

The Seagull and the Gift of Light

A Story told by Native Americans

Key Ideas: Sharing, light, creation

Long, long ago, at the very beginning of creation, God gave each of the animals a special gift. At first sight, the gifts seemed very ordinary. They were just wooden boxes. But the animals had come to know God as a God of surprises and when they opened the boxes, they gasped in wonder for he had done it again. Out of one box there rolled the foaming waves of Sea; from another the gnarled trunks and leafy arms of Tree, from another the shimmering blue calm of the lakes. As each box opened, another wonder of creation tumbled out, shaking itself and stretching, and looking around for a spot where it could rest in comfort. This often took some time but eventually, all were settled. Every box was opened. Every box that is, except the box of the seagull.

All creation pleaded with seagull to open the box. But Seagull clutched it more tightly to himself. ‘No-one is going to share my surprise,’ he gloated. ‘God gave it to me, all for myself. I refuse to open my box. None of you will ever know what is inside.’ As you will have guessed, this did not make seagull very popular.

However, it did not take the animals very long to guess what was in Seagull’s box. They were finding it very hard to see the wonders of creation that had tumbled from their own boxes, for the world lay in darkness, still. The gift in seagull’s box must help them to see.

First, the great bear shambled over to the sullen bird. ‘My young cubs need help to see their way in the deeps of the forest,’ he growled ‘The trees whip across their faces and hurt their eyes. Please, open your box.’ But not even the size and the power of the bear frightened the seagull. ‘It is my gift, only for me. No one else is sharing it,’ he pouted.

The animals thought that something small and delicate might move the heart of the seagull. They sent the bee. ‘I cannot see the way to my home in the hive,’ he moaned. ‘I just wander around in circles and my young will die from hunger. I shall be in despair if you do not help me, Seagull.’ But the bird clung, more firmly, to the box and pretended not to hear.

Finally, all the trees in the forest agreed to try. ‘Seagull,’ they moaned. ‘In all this darkness, our roots grow cold and have no life. There is no warmth to tell them it is spring and send the sap to our branches to feed the leaves. But without leaves we will surely die. Have pity on us and open your box.’ The

seagull hesitated, shifting from one foot to another, but then shook his head as firmly as before. His answer was always the same. 'I will not open it. The gift is only for me.'

By now, the animals were in despair. Some were for snatching the box and forcing it open but the others warned that would only spoil the gift. Somehow the seagull would have to be persuaded. Then they remembered the raven and wondered why they hadn't thought of him before. The raven was such a clever, wily bird, full of tricks. You never knew what he was thinking or plotting and he always had an answer for everything. They put their problem to him and Raven agreed it was intolerable. He would think hard about it and see what he could do.

Some days later, the seagull was standing; alone, clutching his box close as usual. The raven watched him from the top of a tall tree for a time, then slipped on quiet wings to the ground beside him. At first, he was quite still and quiet. That made Seagull nervous. He had heard stories about Raven.

Finally, Raven spoke. 'It is very good to see you, Seagull. I hear the others are angry that you will not open your box but they are wrong. It's your box and no one can make you open it.' This conversation only made the seagull more nervous and he moved the box to his left wing, further away from the raven.

As he did so, he lifted his right leg a little way off the ground, to keep his balance. The raven stooped and slipped a thorn right under the foot of the seagull. As he put his foot down on the ground again, the seagull let out an ear – piercing screech. 'What have you done?' said the raven.

'I've stepped on a thorn,' screamed the seagull.

'Well, pull it out, stupid' said the raven.

'How can I?' wailed the seagull. 'If I try, I'll drop my box.'

'I can see your problem.' Said the raven. 'I would love to help. But there is no way I can see to pull a thorn out of your foot. It is such a pity about this dark.'

The seagull pondered the problem of his throbbing foot. Whatever way he looked at it there seemed to be only one solution. Slowly, he opened the lid of his box, just a fraction. A rush of gleaming jewels poured through the air towards the sky, spangling the heavens with their rays of light. As the raven saw the sky studded with stars for the first time, he could not restrain his wonder.

‘Look, look, look,’ he pleaded with Seagull. But the seagull had other worries.

‘The thorn,’ he said. ‘Please, now you have light to pull out the thorn.’

The raven bent down and picked up the foot of the seagull. He stared at it hard for a long time. Then he pushed the thorn deeper into the foot. The seagull screeched again.

‘I am really sorry,’ said the raven. ‘The problem is that I have enough light to see the shape of your foot but I will never be able to find the thorn against the dark of your skin. If only I had more light, I’m sure I could find it.’

Again the seagull pondered. The pain in his foot was even worse. Carefully, he opened his box another fraction wider.

This time, a globe of pale light climbed silently to the sky and rested amongst the stars, its peace filling all things. Again, the wonder of the first moonlight thrilled the raven and again he pleaded, ‘look, look, look.’

‘The thorn,’ screeched the seagull. ‘Please, please. The pain is awful. Pull it out for me, please.’

The raven bent again and lifted the foot of the seagull. Again, he pushed the thorn more deeply into it.

The seagull swayed with pain and flapped his wings. His box fell to the ground and burst open. Liquid gold, circling round like the rings of a whirlpool, poured from it. Slowly, it too rolled a path through the air until it rested on the sky, bathing the whole earth in a light more golden than honey. None of the previous wonders could compare with the glory of sunlight. The raven was so filled with awe that he was still, completely silent. But that was not true of the seagull. All he could think about was the pain in his foot. Again he pleaded that the raven keep his promise and pull out the thorn. ‘Surely, you have enough light now,’ he moaned. ‘Can you see it?’ The raven stooped and looked. ‘I certainly can,’ he said and pulled the thorn from the foot. The seagull gave a long, low sigh of relief. ‘There, said the raven looking around at the gleaming earth, ‘isn’t all this just wonderful?’ For once, the seagull had to agree.

So it is that the seagull often stands on one foot, for a time, each day, to remind us that it is difficult to share the light and allow it to brighten all creation – so difficult that it happens, often, only with pain.

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