

Hodadenon: The Last One Left And The Chestnut Tree

A Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Legend

<http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-HTML-Legends/HodadenonTheLastOneLeftAndTheChestnutTree-Unknown.html>

Long ago a boy and his uncle lived together in an elm bark lodge. The boy's name was Hodadenon, which means "The Last One Left." All of the rest of his family had disappeared over the years and it was thought they had been killed by those who were 'otgont', possessed of wicked powers.

Each morning the uncle would feed Hodadenon and then go out of the lodge to hunt, leaving the boy by himself. Each evening he would return, again feed the boy, and then go to sleep.

One day Hodadenon was playing by himself in the lodge. He began to think. "Enh," he said, "why is it that I never see my uncle eat?" Then he took a bone awl and made a small hole in the deerskin he used as a blanket each night. "Tonight," said Hodadenon, "I shall see what happens after we go to bed."

That evening as always the uncle returned. He fed the boy and told him to go to sleep. Hodadenon lay down on one side of the fire and on the other side the uncle lay down on his couch, which was made of saplings and covered with many animal skins. Pulling the deerskin over his head, Hodadenon pretended to sleep, but he could still see his uncle through the small hole he had made.

After a time, the uncle stood up and went over to the fire. "Hodadenon," said the uncle in a soft voice, but the boy did not answer. Three times more the uncle called his name, but Hodadenon still pretended to sleep. Coming closer to the fire, the uncle blew very hard into it. Sparks flew out, landing on the boy's legs. "Hodadenon," said the uncle, "be careful. You are going to be burned." But even though some of the sparks fell on his bare skin and burned him Hodadenon did not move. "Nyoh," said the uncle, "the boy is indeed asleep." He went over to his couch and removed the skins. He lifted off the top of the couch and took out a box made of birch bark. All of this Hodadenon watched through the hole in his blanket.

Opening the box made of birch bark, the uncle took out a small pot. It was so small that it fit easily in the palm of his hand. From inside the pot he took out another object which the boy could not clearly see though it looked to be smaller than an acorn. Using a little knife, the uncle scraped tiny shavings from the thing into the pot. Then, putting the tiny pot over the fire, he blew on it and sang this song: Grow, pot, grow in size Grow, pot, grow in size.

And as Hodadenon watched, the pot grew in size as the uncle sang his song and blew on it. Finally the pot was as large as a normal cooking pot and the odor of something delicious came from it. Before long the food was ready and the uncle ate it all. When he was through, he blew once more on the pot and sang this song: Shrink, pot, shrink in size. Shrink, pot, shrink in size.

And once again the pot became small enough to hold in the palm of his hand. Replacing the thing he had scraped in the tiny pot, Hodadenon's uncle replaced the pot in the birch bark box and again hid everything in the secret compartment under his couch. Then he went to sleep.

The next morning, as always, the uncle went out hunting and left the boy alone in the lodge. For a time Hodadenon played around the lodge. He shot his small bow and arrow at a target and did other things, but the song his uncle sang to the pot kept going through his head. Finally he could

stand it no longer. "My uncle will be back soon from his hunting," he said. "He will be very hungry. I should prepare a meal for him."

Hodadenon went over to his uncle's couch, pulled off the skins and opened the compartment. Taking out the box of birch bark, he opened it and found the tiny pot. Within it was half of a small dry nut. "So this is my uncle's food," said Hodadenon, "but it is almost gone. If I want to make enough for him to eat, I must use it all. I am sure he can get more." So Hodadenon took a knife and scraped all that was left of the nut into the tiny pot. Then, placing the pot over the fire, he blew on it and sang: Grow, pot, grow in size. Grow, pot, grow in size.

Sure enough, just as it had done for his uncle, the pot became larger. Now it was the size of a normal cooking pot and it was boiling and boiling.

But Hodadenon was not satisfied, "surely my uncle will be more hungry than this when he comes home. I must make more." Then he blew on the pot and again sang: Grow, pot, grow in size. Grow, pot, grow in size.

Now the pot was so large and bubbling so fast that Hodadenon had to stretch to stir the contents, which smelled very good indeed.

