

How The Beaver Lost The Hair On His Tail

William R. Palmer. From *Why the North Star Stands Still*

In the long ago time pah-ince, the beaver, was a great fellow. He was a very proud fellow. His hair was the softest and the most beautiful of all the animals in his country. Of all the beaver's possessions, pah-ince was most proud of his tail. He thought it was the finest tail that ever had been made. It was not round and thin and bare and useless like the rat's tail. It was broad and flat like the eagle's and was much longer and stronger. It was covered with thick, soft, black hair as long as the braids of an Indian chief.

That bushy tail was not only an ornament, it was very useful. Sometimes he folded it under him and he could lie dozing in the warm sun on the softest kind of a bed, and if the nights grew cold, he could fold his tail back over him. Sometimes his little ones would cuddle around him and when he laid his tail over them they were as cozy as birds under their mother's wings.

Pah-ince loved to strut. He could hoist his bushy tail up straight and parade before the living things, the envy of all. As the breeze fanned the long hair into ripples he was sure no other animal could sport such a beautiful ornament. He was very proud of it.



One day Shinob came to Pah-lnce Agunt, the country where the beavers lived, and called all the living things together. He said to them, "Where is your fire? I am pretty cold. Where is your fire?" They asked, "What is that stuff you are talking about? We don't know what that stuff is. We have no fire." Shinob said, "Over that mountain there are some Indians. They have learned how to make fire. Fire is a good friend. You better go over there and trade for some. Bring it back to your country."

So all the animals went over the mountain to trade for fire. Each one took something along to trade and something to carry the fire home in. They traveled eagerly and chattered much and they tried to outrun each other, fearing that there might not be enough fire there for everyone.

But when they got to those Indians over the mountain, those fellows did not want to trade. They wanted to keep all

their fire and they would not teach their visitors how to make it. They did not want anyone else to have what they had and so the visitors could only look on and see and feel what a beautiful thing the fire was.

When they could not buy any they decided to try to steal some and run home with it. They said to the fire Indians, "If you won't trade us your fire, let us play games and be friends. We will all go down on that flat and run races. We can outrun all your men."

They all went down to the flat and ran races but the fire Indians left a few men to guard the fire. Every little while some of the visitors would sneak back to the fire but the guards would run them away.

Pah-ince wanted so much to show off his style before the strangers that he fluffed his tail and hoisted it straight up, then he went parading among the guards up by the fire. These were much impressed by the beaver's antics and one of them said to himself, "I think I will kill that fellow and cut off his fine tail. I would like to have that tail." He called to pah-ince, "Come over here by me, you fancy fellow, and show me how you do that."

The beaver being thus flattered let his tail down and went running over to the guard by the fire. Just in the nick of time pah-ince saw that the fellow was trying to catch him.

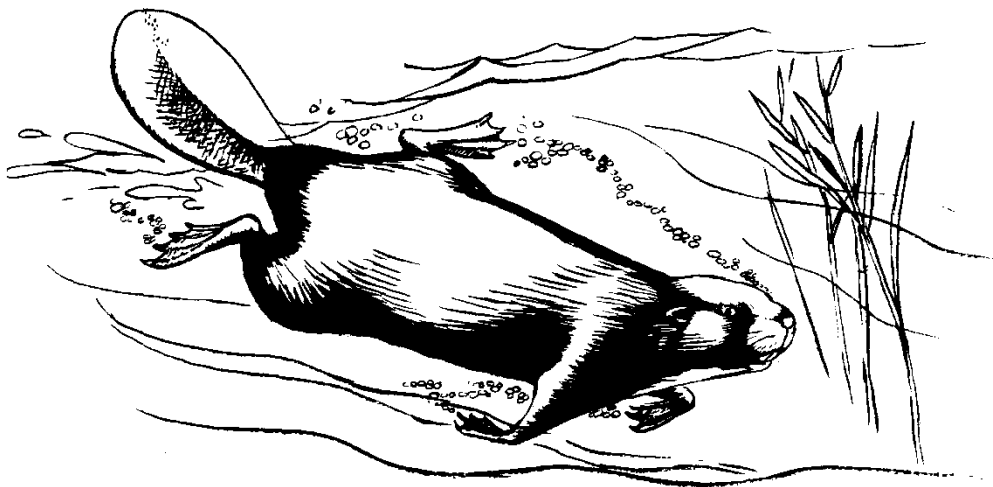
To escape he had to jump over the fire. In doing so his tail drooped down, touched the blaze and flared up like a torch. Frightened almost to death, poor pah-ince ran as fast as he could for home. The guards ran after him to kill him or to put out the fire he was carrying away. He ran as fast as ever he could go, dragging his flaming tail through the dry grass and leaving a string of fire all the way over the mountain.

Because pah-ince was running so fast, the fire went streaming out behind him and none of it reached his coat, but by the time he reached home there was not a hair of his beautiful bushy tail left. It was burned clean and the fire blisters were hurting him so badly that he plunged into the river to stop the pain. Its coolness put out the fire and soothed his hurts, but what a sight he was without that beautiful bush. He thought he could never face the animals again until it all grew back. He would live down under the water where he could not be seen and would come out only at night.

But the proud tail of pah-ince healed over with a thick, coarse hide that never grew hair again. So the beaver, still grieving over his loss, keeps his home under water and the very sight of fire puts him in a panic. When he comes out into the sunshine his tail is still sensitive to heat and soon begins to hurt. So pah-ince comes out mostly at night to cut

and gather the blocks of wood he needs to build his nest and to gather the bark he stores for his winter food. His strong bare tail has become very useful as a paddle in the water and it helps to hold the logs in place while he makes them secure in the wall of his home.

After all the excitement was over, Shinob came once more to Pah-ince Agunt. He called the living things together and asked again, "Where is your fire? I am cold. Where is your fire?" Answering, they said, "What is the matter with your eyes, Shinob? Can't you see the fire is burning all the trees on the mountain?" Pah-ince added, "That fire is very bad stuff. See what it did to my beautiful tail."



Shinob said, "I am very glad you have got fire. Fire is not bad. Fire is very good if you will learn how to use it and how to take care of it. As for you, pah-ince," the god continued, "it was your vanity that burned your tail. Be thankful that bush of hair was not on your head."