

The Moon Greater than Every other

Early morning sunlight seeped through the opening in Shining Moon's wigwam. It was a cold but sunny sun in the Moon of Breaking Snowshoes. Little piles of snow littered the ground, leftover from colder moons. Normally after finishing chores, she would love to play Double-Ball with her friends, but on this sun she had something more important to do.

For as long as the eldest elder could remember, boys and men hunted, set traps and did every dangerous or exciting thing. Girls and women did everything else.

"It is the way of things, boys are created to do other things than girls."

But the more everyone tried to explain to Shining Moon, the more angered she became. Today, she would prove that every single word they had ever said on that matter was wrong. Determination surged through her slender body and puffed her up so much she felt she could fly.

Shining Moon jumped up from bed and crept past her sleeping family to where the cornbread was kept. She grabbed a hunk, threw a deer skin over her shoulders, and left her wigwam. Shining Moon trudged through the bracken to the river where she would go fishing (that was what she had decided to do to prove girls just as worthy as men. *I shall catch so many fish that the Tribe will be fed for suns*, she thought to herself.) With a heart much lighter than it would be the next time her feet touched these shores, she gathered the small spear that she had made, hastily chewed the cornbread, and climbed into her father's canoe.

Now, Shining Moon thought, *is the time to remember all those things I overheard while listening to the boys' endless talk of their fishing glories*. Her muscles strained under the weight of the heavy oars, but she soon got used to the circular motion of the oars as she rowed towards the middle of the river where all the big fish were caught. Finally, Shining Moon stopped when she spotted a movement in the water, *yes!* she thought, *I am in luck*. Her nimble fingers reached for her spear, she focused mind and soul on that little glimmer, right below the surface of the cool, spring river water. Shining Moon waited for just the right moment, for timing was essential in fishing.

NOW! Shining Moon's mind screamed as the fish stood still. Before she knew what was happening, Shining Moon felt her spear dig into the fish. It was huge, as big as the span of her father's arms. As Shining Moon strained to haul the fish into the canoe, a wave of joy washed over her body. It swept away all the resentment that she had ever felt. But the feeling didn't last long as freezing cold water gushed over her head. Her whole body screamed in panic as she struggled to keep her head above water. *This is the end*, she thought, *you might as well give up. You are going to join your ancestors*. But part of her kept fighting to not give in to the icy waters. And gasping, her head pushed above the surface of the water. Her legs kicked out and she found herself floating on her back.

Suddenly, she realized what had happened. As the fish landed in the canoe, its weight tilted the canoe so that Shining Moon fell out. Then the fish had rolled to the center and steadied the canoe. Shining Moon was miserable. *I set out to prove girls strong and worthy and now I have done the opposite, I will have to wait here until some boy finds and saves me*. That was

when the last person Shining Moon expected to see appeared from the bushes by the side of the river.

Black Arrow. Black Arrow was the most favored child in the village. But the moment adults turned their back, Black Arrow attacked. Surely Black Arrow was up to no good. He had that sneer on his face that he always carried whenever he was about to do something horrid.

“Hello Shining Moon, what a surprise to find you here. Lovely day for a dip in the river?” Black Arrow sneered. “Wouldn’t you like some nice dry land under your feet? Because I’m going to give you some.”

Then, Black Arrow leaped from the shore to the canoe (it had floated much closer to the shore) and started rowing towards Shining Moon. When he got close, he grabbed her and threw her to the bottom of the canoe. But Black Arrow didn’t row back the way he came, but to the unknown territory on the opposite bank. That was when Shining Moon’s mind went blank and she passed out.

Shining Moon’s eyes fluttered open. Barely any time had passed since Black Arrow had hit her on the head so that she fainted. Slowly, Shining Moon forced her tired body to stand up. Black Arrow had dumped her on the unexplored land on the opposite side of the river. Shining Moon would have to learn how to survive on her own until she could return to her home. She quickly built a lean-to to protect her from the wild as she napped.

Shining Moon awoke to the glare of the sun. It was now in the middle of the sky and hunger filled her with longing for the good meal she would now be having if it weren’t for Black Arrow. The delicious scent of the foods being eaten at her village wafted across the river to Shining Moon’s shelter. How she longed to fly, to spread wings and fly away from this rotten forest, over the river and back home where she would show Black Arrow that she wasn’t as weak as he thought. Yes, she thought contentedly, that was what she’d do. But then, realization flooded over her that it wasn’t as easy as all that, and anger surged through her tattered, skinny body.

