

The Story of Owl

Folktale from Haiti

Owl is very shy. He believes that he is so ugly that no one would want to see him or look at him. So ugly that he would cause road accidents. So ugly that babies would scream if they caught sight of him. Because of this, Owl almost never goes out in the daytime. He waits until dark, when his looks can be hidden.

Once, when he was out at night, Owl met a young woman. They started to talk. She invited him to her house and he accepted. They sat on her porch for several hours, talking. Owl liked her very much, and she liked Owl. She invited him to come back the next night. He did so, and again they sat on the porch and talked until almost dawn. At some point in the evening, they started holding hands. Night after night, Owl came to visit, and night after night he left before dawn, so the girl wouldn't see what he looked like.

The girl's friends heard of her suitor and began to ask her questions. They liked the girl, and were pleased that she had met someone she liked. They were curious, too. "Why does Owl never visit during the day?" they asked.

"He works very hard," replied the girl. "By the time he gets home from work, gets cleaned up, and has his supper, it's after dark."

"We want to meet him," said the girl's friends. "Surely he doesn't work on Sunday. Why don't we have a big party for him? Then we could all get to know him."

The girl thought that was a very good idea. So the next time Owl came to visit, she invited him to come to a party. Although Owl was very shy, he was actually quite pleased. "A party for me? And me to be the guest of honor? Oh, my!" And he agreed to come on Sunday afternoon.

But when Sunday came, Owl began to get nervous. He had his cousin, Rooster, got on their horses and started to the girl's home. But on the way Owl looked at Rooster and compared himself. "Rooster is tall and brightly dressed and outgoing," thought Owl, looking at Rooster's red hair, colorful clothing, and yellow boots. "I'm dull and drab," thought Owl, looking at his own brown clothes. "And I'm ugly."

By the time they neared the party, Owl was in a panic. "Rooster," said Owl, "I've forgotten something. You go on and tell them I had to go back and get something. Tell them I'll be there in a little while."

Rooster was a cheerful, accommodating fellow, so he agreed to go in and give Owl's message. Owl went away and came back much later, after it was dark. He was afraid that the girl and her family might be angry because he was so late. When he came to the door, he asked for Rooster.

Rooster came to the door and was startled. "Owl," he said, "What's that on your head?"

"It's a hat," said Owl. "Lots of people wear hats."

"Yes," said Rooster, "but they wear them on their heads, not over them."

“I’ve hurt my eyes,” said Owl. “They can’t bear the light. The hat covers them.”

“And the rest of your head!” retorted Rooster.

“Don’t mind about my hat,” said Owl. “Are they mad at me for being late?”

“They’ll be even madder if you don’t arrive at all,” said Rooster, and made as if to drag Owl inside.

“I’ll come in, I’ll come in,” said Owl, “but promise me one thing first.”

“What’s that?” asked Rooster.

“I have to be home by sunrise,” said Owl, “so would you be willing to crow a little before, rather than at sunrise, to let me know?” Owl was worried that if he stayed until daylight, the girl would see his face – even with the hat covering it.

“Sure, Owl, sure,” said Rooster, and they both went inside.

By then the part was in full swing. The drummers were drumming and the singers were singing. It sounded something like this: (improvise). They were playing Owl’s favorite song, and when he heard it he wanted to dance, so he found the girl and apologized. She forgave him and they went onto the dance floor.

For all his shyness, Owl was a very good dancer. He really loved music, and when he started moving to it, he didn’t think of

where he was or feel embarrassed. He and the girl had a wonderful time and danced all through the night. (Improvise again.)

Owl was having so much fun that he completely forgot about the time until he heard his cousin the rooster, who was quite drunk, trying to crow: “Cock-a-hic!” Owl looked out the window and panicked completely. Rooster was so drunk that he’d missed the dawn. It was bright daylight outside! Owl was certain that the girl would see his face, realize how ugly he was and hate him for it. He ran for the door. Shocked by his sudden flight, the girl called, “Owl! Come back!” and ran after him.

Owl didn’t hear her or pay attention to what she said. As he neared the door, he ran right into one of the drummers. Owl tripped and fell to the floor. He lost his hat, and for the first time the girl saw his face. He got up and ran. “Owl! Come back!” yelled the girl, who was gaining on him. But Owl made it to the door before she did, mounted his horse, and rode away.

The girl went back to the house and helped clean up after the party. No one knew what to think of Owl’s strange behavior. That evening she sat on the porch and waited, hoping he would come, but he didn’t. “It was a late night,” she thought. “Maybe he’ll come tomorrow.” She went to bed thinking of him and how nice he was, and how well he danced, and how well he looked.

You see, she didn’t think he was ugly at all. He had an almost round face, with big eyes and a small nose. She thought it was a strong, attractive face. She liked his eyes. She didn’t realize that he thought himself ugly. She waited for him again the next

night, but he didn't come back then. Or the night after that, or the week after that, or the month after that. For a whole year she waited for him to return, but he never did.

Finally, she met someone else and married him. But even then there were mornings when she would hear roosters crowing and wake up thinking of Owl and wondering why he had run away and where he had gone.