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## *Song of the Spider*

Douglas A. Rossman

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Doug Rossman frequently favors these pages and we are glad to note the publication of his new book, **Where Legends Live**, a source for Cherokee mythology and related material. Obviously, he makes good use of his knowledge in these pages!

"...It is one of my favorite creation myths and has not --to my knowledge-- before been rendered in verse form. Hopefully when you read it aloud you will sense some of the drum beat I heard while I was writing it."

## SONG OF THE SPIDER

A Cherokee Creation Myth

I am Kānaneski the Spider;  
Come, listen to my Song.

\* \* \*

When the world was new,  
All was cold and dark,  
The landscape somber,  
Gray, and stark.

Our bodies were chilled;  
We could barely see--  
The Winged Ones, the Four-foots,  
The Snakes, and me.

Then the Thunders took pity  
And hurled down a bolt  
At a hollow tree  
On an island afloat.

But the water kept us  
From that burning tree--  
The Winged Ones, the Four-foots,  
The Snakes, and me.

"Who will go fetch  
The Fire here?  
One who is strong  
And has no fear."

Raven was first  
To dare the fumes  
But black were turned  
His snow-white plumes.

Wahuhu the Screech Owl  
Was the next to try,  
But the smoke was so thick  
That it made him cry.

The bigger owls  
Each went in turn,  
But the swirling sparks  
Did their bright eyes burn.

No more birds would go,

So it fell to the snakes  
To swim to the island  
For all of our sakes.

White Racer and Rat Snake  
Strong nerves did not lack,  
But the fiery embers  
Burned their bodies black.

Now none would go  
Through water or air  
And we all were filled  
With deep despair.

Then I thought I saw  
A huge gleaming hand  
Parting the dark clouds  
Hanging o'er the land.

And I heard a voice  
Say "It can be done,  
And you will do it,  
My brave little one."

For a moment or two  
I was struck dumb with awe  
By the voice that I heard  
And the sight that I saw.

Then I said to the birds  
And the beasts so forlorn,  
"Now I'll give it a try,"  
But my vow drew their scorn.

"How can you, Oh Spider,  
So small, so frail,  
Dare to succeed  
Where the great ones fail?"

But I feared not,  
Or fearing yet came,  
To dance across the wave  
To the tree and the flame.

To touch an ember  
Meant death I well knew,  
But I was determined  
To see the task through.

Its tough silken strands--  
Extensions of my soul--  
Drawn from my body,  
I wove a *tusti* bowl.

Carrying an ember  
In my *tusti* bowl,  
I started to dance back  
Toward my distant goal.

I danced to the shore  
Where the others waited;  
'Til the Fire rekindled,  
Their breaths were all bated.

When the New Fire sprang forth,  
A voice from the cloud  
Was heard quite distinctly  
By each in the crowd.

"Where the large ones have failed,  
The small one succeeds;  
Now I put my mark on him  
To honor his deeds."

A cross then appeared,  
On my back 'twas burned;  
The sign of the Fire--  
Of the Sun--well earned.

For sheer joy I danced  
Round and round the Fire;  
Each time I circled  
My feet went higher.

I danced the Fire,  
I danced the Sun,  
I danced the Song,  
Of Life begun.

\* \* \*

I am Kānaneski the Spider;  
I am the Fire-Bringer.

-- Douglas A. Rossman