



The Nighthawk's Star

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Translated by *Tony* @ [Translations & Such](#)

Nighthawk was truly an ugly bird. His face was covered in splotches as if he had been splattered with *miso*, and his beak was flat and split all the way back to his ears. His legs were so frail that he could not walk at all. He was such a sight that just seeing him made other birds uncomfortable.

Now Skylark was not a particularly attractive bird, either, but knowing that he looked better than Nighthawk, at least, upon seeing him in the evening he would make a sour face and turn away, silently closing his eyes. The smaller, more talkative birds would speak of him with contempt right in front of him, saying, “Look, it’s him again. Would you just look at that? He’s truly a disgrace to birds.” “Indeed. Look at how big his mouth is! Maybe he’s actually some kind of frog.”

And so on. Now if he had been a real hawk then just mentioning his name would cause these insignificant little birds to tremble and go pale and cower and hide among the leaves! But Nighthawk wasn’t a hawk, or even related to the hawks. He was actually the elder

brother of the beautiful Kingfisher, and of that avian jewel, Hummingbird. Hummingbird sipped the nectar of flowers and Kingfisher ate fish, but Nighthawk caught and ate bugs. Nighthawk didn't have sharp talons or a sharp beak, either, so not even the weakest bird was afraid of him.

So one might wonder why he was named so, and the reason is because his wings were inordinately strong, and so he resembled a hawk when he soared upon the wind. He also had a powerful cry that was not unlike that of a hawk. Hawk, of course, was very conscious of this, and hated it. Every time he saw Nighthawk he would tell him, "Change your name! Change your name!"

One evening, Hawk even came to Nighthawk's home. "Hey! You there! You still haven't changed your name! You should be ashamed. We're completely different, you and I. I can fly through the blue sky all day long, and you only come out when the sun is clouded over, or at dark. Just look at this beak and these talons, and then look at your own!"

"Mr. Hawk, I can't change my name! I didn't take this name myself, God gave it to me."

"No, I'm the one who got his name from God. In a sense, you're just borrowing my name. And Night's. Now give them back."

“I can’t do that, Mr. Hawk!”

“Of course you can. I’ll give you a good name to take its place. How about Leonard? Yeah, Leonard. I like that. So to officially change your name you have to make it public, right? To do that you need to hang a sign that says ‘Leonard’ around your neck, and go around to everyone’s home, bowing and saying ‘From this day on, I am to be known as Leonard.’”

“I could never do that!”

“Sure you can! So do it! If you haven’t done it by the morning of the day after tomorrow, I’ll come and squeeze you to death in my claws. To death, I say! On the morning of the day after tomorrow I’m going to go to every house and ask if you’ve been by. If I find even one home that you haven’t visited, that will be the end of you!”

“But there’s no way I could do it! I would rather die! Please, just kill me now!”

“Oh, come now, think it over. Leonard is a pretty good name.” The hawk spread out his wings and flew back towards his nest.

The nighthawk stood there with his eyes closed in thought. *Why do they hate me so? Because my face looks like it’s been splattered with miso, and because my beak is odd? Even so, I haven’t done anything wrong! I remember that day when I helped the Whiteeye chick back*

to its nest after it fell out. Its mother snatched it from me as if rescuing her baby from a thief. And then she just laughed so hard at me. And now I have to change my name to Leonard? Hang a sign about my neck? Oh, how terrible...

It was already getting dark. Nighthawk flew from his nest. The clouds glowed menacingly, and hung low in the sky. The nighthawk seemed to almost rub against them as he silently flew about.

Nighthawk suddenly opened his mouth wide, held his wings out straight, and cut across the sky like an arrow. He trapped countless small insects in his mouth. Almost as soon as he touched ground he lit off again. The clouds had turned gray, and the setting sun colored the faraway mountaintops with crimson fire. Nighthawk flew so forcefully that he seemed to slice the sky into two. A beetle flew into his mouth and squirmed about. The nighthawk swallowed it down, but for some reason doing so sent a chill down his back.

The clouds were now pitch black, and only the mountains to the East cast the frightening reflection of the red setting sun. Feeling an ache in his chest, Nighthawk again took off into the sky. Again a beetle flew into his mouth, and there it squirmed, scratching his throat. After great effort Nighthawk managed to swallow the beetle, but doing so caused his heart to leap, and he cried out in a loud voice. Crying, he flew around and around, making circles in the sky.

Oh, I kill so many beetles and insects every night. And now I'm to be killed by the hawk. So this is what it feels like. Oh, I can't stand this. I'll stop eating insects, and starve to death. No, Hawk will kill me before that happens. No, before that happens I'll fly far, far away.

