

# *Osseo, the Son of the Evening*

## *Star*

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There once lived an Indian in the north who had ten daughters, all of whom grew up to womanhood. They were noted for their beauty, especially Oweenee, the youngest, who was very independent in her way of thinking. She was a great admirer of romantic places, and spent much of her time with the flowers and winds and clouds in the open air. Though the flower were homely, if it was fragrant—though the wind were rough, if it was healthful—and though the cloud were dark, if it embosomed the fruitful rain, she knew how, in spite of appearances, to acknowledge the good qualities concealed from the eye. She paid very little attention to the many handsome young men who came to her father's lodge for the purpose of seeing her.

Her elder sisters were all sought in marriage, and one after the other they went off to dwell in the lodges of their husbands; but Oweenee was deaf to all proposals of the kind. At last she married an old man called Osseo, who was scarcely able to walk, and who was too poor to have things like others. The only property he owned in the world was the walking-staff which he carried in his hand. Though thus poor and homely, Osseo was a devout and good man; faithful in all his duties, and obedient in all things to the Good Spirit. Of course they jeered and laughed at Oweenee on all sides, but she seemed to be quite happy, and said to them, "It is my

choice and you will see in the end who has acted the wisest.”

They made a special mock of the walking-staff, and scarcely an hour in the day passed that they had not some disparaging reference to it. Among themselves they spoke of Osseo of the walking-staff, in derision, as the owner of the big woods, or the great timber-man.

“True,” said Oweenee, “it is but a simple stick; but as it supports the steps of my husband, it is more precious to me than all the forests of the north.”

A time came when the sisters, and their husbands, and their parents were all invited to a feast. As the distance was considerable, they doubted whether Osseo, so aged and feeble, would be able to undertake the journey; but in spite of their friendly doubts, he joined them, and set out with a good heart.

As they walked along the path they could not help pitying their young and handsome sister who had such an unsuitable mate. She, however, smiled upon Osseo, and kept with him by the way the same as if he had been the comeliest bridegroom in all the company. Osseo often stopped and gazed upward; but they could perceive nothing in the direction in which he looked, unless it was the faint glimmering of the evening star. They heard him muttering to himself as they went along, and one of the elder sisters caught the words, “Pity me, my father!”

“Poor old man,” said she; “he is talking to his father. What a pity it is that he would not fall and break his neck, that our sister might have a young husband.”

Presently as they came to a great rock where Osseo had been used to breathe his morning and his evening prayer, the star emitted a brighter ray, which shone directly in his face. Osseo, with a sharp cry, fell trembling to the earth, where the others would have left him, but his good wife raised him up, and he sprang forward on the path, and with steps light as the reindeer he led the party, no longer decrepid and infirm, but a beautiful young man. On turning around to look for his wife, behold she had become changed, at the same moment, into an aged and feeble woman, bent almost double, and walking with the staff which he had cast aside.

Osseo immediately joined her, and with looks of fondness and the tenderest regard, bestowed on her every endearing attention, and constantly addressed her by the term of ne-ne-moosh-a, or my sweetheart.

As they walked along, whenever they were not gazing fondly in each other's face, they bent their looks on heaven, and a light, as if of far-off stars, was in their eyes.

On arriving at the lodge of the hunter with whom they were to feast, they found the banquet ready, and as soon as their entertainer had finished his harangue—in which he told them his feasting was in honor of the Evening or Woman's Star—they began to partake of the portion dealt out, according to age and character, to each one of the guests. The food was very delicious, and they were all happy but Osseo, who looked at his wife, and then gazed upward, as if he was looking into the substance of the sky. Sounds were soon heard, as if from far-off voices in the air, and they became plainer and plainer, till he could clearly distinguish some of the words.

“My son, my son,” said the voice; “I have seen your afflictions, and pity your wants. I come to call you away from a scene that is stained with blood and tears. The earth is full of sorrows. Wicked spirits, the enemies of mankind, walk abroad, and lie in wait to ensnare the children of the sky. Every night they are lifting their voices to the Power of Evil, and every day they make themselves busy in casting mischief in the hunter's path. You have long been their victim, but you shall be their victim no more. The spell you were under is broken. Your evil genius is overcome. I have cast him down by my superior strength, and it is this strength I now exert for your happiness. Ascend, my son; ascend into the skies, and partake of the feast I have prepared for you in the stars, and bring with you those you love.

