief up in the sky whom we call Grandfather Thunder hated all wizardry and sorcery too. All the Thunderers killed witches when they could find them at their evil work.

Now, this Hi''no<sup>n</sup> was very sure that he would win the girl he wanted and he visited her lodge at night and took a fire brand from the fire and sat down and talked with her, but she kept saying, "Not yet, perhaps by and by."

Hi''no<sup>n</sup> was puzzled and resolved to watch for the coming of a rival. He told the girl's father that he suspected some witch had cast a spell on her or that some wizard was secretly visiting her. So they both watched.

That same night a strange man came. He had a very fine suit of clothing, and the skin had a peculiar tan. It was very clean, as if washed so that it shone with a glitter. Over his back and down the center there was a broad stripe of black porcupine quills with a small diamond-shaped pattern. He had a long neck and small beady eyes, but he was graceful and moved without noise. He went directly to the lodge and taking a light sat at the girl's bedside.

"Are you willing?" he asked her. "Come now, let us depart. I want you for my wife. I will take you to my house."

The girl replied, "Not yet, I think someone is watching, but in three days I will be ready."

The next day the girl worked very hard making a new dress and spent much time putting black porcupine quills upon it as ornamentation. It was her plan to have a dress that would match her lover's suit. Upon the third day she finished her work and went to bed early. Her apartment was at the right side of the door and it was covered by a curtain of buffalo skin that hung all the way down.

Hi''no<sup>n</sup> again called upon her, taking a light and seating himself back of the curtain. "I am willing to marry you," he said. "When will you become my wife?"

"Not yet," she replied. "I am not ready now to marry."

"I think you are deceiving me," answered Hi''no<sup>n</sup>, "for you have on your new dress and have not removed your moccasins."



"You may go," the girl told him, and he went away.

Soon there came the stranger and he too took a little torch and went behind the curtain. Soon the two came out together and ran down the path to the river.

"I shall take you now to my own tribe," said the lover. "We live only a short way from here. We must go over the hill."

So onward they went to their home, at length arriving at the high rocky shores of a lake. They stood on the edge of the cliff and looked down at the water.

"I see no village and no house," complained the girl. "Where shall we go now? I am sure that we are pursued by the Thunderer."

As she said this the Thunderer and the girl's father appeared running toward them.

"It is dark down there," said the lover. "We will now descend and find our house."

So saying he took the girl by the waist and crawled down the cliff, suddenly diving with a splash into the lake. Down they went until they reached the foot of the cliff, when an opening appeared into which he swam with her. Quickly he swam upward and soon they were in a dimly lighted lodge. It was a strange place and filled with numerous fine things. All along the wall there were different suits of clothing.

"Look at all the suits," said the lover, "when you have found one put it on."

That night the couple were married and the next day the husband went away. "I shall return in three days," he announced. "Examine the fine things here, and when you find a dress that you like put it on."

For a long time the girl looked at the things in the lodge, but she was afraid to put on anything for everything had such a fishy smell. There was one dress, however, that attracted the girl and she was tempted to put it on. It was very long and had a train. It was covered all over with decorations that looked like small porcupine quills flattened out. There was a hood fastened to it and to the hood was fastened long branching antlers. She looked at this dress longingly but hung it up again with a sigh, for it smelled like fish and she was afraid.

In due time her husband returned and asked her if she had selected a suit. "I have found one that I admire greatly," said she. "But I am afraid that I will not like it after I put it on. It has a peculiar fishy smell and I am afraid that it may bring evil upon me if I wear it."



"Oh no!" exclaimed her husband, "If you wear that suit I will be greatly pleased. It is the very suit that I hoped you would select. Put it on, my wife, put it on, for then I shall be greatly pleased. When I return from my next trip I hope you will wear it for me."

The next day the husband went away, again promising soon to return. Again the girl busied herself with looking at the trophies hanging in the lodge. She noticed that there were many suits like the one she had admired. Carefully she examined each and then it dawned upon her that these garments were the clothing of great serpents. She was horrified at the discovery and resolved to escape. As she went to the door she was swept back by a wave. She tried the back door but was forced into the lodge again by the water. Finally mustering all her courage she ran out of the door and jumped upward. She knew that she had been in a house under water. Soon she came to the surface but it was dark and there were thunder clouds in the sky. A great storm was coming up. Then she heard a great splashing and through the water she saw a monster serpent plowing his way toward her. Its eyes were fiercely blazing and there were horns upon its head. As it came toward her she scrambled in dismay up the dark slippery rocks to escape it. As the lightning flashed she looked sharply at the creature and saw that its eyes were those of her husband. She noticed in particular a certain mark on his eyes that had before strangely fascinated her. Then she realized that this was her husband and that he was a great horned serpent.

