



Raven and the Geese

A Treasury Of Eskimo Tales

North American

Intermediate
8 min read

For a long time Raven lived alone, but finally became tired of it and decided to take a wife. It was late in the fall and he noticed that the birds were going south in large flocks. He flew away and stopped directly in the path taken by geese and other wild fowl on their way to the land of summer.

As he sat there he saw a pretty young goose coming near. He hid his face by looking at his feet, so that she would not know but that he was a black goose, and called out, "Who wishes me for a husband? I am a very nice person."

The goose flew on without heeding him and he looked after her and sighed. Soon after a black brant passed, and Raven cried out as before, but the brant flew on. Again he waited and this time a duck passed near, and when Raven cried out she turned her head a little.

"Oh, I shall succeed this time," thought Raven, and his heart beat fast with hope. But the duck passed on, and Raven stood waiting with bowed head.

Very soon a family of white-front geese came along, consisting of the parents with four sons and a sister. Raven cried out, "Who wishes me for a husband? I am a fine hunter and am young and handsome."

As he finished speaking they alighted just beyond him, and he thought, "Surely, now I shall get a wife." He

looked about and found a pretty white stone with a hole in it lying near. He picked it up and, stringing it on a long grass stem, hung it about his neck.

As soon as he had done this he pushed up his bill so that it slid to the top of his head like a mask, and he became a dark-colored young man. At the same time each of the geese pushed up its bill in the same manner, and they became nice-looking people.

Raven walked toward them, and was much pleased with the looks of the girl and, going to her, gave her the stone which she hung about her neck. By doing this she showed that she accepted him for her husband. Then they all pulled down their bills, becoming birds again, and flew away toward the south.

The geese flapped their wings heavily and worked along slowly, while Raven on his outspread wings glided along faster than his party, and the geese gazed after him in admiration, exclaiming, "How light and graceful he is!" and the little bride was very proud of her fine husband.

But Raven was not accustomed to the long, all-day flights of the geese, and he became tired.

"We would better stop early and look for a good place to spend the night," he said. The others agreed to this, so they stopped and were soon asleep.

Early the next morning the geese were astir, but Raven slept so heavily that the father goose had to shake him and say, "Wake up! Wake up! We must make haste for it will snow here soon; we must not linger."

As soon as Raven was fully awake he pretended to be eager to get away, and, as on the day before, he led all the others with his wide-spread wings, and was greatly admired by the others, especially by his young wife. He kept on, above or in front of his companions, and his bride would often say, "See how gracefully he skims along without having to flop heavy wings as we do," and she gave her brothers a side glance which made them feel that she was contrasting their clumsiness with his ease. After that tactless remark, the four brothers-in-law began to feel envious of Raven.

They stopped one evening on the seashore, where they feasted upon the berries which were plentiful there, and then they settled down for the night and fell asleep. In the morning the geese were making ready to start without waiting for breakfast, and Raven's stomach cried out for more of the berries. But father goose said

they could not wait, and he dared not object to starting. The brothers-in-law had secretly urged the father not to wait, for they said, "Our sister needs to have some of the conceit about that husband of hers taken out of her; and so does he."

Raven dreaded the long flight across the sea, for he heard father goose say, "We will make only one stop in crossing this water. There is an island in the center of it, and there we will rest for a short time and then go on to the farther shore."

Raven was ashamed to say that he feared he could never reach that farther shore, so he determined to keep still and risk it; and off they all flew.

The geese kept steadily on and on. After a long time Raven began to fall behind. His wide-spread wings ached, yet the geese kept steadily and untiringly on. His vanity was no longer gratified by admiring remarks from his companions, for he was flapping heavily along. Sometimes he would glide on outspread pinions for a time, hoping to ease his tired wings, but he fell farther and farther behind.

Finally the geese looked back and the brothers said, sarcastically, "We thought he was light and active." The father goose said, "He must be getting tired. We must not press him too hard. We will rest."

The geese sank upon the water close together, and Raven came laboring up and dropped upon their backs, gasping for breath. In a short time he partially recovered and, putting one hand on his breast, said, "I have an arrow-head here from an old war I was in, and it pains me greatly; that is the reason I fell behind."

He had his wife put her hand on his breast to feel the arrow-head which he declared was working its way into his heart. She could feel nothing but his heart beating like a trip-hammer with no sign of an arrow-point. But she said nothing, for her brothers were whispering, "We don't believe that story about the arrow-point! How could he live with an arrow in his heart?"

They rested two or three times more, he sinking upon their backs as before; but when they saw the far-off shore before them father goose said, "We can wait for you no more," for they were eager to reach the land and find food.

They all arose and flew on, Raven slowly flapping along behind, for his wings felt heavy. The geese kept steadily

on toward the shore, while he sank lower and lower, getting nearer to the dreaded water. When the waves were almost touching him he shrieked to his wife:

“Leave me the white stone; it has magical powers. Throw me the white stone.”

Thus he kept crying until suddenly his wings lost their power and he floated helplessly on the water as the geese gained the shore. He tried to rise from the water but his wings seemed to be weighted down, and he drifted back and forth along the beach. The waves arose and one whitecap after another broke over him till he was soaked, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that he could get his beak above the surface to breathe a little between the billows.

After a long time a great wave cast him upon the land, and as it flowed back he dug his claws into the sand to save himself from being dragged back into the sea. As soon as he was able he struggled up the beach, an unhappy looking object. The water ran in streams from his soaked feathers and his wings dragged on the ground. He fell several times, and at last, with wide-gaping mouth, he reached some bushes. As soon as he could get his breath he took off his raven coat and pushed up his beak, becoming a small, dark-colored man.

“From this time on, forevermore I’m done with being a goose,” he declared.

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