“The food set before you is enchanted and blessed. Fear not to partake of it. It is endowed with magic power to give immortality to mortals, and to change men to spirits. Your bowls and kettles shall no longer be wood and earth. The one shall become silver, and the other pure gold. They shall shine like fire, and glisten like the most beautiful scarlet. Every female shall also change her state and looks, and no longer be doomed to laborious tasks. She shall put on the beauty of the star-light, and become a shining bird of the air. She shall dance, and not work. She shall sing, and not cry.

“My beams,” continued the voice, “shine faintly on your lodge, but they have power to transform it into the lightness of the skies, and decorate it with the colors of the clouds. Come, Osseo, my son, and dwell no longer on earth. Think strongly on my words, and look steadfastly at my beams. My power is now at its height. Doubt not, delay not. It is the voice of the Spirit of the Stars that calls you away to happiness and celestial rest.”

The words were intelligible to Osseo, but his companions thought them some far-off sounds of music, or birds singing in the woods. Very soon the lodge began to shake and tremble, and they felt it rising into the air. It was too late to run out, for they were already as high as the tops of the trees. Osseo looked around him as the lodge passed through the topmost boughs, and behold! their wooden dishes were changed into shells of a scarlet color, the poles of the lodge to glittering rods of silver, and the bark that covered them into the gorgeous wings of insects.

A moment more and his brothers and sisters, and their parents and friends, were transformed into birds of various plumage. Some were jays, some partridges and pigeons, and others gay singing birds, who hopped about, displaying their many-colored feathers, and singing songs of cheerful note.

But his wife, Oweenee, still kept her earthly garb, and exhibited all the indications of extreme old age. He again cast his eyes in the direction of the clouds, and uttered the peculiar cry which had given him the victory at the rock. In a moment the youth and beauty of his wife returned; her dingy garments assumed the shining appearance of green silk, and her staff was changed into a silver feather.

The lodge again shook and trembled, for they were now passing through the uppermost clouds, and they immediately after found themselves in the Evening Star, the residence of Osseo's father.

"My son," said the old man, "hang that cage of birds which you have brought along in your hand at the door, and I will inform you why you and your wife have been sent for."

Osseo obeyed, and then took his seat in the lodge.

“Pity was shown to you,” resumed the King of the Star, “on account of the contempt of your wife’s sister, who laughed at her ill fortune, and ridiculed you while you were under the power of that wicked spirit whom you overcame at the rock. That spirit lives in the next lodge, being the small star you see on the left of mine, and he has always felt envious of my family because we had greater power, and especially that we had committed to us the care of the female world. He failed in many attempts to destroy your brothers and sisters-in-law, but succeeded at last in transforming yourself and your wife into decrepid old persons. You must be careful and not let the light of his beams fall on you, while you are here, for therein lies the power of his enchantment. A ray of light is the bow and arrow he uses.”

Osseo lived happy and contented in the parental lodge, and in due time his wife presented him with a son, who grew up rapidly, and in the very likeness of Osseo himself. He was very quick and ready in learning every thing that was done in his grandfather’s dominions, but he wished also to learn the art of hunting, for he had heard that this was a favorite pursuit below. To gratify him, his father made him a bow and arrows, and he then let the birds out of the cage that he might practice in shooting. In this pastime he soon became expert, and the very first day he brought down a bird; but when he went to pick it up, to his amazement it was a beautiful young woman, with the arrow sticking in her breast. It was one of his younger aunts.

The moment her blood fell upon the surface of that pure and spotless planet, the charm was dissolved. The boy immediately found himself sinking, although he was partly upheld by something like wings until he passed through the lower clouds, and he then suddenly dropped upon a high, breezy island in a large lake. He was pleased, on looking up, to see all his aunts and uncles following him in the form of birds, and he soon discovered the silver lodge, with his father and mother, descending, with its waving tassels fluttering like so many insects’ gilded wings. It rested on the loftiest cliffs of the island, and there they fixed their residence. They all resumed their natural shapes, but they were diminished to the size of fairies; and as a mark of homage to the King of the Evening Star, they never failed on every pleasant evening during the summer season to join hands and dance upon the top of the rocks. These rocks were quickly observed by the Indians to be covered, in moonlight evenings, with a larger sort of Ininees, or little men, and were called Mish-in-e-mok-in-ok-ong, or Little Spirits, and the island is named from them to this day.

Their shining lodge can be seen in the summer evenings, when the moon beams strongly on the pinnacles of

the rocks; and the fishermen who go near those high cliffs at night, have even heard the voices of the happy little dancers. And Osseo and his wife, as fondly attached to each other as ever, always lead the dance.

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