

# Things That Go Bump In a Canadian Night

## Nanabozho & The Spirit Bride

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Nanabozho is the Ojibwa trickster figure and culture hero. He plays a similar role as the Saulteaux Wiisagejaak (Cree Wisakedjak). The Algonquin had a similar figure called Ganoozhigaabe (Abenaki Gluskabe).

Nanabozho was one of four sons of Wiininwaa ("Nourishment") a human mother, and E-bangishimog ("In the West"), a spirit father. Nanabozho most often appears in the shape of a rabbit and is characterized as a trickster. In his rabbit form, he is called Mishaaboos ("Great rabbit" or "Hare") or Chi-waabooz ("Big rabbit"). He was sent to Earth by Gitchi Manitou to teach the Ojibwa. One of his first tasks was to name all the plants and animals. Nanabozho is considered to be the founder of Midewiwin. Like the Egyptian god Thoth, he is thought to be the inventor of fishing and hieroglyphs. He is a shape-shifter and a cocreator of the world.

In more recent myths among the Ojibwa, Nanabozho saves the forests from Paul Bunyan. They fought for forty days and nights, and Nanabozho killed Bunyan with a Red Lake wall-

eye.

### The Spirit Bride

There was once a young warrior whose bride died on the eve of their wedding. Although he had distinguished himself by his bravery and goodness, the death left the young man devastated.

He was unable to eat or sleep. Instead of hunting with the others, he just spent time at the grave of his bride, staring into the air.

However, one day he happened to overhear some elders speaking about the path to the spirit world. He listened intently and memorized the directions to the minutest detail. He had heard that the spirit world was far to the south. He immediately set out on his journey. After two weeks, he still saw no change in the landscape to indicate that the spirit world was near.

Then he emerged from the forest and saw the most beautiful plain he had ever seen. In the distance was a small hut where an ancient wise man lived. He asked the wise man for directions.

The old man knew exactly who the warrior was and whom he sought. He told the lad that the bride had passed by only a day before. In order to follow her, the warrior would have to leave his body behind and press on in his spirit.

The spirit world itself is an island in a large lake that can be reached only by canoes waiting on this shore. However, the old man warned him not to speak to his bride until they were both safely on the island of the spirits.

Soon the old man recited some magic chants and the warrior felt his spirit leave his body. Now a spirit, he walked

along the shore and saw a birch bark canoe. Not a stone's throw away was his bride, entering her own canoe. As he made his way across the water and looked at her, he saw that she duplicated his every stroke. Why didn't they travel together? One can only enter the spirit world alone and be judged only on one's individual merits.

Midway through the journey, a tempest arose. It was more terrible than any he had ever seen. Some of the spirits in canoes were swept away by the storm-these were those who had been evil in life. Since both the warrior and his bride were good, they made it through the tempest without incident and soon the water was as smooth as glass beneath a cloudless sky.

The island of the blessed was a beautiful place where it was always late spring, with blooming flowers and cloudless skies, never too warm or too cold. He met his bride on the shore and took her hand. They had not walked ten steps together when a soft sweet voice spoke to them-it was the Master of Life.

The Master told them that the young warrior must return as he came; it wasn't his time yet. He was to carefully trace his steps back to his body, put it on, and return home. He did this and became a great chief, happy in the assurance that he would see his bride once again.

Some legends, folklore, myths and even haunting, bump louder and harder than others but they all bump in a Canadian night.