

How the Butterflies Came to Be - Papago Tribe

Now, one day after Earth-Maker shaped the world, Iitoi, our Elder Brother was sitting and watching the children play. He saw the joy and the youthfulness they displayed. He saw the beauty of their surroundings, and the fresh fragrance of the trees and the flowers. He heard the happy songs of the birds, and saw the blue of the sky. He saw the women as they ground cornmeal. He saw their beauty, and the sunlight as it shone from their hair. These were wonderful things.

But then Elder Brother realized that all of these things would change. He knew that these children would all grow old and weaken and die. The beautiful women would someday grow fat and ugly, and their beautiful black hair would turn gray. The leaves would turn brown and fall from the trees, and the beautiful flowers that smelled so fresh would fade. The days would grow short and the nights would be cold. Elder Brother's heart grew sad and troubled.

As Elder Brother watched the women grind cornmeal, the wind made some fallen yellow leaves dance in the sunlight. He decided to do something which would capture some of these wonderful things which He saw. He decided that He must make something that everyone could enjoy, that would lift their hearts and spirits. So, He took out His bag of Creation and began to gather some things together.

He took some blue from the sky, and some whiteness from the cornmeal. He gathered some spots of sunlight, and the blackness of a beautiful woman's hair. He took the yellow of the falling leaves, and the green of the pine needles. He gathered the red, the purple, and the orange from the flowers. As He gathered these things, He put them into His bag. And, last, He put the songs of the song birds in the bag.

When He had finished gathering these things together, He called the children together. He told them to open the bag and there would be a surprise for them. So they opened the bag, and out flew hundreds of beautiful Butterflies! They were red and gold and black and yellow, blue and green and white. They looked liked flowers, dancing in the wind. They flew all around the gleeful children, and lit on their heads. The hearts of the children and the adults soared. Never before had they seen such wonderful, happy things. They began to sing their songs as they flew.

But then song bird lit on Iitoi's shoulder and asked Him. He said, "It is not right to give our songs to these pretty things! You told us when you made us that each bird would have his own song. These pretty things have all of the colors of the rainbow already. Must they take our songs, too?"

Elder Brother said, "You are right. I made one song for each bird, and I must not give them away to any other." So butterflies were made silent, and they are still silent to this day. But their beauty brightens the day of all People, and brings out songs from their hearts.

And that is how Elder Brother meant it to be.