"Neh," said Hodadenon, "this isn't enough. What if my uncle wishes to share this good food with me. After all, he will be grateful that I prepared it. I must make more." So, once more, he blew on the kettle and sang the song. Again the pot grew and now it was so large that Hodadenon had to stand on top of his uncle's couch and use a canoe paddle to stir the contents, but he was so excited that he did not want to stop.

"This is almost enough for us," he said, "but what if we should have visitors? We should have enough to offer them as well." So, for a fourth time, Hodadenon blew on the pot and sang the magic song. The pot grew so big that Hodadenon had to get out of the lodge because it filled the whole place from side to side! It was so big that the only way the boy could stir it was by taking a long pole up to the roof and reaching down to stir it through the smoke hole!

When Hodadenon's uncle came back from hunting, the first thing he saw was the pudding bubbling out of the door of the lodge. He heard someone singing above him and looked up. There was Hodadenon, swinging his legs in the smoke hole, still stirring the pudding and singing happily: What a good cook I am What a good cook I am. We all will eat well now. What a good cook I am.

"Nephew," called the old man, "come down from there. What you have done has killed me."

Then Hodadenon's uncle blew on the pot through the door of the lodge and sang the song to make it grow small. When it was down to the size it had been at the beginning, he entered the lodge, lay down on his couch and began to weep.

Hodadenon, who had come down from the smoke hole, walked over to where the old man lay. "Uncle," said Hodadenon, "what is wrong?"

"Hodadenon," said the uncle, "you have used up all of the only food I can eat. Now I will starve to death. This is why I never allowed you to see me eat. I knew that you would do this."

"Uncle," said the boy, "things can't be that bad. Just go and get another of those little nuts."

"Neh," said the uncle, "that is the kind of food called a chestnut. Long ago, though it was very dangerous, I obtained that one. All these years I have eaten it and it would have lasted for many more. Now I am too old to get another one."

"Wah-ah," said Hodadenon, "this is my doing. I shall go and bring back many chestnuts."

"It is not possible," said the old man. "The way is long and guarded by many terrible creatures. Others of your family have gone there but none have ever returned."

Yet Hodadenon would not give up. Finally the uncle agreed to tell him the way. "Go straight to the north, the uncle said. "There you will find a narrow path. At its first turn it is guarded by two great rattle snakes, slaves to the evil ones who own the chestnut trees. No one can get past them."

"But what if I do, Uncle?" asked Hodadenon.

"If anyone by good luck passes the great snakes, he will next encounter two huge bears. They guard a passageway between the rocks. They too are slaves of the evil ones. They will tear apart anyone who tries to pass. Further on down the path are two giant Panthers which leap upon anyone who attempts to get by them. Hodadenon, it cannot be done."

"Is that all, Uncle?" Hodadenon said.

"Is it not enough?" said the old man. "Neh, that is only the beginning. Next is the place where the chestnut trees grow. There live the seven sisters who own the trees. All of them are strong in otgont power. If anyone comes to steal the chestnuts, they run from their long lodge and beat the person to death with their clubs. No one can hope to go undetected, for a flayed human skin hangs in the top of a tree looking down on the chestnut grove and it sings a warning when anyone comes close."

"Nyah-weh, Uncle," said Hodadenon, "I thank you for your good advice. Now I must be on my way. I shall return with the food you need if all goes well." Taking two sticks, he tied them together and placed them standing near the fire. "Watch these sticks, Uncle," said the boy. "If all is well with me they will not move, but if I am killed they will break apart."

Now Hodadenon set out on his way. He went straight to the north and found a narrow path.

"This must be the road my uncle told me of," said Hodadenon. "It looks easy enough to travel."

The boy continued along and soon the path began to twist and wind. Ahead, it turned sharply to the left. Hodadenon stopped, crept off the path, went through the trees, and peered out cautiously. There on either side of the path, were two great rattlesnakes, coiled and ready to strike.

"Uncle," said Hodadenon, "you know this road well." He went and caught two chipmunks. Holding one in each hand he again began to walk the path.

