One day the forest was alive with excitement. Mother Nature, or “lìi lìway di la terry” or “Pimachiwin” as she was also known, was having a party and her guest list didn’t exclude anyone. Everyone wanted to look their best for Mother Nature and her guests. The birds busily spruced up their nests so they were extra clean and looked their best. The trees were busy shaking dust from their leaves and rustling the kinks out of their branches so they could stand tall and proud when Mother Nature walked past. Even the berries on the bushes did their part, plumping themselves as large as their skins would allow in case Mother Nature should become hungry or parched. Their juicy flesh would provide both nourishment and quench her thirst at the same time. News of the party spread once the babbling brook found out. Before long, all of the forest buzzed with news of three special guests who had been invited. They were the cousins, Chi-Jean, Nanabush and Wiisakaychak. All three were clever tricksters, or Chakapesh, and all three had a way with Mother Nature. They used their creative talent to entertain her.

Mother Nature enjoyed Chi-Jean’s company because of his great dancing ability. Those two could dance like no other dance partners before or since. Chi-Jean always practiced his dancing skills. He never removed his dancing shoes, and everywhere he went he danced.

Mother Nature relished spending time with Wiisakaychak because he was a wonderful fiddle player. No one could lift Mother Nature’s heart more than Wiisakaychak. Although Mother Nature adored Wiisakaychak he irritated her too. Wherever he went, Wiisakaychak ran. He just couldn’t stand and play. Still, Mother Nature enjoyed his company and appreciated his talent even more.

Mother Nature loved Nanabush’s company because of his wonderful singing voice. He was a very good singer, and was always on key. His voice was so full of emotion that he could make a dried-up old water well cry. The problem with Nanabush was that he was either running so fast that he was flying, or he was walking so slowly that it took all his strength to drag his feet to propel himself forward. Still, he had a lovely voice and Mother Nature enjoyed his friendship. Also, since the three cousins’ talents complemented each other so well, Mother Nature couldn’t resist inviting all three to her party. In all truth, without any one of them, her party wouldn’t be a party at all.

The three cousins agreed to meet at a crossroad on the way to the forest Mother Nature called home. Wiisakaychak was the first to arrive since he always ran. Wiisakaychak was always early because
He ran around so much. However, this constant running around also made him impatient. He had only just arrived when he said, "Oh, I wonder where my little cousins are?" He didn't see Nanabush or Chi-Jean coming from any direction so he decided he should try to speed them along. "Oh, they'll be coming but to make sure they know I'm here, I'll whistle." Putting his fingers to his lips, Wiisakaychak blew a loud, piercing whistle which cut through the quiet air, "Shwi shwho." Wiisakaychak did this twice. Then he listened. Nobody heard him so he tried again. Still no one heard him. He waited a moment then whistled a third time. This time when he listened, he heard someone whistle back, "shhh shhh tick shhh shhh tick." In reply, Wiisakaychak whistled again, "shhh shoo, shhh shooo." He waited and then heard "shhh shhh tick shwi show" which told Wiisakaychak that Chi-Jean was coming. Before too long, Wiisakaychak looked and saw Chi-Jean dancing his way toward him. Together they waited for Nanabush to arrive.

They had only been together a few minutes when the two heard a sound "shhh shhh shhh" coming toward them. It was Nanabush flying to meet them, and he now had something to tell them.

"I'm not going to Mother Nature's party," Nanabush told his cousins. "She tells stories about us and I don't want to go there. Besides, she'll ask me to sing and I don't know that I'm in a singing kind of mood." "Don't go?" said Chi-Jean, "Don't be ridiculous Nanabush, of course you'll go! Come and stay with us." Turning to his cousin, Chi-Jean said, "Convince him to join us, Wiisakaychak." Wiisakaychak knew just what to say so he whistled to Nanabush and said, "Think of the wonderful food Mother Nature will serve." This appealed to Nanabush's stomach. Nanabush agreed that Mother Nature was a good cook and he liked eating. Boy did he like eating!

Nanabush then whistled to let them know that they should all continue on to Mother Nature's house as they had planned. Relieved, Wiisakaychak and Chi-Jean left for Mother Nature's home. Nanabush decided that he would take a short cut, and beat his cousins to Mother Nature's home.

