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MINK AND SUN

The Kwakiutl people, who lived around Puget Sound in the state of Washington, liked to tell stories about Mink. Mink was always playing tricks on other animals and people. He liked to make them look foolish.

But when Mink had already tricked almost everybody, nobody trusted him any more. He couldn't play his tricks. What could he do?

He looked up in the SkyLand where Sun trudged across, from east to west, every day. "That looks like an easy job!" he thought. "I can do that. I just have to trick Sun into letting me take over."

So Mink climbed the tallest cedar tree and jumped into the SkyLand. He headed east to Sun's house, and knocked on the door.

Mrs. Sun answered. "Yes?"

Mink lied, "I am your husband's cousin. I have come to pay a visit."

Mrs. Sun looked at Mink's long, thin body and short legs. He didn't look like Sun's family at all. But you have to be polite to relatives. "I'm sorry," she said, "my husband is not at home now. He is carrying the sun's light across the SkyLand, from east to west."

Mink rolled his eyes. "I know that," he scowled. "Let me in, and I'll wait for him."

So she let him in. You have to be polite to relatives.

That evening, when Sun came home from work, Mrs. Sun met him at the door. "We have a visitor. He says he's your cousin but he doesn't look anything like you: long skinny body, little short legs."

"Ah, that sounds like Mink!" said Sun. "I have watched him playing tricks on all the animals and people on Earth, and now he probably wants to trick us. But perhaps we can make him look foolish."
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They had a nice dinner. Afterwards, Mink said, "Listen, Sun, you're getting old but I am young and strong. I have come to take over your job, carrying the light across the SkyLand."

"You think you can do it? It's a long walk, from east to west."
"I know that," scowled Mink. "But I can do it. It will be easy for me."
"Well, I guess you know all you need to know," smiled Sun. "You can try tomorrow."

In the morning, they dressed Mink in heavy, thick robes and a heavy mask. Sun gave him a torch filled with pine pitch. "That's enough fuel to keep the light burning all day."
"I know that," scowled Mink.
Then Sun handed Mink a tall walking stick. "I don't need a cane!" said Mink, "I'm not an old fellow like you!"
"Don't you think it might be useful?" asked Sun. Obviously Mink didn't know about the River of Stars.
"Not to me -- I don't need it."
"Well, take it anyway. It makes you look important."
Important! That sounded good to Mink.

They lit the torch and sent Mink out to walk across the SkyLand, from east to west.
At first it was easy. But after a while, the thick robes were hot and the torch was heavy. "This job is not as easy as I thought."

Then in the middle of the SkyLand, Mink came to the River of Stars. Maybe you have seen it on a very very dark night when there's no moon? Astronomers
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call it the Milky Way. Its light is so dim that we can't see it during the daytime, but it's always there.

Mink ran up and down the river bank, but there was no bridge. "How am I supposed to get across this?" He didn't know that Sun always used the tall walking stick to vault across the river.

"I'll bet he gave me this heavy stick to weigh me down, so I can't jump over. I don't need that!" He threw the stick away.

He found the narrowest part of the River of Stars, where it flowed fast and deep.

"I'll just get a running start..."

He backed up, he ran, he jumped as hard as he could —-

Ker-plosh! he landed in the River of Stars.

Fssst --the sun torch went out. Darkness fell in the middle of the day!

It was the first solar eclipse.

Sun had been expecting this, and had another torch ready. He lit it, and soon sunlight returned to the world.

But the River of Stars tumbled Mink head over heels and finally dumped him back on Earth. He never tried to trick Sun again.

From time to time, however, Sun puts his torch out for a little while -- in the middle of the day - to remind us to be polite to relatives.

But you knew that.

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sources:

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Franz Boaz found this story among the Kwakiutl people: "Mink and Sun" #585 Mythology of the Bella Coola Indians, 1898.

Emerson N. Matson also heard it from Chief Martin J. Sampson (Puget Sound Swinomish): "The Mink and the Sun" pp123-127 in Longhouse Legends Thomas Nelson Sons 1968.

### HEAVENLY SWEETHEARTS

Long long ago, when Thailand was still called Siam, they used to say that the King of the Sky drove his golden chariot across the sky every day, bringing light and warmth to the Earth. At night, he shut his chariot and horses in a barn and the stars winked down from the dark sky while he rested.

