

WHY HALF THE YEAR IS COLD AND THE OTHER HALF IS WARM

(A Cayuga legend)

A long time ago the weather was warm all the time. The people never needed to think about being cold. One day a man was walking in the woods looking for fire wood, for they had to have fires to cook by. He was carrying his ax with him so he could cut down branches. This day he was going slowly listening to the sounds of the woods. Suddenly he heard a knock. It sounded like an ax striking a big tree. Being of a dauntless nature he stopped and deliberately struck a big tree with his own ax. He listened and again he heard the same knock as before. Determined to find out the cause he struck his own ax against the tree again, a little louder this time. He repeated this a number of times until at length a spirit appeared and proceeded towards him from the dense woods. He was the cold spirit. The angry spirit told the hunter that he would have to fight through to the finish now that he had challenged him by striking the trees back at him in mockery. With that he vanished. This sounded too serious for the woodsman to ignore. As he walked home in deep thought he was spoken to by a strange spirit, who came toward him from the forest depths. He was pleasant and had a big heart. He pitied the troubled hunter. He said in kindly tones, "I have seen what has happened to you today. I know this spirit and I know you have no chance by yourself. You must go home and cut wood. You must work hard for several days and get all the wood you can cut. Pile your camp high with it to be prepared for the night the cold spirit will attack you. Even this will not be enough. I give you this to save your life. Keep it safe and use it when all else fails." With that he too disappeared and the hunter looked at the little bottle full of a precious liquid he held in his hand.

Upon returning to his camp he immediately began to cut and pile up firewood in his tent as the second spirit had advised. He worked long and hard every minute he could, piling, piling wood. At length his camp was full, save for a small place for his fire and himself in the middle. The night came and it grew cold. With confidence he placed the first few logs on his fire. He was warm, but not for long. Slowly as the night proceeded it grew colder and colder. He was using up more wood than he had expected. He feared he would run short of wood before the sun rose again. Within a short time he experienced difficulty in making the fire burn brightly. The cold increased so much that his fire threatened

to go out and he would then freeze to death. The crisis came when he saw the cold spirit standing in the very door of his camp. With that he opened the gift bottle and poured the magic liquid on the fire. Brightly burned the fire and great was the heat, so great in fact that the frozen sneer on the face of the cold spirit turned to one of horror. His icy limbs and clothes melted and dripped. The brave had won the contest and he turned to see the first comforting ray of dawn. Because of his defeat the cold spirit now has power only over half the year. That season we call winter. The other half of the year is warm and comfortable, as it was all the time in the beginning. We call the warm season Summer.

(Told by Des-ka-hay, a Cayuga chief)