A very tall hill stood between Nanabush and Mother Nature's forest so he decided to climb the hill. He climbed halfway up the hill when he became tired and stopped to rest for a minute. That's when he realized that he wasn’t climbing a hill; he was climbing a mountain! Nanabush realized that he must have become confused when he was flying. He’d been coming from the west to meet his cousins so he now knew that he was over what the White people called the "Rocky Mountains."
He decided he would make the stones dance with a song but he couldn’t decide on a tune. Finally, he chose a song his White brothers taught him when they came from Europe. Nanabush sang “Yo do lady hoo.” A few pebbles fell and Nanabush was not satisfied with his song. “Yo do lady hoo,” he sang a little louder. “Odalady, odalady, odalady,” he sang with big, bold words as loud as he could sing. The words echoed off the mountains and back to Nanabush’s own ears. They sounded really good. He looked to see if the stones would dance. From behind, he heard a big noise. Turning around, Nanabush saw a huge rock coming toward him. Then he saw many rocks coming toward him, all falling at once and all toward him.

Nanabush quickly flew up into the air, using his arms like wings. He could hear his cousins whistling, they were saying “sing again.” Wiisakaychak was sitting on the ground whistling to his cousin, unable to see that a huge rock was barrelling down the mountain towards him. Nanabush whistled urgently and Wiisakaychak moved just in the nick of time. Nanabush landed on the ground and grabbed a big stick. He then walked around the bend in the road dragging both his feet and the stick.

When Nanabush reached his cousins, Wiisakaychak was huffing and puffing, having only just missed being hit by the huge rock. Chi-Jean also realized the danger they had just avoided and was upset as well. After all of the excitement, Nanabush was quite tired and he needed to rest so he came up with a plan. He hugged his cousins. As they hugged him back he said, “Oh, I hurt my back. A big stone fell on me. That’s why I’m dragging my feet. I’m sore. I’m just so sore.” Nanabush saw that Wiisakaychak had a bag on his back. Inside the bag, Wiisakaychak carried his fiddle. “Oh, how am I going to walk?” Nanabush asked as he dragged himself in the direction of Mother Nature’s house. Wiisakaychak and Chi-Jean looked at one another. “Okay, jump in,” Wiisakaychak told Nanabush. Without a second thought, Nanabush jumped into the air as Chi-Jean opened the bag on Wiisakaychak’s back. Nanabush transformed himself into a tiny little person and enjoyed his ride to Mother Nature’s house. Chi-Jean and Wiisakaychak felt sorry for Nanabush, so they didn’t say anything when they heard “chhhh chhh chhh chhhh chhh chhh” and then “chhh chhh tick chhh chhh tick” and “errr errrr” coming from the bag. Even when Chi-Jean and Wiisakaychak neared Mother Nature’s house, they didn’t wake him and tease him about falling asleep and snoring, after all, he hurt his back.

When they arrived at Mother Nature’s house she invited them into her home and welcomed them. Her conversation was pleasant and soft as she spoke in Michif. “Oh mes cousins, mes cousins, mes cousins,” a happy Mother Nature exclaimed. She called these dear friends her “cousins.” She asked Wiisakaychak, “Did you bring your fiddle?”

“Yes, I did” he replied as he removed it from his bag. Mother Nature turned her attention to Chi-
Jean, “Did you bring your dancing shoes?”

“Oh yes, I even have new jigging steps I’ll dance,” Chi-Jean told Mother Nature. His words brought a happy smile to her lips. Just then Nanabush crawled out of Wiisakaychak’s bag and transformed himself to his normal size.

“Well, sleeping beauty, welcome at last!” Mother Nature laughed when she saw her friend, “and what will you be doing this evening?” Nanabush was irritated that she called him “sleeping beauty” but he didn’t say anything.

“I’ll sing,” Nanabush told Mother Nature. She looked at him for a long moment before she answered back. “Okay,” she said. “Maybe you should rest a while before you come and eat.” Nanabush felt insulted again. Mother Nature knew he loved to eat. She continued speaking to everyone in the room, “I’ve been cooking in anticipation of your arrival. I cooked lii boulettes, lii patates, lii gallettes, and après, lii beignes¹ and fried chokecherries. They are all ready.” Mother Nature and each of her guests got a plate, and they had their meal together. They drank tea and they filled their dishes some more. There were lots of people at the party and Wiisakaychak said, “My meal is too hot and my soup is too hot. I will let it cool off and I’ll play some music.” He got his fiddle, and he started to play. It was really good fiddle music. Chi-Jean heard the music and he couldn’t stop his feet from moving even if he wanted to.

