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How The Squirrel Got Wings

Carolyn Sherwin Bailey

Once upon a time the Native Americans tell us that the Manito was the good spirit of the woods. He taught every wild creature, bird, beast, or fish its own special work. It was then that the Beaver learned how to be a mason, and the Oriole to be a weaver. The Mole learned how to dig long, secret tunnels although he was blind. The Spider was taught to spin and the Bee to make honey.

Then, too, the Manito made the Squirrel the little harvester of the woods, gathering nuts in the fall and digging holes in the earth in which to bury them for the winter. It was planned that the Squirrel should be an example to man of the wisdom of working while others feasted. He gathered food for the days when the wind would howl and the snow drift about his lodge. So the Squirrel spent his days looking for nuts and laying them away for cold weather. With him went his friend, the Woodchuck.



In those days, the Woodchuck ate nuts, and as his legs were short and his feet flat he could not climb trees. His feet were shaped like shovels. He used them for digging himself a little house in the side of a hill where he planned to sleep through the winter until spring should come. But he was very fond of nuts. His friend, the Squirrel, was good enough to take him about the woods and show him the places where nuts were scattered on the ground. The Squirrel gave him half of all the nuts there were. The Woodchuck cracked these with his sharp teeth and ate them all.

The Manito was apt to walk through the forest at night to see if everything was safe. He wished, too, to see if his little wild children had done their work during the day. One evening in the late fall the Manito went through the forest in the form of a night wind. He looked in the door of the Woodchuck's house in the side of the hill. It was empty!

Taking his way through the trees the Manito saw a little creature in a gray fur blanket creeping softly along from one spot to another. He had short legs, and feet shaped like shovels. It was the Woodchuck. As he came to a place for which he had been looking, the Woodchuck would dig deep down in the earth with his

paws. He would bring up a store of nuts and carry them back to his hole in the side of the hill.

"This is not as it should be," the Manito thought. "I did not plan that my son, the Woodchuck, should harvest at night. Nor did I decree that he should gather nuts."

Then it came to the mind of the Manito what the Woodchuck was up to!

The next night the Manito had a council fire in the woods and bade all the wild creatures to come to it. He, himself, dressed in fine blankets and feathers like a Chief, sat on a rock before the fire. All his sons, the Squirrel, the Beaver, the Wolf, the Deer, the Otter, the Fox, and the rest, sat in a circle around the fire. There was one vacant place, though. The Woodchuck had not yet come.

At the time for the council to open, the Manito stood up and spoke.

"We are gathered here as a court of law," he said. "I have learned that my thrifty son, the Squirrel, has been the victim of a thief. He has been busy and saving, as I have taught him to be. He has done his harvesting for the winter. But while he slept a friend robbed him of his nuts. What shall we do to such a false friend?"

"Drown him!" said the Beaver.

"Starve him!" said the Otter.

"Eat him!" barked the Fox and the Wolf.

"Who is he?" asked the gentle Deer.

Just then the Woodchuck tried to slip into his place in the circle without being seen. He had a nut in his mouth so that every one knew at once that he was the thief. He was the false friend of the thrifty Squirrel! The animals rose in a body and would have torn the Woodchuck to pieces at once, or thrown him into the fire. But the Manito raised his hand to quiet them. Then he called the Woodchuck and the Squirrel to come to his side.

"I gave you a place to harvest, in the corn field," the Manito said to the Woodchuck. "And I gave you a friend who was good enough to share his nuts with you because you are so fond of them. You have disobeyed me, and stolen from your friend. As a punishment I will take out your sharp teeth so that you can never crack a nutshell again. You shall have grinding teeth, for eating only corn."

Then the Manito asked the Squirrel to come closer to him, and he fitted a pair of wings to his back. "These wings are a reward for your industry," he said, "and to help you gather another harvest in place of that which the Woodchuck stole from you."

From the night of that council fire to the present time the Woodchuck has eaten only grains and vegetables. And there have been flying squirrels because of the first Woodchuck who stole from his friend.

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