**The Myth of the Moon and the Stars**

**Based on a Native American Myth**

 Long ago, before the first humans walked the earth, the animals lived in twenty-four-hour

sunlight. It was a wonderful life, and nobody went without what they needed. But, like us, the animals still found things to argue about. They would argue about who had the nicest homes, the most beautiful fur, the best water. And the Great Spirit looked down upon his creations and frowned.

 “Animals, I did not create this beautiful planet just so you could argue about it. Please stop, or I will punish you.” And of course, the animals did not want to be punished, so they stopped arguing…for a little while. But without fail, the animals began arguing again about who had the best food, and the most beautiful view, and the nicest feathers.

 The Great Spirit was very displeased, and decided to teach the animals a lesson. He threw a heavy blanket over the planet, plunging the whole thing into darkness. The animals were terrified, since they couldn’t find their homes, their food, or their friends. Eventually, they gathered together under the council of the wisest animal of all, the owl.

 “Who among us believes that they can remove this blanket from the Earth?” He asked. The first animal to come forward was the cougar. She told the animals that with her speed and sharp claws, she could have that blanket off the sky in no time. She ran as fast as she could to the top of the tallest mountain and took a flying leap, claws extended…and she missed. She landed face-first on the ground before running away in embarrassment at her failure. That is why to this day, you rarely see cougars, and why their faces appear so flat.

 The second animal to volunteer was the black bear. “I’m a great climber, so I will climb a tree.” He said in a proud, deep voice. The other animals liked this idea, and the bear lumbered up to the top of the tallest tree, reached out his paw, and made one large scrape against the night sky before he too reached too far and fell as well. In the process, a tree branch snagged on his tail, ripping most of it off. That is why the bear has a short, stubby tail. He was not willing to risk losing more of his tail, so he too gave up and returned to the crowd.

 At this point, the animals were getting more and more discouraged. It seemed like all hope was lost, until a tiny voice spoke up. “Please, let me try! I think I can do something!” came the high-pitched voice from somewhere in the crowd. The animals tried to figure out who had spoken, and discovered the voice belonged to a little brown bird, barely bigger than Bobcat’s paw.

 The animals laughed. “What could you possibly do, tiny little bird? But perhaps you have a good idea. Let’s have a bird give a try. After all, something that flies won’t fall.” And the turkey vulture jumped in to volunteer. At the time, she had beautiful, glossy feathers of all colors of the rainbow, and she was quite proud of her feathers. But what was the point of her beauty if nobody could see it? So she spread her giant wings and drifted on the air currents, all the way up to the blanket. She used her beak to open a hole, and stuck her head through to give the Great Spirit a piece of her

mind. But what she found instead was the heat of the sun. It quickly burned the feathers and skin on her head and neck, and the ashes from those feathers fell upon her body, muddling her feathers to shades of gray and black. And that is how the turkey vulture lost her color, and why her head is shriveled and red.

 As she flew back to the ground, she perched and loudly proclaimed that she would not try again. And all hope seemed lost…except for one little brown bird. “Please, I really think there’s something I can do! Can I at least try?” The animals thought about it for a moment, and decided that perhaps they could let the little bird try. After all, what harm could it do? Maybe this little bird would surprise them!

 Not wanting to disappoint the others, the tiny bird flew on his fast-beating wings to the top of the sky. Using his tiny beak, he poked a teeny tiny hole before falling back to the ground. But unlike the other animals, he didn’t give up. He picked himself up and flew again. And again. Each time poking a tiny hole. He flew up there thousands upon thousands of times, creating thousands upon thousands of tiny little sparkles of light in the darkness, each one a beacon of hope, until at last, he collapsed, unable to lift a single feather.

 The animals looked up at what they had created. They saw the bear’s claw mark, now called the Milky Way. They saw the bright hole from the vulture’s head, the moon that lights our way. And most importantly, they gazed upon the stars with a sense of awe. It truly was a beautiful sight.

 The Great Spirit thought so as well. He was impressed with what the animals had achieved. So he spoke to them. “Animals, I see you have learned to work together. But you have learned an even more important lesson. This little bird wasn’t the biggest, strongest, or fastest. But he didn’t give up. Let his bravery and perseverance serve as a guide that the smallest, the shyest, the quietest among us can make the biggest difference if we let them and believe in them!”

 “So with that, I will remove this blanket from the sky. But for half your lives, I will return it to remind you of what you have learned. And for you, little hummingbird, I have a special present. I am so impressed with you that I have a gift. I will dress you in feathers of ruby and emerald, and you will drink only the nectar from the sweetest flowers.” And that is how the hummingbird gained his coloration, and how the moon and stars came to be.