



Why the Chipmunk's Back is Striped

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Intermediate
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What a splendid lodge it was, and how grand War Eagle looked leaning against his back-rest in the firelight! From the tripod that supported the back-rest were suspended his weapons and his medicine-bundle, each showing the wonderful skill of the maker. The quiver that held the arrows was combined with a case for the bow, and colored quills of the porcupine had been deftly used to make it a thing of beauty. All about the lodge hung the strangely painted linings, and the firelight added richness to both color and design. War Eagle's hair was white, for he had known many snows; but his eyes were keen and bright as a boy's, as he gazed in pride at his grandchildren across the lodge-fire. He was wise, and had been in many battles, for his was a warlike tribe. He knew all about the world and the people in it. He was deeply religious, and every Indian child loved him for his goodness and brave deeds.

About the fire were Little Buffalo Calf, a boy of eleven years; Eyes-in-the-Water, his sister, a girl of nine; Fine Bow, a cousin of these, aged ten, and Bluebird, his sister, who was but eight years old.

Not a sound did the children make while the old warrior filled his great pipe, and only the snapping of the lodge-fire broke the stillness. Solemnly War Eagle lit the tobacco that had been mixed with the dried inner

bark of the red willow, and for several minutes smoked in silence, while the children's eyes grew large with expectancy. Finally he spoke:

“Napa, OLD-man, is very old indeed. He made this world, and all that is on it. He came out of the south, and travelled toward the north, making the birds and animals as he passed. He made the perfumes for the winds to carry about, and he even made the war-paint for the people to use. He was a busy worker, but a great liar and thief, as I shall show you after I have told you more about him. It was OLD-man who taught the beaver all his cunning. It was OLD-man who told the bear to go to sleep when the snow grew deep in winter, and it was he who made the curlew's bill so long and crooked, although it was not that way at first. OLD-man used to live on this world with the animals and birds. There was no other man or woman then, and he was chief over all the animal-people and the bird-people. He could speak the language of the robin, knew the words of the bear, and understood the sign-talk of the beaver, too. He lived with the wolves, for they are the great hunters. Even to-day we make the same sign for a smart man as we make for the wolf; so you see he taught them much while he lived with them. OLD-man made a great many mistakes in making things, as I shall show you after a while; yet he worked until he had everything good. But he often made great mischief and taught many wicked things. These I shall tell you about some day. Everybody was afraid of OLD-man and his tricks and lies—even the animal-people, before he made men and women. He used to visit the lodges of our people and make trouble long ago, but he got so wicked that Manitou grew angry at him, and one day in the month of roses, he built a lodge for OLD-man and told him that he must stay in it forever. Of course he had to do that, and nobody knows where the lodge was built, nor in what country, but that is why we never see him as our grandfathers did, long, long ago.

“What I shall tell you now happened when the world was young. It was a fine summer day, and OLD-man was travelling in the forest. He was going north and straight as an arrow—looking at nothing, hearing nothing. No one knows what he was after, to this day. The birds and forest-people spoke politely to him as he passed but he answered none of them. The Pine-squirrel, who is always trying to find out other people’s business, asked him where he was going, but OLD-man wouldn’t tell him. The woodpecker hammered on a dead tree to make him look that way, but he wouldn’t. The Elk-people and the Deer-people saw him pass, and all said that he must be up to some mischief or he would stop and talk a while. The pine-trees murmured, and the bushes whispered their greeting, but he kept his eyes straight ahead and went on travelling.

“The sun was low when OLD-man heard a groan” (here War Eagle groaned to show the children how it sounded), “and turning about he saw a warrior lying bruised and bleeding near a spring of cold water. OLD-man knelt beside the man and asked: ‘Is there war in this country?’

“‘Yes,’ answered the man. ‘This whole day long we have fought to kill a Person, but we have all been killed, I am afraid.’

“‘That is strange,’ said OLD-man; ‘how can one Person kill so many men? Who is this Person, tell me his name!’ but the man didn’t answer—he was dead. When OLD-man saw that life had left the wounded man, he drank from the spring, and went on toward the north, but before long he heard a noise as of men fighting, and he stopped to look and listen. Finally he saw the bushes bend and sway near a creek that flowed through the forest. He crawled toward the spot, and peering through the brush saw a great Person near a pile of dead men, with his back against a pine-tree. The Person was full of arrows, and he was pulling them from his ugly body. Calmly the Person broke the shafts of the arrows, tossed them aside, and stopped the blood flow with a brush of his hairy hand. His head was large and fierce-looking, and his eyes were small and wicked. His great body was larger than that of a buffalo-bull and covered with scars of many battles.