“My soup is too hot as well. I’ll just wait and I’ll dance a bit,” Chi-Jean said. Chi-Jean danced to Wiisakaychak’s fiddle tune. It was very good. Nanabush came to the table where Wiisakaychak’s and Chi-Jean’s food cooled. He took a bit of Wiisakaychak’s soup and he pushed it away. “Oh!” he said. “It is too salty!” Then he tried Chi-Jean’s soup. “Oh! Too much pepper!” So he took both plates and he ate the food. The only thing he didn’t touch was the fried chokecherries. Then Nanabush went and got his own plate of food but still, he didn’t try the chokecherries. He ate and ate some more. Finally, Nanabush had a full stomach and he felt satisfied and happy. “Ha,” he said, “Now I shall go and sing.”

Nanabush joined his cousins and he sang, Wiisakaychak played fiddle and Chi-Jean danced for a long time. Soon they were going so hard and so fast that Wiisakaychak broke the neck of the fiddle, and the all the hair had gone off of his bow. When the music stopped, Chi-Jean stopped dancing. When he looked at his feet, there was smoke rising off of them—he had been dancing so hard and so fast. Now Wiisakaychak and Chi-Jean decided they would eat, which gave Chi-Jean a chance to rest his feet. Wiisakaychak could then fix his fiddle using a flour paste. Nanabush kept singing different kinds
of songs, some fast and some slow. Then he remembered the song he’d sung on the mountain earlier that day.

“This is a song I learned from my White brothers, way over there when they came by boat over a big, big lake” Nanabush explained. “They showed me how to sing this.” Nanabush sang, “Yo do lady hoo yo da lady hoo.” He was a really good singer and an even better yodeller. As Nanabush sang Chi-Jean and Wiisakaychak saw their plates were empty. They asked Mother Nature if their plates had been set aside. The plates couldn’t be found and no one had moved them. Nanabush stopped singing when he heard his cousins’ raised voices.

“What’s the matter, cousins?” Nanabush asked as he made his way over to them.

“What happened to our food?” Wiisakaychak asked Mother Nature as Nanabush approached. All eyes turned to Nanabush. “You ate it,” Wiisakaychak said. Chi-Jean looked at Nanabush and accused him of eating all the food: “You ate it, you ate our food!”

“No, I didn’t,” Nanabush explained to Wiisakaychak. “You were playing your fiddle so hard you didn’t know what you were doing. You were eating at the same time as you were playing.” “And you were jigging so hard, you didn’t notice you were eating. I didn’t eat your food,” he told Chi-Jean. Mother Nature knew what Nanabush had done with his cousin’s food but she didn’t say anything.

Nanabush knew his cousins were angry at him. He couldn’t stand there with them not speaking to him so he said, “I’m getting really tired of singing but I’ll sing one more song. Maybe this time I’ll even get to finish it.” Nanabush began to sing, “Odalady odalady odalady hoo!” He was singing louder and louder. Mother Nature looked at Nanabush and began to get very angry. She thought he was calling her an old lady. She ran to Nanabush and grabbed him by the neck.

“You’re a bad cousin!” She told him, “You’re not supposed to call anyone names, especially me. I did everything nice for you. I like your singing, but not this song,” she said. “You take this song back where you got it from and don’t sing it here anymore.” Everyone was silent when Mother Nature finished speaking. That was okay because the party had ended and it was time for people to go.

Chi-Jean was the first cousin to leave. He said goodbye to Mother Nature and to Wiisakaychak and to Nanabush. When Wiisakaychak left he said goodbye to Mother Nature and to Nanabush. Nanabush was the last one to leave. After he hugged his cousin, he hugged Mother Nature so hard he tied his arms around her. She began to choke and gasp for air. He let her go after a long hug.

“That’s for saying that I ate my cousin’s food. I heard the words you spoke in Michif to them. I didn’t touch their food after I tasted it, and I didn’t touch their fried chokecherries. You told them I ate all their food. You told a lie.” He looked at Mother Nature long and hard. He then choked her so she couldn’t
talk. She had spoken to them all evening in Michif and now she couldn’t talk at all. Nanabush looked Mother Nature straight in the eyes and continued speaking, “You’ll never talk your language, but someday you’ll remember it.”

Nanabush let go of Mother Nature’s throat, and they stared at each other. Tears glistened in her eyes but they never spoke another word to one another. Nanabush took off flying, using his arms. To this day, Mother Nature has never spoken Michif. She speaks English. Now her Michif is starting to slowly come back, but she barely remembers it. Some of her Métis people have lost the Michif language.

<<Kii wanitanaan nutr laanginaan li Michif kaykatch ki waanitanaan nutr laanginaan.>> We have to keep telling our grandchildren this story so maybe they will remember why Michif was lost and maybe they will help us find it again.

1 Michif/French for “meatballs, potatoes, bannock, and afterwards donuts.”