

THE FOLKS OF THE FOREST

In the folk tradition, there are usually separation made between the sprites who shelter the home, garden and cultivated land, and sprites of uncultivated land, in other words, the forest folk, and the water sprites, water folk. Sometimes the forest sprite is also called as the forest keeper. The home of the forest folk is an anthill, "the forest castle". It is also a passage between the human and the forest sprite. According to folk tradition, one can address the forest sprite by sacrificing to the anthill for example silver, liquor or blood from ones finger. If one makes right kinds of magic, the forest sprite might appear in his or her dream. Like always when one meets some powers from the other world, healthy respect is necessary. According to belief, one shouldn't greet the forest sprite first, but to let the sprite make an initiative, in its own time and rhythm.

The form that a sprite takes depends on how the forest, as a living creature, relates to the intentions of the man in question. It was believed, that if a sprite shows himself in ordinary, undecorated clothes and in a grumpy mood, the hunter shouldn't expect a great prey. More likely he will get into an accident, which could be avoided by sacrificing to the forest folk. On the hand, if the sprite appears dressed in decorated clothes, looking gently to the hunter and speaking with female voice, hunter could expect a great prey. Part of the catch was always sacrificed to the sprite, its donor.

This sacrifice was not just a gesture of good-will, but it had a concrete aim: to avoid the anger of the sprite. To avoid the anger, a rabbit or a bird was not to removed from the trap before brushing them with branches. A sprite who was left without his belongings, or who was in other ways insulted, took revenge by mixing up the hunters sense of direction. Angry forest sprite could also hide some object that belonged to the man to the forest. Sometimes the sprite might deceive people even if they hadn't done anything. If one had to sleep over in the forest, he/she had to say a special spell to avoid being "caught" by the forest folk.

*Terve maa ja maanhaltija,
suo minun tervennä ollakseni!*

I greet you, the land and the sprite of the land,
Let me go healthy!