When he came to the two rattlesnakes he threw a chipmunk into the mouth of each before they could strike him.

"Tca," he said, "you seem to be in need of food. Now I have given you that which you should hunt for yourselves. Hawenio, our Creator, did not make any of his beings to be slaves. Go from this place." As soon as he finished speaking, the two rattlesnakes uncoiled and crawled off in different directions, leaving the road unguarded as Hodadenon went along his way.

Meanwhile, back at the lodge, the two tied sticks which had been quivering now stood still as Hodadenon's uncle watched them intently.

Now the path entered a rocky place. Again Hodadenon left the trail to scout ahead. There, where the way dipped between two big boulders, were a pair of giant bears, crouched and ready to tear apart anybody who tried to go by. "Uncle," said Hodadenon, "you have traveled this road before." He climbed a tree where he heard the buzzing of many bees, pulled out two combs of honey and went back onto the path. When he came to the bears, he hurled the combs of honey into their mouths before they could grab him.

"Hunh," the boy said, "it looks to me as if you were hungry. Now I have given you that which you like best of all. The one who gave us breath, Hawenio, did not make us to be the slaves of anyone. Go from this place." At his words, the two bears turned and went away, each in a different direction as Hodadenon continued down the trail.

Meanwhile, back at the uncle's lodge, the two tied sticks stopped quivering and Hodadenon's uncle breathed a sigh of relief.

Now the path entered a deep forest and wound between large trees. Leaving the trail, Hodadenon crept along till he could see the place where two huge panthers, eyes glowing like green flames, hid behind a pair of giant pines on either side of the path.

"Uncle," Hodadenon said, "you remember your travels well." Taking his bow and arrows, he killed two deer. Carrying them over his shoulders, he went down the trail once more. Before the panthers could leap upon him, he threw each of them a deer. "Ee-yah," he said, "I see that you were in need of food. Now I have given you that which you are supposed to hunt. Know that the one who gave us strength to walk around, Hawenio, did not intend that any living creature should serve another as a slave. Go from this place." In two different directions away into the trees slunk the panthers and the boy continued along his way.

Meanwhile, back at the lodge, the two sticks which had been shaking as if struck by a strong wind once more stood still as Hodadenon's uncle watched them.

The path in front of Hodadenon was very straight and wide. It looked to have been traveled by many feet. The boy listened very carefully and soon he began to hear a very faint song coming from the treetops. Crawling forward through the brush, he peered up and saw the one who was singing. It was the skin of a woman tied in the top of a tree. This was her song: Gi-nu, gi-nu, gi-nu I am the one who sees all, I see you.

The song was very soft. Hodadenon could barely hear it, but he knew it would grow loud indeed if she caught a glimpse of him. Below her was a grove of trees. They were covered with a fruit

which had burrs all over it. These, Hodadenon knew, must be the chestnuts. Beyond the skin woman and the trees was a great pile of human bones and just to the other side of them was the long lodge of the seven witches.

"Tcu," said Hodadenon, "now I shall need some help." Going to a basswood tree, he peeled a long strip of bark. With a burned stick and the juice of berries, he decorated the piece of bark until it looked just like a long wampum belt. Slinging it over his shoulder, he knelt down and tapped four times on the earth.

"My friend," he said, "I am in need of help."

Up out of the ground poked the nose and then the head of a female mole. "Nyoh, Hodadenon! How can I help you?" asked the mole.

"Grandmother," said the boy, "if I make myself very small, will you carry me under the earth with you?"

"That's too easy," said the mole. "Let's go!"

Then Hodadenon began to rub himself with his hands. As he did so he grew smaller and smaller until he was small enough to travel with the mole under the earth. Down into the ground they went, coming up beneath the very tree where the Skin Woman was swaying back and forth.

Once again Hodadenon rubbed himself with his hands until he was back to normal. Then he called up to Skin Woman.

"Sister," he called, "I have seen you first. Do not tell the others I am here and I will give you this fine belt of wampum."

"Wah-ah!" said Skin Woman, "I did not see you, Hodadenon. Give me the belt and I will not warn them you are here."