She screamed and sought to scale the cliff with redoubled vigor, but the monster was upon her with a great hiss. His huge bulk coiled to embrace her, when there was a terrific peal of thunder, a blinding flash, and the serpent fell dead, stricken by one of Hi'no's arrows.

The girl was about to fall when a strong arm grasped her and bore her away in the darkness. Soon she was back at her father's lodge. The Thunderer had rescued her.

"I wanted to save you," he said, "but the great horned serpent kept me away by his magic. He stole you and took you to his home. It is important that you answer me one question: did you ever put on any dress that he gave you? If you did you are no longer a woman but a serpent."

"I resisted the desire to put on the garment," she told him.

"Then," said he, "you must go to a sweat lodge and be purified."

The girl went to the women's sweat lodge and they prepared her for the purification. When she had sweat and been purged with herbs, she gave a scream and all the women screamed for she had expelled two young serpents, and they ran down and slipped off her feet. The Thunderer outside killed them with a loud noise.

After a while the young woman recovered and told all about her adventure and after a time the Thunderer came to her lodge and said, "I would like to take you now."



"I will give you some bread," she answered, meaning that she wished to marry him. So she gave him some bread which he ate and then they were married.

The people of the village were now all afraid that the lake would be visited by homed serpents seeking revenge but the Thunderer showed them a medicine bag filled with black scales, and he gave every warrior who would learn his song one scale, and it was a scale from the back of the horned serpent. He told them that if they wore this scale, the serpent could not harm them. So, there are those scales in medicine bundles to this day.

### **Niagara Falls and the Thunderbeings**

A young girl and her elderly mother lived in a large village along the shores of the upper Niagara River. Her and her mother lived alone for many years. The girl was very sickly and she could not attract the attentions of any young man. One day, her mother went off to visit another village so she told her daughter that she would be gone quite some time. She told her to keep the door locked and shut until she returned. The daughter dutifully agreed.

Late that night, someone knocked on the door of the young girl's longhouse. "What do you want?" asked the girl. "I want you to open the door for me. I want to be with you," came the reply from beyond the door. His voice was so gentle that the girl opened the door despite what her mother had told her. In walked the most handsome man she had ever seen. He seemed to be very pleasant and well behaved.

He told her he wanted to marry her, and she was so excited by his attention that they slept together right away. She noticed that he wore a beautiful necklace made with white clam shells that shone like silver. The shells were small in the front and grew larger to where the necklace ended at the shoulders. They stayed together several days but one morning the man said that he had to return to his home. He took one of the large clam shells from his shoulder and said, "This will serve to remind you of me while I am gone."

"Will you not be coming back?" asked the girl. He shook his head no. She was devastated by the shocking news that he was leaving her. He tried to make her feel better by saying, "Some day I will return to you," but he did not really mean it.

The next morning, her mother returned and it did not take her long to realize that someone else had been in her home. She became suspicious and asked her daughter of anyone had come to visit. Her daughter told her the truth about what had happened. She pulled out the clam shell that he had given her to show to her mother, explaining that the man was the most handsome young man she had ever seen. In looking at the bright shell, they realized that it was actually a large scale, like that of a fish or snake. The mother began to cry knowing what had happened. "It was not a man that you were with," she told her shocked daughter, "it was a giant snake who took advantage of you because you are ill."



It was not long before the young girl discovered she was pregnant. As her stomach grew larger she became more and more sleepy. Finally, she became so large that all she could do was lie down in the sunshine and sleep all day long. One day her mother came upon her sleeping in some brush and was astonished to see a mass of tiny, entangled snakes magically appear next to her daughter. When the snakes saw her, they retreated back into the body of her sleeping daughter. She knew these snakes were powerful spirits as they reappeared again.

The old woman had to tell her daughter that her belly was full of snakes. This news terrified the young girl and she ran off into the woods to try to escape the truth. She ran to the river above the great waterfall. She threw herself into the water and swiftly floated directly towards the brink of the falls. As her body floated over the cascade towards what she thought would be certain death, a strange thing happened.

The Thunderbeings, who lived in caves behind the great falls, reached out and caught her, saving her from the crushing power of the falls. There were four Thunderbeings, three young ones, and one very old elder being. They told her that they knew what was bothering her. They led her to their lodge and the oldest one began to make medicine that would cure her of the unwanted pregnancy.

The medicine worked and the jumble of snakes began to fall out of her stomach. The elder Thunderbeing told the girl not to fear them for the snakes were a fine food. They grabbed them up and cooked the snakes. The Thunderbeings enjoyed a great feast of the snakes, eating every last one of them. They then turned their attention back to the girl and gave her more medicine as she had grown weak from the experience.