Sky King's best friend was the King of the Earth. And Sky King was delighted when he heard that the King and Queen of Earth were expecting a baby. "Have you been to see the soothsayers? They will predict the future for your baby."

The soothsayers prayed and chanted, and they reported, "The baby will be a girl -- a most beautiful girl! She will be more beautiful than the dawn itself." And they suggested that the baby should be named Vela Chow, which means "beautiful dawn."

Indeed, when the baby came she was a girl, and she was beautiful. Even better, she grew up healthy and strong, friendly -- and curious! Vela Chow loved to walk in the hills-and-valleys, watching the animals and studying the plants.

When she was 16 years old, the soothsayers asked the King and Queen of the Earth, "Have you found a suitable husband for Vela Chow? She is almost old enough to marry."

How could any man be good enough for such a princess? But she didn't
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care about that. She just wanted to wander free in the hills and valleys, watching the animals and studying the plants.

One day in the hills, Vela Chow saw a kind of butterfly she had never seen before. And there was another one! She wondered, what do they eat? Where do they live? So she followed them, hurrying deeper into the hills as they fluttered over her head. She watched them with her face turned to the sky.

And that's how the King of the Sky, driving his golden chariot overhead, fully saw her face for the first time. You've heard of "love at first sight"? He lost his heart in that instant.

Sky King couldn't take his eyes off Vela Chow. He was supposed to drive straight across the sky, from east to west -- but instead he circled his chariot over Vela Chow. As she hiked further into the hills, following the new butterflies, he drove round and round in the sky. Round and round. Round and round.

To signal the end of the day, when hard-working people could go home to supper and rest, he was supposed to drive his golden chariot lower into the western sky. But instead he kept circling, circling. The day got longer and longer. People complained, "I'm so tired! What a long day this has been!"

And the stars were getting jealous. "When do we get our turn? We're up here all the time but no one can see us when Sky King's golden chariot is in the sky. When will he take it to the barn so that we can shine?"

But the stars soon discovered the problem: Sky King was circling over that girl, Vela Chow. "Hey, when do we get our turn?" they called, but he paid no attention.

Finally Vela Chow herself got tired on this unnaturally long day. She wanted a quiet, dark place where she could lie down and rest. Luckily, she knew of a cave in the hills. She hiked there, and went in.

Sky King saw where she went. "Maybe, while she's in there I could pay her
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a visit and introduce myself." So he drove his golden chariot right down to the Earth. He tied his horses to a tree by the mouth of the cave, and went in.

"Aha!" said the stars, "here's our chance!" They untied the horses and led them to a secret hiding place. They locked up the golden chariot. At last, night darkened the sky. The stars winked happily.

I said when Sky King saw Vela Chow's face for the first time, it was love at first sight. Vela Chow had always loved and admired the beautiful light of the sun. It didn't take long for the two of them to decide that they belonged together! Sky King said, "I will take you in my golden chariot up to my palace in the sky, and we will make plans for the wedding!"

But when they came out of the cave, they found the world in darkness. The chariot was gone. It was the first eclipse of the sun.

"Where are my horses? How can I bring my bride to the sky?" They searched, in the faint starlight.

Finally the mountains, who had always been Sky King's friends, whispered that they had seen the stars steal his chariot and horses. They didn't know the hiding place, but they did know which mountain peak was the highest. Sky King thought, "Maybe we can jump into the sky from there."

So they tried. Sky King had long, strong legs. He ran, and leaped, and he just managed to jump into the sky! But Vela Chow was much smaller; she couldn't do it.

Sky King was so frustrated and angry that he wept with rage. People say that his tears turned into gold and rained down on the mountains, where lucky miners sometimes find it today.

Vela Chow held up her arms to him, but could not reach the sky. She wept tears of silver, which soaked into the rocks. They say that's where silver comes
Finally Sky King went to talk to the stars. "Give me back my chariot and horses! The Earth needs my light and warmth."

The stars said, "We have decided we'll return them if you promise two things. One, you must promise to let us have our turn: the Earth also needs dark night, and we deserve a chance to shine. Two, you can have Vela Chow -- but only for two weeks of each month! We have fallen in love with her too! So she can stay with you for half the month, but for the other half, she will join us in the sky. She will be called Queen of the Night, the Moon."

Sky King had no choice; he agreed.

