



The Girl Who Always Cried

Canadian Fairy Tales

Canadian Native American North American

Intermediate
10 min read

On the bank of a stream far in the West, Owl-man lived long ago in a little house under the ground. He had very strange habits. He always kept away from the Great Water and he dwelt for the most part in the forest. He had very few friends, and he usually went hunting by himself. He lived on toads and frogs and flies. He would say but little, and when other people sat around him talking pleasantly, he was always silent, gazing into space with wide-open eyes, and trying to look wiser than he really was. Because of this, people thought he was very strange, and stories about him soon spread far and wide. It was said that he was very cruel, and that he was silent because he was always brooding over his past wickedness or thinking about some evil deed he was soon going to do. And when children were troublesome or disobedient, their mothers always frightened them into goodness by saying, "The Owl-man from the stream will come and take you if you do not mend your ways." And although the Owl-man was a solitary fellow he thus had great influence in all the land.

Not far away lived a man and a woman who had one adopted daughter. Because she was the only child in the house, she was much petted, and she was never satisfied, and she cried and fretted all the time, and kept always asking for things she could not get. She disturbed all the neighbors round about so that they could not sleep because of her constant wailing and complaining. At last her foster parents grew tired of her weeping and they said, "The Owl-man will carry you off if you do not stop crying." But still she pouted and fretted. And the old man of the house said, "I wish the Owl-man would come and take her away." Now the old man was a great magician, and as he wished, so it came to pass.

That evening it happened that the people were gathered at a feast of shellfish on the beach by the bright moonlight, as was their weekly custom. But the sorrowful girl would not go with the others. She stayed at home and sulked. As she sat alone in the house, old Owl-man came along carrying his basket full of toads and frogs. The girl was still crying when he came in. "I have come for you," he said, "as the old man wished."

And he put her in his basket with the toads and frogs and carried her off. She yelled and kicked and scratched, but the lid of the basket was tightly closed and Owl-man laughed to himself and said, "Now I have a wife at last. I shall be alone no more, and the people will not think I am so strange." So he took her to his underground house by the stream. That night the people noticed that the girl's cries were no longer heard and they said, "What can have cured Sour-face; what can have pleased Cry-Baby into silence?" And the girl's foster mother wondered where she had gone. But only the old man knew that it had happened as he had wished, because of his magic power, and that Owl-man had taken her away.

The girl was not happy in her new home, for she would not be happy in any place. She still kept up her caterwauling and there was no peace in the house. Owl-man was a great hunter. Every day he went out hunting with his big basket on his arm, but he always locked his wife in the house before he went away. He was always very successful in the chase, and each night he came back with his basket full of toads and frogs and field-mice and flies. But his wife would eat none of them and she threw them in his face when he offered them to her, and said in a bad temper, "I will not eat your filthy food. It is not fit food for gentle-folk." And Owl-man said, "Gentle-folk indeed! You should find a more suitable name; you are not gentle; you are a wild evil thing, but I am going to tame you." And the girl wept again and sulked and stamped her feet in her temper.

At last the girl became very hungry, for there was little to eat except the food that Owl-man brought home for himself. He gathered a few berries for her, but even these did not satisfy her hunger. So she thought out a plan

of escape. One day when Owl-man was away, she took some oil she found in the house and rubbed it all over her face and hair. When Owl-man came home in the evening, he said, "You are very pretty tonight. What have you done to make yourself look so sleek and shiny?"

And she answered, "I have put on my face and hair gum which I picked from the trees last night when I went walking with you."

And he said, "I should like to put some on too, for perhaps it would make me beautiful." The girl told him that if he would go out and gather some gum she would put it on his face and hair for him. So he went out and gathered a great store of gum from the trees and brought it back to her. She melted it on a hot stove until it was balsam again and would pour easily out.

Then she said, "Shut your eyes so that it will not harm your sight, and I will make your face and hair beautiful and shining like mine." Owl-man shut his eyes, and the girl soon covered his face and head with the soft gum. She put it on very thick, and she said, "Keep your eyes shut until it dries or it may blind you." Owl-man did as he was told, but when the gum dried he could not open his eyes, and while he was trying to rub it off, the girl slipped out the door and ran back to her parents, far away by the Great Water.

Owl-man scraped the gum from his face and head as best he could, and when he could open his eyes again and could see pretty well, he went out into the night in search of his wife. And as he went along he cried, "Oh, oh, oh, where is my wife? Where is my girl? I have lost my wife. I have lost my girl. Oh, oh, oh." And when the people heard him calling, they thought they would play a trick on him. So they said, "She is here, she is here."

But when he entered their houses, the woman they showed him was not his wife, and he went away sorrowful. And the people all laughed at his confusion, and said, "Owl-man is getting stranger each day. He is far gone in his head." Owl-man went from house to house, but he could not find his wife. Then he went to the trees and searched among the branches. He pulled the trees up by the roots, thinking she might be hiding underneath. And he looked into the salmon-traps in the rivers, and kicked them to pieces in his frenzy. But nowhere was his wife to be found.

Then he went to the girl's house, where she was hiding, and he yelled, "Oh, oh, oh, give me my wife. Give me my girl. I know she is here. Oh, oh, oh." But the girl's foster mother would not give her up. Then he began to tear down the house over their heads, for the old man of the house was away and there was no one else strong enough to stop Owl-man in his rage. When the woman saw her house in danger of falling about her ears, she

cried, "Stop; your wife is here." And she brought forth the girl from her hiding-place. When Owl-man saw her, his rage left him and he was happy again.

But just then the old man of magic power came home. He had heard the hubbub from a distance. When he came in and saw the great holes in the roof and the side of his house where Owl-man had torn away the logs, he was very angry and he said to himself, "I will punish both Owl-man and the girl for this night's work." And he hit upon a plan. He said to Owl-man, "We must give you a hot bath to melt the gum and take it from your hair, for it will do you no good, and it will take all the hair off your head." And Owl-man gladly agreed.

So they filled a great bark tub with water and heated it by placing at the bottom of it many red-hot stones, after the fashion of Indians in those old days. But the old man put so many hot stones in the water that it was soon almost boiling with the heat, and when they put Owl-man into the tub he was almost scalded to death and he yelled loudly in pain. Then the old man said, "Now I will take vengeance. You will trouble me no more. You have broken my house. Henceforth you will be not a man but an Owl, and you will dwell alone in the forest with few friends, and you will live always on frogs and toads and field-mice, and people will hear you at night crying for your wife all over the land, but you shall never find her." Then with his magic power he changed him to an Owl and sent him on his way.

He said to the girl, "You have done me much harm too, and you have brought all this trouble upon me. Henceforth you will be not a girl but a Fish Hawk, and you will always cry and fret and scream as you have done before, and you will never be satisfied." And with his magic power he changed her into a Fish Hawk, and sent her out to the ocean. And there she screams always, and she is a great glutton, for she can never get enough to eat. And since that time, Owl and Fish Hawk have not dwelt together and have not been on friendly terms. They live far apart, and Owl keeps to the forest and the mountains, while the other keeps to the sea. Thus was the old man avenged, and thus was the weeping maiden punished for her tears. And the cries of Owl and Fish Hawk are still heard in many places, one calling for his wife, the other screaming unsatisfied for something she cannot get.

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com