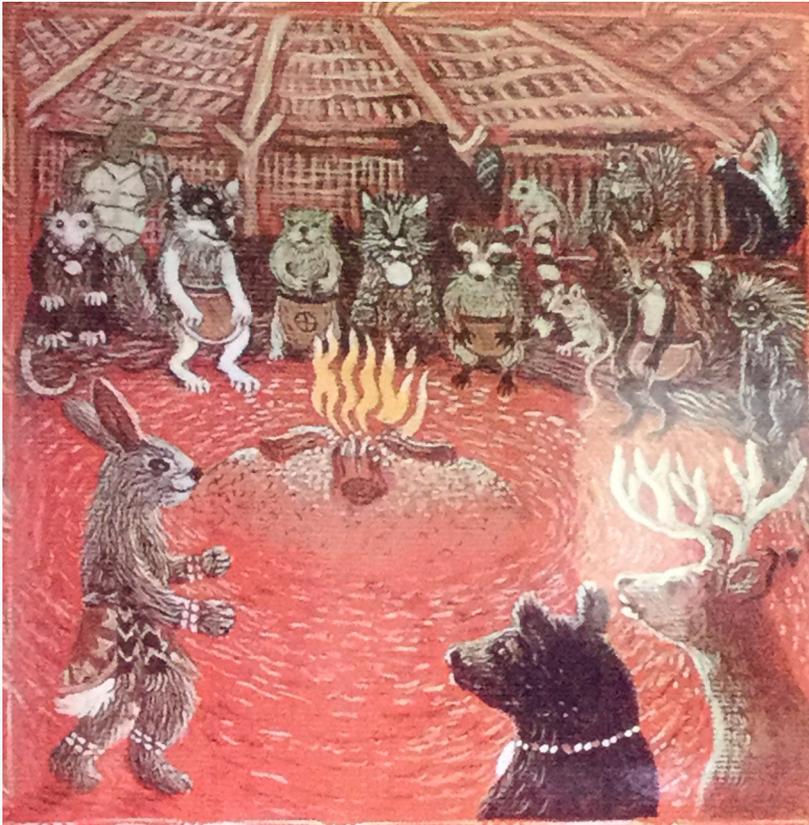


The First Fire



In the beginning there was no fire. The world was cold until the Thunders sent their lightning and put fire into the bottom of a hollow sycamore tree which grew on an island. The animals knew it was there but they could not get on the island because of the water. The animals held a Council to decide what to do.

Every animal that could fly or swim wanted to go after the fire and bring it back. The raven offered because he was large and strong, but the heat scorched all his feathers black.

Next came little Screech-owl and he reached the place but while he was looking down into the hollow tree, a blast of hot air came up and nearly burned his eyes. They are red to this day. One after the other, different animals tried and failed.

The animals then held another Council because they still had no fire, but birds, snakes, and four-footed animals all had some excuse for not going because they were all afraid to go near the burning tree. Finally, the little water spider said she would go. She could run on top of the water or dive to the bottom, so there would be no trouble getting over to the island, but how would she bring back the fire?

The Water Spider spun a thread from her body and wove it into a tutsi bowl, which she fastened on her back. Then she crossed over to the island and through the grass to where the fire was still burning. She put one little coal of fire into her bowl and came back with it, and ever since we have had fire.

The little water spider (the smallest animal to give it a try) brought back the fire to the dark and cold world. She was the first spinner and on her back to this day she still wears her little woven bowl. This little bowl was the first basket, so say the old ones. The spider holds a place of great honor among the Cherokee people, for she brought back the fire to the world.