And so Vela Chow married the King of the Sky, but for two weeks of every month she shines in the night sky as the Moon. The other two weeks, she can stay in her husband's palace.

But she sometimes gets lonely when he's out all day working, driving his golden chariot across the sky. If you look carefully, you may see the pale moon in the sky during the daytime! And very rarely, in the middle of the day, she goes right up to her husband and steals a kiss, modestly covering up his light.

When the Moon covers up the Sun, we call it a solar eclipse.

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Source: Thailand.


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DAUGHTER OF THE SUN

Long ago, when the Cherokee people lived in the hills of Georgia and
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Carolina, they used to say that the sky was a domed ceiling built of stone. They said that Sun Woman walked across the inside of that dome every day, from east to west. In the evening, she walked home along the outside of the dome. And every day she would stop for lunch at the home of her daughter, who lived at the highest center point of the dome.

Sun Woman sometimes complained to her daughter as they ate their lunch, "I don't like these people on the Earth. They are so ugly! Look how they screw up their faces when they look at me! They aren't grateful for the light and warmth I bring them. Don't they know that they can't live without me?"

She became so resentful that she began to send extra-hot beams down to the Earth.

The plants withered and died in the heat. Ponds and creeks dried up. People became sick with fevers. Soon, it seemed as though every family had lost at least one member. The people worried: would anyone survive Sun Woman's heat? What could they do about it?

They went for help to the Little People. These magical beings used to live in the Cherokee country. They were only knee-high, but they were very wise and powerful. They told the Cherokees, "If you have one brave volunteer, we can send him to stop Sun Woman."

A volunteer stepped forward. The Little people transformed him into the first Rattlesnake! They sent him into the sky to wait by the house of the daughter of the Sun. "When Sun Woman comes for lunch, you must bite her."

Rattlesnake curled up by the house door and waited.

It was hot. He became drowzy.

Suddenly he heard footsteps and saw feet. He bared his fangs and struck!

But he had bitten the daughter of the Sun, who had stepped out of her house to look for her mother. The poison of this first rattlesnake was so strong
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that Sun's daughter fell down dead, in her own doorway.

"Oh no! My mistake! I bit the wrong one!" Rattlesnake hurried back to Earth.

The Cherokee people respect rattlesnakes, because now they are careful to
give fair warning before they strike: they rattle their tails so that they won't bite
the wrong one by mistake.

When Sun Woman found her daughter dead, she was so heartbroken that
she shut herself up the house, sealing the door and windows. It was the middle
of the day, but darkness fell on the Earth! It was the first solar eclipse.

A long time passed, but Sun Woman did not come out. Now, instead of too
much heat, the Earth became too cold. Plants could not grow without light.
There would be no food for animals or people.

Again the Cherokees went to the Little People. "What can we do so that Sun
Woman will come out?"

"She will come out if you bring her daughter back from the Land of Ghosts,"
they replied. "This time, seven volunteers will be needed."

The Little People gave each volunteer a short stick of sourwood and told
them to travel west for seven days to the Land of Ghosts. They told the men
how to find the ghost of Sun's daughter and how to carry her home in a box.
"But remember: you must not open the box even a little bit, until you have
brought her back to the village."

The seven volunteers walked west for seven days carrying the box. They
found the Land of Ghosts, where ghosts of people who had gone on before were
holding a dance just as if they were back in their home villages. The volunteers
stood and watched the circle of dancers until they recognized Sun's daughter
coming around. Then the first volunteer stepped forward and tapped her with his
stick of sourwood.

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She looked at him; but she continued in the dance.

The next time she came around in the circle, the second volunteer tapped her. She did not stop.

The third, and fourth, and fifth, and sixth time it was the same. But when the seventh voluteer tapped her with his sourwood stick, she fell unconscious to the ground. The other dancers did not stop. The men shut her into the box, and hurried back eastward.

They carried her for days. They could feel something begin to move in the box. They heard a voice: "I'm hungry! Open the box and give me food!" She was coming back to life! But they didn't dare to open the box.

They walked and walked.

"I'm thirsty! Please give me water!" They could not open the box, even though she begged and begged.

Finally, when they were almost back to their home village, they heard her say, "I can't breathe in here! I'm suffocating! Open the box!"

They were afraid that for lack of air, Sun's daughter would die again. So they put down the box and opened the top just a tiny bit.