Slowly she recovered as she lived with the Thunderbeings. One day, she met another Thunderbeing and they quickly fell in love. Again the girl had become pregnant, but this time, the elder Thunderbeing explained that she must be returned to her mother so that she can be cared for properly. But her Thunderbeing lover could not stay with her and he had to return to the lodge behind the falls. He told her that she would have a baby boy, and that he would always want to crawl all over the place. He also warned her that she must not let him play with other kids. If he ever got mad at others, he could make it lightning and that would be very dangerous. Further, he told her that when the boy grew older, he must be kept indoors when the other Thunderbeings called out to him, or else he would disappear with them.

When ever thunder rolled across the sky, she dutifully locked her little son in the longhouse. But he cried relentlessly, wanting to go outside. This continued for many years until he became a young man. One day his mother went visiting and forgot to lock him in the house. He waited until she disappeared into the woods and then bolted through the open door. As he stepped outdoors, the Thunderers spoke to him from the sky above. He walked towards them and their voices got louder. The son, born of the love of the sickly girl and the Thunderbeing, vanished into the sky to join his father's



relatives.

## **The Thunder Beings and the Hunter**

*Another story about the Thunder Beings collected by J.N.B. Hewitt. (Another version from the story above "A Man Entertained by the Thunderers")*

A storm cloud on the horizon forced a man to quickly gather up ears of corn from his field. He nearly exhausted himself trying to beat the coming storm. The clouds turned into a tornado and loud claps of thunder rang overhead. Rushing around, he cut his foot and had to limp off to the safety of the bush line, under some large trees. As he dressed his wound the rains began to fall and the thunder roared. A sudden flash of lightning struck the tree next to him and knocked him senseless.

When he regained consciousness, the storm was over and he headed back to his village. This man was a good hunter and had a special place where he always had good luck in finding game. He would not reveal its location. Not wanting others to over hunt his special place. He headed off for that distant hunting ground in his canoe for the long ride to the land of bounty.

He was lucky again and filled his canoe with game and started to head home. But he fell asleep as the canoe drifted down stream. He awoke to find himself in a large body of water that seemed endless. His canoe moved swiftly, despite the fact that there was no current in the water. The canoe was headed for a large island and he saw smoke rising from the dense forest on that island. He thought it was a good sign so when his canoe touched the shore he jumped onto the island.

As he was tying up his canoe a man appeared and welcomed him, inviting the hunter to his house. As he entered the house he was surprised to see that it was the home of the Thunderers. An old Thunder Being greeted him and explained that it was he who brought the hunter to this island as he slept in his canoe. The hunter looked around and saw that the four Thunder Beings were broiling a large green lizard, about 12 feet long, for their meal. These huge lizards were very destructive towards humans and the Thunderers found great delight in tracking them down and killing them with their thunderbolts. For the hunter they prepared deer meat and roasted corn instead, as the lizard meat was only for the Thunderers.

Then the old Thunderer introduced one of the younger beings, saying, "This young man here, has human blood in him and he knows what human beings can eat." As he ate the deer meat, the hunter realized that the half-human Thunderer was the one that struck the tree next to him as he dressed his foot. The other beings explained that the human-Thunderer could not shoot his bolts of lightning straight, often hitting trees or houses. His voice was not as strong as the others, but was sharp and crackling, often scaring all who hear it. They explained how the human-Thunderer came into being.





As the dinner progressed, they also explained that it was their duty to kill all of the reptilian monsters which were a threat to humans. They only left those that humans could kill themselves, or escape from. After the meal, the elder Thunderer asked one of his Thunder sons to return the hunter to the place where they found him. The hunter was glad to be going home, but sorry that he had to leave his new friends. Upon returning to his village he gathered the people together and told them of his great adventure. He taught them about the reasons for the thunder that he had learned and ever since that time the Skarure have had the greatest respect for the falls at Niagara as the home of the Thunderbeings.

### **The Thunderer and His Son**

*This is based upon a story by Chief Elias Johnson, recorded by A.J. Gatschet, 1885.*

Long ago, the Thunderer, called “Our Grandfather,” or *Yekwariaksut* used to live at the falls of Niagara, called *Niuhtawe-e*. From time to time the Thunderer would take on human form and leave his home behind the falls and wonder among the humans. Once he even married a certain woman and they eventually had a son. As he grew, he began to play with the other boys in his village. But he was different from the rest. Whenever his playmates made him angry, he made lightning. Whenever this happened it frightened some of his friends so much that they fainted. This angered the other parents and they would often complain to the thunder child’s mother.

At first she did not pay attention to their complaints. However, the other parents seemed to complain even more. Finally she decided that she had to do something, so she called her son and when he returned, she scolded him. He began to cry, and the more she scolded him the worse he cried. He could not stop crying.

Hearing his cries, his father, the Thunderer, came forth from the sky. He told the boy’s mother, “You did wrong in scolding the boy. I had intended that he should have sustained your people, but it did not work out. Now, I will take him away with me.”

The Thunderer reached out and grabbed his son and took him away. To this very day, when you hear thunderclaps overhead, it is actually the son who makes the loud noise that sounds like the sky ripping apart.