

Shingebiss

(Adapted and abridged by Stephen Spitalny from the traditional Ojibwe tale as told by Nancy Van Laan in *Shingebiss*)

In his home on the shores of a great lake lived a little green duck named Shingebiss. During the warm months of spring and summer, Shingebiss silently paddled across the water, catching small fish as they swam near the surface. When autumn came, Shingebiss dived down, swimming beneath the water, and found plenty to eat.

When the fierce Winter Maker swept down from the glittering land of snow, Shingebiss had four logs to keep him warm, one for each cold winter month.

No matter how Winter Maker raged, Shingebiss still waddled out across the ice. Pulling up the frozen rushes that grew by the shore, he dived down through the holes they made and got his fish for supper. Then away to home he went, dragging his fish behind him. By the blaze of his bright burning fire, Shingebiss ate his supper.

Winter Maker did not like that a little duck showed no fear of him. So he sent his great north wind until deep drifts of snow covered Shingebiss' house. Inside, Shingebiss stayed close to the fire for warmth until the storm ended and he dug himself out using his webbed feet. Then he ruffled his feathers to shake off the snow and set forth to the edge of the frozen lake. Just as before, he pulled up reeds and dove in through the holes in the ice to fish. Once again he returned home with his fish trailing behind him.

Winter Maker howled and roared. He sent a storm of ice to coat the deep drifts of snow. Shingebiss stayed warm by his fire. When the storm ended, Shingebiss used his strong beak to peck through the ice. He went down to the frozen lake and again pulled up rushes and made new holes in the ice. He dove in and brought fish home for his supper. Shingebiss ate his fish and stayed warm while his third log burned.

Winter Maker was angry and sent cold, icy drafts and the chilling north wind. All the animals in their homes were shivering as they slumbered.

As soon as Shingebiss heard the winds die down, he went out just as he had before and made a hole to dive through the ice and dived in. Winter Maker blew his icy breath over the hole and the hole closed up with Shingebiss under the ice. "Ahhhhh!" cried Winter Maker. "Now I have you, little duck!"

A few moments later, near the shore where the ice was thin, there was a sound.

Pik, pik, pik.....Phit-phit-phit...

Several rushes disappeared under the ice and up popped Shingebiss with a mouthful of fish. Winter Maker was so surprised that he just watched as the little duck returned to his home with a string of fish trailing behind him.

Winter Maker made a new plan. He would show the little duck how powerful he was. Slowly, quietly, Winter Maker crept up to Shingebiss' house. Shingebiss was just putting on his last log. Winter Maker planned to chill his house so much that Shingebiss would freeze. Shingebiss, feeling Winter Maker's chilly breath come in through the cracks in the door, knew who was there. So he sang:

*Ka-neej, ka-neej,
Bee-in, bee-in,
Bon-in, bon-in,
Ok-ee, ok-ee,
Ka-weya, ka-weya!*

Winter Maker knew what he was singing.

*Friend, friend,
Come in, come in
Sit with me or leave me be
I fear you not and so I am free.*

This enraged Winter Maker even more. So Winter Maker slipped silently under the door, and sat next to the fire, right behind little Shingebiss. And again Shingebiss sang:

*Ka-neej, ka-neej,
Bee-in, bee-in,
Bon-in, bon-in,
Ok-ee, ok-ee,
Ka-weya, ka-weya!*

The little lodge was growing very warm from the fire of the fourth log. And as sparks rose up, Winter Maker's icy body started to melt, and the tears ran down his face.

Winter Maker spoke; *Little duck, what kind of being are you? You act as though nothing could do you harm. Some great spirit must be helping you.*

Finally, Winter Maker flung himself out of Shingebiss' house and into a snow bank. Slowly, so slowly, Winter Maker grew colder and colder until at last, when the moon was bright and full, he flew into the starry sky to return to his home in the far north, and he said:

I can't freeze Shingebiss, can't starve him nor make him afraid! He is a very singular being. I will let him alone.