WHOOSHO! something red flew out of the box. Something fluttered into the bushes, and they heard the [cheer! cheer! birdie birdie birdie] cry of the first Redbird.

Quickly they carried the box to their village.

But when they opened it, it was empty.

If they had succeeded in bringing Sun's Daughter back from the Land of Ghosts, we would be able to bring back our friends who have died. But they failed, and we can't ever bring them back.

Sun Woman had been hoping that they would succeed. When she learned
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that they had failed, she was so disappointed that she began to weep without stopping. Into that dark, sunless world fell torrents of tears. The Cherokee people feared that a flood would wash everything away! What could they do to make her stop crying?

The Little People said that they must try to amuse her. So they began to sing, and dance, and play music with their drums and flutes. They tried every dance they knew, but still her teardrops fell -- until the drummers tried a new beat. Then the dancers invented a new step, and the singers made a new song that Sun Woman had never heard before.

Curious, she opened the door and peeked out. Seeing how hard they were trying to lift her spirits, she smiled -- and came out at last.

And that was the end of the first solar eclipse.

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Source: Cherokee mythology


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AMATERASU

Long long ago in Japan, they say that hundreds of gods and goddesses ruled every part of nature. Amaterasu, goddess of the sun, ruled over the heavens, giving light and warmth to the Earth. She taught her weaving maids to make gorgeous garments for all the gods and goddesses. Her sacred ponies grazed in the heavenly pastures. All was peace and beauty.

But Amaterasu's younger brother, Susano-wo, did not enjoy peace. He was a god of storms who loved to wreck fishing boats, flatten rice fields, and tear
pine trees from the mountains. He caused so much destruction that their father, Izanagi, ordered Susano-wo banished to the underworld. "I will go," said Susano-wo, "after I have said goodbye to my dear sister."

But Amaterasu worried that Susano-wo was coming to take over her kingdom. She armed herself and prepared for battle. "No no," he said, "let's not fight. But before I go, let's have a contest to show which of us has the greatest power."

Very well. Amaterasu took Susano-wo's sword and broke it into three pieces. She made each piece into a beautiful warrior goddess.

Susano-wo took Amaterasu's necklace of 500 beads. He chewed it up and spit out five ugly little gods. "I win!" he said. "You made 3, I made 5 -- and they are male!"

"So what? Mine are beautiful. Besides, you made yours out of my necklace. I win."

Susano-wo ignored her. "I win! I win!" and to celebrate, he blew up a terrible storm. He destroyed mountains and swept away villages. He even killed one of Amaterasu's sacred ponies and tossed it through the roof of her palace, crashing into the weaving room -- where it killed one of her weaving maids.

Amaterasu was so shocked and heartbroken by her brother's cruel violence that she fled to a deep cave and shut herself up, throwing the world into darkness. It was the first solar eclipse.

At last father Izanagi banished Susano-wo to the underworld. But how could the other gods and goddesses get Amaterasu to come out of her cave?

They tried to tempt her with delicious food and drinks. But, deep in grief, she had no appetite.

They begged her to come out. "It is your job to light the world!" But she couldn't care about work.
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Finally Ame-no-uzume, the goddess of dawn and laughter, made a plan to lure her out. She prepared a bronze mirror ringed with jewels, and hung it in a tree facing the cave. She brought a rooster, who welcomes the dawn.

Then Ame-no-uzume turned a large washtub upside down in front of the cave, making a small stage. She dressed herself in leaves and flowers, instead of a kimono. Then she hopped up on the tub and began to dance.

Under the starlight, the other gods and goddesses "oo-ed and ah-ed" at the beauty of Ame-no-uzume's graceful dance. Amaterasu heard, and was a little curious.

Then the dance got livelier. Ame-no-uzume stamped the tub with her feet like a drum, and kicked so wildly that her costume of leaves and flowers began to fall apart. The other gods and goddesses clapped and whooped and laughed. Amaterasu was so curious that she just had to peek out to see what was going on --

and the jeweled mirror caught the first beams of her light. Entranced by her own bright beauty, she emerged from the cave. The rooster crowed, and the first solar eclipse was over.

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based on ancient Japanese Shinto myths as recorded in the Kojiki (ca. 712 C.E.) and Nihon Shoki (ca. 720 C.E.).


For hundreds of years, the Emperors of Japan were said to be direct descendants of Amaterasu. A jeweled bronze mirror was part of every emperor's royal regalia.

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