Hodadenon tossed the belt up to Skin Woman. She put it on and immediately it wrapped itself so tightly about her she could not speak. Under the tree, Hodadenon quickly filled his pouch with chestnuts. Then, making himself small once more, he called for his friend, Mole, to take him back under the earth. Up in the tree, Skin Woman finally got her breath. She began to sing: Gi-nu, gi-nu, gi-nu Someone has bribed me I cannot say who.

Out from the long lodge ran the seven witches. Each of them carried a long club. They ran to the place where Skin Woman hung, but they saw no one.

"Someone has been here," said one of the witches.

"Some of our chestnuts are gone," said another.

"Skin Woman," said a third witch, "you are our slave. Speak and tell us who has been here."

But Skin Woman did not answer the question. All she did was swing back and forth in the wind, singing this song: Gi-nu, gi-nu, gi-nu I've been given a wampum belt Shining and new.

"You are a fool," said another of the witches. "That is only the bark from a tree."
 "It must have been The Last One Left." said the fifth witch, "the boy whose uncle stole from us long ago."

"If he comes back," said the sixth witch, "we will catch him and kill him."

"Nyoh," said the last witch, "now we must punish our slave." She took her club and struck Skin Woman a heavy blow. Each of the others did the same. Then the seven witches went back into the long lodge, leaving the Skin Woman covered with bruises, but still singing softly of her fine new belt of wampum.

Meanwhile, back in the lodge of Hodadenon's uncle, the two sticks had fallen over on the floor. Picking them up and standing them upright once more, the old man watched them with great concern.

From his hiding place in the earth, Hodadenon had listened to all that was said by the seven sisters. "It is not right," he said "that those terrible creatures should go on like this. Friend Mole, we must go back there."

The mole dove deeper into the earth. She carried Hodadenon under the long lodge and came up beneath the couch where the sisters slept. There, tied to a string of sinew, were seven hearts. Quick as a spark leaping from the fire, Hodadenon grabbed the string of hearts and ran from the lodge. Seeing him, the seven witches grabbed their clubs and gave chase.

Now back in the lodge of Hodadenon's uncle the two sticks fell over once more. The old man was so disheartened that he did not stand them up again. He lay there staring at them, certain that his nephew would now never return alive.

From the top of her tree, Skin Woman sang as the seven witches chased Hodadenon:
 Gi-nu, gi-nu, gi-nu Hodadenon has your hearts This will be the end of you.

Now the first witch had almost caught up with the boy and raised her club to strike him. As she did so, Hodadenon squeezed one of the hearts on the sinew string and the witch fell dead. Now the second witch was about to strike. Again Hodadenon squeezed a heart and the second witch died also. In the end, he had squeezed all seven of the hearts and all seven of the evil sisters had fallen dead. Climbing to the top of the tree, Hodadenon cut loose the cords which held Skin Woman. He brought her down and placed her on top of the pile of human bones. Then he began to push against a great dead hickory tree which was near the pile.

"Get yourselves up, my relatives!" he shouted. "A tree is about to fall on you!"

Immediately Skin Woman and all of the people whose bones were piled there leaped up and came back to life. Skin Woman was, indeed, the sister of Hodadenon. Long ago the evil witches had caught her and the others of his family whose bones lay in that pile. There before him were his parents, his brothers, and all his relations. All were very happy to be alive and thanked the boy again and again.

Taking the chestnuts from the ground, Hodadenon passed them out to all his relatives.

"Plant these all over," he said. "Food will be shared with everyone from now on."

Finally, his pouch filled with chestnuts, Hodadenon went back to the lodge of his uncle. The old man lay there on his couch, thin as a skeleton, his eyes fixed on the two tied sticks.

"Uncle," said Hodadenon, "I have returned."

The old man jumped up and embraced the nephew. To this day he still sits in that lodge, making chestnut pudding in his pot. And from that time on, the chestnuts, like all the other good things given to us by Hawenio, our Creator, no longer belong to just one family, no matter how powerful they are, but are shared by all.

<http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Legends/HodadenonTheLastOneLeftAndTheChestnutTree-Unknown.html>