“OLD-man went to the creek, and with his buffalo-horn cup brought some water to the Person, asking as he approached:

“‘Who are you, Person? Tell me, so I can make you a fine present, for you are great in war.’

“‘I am Bad Sickness,’ replied the Person. ‘Tribes I have met remember me and always will, for their bravest

warriors are afraid when I make war upon them. I come in the night or I visit their camps in daylight. It is always the same; they are frightened and I kill them easily.'

"Ho!' said OLD-man, 'tell me how to make Bad Sickness, for I often go to war myself.' He lied; for he was never in a battle in his life. The Person shook his ugly head and then OLD-man said:

"If you will tell me how to make Bad Sickness I will make you small and handsome. When you are big, as you now are, it is very hard to make a living; but when you are small, little food will make you fat. Your living will be easy because I will make your food grow everywhere.'

"Good,' said the Person, 'I will do it; you must kill the fawns of the deer and the calves of the elk when they first begin to live. When you have killed enough of them you must make a robe of their skins. Whenever you wear that robe and sing—"now you sicken, now you sicken," the sickness will come—that is all there is to it.'

"Good,' said OLD-man, 'now lie down to sleep and I will do as I promised.'

"The Person went to sleep and OLD-man breathed upon him until he grew so tiny that he laughed to see how small he had made him. Then he took out his paint sack and striped the Person's back with black and yellow. It looked bright and handsome and he waked the Person, who was now a tiny animal with a bushy tail to make him pretty.

"Now,' said OLD-man, 'you are the Chipmunk, and must always wear those striped clothes. All of your children and their children, must wear them, too.'

"After the Chipmunk had looked at himself, and thanked OLD-man for his new clothes, he wanted to know how he could make his living, and OLD-man told him what to eat, and said he must cache the pine-nuts when the leaves turned yellow, so he would not have to work in the winter time.

"You are a cousin to the Pine-squirrel,' said OLD-man, 'and you will hunt and hide as he does. You will be spry and your living will be easy to make if you do as I have told you.'

"He taught the Chipmunk his language and his signs, showed him where to live, and then left him, going on toward the north again. He kept looking for the cow-elk and doe-deer, and it was not long before he had killed enough of their young to make the robe as the Person told him, for they were plentiful before the white man

came to live on the world. He found a shady place near a creek, and there made the robe that would make Bad Sickness whenever he sang the queer song, but the robe was plain, and brown in color. He didn't like the looks of it. Suddenly he thought how nice the back of the Chipmunk looked after he had striped it with his paints. He got out his old paint sack and with the same colors made the robe look very much like the clothes of the Chipmunk. He was proud of the work, and liked the new robe better; but being lazy, he wanted to save himself work, so he sent the South-wind to tell all the doe-deer and the cow-elk to come to him. They came as soon as they received the message, for they were afraid of OLD-man and always tried to please him. When they had all reached the place where OLD-man was he said to them:

“Do you see this robe?”

“Yes, we see it,’ they replied.

“Well, I have made it from the skins of your children, and then painted it to look like the Chipmunk's back, for I like the looks of that Person's clothes. I shall need many more of these robes during my life; and every time I make one, I don't want to have to spend my time painting it; so from now on and forever your children shall be born in spotted clothes. I want it to be that way to save me work. On all the fawns there must be spots of white like this (here he pointed to the spots on Bad Sickness's robe) and on all of the elk-calves the spots shall not be so white and shall be in rows and look rather yellow.’ Again he showed them his robe, that they might see just what he wanted.

“Remember,’ he said, ‘after this I don't want to see any of your children running about wearing plain clothing, because that would mean more painting for me. Now go away, and remember what I have said, lest I make you sick.’

“The cow-elk and the doe-deer were glad to know that their children's clothes would be beautiful, and they went away to their little ones who were hidden in the tall grass, where the wolves and mountain-lions would have a hard time finding them; for you know that in the tracks of the fawn there is no scent, and the wolf cannot trail him when he is alone. That is the way Manitou takes care of the weak, and all of the forest-people know about it, too.

“Now you know why the Chipmunk’s back is striped, and why the fawn and elk-calf wear their pretty clothes.

“I hear the owls, and it is time for all young men who will some day be great warriors to go to bed, and for all young women to seek rest, lest beauty go away forever. Ho!”

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