

How The Earth Was Made

1 THE INDIANS believe that in the beginning all living things lived and dwelled above in the sky—Galun' lati. Which was above the sky vault. But after awhile the sky vault began to be crowded with all the people and animals. Finally someone asked
5 what was below the ocean that they could see from their home in the sky, and at last Dayuni'si, "Beaver's Grandchild," the little water beetle, offered to go and see if it could learn. When it flew down from the sky vault it darted in every direction over the surface of the water, but could find no firm place to
10 rest. The water beetle dived to the bottom of the ocean and brought up some mud which began to grow and grow. It grew and spread on every side until it became the island which we call the earth. It was afterward fastened to the sky with four
15 giant ropes, but no one remembers who did this. Not even the oldest of the oldest medicine men.



At first the earth was very flat and soft and wet. The animals were very anxious to get down to the earth so no one would be pushed off the sky vault, so they sent out different birds to see if the earth was dry enough to live on. These birds flew
20 around over the earth until they grew very tired but they could find no place where they didn't sink up in the soft mud. All the people and animals were very discouraged, but after a long while they decided that the earth had dried enough so they sent out the great buzzard. Now this buzzard was not an ordinary
25 buzzard. He was the grandfather of all buzzards. He flew all over the earth, low down near the ground, and the earth was still very soft. When he reached the Cherokee Country he was very tired and his giant wings began to flap and strike the ground. When his wings struck the earth there was a valley and where
30 they turned up again there was a mountain. The animals above, seeing this, were afraid that the whole world would be mountains so they called the grandfather buzzard back to the sky vault, but the heart of the Cherokee Country is full of mountains to this day.

35 When the earth was dry and the animals came down, it was still dark, so they got the sun and set it in a track to go every day across the island from east to west. At first the sun was so close that all the animals like to have burned up. Tsiska'gili, the Red Crawfish, had his shell scorched a bright red so that his
40 meat was spoiled. And to this day the Cherokee will not eat the meat of the Red Crawfish.

The conjure men put the sun another handbreadth higher in the air but it was still too hot. They raised it another and yet again until they had raised it just under the sky arch. Then it
45 was right and they left it so. This is why the conjurers call the highest place Gulkwa'gine Di'galun'latiyun; "the seventh height," because it is seven handbreadths above the earth. Every day the sun goes along its track and at night returns to its starting place.

50 There is another world under this that is just like ours except that the winters are when we are having summer and the summers are when we are having winter. The streams that come down from the high mountain tops are the trails by which we can reach this underworld and the springs at the heads of these
55 streams are the doorways by which we enter. But no one can go to this world without first being purified and fasting for a long time. He must also have for a guide one of the people who live in the other world. We know that the seasons are different in this other world because the water in the springs is always
60 warmer in the winter and cooler than the outer air in the summer.

When the animals and plants were first made—we do not know by whom—they were told by the Great One to watch and keep awake for seven nights just as the young men fast and keep awake when they pray for their medicine to work. The plants
65 and animals tried to do this and nearly all were awake through the first night, but the next night several dropped off to sleep and then others as time went on until on the seventh night only the owl and the panther and one or two others were yet awake. To these animals the Great One gave the power to see at night
70 and be able to prey on those that had fallen asleep and now must forever sleep, soon after the sun goes down. Of the trees only the cedar, the pine, the spruce, the holly, and the laurel were awake to the end and to them it was given to be always green and to be the best for making medicine. But to the others it was
75 said, "Because you have not endured to the end you shall lose your hair every winter."

Before the world was dry enough for all the people and animals to come down and live on it, all things lived and talked in common. It was said by the myth keepers that when man was
80 first created that there were only a brother and sister, but that one day he struck her with a fish and she bore a child and every seven days another until there was danger that there would not be enough room for all the new people, so it was then made that a woman would only bring forth a child once every year.