The red light from the sun spread like water, setting the clouds on fire. Nighthawk flew straight to the home of his brother, Kingfisher. When he got there Kingfisher had just awoken, and was looking at the burning mountains. Seeing Nighthawk land, he spoke: "Well hello, brother. To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Nothing. I just came to say goodbye. I'm leaving for a place far, far away."

"Brother! You can't leave! With Hummingbird so far away now, I'll be left all alone!"

"I'm sorry, it can't be helped. Please, speak no further on this today. And please, try not to kill any more fish than is absolutely necessary. Good bye, now."

"Brother, what's wrong with you? Please, stay a little longer."

"No, staying any longer won't change things. Please give my regards to Hummingbird. Goodbye. I'm afraid we'll never meet again. Goodbye."

Nighthawk returned to his home in tears. The short summer night was already coming to an end. The fern leaves absorbed the mist as they waved blue and cold. Nighthawk gave a high twitter. He then thoroughly straightened up his nest, preened his feathers, and flew from his nest again.

The mist had cleared, and the sun had just risen in the East. Ignoring the dizzying brightness, Nighthawk flew like an arrow in that direction.

“Mr. Sun, Mr. Sun! Please bring me to you! I don’t care that I’ll burn and die. Even an ugly body like mine will shine as it burns! Please, take me!”

But no matter how far he flew, he didn’t get any closer to the sun. The sun seemed to get smaller and farther, even, and said “Nighthawk, isn’t it? Yes, yes, I know your pain. But you should try talking to the stars. You’re not a day bird, you know.”

Nighthawk tried to give a bow, but suddenly became dizzy and fell back down into the fields. He felt as if he were having a dream. He saw his body climbing up to between the red and yellow stars, he saw himself blown endlessly by the wind, he saw himself trapped in Hawk’s talons.

Something cold plopped on his face. He opened his eyes. The dew

from the pampas grass had dripped on him. It was already night, and the sky was blue-black and filled with blinking stars. Nighthawk flew back up into the sky. The mountains were again red with the setting sun. Nighthawk flew about in that faint glow and among the cold light of the stars. Then he flew off again. He headed west, straight towards the beautiful constellation of Orion, shouting “Oh, star! Blue-white star of the West! Please take me to you! I don’t care that I will be burned to death!” But Orion just continued singing his heroic song, and didn’t pay Nighthawk the least bit of attention.

The Nighthawk almost began to cry, and spiraled back to the ground. He finally landed and took off again, circling once. Then he flew straight towards Canis Major in the south, shouting, “Oh, Star! Blue star of the South! Please take me to you! I don’t care that I will be burned to death!”

The Great Dog blinked blue and purple and yellow and said, “Silence with such foolishness. Who do you think you are? You’re just a bird. It would take you millions, billions, trillions of years to fly this far with those wings of yours!” and with that, he turned away.

Disappointed again, Nighthawk spiraled back to the Earth. He then flew back up and circled twice. This time he flew north towards Ursa Major, shouting “Blue star of the North! Please take me to you!”

The Great Bear answered, “Don’t waste your time with such silliness. You should go cool your head. Jumping into an iceberg-filled ocean might help, or if there is no ocean near you, try diving into a cup filled with ice water.”

Disappointed again, Nighthawk spiraled back to the Earth, and then flew back up and circled four times. He then flew east again, towards the eagle Aquila on the far bank of the just-risen the Milky Way, shouting, “White star of the East! Please take me to you! I don’t care that I will be burned to death!”

The Eagle proudly stated, “No, no, that will never happen. You need a certain level of birth to become a star. That and a lot of money.”

Nighthawk lost all hope, and closing his wings began to fall to the ground. When his weak legs were just a yard from the ground he suddenly twisted back up into the heavens like a whirlwind. Upon reaching the high heavens he spun around like an eagle attacking a bear and stood his feathers on end. He let out a high, high screech. His voice was like a hawk’s. The other birds asleep in the fields and the forest all woke up and, shaking, looked curiously up into the starry sky.

Nighthawk continued on higher and higher, straight up into the

sky. The sun on the mountains looked like the glowing end of a cigarette. Nighthawk climbed and climbed. The cold froze his breath upon his breast. The air became thinner, causing him to beat his wings faster and faster.

Nonetheless, the stars grew no larger. His chest pumped like a bellows. The cold and frost pierced him like a sword. His wings grew numb. He opened tear-filled eyes and once again looked up at the heavens. And yes, that was the end of him. He no longer knew if he was falling or climbing, upside down or right side up, or if he was still looking up. But peace filled his heart, and though his bloody beak was slightly bent to one side, there was a slight smile on it.

After a time Nighthawk opened his eyes wide. He saw that his body had become a beautiful light, blue like a phosphorous flame, burning silently. Just next to him was Cassiopeia. From just behind him shined the blue-white light of the Milky Way.

And Nighthawk's Star burned on. It burned on and forever on. It continues to burn, even now.