

Rough Face Girl

There was once a large village situated on the border of a lake. At one end of the village was a lodge in which lived a being who was always invisible. He was a mighty hunter, whose Spirit Guide was Ti'am, the Moose. He had a sister who attended to all his wants, and it was known that any girl who could see him might marry him. There were few who did not try, but it was a long time before one succeeded.

Towards evening, when the Invisible One was supposed to be returning home, his sister would walk down to the lakeshore with any girls who had come to visit. She could see her brother returning home, since to her he was always visible, and when she saw him, she would say to her companions, "Do you see my brother?"

As it happens, none of these girls could ever see him. However, while some honest girls would say "no," most would answer that they could indeed see him.

Then the sister would ask "Of what is his shoulder strap made?" Or, as some tell the tale, she would inquire about other things, like his sled harness or his bowstring.

They would reply, "A strip of rawhide," or "A green sapling," or something of that kind, and each was a likely guess. But the sister always knew they had not told the truth, and she would turn her face away, and reply quietly, "Very well, let us return to the wigwam."

When they entered the wigwam, she would ask them not to take a certain seat, for it was the seat of the Invisible One. After they had helped to cook supper, they would wait with great curiosity to see him eat. Each would get proof that he was a real person, for as he took off his moccasins they became visible, and his sister would hang them up. They would also see food leaving his birchbark dish and disappear in mid-air, but beyond that they would see nothing.



Elsewhere in the village there lived an old man, a widower with three daughters. The youngest of those was very small, weak, and often ill, but this did not prevent her sisters from treating her with great cruelty. The second daughter was somewhat kinder, and sometimes stood up for her younger sister. But the eldest sister would hack off her hair with

a knife, and burn her hands and face with hot coals. Eventually her whole body was scarred with the marks, so that people called her Oochigeaskw, the Rough-Skin Girl.

When her father returned home from the day, he would ask why the child was so disfigured, and her sister would promptly say that it was the fault of the girl herself, for even though the father had forbidden her from going close to the fire, she had done so anyway, and had fallen in. The father would shake his head, and wonder what would become of his youngest daughter.



One day, it occurred to the two older sisters that they should go and try their luck at seeing the Invisible One. They wore their finest clothing, and took great effort to look their best. That evening they walked to the end of the village, and finding his sister at home went with her to walk down to the water. Then when the Invisible One came, and his sister asked if they saw him, they said, "Certainly," and also replied to the question of the shoulder strap or sled harness saying "A piece of rawhide." Of course, they could not actually see him, and they got nothing for their lies, and eventually went home disappointed.

When their father returned home that evening he brought with him many of the pretty little shells from which wampum was made, and the next day the two older sisters were engaged in stringing the shell beads. Oochigeaskw, of course, was not included in their activity - and she decided that it was time for her to see whether she might catch sight of the Invisible One.

Having no clothes beyond a few rags, and knowing that she would get nothing from her sisters, Oochigeaskw went to the woods and got herself a few sheets of birch bark. She made herself a dress and leggings of this, and decorated it by scraping figures on the bark. Then she found a pair of her father's old moccasins, stiff with age, and soaked them in water so that they would become flexible enough to wear. Finally she begged her sisters for a few wampum shells; while the eldest only called her names, the middle sister felt sorry for her, and gave her a few of the beads.

So poor Oochigeaskw, dressed in birchbark and wampum, and wearing her father's great old moccasins (which came nearly up to her knees,) started across the village to try her luck. And if her sisters' scorn was not bad enough, little Oochigeaskw's courage was tested

further, for the entire village erupted in laughter and ridicule as she passed by. Her sisters tried to shame her into returning home, but she would not obey, and carried on to the door of the Invisible One's lodge despite all the teasing from the village. Some say that a spirit had inspired her, and walked with her to give her strength, and this may indeed be so.



The Invisible One's sister regarded her young visitor with surprise, but she told Oochigeaskw, "You are welcome," and treated her with kindness. As usual, