



How Badger, Skunk and Sage Hen Were Marked

A Paiute Tale

Cultural Note

According to Paiute legend, the hawk and the coyote were not always animals as we see them now. Long ago, they were people, like you and me. The hawk was known as *Kuhsawv*, and the coyote was known as *Soonungwuv*.

Coyote tales are part of the Paiute oral tradition used to teach proper behavior and values from an early age. These stories are only told during the winter time. The Coyote illustrates the mischievous nature in all of us.

Vocabulary

ferocious

marveled

sacred

taunted

transformed

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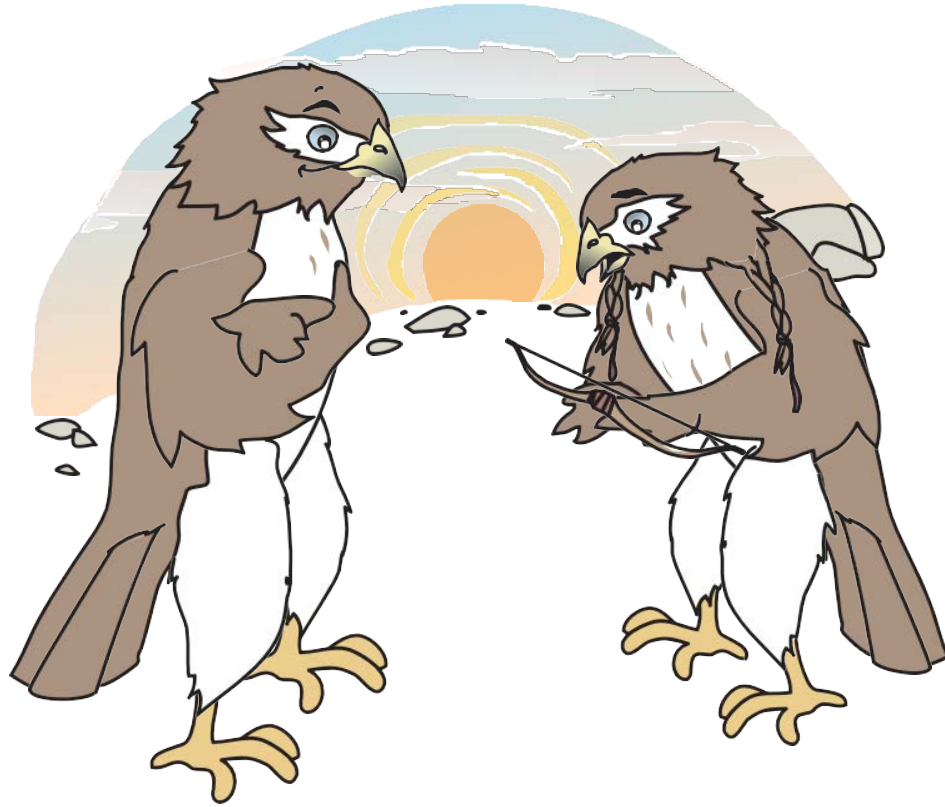
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Every day *Kuhsawv*, Hawk, and *Soonungwuv*, Coyote, went out together to hunt rabbits.

Coyote loved to brag about his fine bow. It was made from the horns of a mountain sheep. One morning, like every other morning, he said, "Hawk, you know I'll be the one to kill all the rabbits today. My fine bow will never miss a mark!" And just as he had said, Coyote shot many rabbits with his bow.

"Hawk," he said, "since I did all the work, you can carry all the dead rabbits home for us."



Hawk marveled at Coyote's wonderful bow. That night, he told his mother about the bow, and the next morning she presented him with a surprise: a magic bow! She said, "This bow is a special gift. Its powers are sacred. Do not show it to anyone!" Hawk held it in his hands and felt great joy.

The bow indeed held special powers. Most of the time, it was very small. He carried it by tucking it into the braids of his hair. When he needed to shoot a small animal or bird, it was the perfect size. And when Hawk needed to shoot a large animal, like an elk or a ferocious bear, the bow magically transformed itself into a larger size. Hawk was never afraid to go up against any animal. Each day, his mother warned, "Remember, do not show your magic bow to anyone!"

It was difficult for Hawk to do this. Each time Coyote bragged about his bow, Hawk wanted to pull his own bow out and demonstrate what it could do. Hawk's bow was by far the finer weapon. How he wanted to show Coyote! "If I could just show him," he thought. "If I could just show everyone! How they would marvel at me!" But he knew he must honor his mother's wishes. None of the other hunters ever knew of his bow. They never knew of his great victories over large and ferocious animals. He had to sit quietly as the other hunters bragged and told stories.





