

Why the Nighthawk's Wings are Beautiful

Blackfoot

"Old-man was traveling one day in the springtime; but the weather was fine for that time of year. He stopped often and spoke to the bird-people and to the animal-people, for he was in good humor that day. He talked pleasantly with the trees, and his heart grew tender. That is, he had good thoughts; and of course they made him happy. Finally he felt tired and sat down to rest on a big, round stone the kind of stone our white friend there calls a boulder. Here he rested for a while, but the stone was cold, and he felt it through his robe; so he said: "'Stone, you seem cold to-day. You may have my robe. I have hundreds of robes in my camp, and I don't need this one at all.'" That was a lie he told about having so many robes. All he had was the one he wore.

"He spread his robe over the stone, and then started down the hill, naked, for it was really a fine day. But storms hide in the mountains, and are never far away when it is springtime. Soon it began to snow -- then the wind blew from the north with a good strength behind it. Old-man said: "'Well, I guess I do need that robe myself, after all. That stone never did anything for me anyhow. Nobody is ever good to a stone. I'll just go back and get my robe.'"

"Back he went and found the stone. Then he pulled the robe away, and wrapped it about himself. Ho! but that made the stone angry -- Ho! Old-man started to run down the hill, and the stone ran after him. Ho! it was a funny race they made, over the grass, over smaller stones, and over logs that lay in the way, but Old-man managed to keep ahead until he stubbed his toe on a big sage-brush, and fell snow!

"'Now I have you!' cried the stone -- 'now I'll kill you, too! Now I will teach you to give presents and then take them away,' and the stone rolled right on top of Old-man, and sat on his back.

"It was a big stone, you see, and Old-man couldn't move it at all. He tried to throw off the stone but failed. He squirmed and twisted -- no use -- the stone held him fast. He called the stone some names that are not good; but that never helps any. At last he began to call: "'Help! -- Help! -- Help!' but nobody heard him except the Night-hawk, and he told the Old-man that he would help him all he could; so he flew away up in the air -- so far that he looked like a black speck. Then he came down straight and struck that rock an awful blow -- 'snow!' -- and broke it in two pieces. Indeed he did. The blow was so great that it spoiled the Night-hawk's bill, forever -- made it queer in shape, and jammed his head, so that it is queer, too. But he broke the rock, and Old-man stood upon his feet.

"'Thank you, Brother Night-hawk, ' said Old-man, 'now I will do something for you. I am going to make you different from other birds -- make you so people will always notice you.' "You know that when you break a rock the powdered stone is

white, like snow; and there is always some of the white powder whenever you break a rock, by pounding it. Well, Old-man took some of the fine powdered stone and shook it on the Night-hawk's wings in spots and stripes -- made the great white stripes you have seen on his wings, and told him that no other bird could have such marks on his clothes.

"All the Night-hawk's children dress the same way now; and they always will as long as there are Night-hawks. Of course their clothes make them proud; and that is why they keep at flying over people's heads -- soaring and dipping and turning all the time, to show off their pretty wings.