



Winter Solstice

By Pete Leki

For Nicole and Salim

Long time ago,

before Hanukah,
and Christmas,
and Diwali
and Kwanza.

In fact, before humans roamed the Earth,
the planets and the Sun did their dance,
circling around and around each other,
in a tipsy celebration of Time.

On Earth, creatures big and small,
plant and animal,
watched the dance carefully.

And they noticed that at one part of the year,
the days started getting shorter,
And the Sun didn't come up so high into the sky
like before.



A Snapping Turtle was talking to a Great Blue Heron.
"Feels like there is a chill in the air. I'm thinking
about taking a deep breath and hunkering down in
the mud for a long nap."

Heron looked with her big eye and said:
"Well, I ain't doin' that! Get's too cold. I'm out of
here. Goin' south"

A nearby Black Willow said, in a creaky tree voice:
"Happens every year, this time.
Days get short, my leaves fall off,
I suck in all the chlorophyll I can handle,
and take MY rest, too." But alot of animals worried,
especially the young ones.

A Skunk said to a Possum:
"You notice how each day gets shorter?
And the Sun keeps sinking and sinking?
Now what if, I'm just saying, what if it kept sinking
and the daylight disappeared totally?
Then what?
Then what? Why, you'd freeze, and I'd freeze. No
Sun, no heat."
"What we gonna do Skunk?"
Skunk scratched his head, and neck, and tail, and
then said:
"Let's talk to Bur Oak"









“Scuze us! Hello! Scuze us ma’m”, Skunk said to Bur oak.
Nothing.

Possum and Skunk looked at each other, and Possum
began to cry, then wailed : “Yahhhhhh”

“What? What?” said bur oak, wakened from the start of
her winter nap.
“What is it?”

Skunk and possum explained about the days getting
shorter and the Sun going down further, and it getting
colder....

Bur oak groaned a cranky groan, like
a mom or dad might do when waked
up by a whining kid in the middle of
the night.

“Now, why do you think you got those
nice fur coats??? All stylish and warm?
Do YOU think YOU are the first people
to go through a Winter??? Have you
noticed that EACH day the Sun is
slowing down as it lowers itself in the
sky?” Skunk and Possum looked at each
other, a little embarrassed.

“No” said Possum, “We didn’t. We were
busy playing.
I was hanging by my tail. And Skunk was
spraying her perfume on a coyote. We just
noticed the Sun and got to thinking..”

"Well", said Bur oak, "pay attention. In a few days it will be the Winter Solstice. The Sun will stop its journey to the south. The days will STOP getting shorter. And slowly, gradually, the Sun will start back up into the high sky, and the days will get longer, and, in a month or two, you will start to feel the first warm breath of spring.

Possum and Skunk looked at each other.
"But how do you know?????" asked Skunk.

"Go on away with you. You know how old I am??? I been through this for more than 350 cycles and I can tell you, for sure, this is the BEGINNING of the END of Winter. Oh, there will be cold days ahead, wind and snow. But there's no stopping it. Spring is on its way." Skunk and Possum's eyebrows shot up. "Yeah! Let's go and play. You play dead," said Skunk. And I will play perfume counter...."

"Oh my" Bur Oak moaned. "Let me sleep"

What Bur Oak predicted, came to pass. And each year after, Skunk and Possum shared this wisdom with their own worried children. And instead of worrying, on the day of the Winter Solstice, they danced and sang, and ate and drank, watched the Sunset, and the Moonrise, and the stars circling in Space.



