

The Woman Who Married an Owl

Collected by J.N.B. Hewitt

One day a Skarure family went hunting. The father and mother took their son and daughter with them as they headed out from their home on a long hunting trip. The first they had to make was a hunting lodge of wood poles that they covered with large sheets of bark. In the front, they made an enclosed entrance. The father was a good hunter and it was not long before the front entrance was full of deer and bear meat that was dried and cured.

One day, the mother felt something itch in her hair and asked her daughter to see if she had head lice. Sure enough, the daughter found a louse and the mother told her to kill it.

“After a while, I will kill it,” her daughter said and carried that tiny louse outside. She found a leaf and wrapped the louse inside it. She then placed the rolled leaf in a fork in a tree, and then headed home.

When the father came home from his hunt, the daughter raced to see him. She told him that while hunting for lice in her mother’s hair, she found something very strange. She ran and got the folded leaf and opened it to show her discovery to her father. To her surprise, he said that it was the kind of louse that only owls have. He was visibly concerned. He asked if her mother had stayed near the lodge while he was away. Both the children said their mother would leave during the day. He became very suspicious of his wife, but he said nothing.

In fact, the next day he went hunting as usual. He came across some turkeys who

were having fun running and rolling themselves down a steep hill. He watched them for a while then magically transformed himself into a turkey so that he could talk with them.

“I have a basket at home,” he said to the other turkeys, “Let me go and get it, and you can play with it.”

He raced to his hunting lodge and returned with a large seed basket. “Get in,” he told the turkeys, “and I will pull you down the hill.”

They all jumped in the basket and he pulled them down the hill and they all went running back to the top of the hill for more. He then told them to cover their heads for the second basket ride. They jumped in and he tied a skin cover over the top of the basket. He then picked up the basket and headed for home. There he called his children and opened the basket. One by one the turkeys came out and they killed them all and soon all the turkeys were dressed for cooking. The hunter noticed that his wife was gone, and he asked the children where she went. They said that she took a basket and went to dig tubers. He decided to go look for her.

Before he left, he placed a gourd bowl in each corner of the room, filled with water. From the rafters, he hung the body of a weasel, head downwards. He then told his children, “If the weasel vomits blood when I am gone, you will know that I am dead. But if there is no blood, then you will know that I’m still alive.”

He placed all of the meat outside the door to the lodge and locked the door behind him. He told his children, "Now, do not open the door, no matter who or what comes by and tries to get in."

That night, after he was gone in search of his wife, a bear came to the lodge and began to eat the meat stored outside. The bear approached the door to the lodge and called out, "Grand children, open the door. I have returned." The children would not unlock the door.

Soon after, a lynx came by and began to eat the meat as well. After it got full, it went up to the door and said, "My children, open the door for me. I have returned." But the children knew better than to open the door.

Next came a wolf. It too ate its fill of meat. Then it said, "Open the door for me, I am in a hurry to come in." The children would not unbar the door.

Suddenly a Stone Giant, called Thuneyarhe, came by and ate up all of the meat. He tried to knock the door down. The boy told his sister to climb on his back and together they disappeared into the ground, right near the fireplace. Just as they sunk below the surface, the Stone Giant burst his way in. He looked around and shouted, "Where have the humans gone?"

One of the bowls of water began to mutter horse sounds. The Giant struck it with his powerful war club, shouting, "Where have the human beings gone?"

The next gourd bowl made sounds and he smashed that one too. He repeated his demand and the next two gourd bowls gave a similar response. He grew impatient and sat still for a moment. He concentrated on

the floor and used his powers to see through things to try and locate the children. He saw their tracks by the fireplace and he transformed himself down through the same hole they had entered the earth.

The two kids emerged from the ground and rushed up a tree. Just as quick, the Giant burst forth from the earth in the same spot and began to strike the tree, hoping to knock the children to the ground. But they held on tightly and he grew impatient and disgusted. Giving up, he walked away. The children saw their moment to escape, so they climbed to the top of the tree.

It was there that something magical happened. They ascended into another world. They stepped into this other world to find that it was much like the earth, some parts were good, some were not. The new world was inhabited by a nation of owls. They came across a palisaded village. Inside that village, a great council was taking place. Inside that council, they saw their mother.

Much to their surprise, their mother did not respond to them. In fact, she said that they were not her children, saying that she never gave birth to any children. She sent some ruffians to beat her children and send them away. One captured them and placed them in a basket and carried the basket to a tree that hung over a stream. He tied the basket to the top of the tree so that if the children tried to escape, they would fall in the water and drown.

The children stayed in that basket for a night and the next day until a hunter came along and freed them. He took them to his mother's lodge. Along the way, they camped and cooked some venison. The next day, they reached the lodge. It was there that they

learned about what had happened. It seems that their father was killed by the Owl People because he had tracked down their mother and found her with her lover - an Owl Man. In a rage, their father killed the Owl Man. Their mother escaped and fled to the Owl People and told them of the killing of her owl lover. Their father followed her to the Owl world and tried to talk her into going back with him, but to no avail. She had him killed by some Owl-Warriors. She then lived openly with one of the owls who had murdered her husband.

Not having a family to return to, the children decided to stay with the hunter and his

mother. The boy grew to be well known and respected for his mind and spiritual powers. He became the principle war-chief of the owl nation. He organized a large war party and ventured into the country of the Owl People to avenge the death of his father and to kill his mother for the shame she brought on the family. However, his rage had grown so strong that once he started killing, he could not stop himself. Before he realized what he was doing, he had exterminated the entire race of Owl People. That is why, to this very day, the Owl People exist no more.