In exasperation, Shining Moon sank to the forest floor, but suddenly, she tripped on a long vine and fell on her face. Shining Moon slowly pulled herself up from the ground, wincing in pain. Blood trickled from a scar on her cheek and the skin around her eye swelled to double its size. Shining Moon remembered once watching the Tribe healer stop a cut on her brother’s leg from bleeding. She remembered how the healer had gently pressed an herb to Blue Feather’s scar and then tied a length of wegu around his injured leg. Shining Moon looked around. Luck was with her, by the roots of a nearby tree lay the exact same herb that she had seen the healer use so many moons ago. Shining Moon attempted to stand but fell to her knees again, gasping in pain. Slowly, she crawled over to the herb, wincing at every move. Shining Moon yanked the herb from the ground and crushed it between her teeth, as the healer had done. She then smeared the crushed leaves across her wounds and slowly, the pain started leaving as the juice of the leaves soothed her stinging scars.

Shining Moon realized that if she was to return to her home, she would have to use her wits. She slowly turned to see that there were many vines like the one that had tripped her, she also saw that the vine that had tripped her was much longer than she had thought, so long that if tripled, it could stretch all the way across the river. *Across the river* the words lingered in her mind. And that was when Shining Moon got her idea.

Shining Moon jumped to her feet, her pain muffled by a joyous feeling of hope. With no time to waste, she ran towards the tangled vines and started knotting them together, until she was satisfied by the length of her leafy rope. It was very strong and its coarse surface made it easy to grip. She then dragged the rope behind her and returned to the shore. Yes! she thought, there was her spear, to which she tied the end of the her vine rope. Shining Moon remembered how when the boys had spear throwing practice she would beg them to let her try. Then, taking careful aim, she hurled her spear into the very center of the target. Shining Moon felt the same determination that she felt during spear throwing practice, as she raised the spear, took aim, and let go. The spear ripped through the air and attached itself to the large pine tree on the other shore. It was a perfect throw. Shining Moon gave the end of the vine rope a tug. It was firm and secure. It was time now- to go home to her family, her friends, time to put her whole body and soul into the task that awaited her.

With one final glance at the forest, Shining Moon grabbed the rope tightly and plunged into the freezing cold river water. For a second, Shining Moon thought that her plan had failed, but then her head bobbed up above the water. As she looked at the great shining expanse of water in front of her, she somehow knew that all would be well and that the Great Spirit was watching over and protecting her. With a new determination in her heart, Shining Moon started pulling at her rope, hand over hand over hand over hand.

As she inched through the icy water, Shining Moon saw the sun was far past the middle of the sky. Shining Moon forced herself to think happy thoughts, of wonderful memories and good times past. She remembered how happy she was the first time she made a birchbark basket. She remembered the proud look on the faces of her parents, Blooming Spring and Bright Dawn the time the healer didn't have the right herb while helping a woman give birth. Shining Moon had jumped up and ran as fast as her little legs could carry her to a spot where the herb was growing, then, fast as lightning she ran back, breathless and just in time. Shining Moon had always felt drawn to the healer and herbs. Sometimes, she would eavesdrop on the healer while she was gathering herbs or fixing a wound. The healer knew that she was watching, but never seemed annoyed. A few times the healer had even invited Shining Moon into the wigwam where she kept her herbs and taught Shining Moon the magical art of healing.

Shining Moon returned to reality when she felt something hard bump against her and realized, with a wave of pure joy, that she had reached the shore. As Shining Moon climbed out of the water, she realized that she was not running straight towards the village as she thought she would, but slowly trudging along, as though trapped in a bubble where time had slowed down. Maybe, there was a tiny bit of her that didn't want her adventure to be over. But then, her heart swelled with joy that she was back, that she was home, and she put wings to her feet and raced through brambles and thickets, bushes and thorns into the arms of the ones that loved her dearly. At first, everyone was surprised. They said that Black Arrow had told them that Shining Moon had drowned and he had courageously tried to save her. But seeing the condition that Shining Moon was in, they quickly believed her.

That night, a powwow was held in her honor and Black Arrow was put in great disgrace. Shining Moon was hoisted onto the shoulders of her friends. It was a whirlwind of love, joy and happiness, and Shining Moon was in the very middle of it. At that moment, like the time on her birth that gave Shining Moon her name, the clouds parted to reveal a Shining Moon greater than every other.