One day, as Hawk and Coyote were out hunting, the magic bow slipped out of his braid and landed on the ground. Coyote saw the small bow and grabbed for it, but not before Hawk tucked it in his leather pouch. "Hawk, your bow—how small it is! No wonder you never catch anything!" he laughed. He pointed at a stinkbug scurrying along the sand. "There, Hawk! You can surely be a great hunter now!" Later, when he saw a fire ant, Coyote teased Hawk again, "Quick, Hawk, be ready! Here comes a fearsome creature! Your bow might be just the right size!" He laughed and teased all day long.

But Hawk was patient. He put up with all of Coyote's ugly talk and never answered back.

That night, Hawk spoke with his mother about what had happened. "Mother, I will not take that from Coyote anymore. I will show him what my bow can do."

She shook her head gently from side to side. "No, Hawk, we do not know how strong the bow is. If you use your bow in anger, you might pull on the string too hard. Please, Hawk, you must use wisdom."

Hawk took a deep breath. He nodded to his mother, showing her respect and promising to do as she had cautioned.



The next day, however, Coyote teased and taunted Hawk about the bow. Hawk couldn't take it any longer, and in his anger he forgot his promise to his mother. "You are a fool, Coyote. My bow is better than yours. It can hit its mark each time I shoot. It can shoot farther and straighter than yours. Your bow is nothing compared to mine."

"Impossible!" Coyote exclaimed. "Everyone knows my bow is the grandest bow around. I've seen your bow! How can you even think your tiny bow is better?"

Hawk stood tall and proud, his eyes meeting Coyote's. "I know my bow can break yours to pieces, and I can prove it," he replied. He had forgotten all his mother had said. "Let us have a shooting match. You go across the valley and stand your bow wherever you choose. Then I shall shoot an arrow across and break it all to pieces in one shot."





Coyote teased and laughed all the way across the valley. "You are crazy, Hawk!" he teased, placing his bow on the hillside. "Hawk, your little bow will never shoot this far!"

Hawk chose his strongest arrow and placed it in the bow. His eyebrows furrowed in anger and concentration. His hand drew the string back as far as it could reach, then let go. As swift as a flash of lightning, the arrow zipped through the air. Coyote's mouth gaped wide open as the arrow hit his bow and shattered it to pieces. And the arrow kept on going.



The arrow went on. It made a hole clear through the mountainside. A stream of water came pouring out. It sped through the air and smashed great trees. It cut through the earth, leaving grooves and great canyons in its path. Creatures great and small scampered for safety.

Skunk heard the arrow coming. He lay down as flat as he could on the ground. The arrow skimmed him between his ears, shearing his fur flat upon his back from the tip of his head to the tip of his tail! And the arrow went on.

Badger peeked out of his hole only to have the arrow come streaking across the top of his head, giving him a grazing blow on his forehead. And the arrow went on.

Sage Hen, tucked into a bush, snapped her head back just in time to save her throat from being gashed. But the lightning-fast arrow burned her feathers black as it sped past her.

Nothing could stop the arrow. It continued on and on, over the edge of the world and out into space. To this day, no one knows if it ever stopped.





The sheared fur on Skunk's back never was the same again. When it healed it grew back white. To this day, Skunk has a white stripe down his back, from the tip of his head to the tip of his tail!

When the fur on Badger's forehead healed, it grew back white, too. To this day, all who see Badger know him by the white stripe on his forehead.

And the feathers across Sage Hen's throat still are black, forever a reminder of the day Hawk's arrow burned them.

Shinob, the great one, saw that Hawk had abused the gift he had been given. He took away the magic bow and turned Hawk into *Kuhsawy*, a bullet hawk. Instead of shooting arrows at the game he wants to eat, he must now throw himself at it. If you watch a bullet hawk, you will see how, to this day, he throws himself at his prey.

Glossary

kuhsawv – hawk

kuhsawy - bullet hawk

oonum'puhts - badger

poanee' – skunk

soonungwuv – coyote

sechu - sage hen

Shinob - the great one

Reading Suggestions

- Just from reading the title, what prediction could you make about what will happen in the story?
- What is the problem that needs to be solved in the story?
What is the solution?
- Talk to your family about one of your favorite hunting or fishing stories.

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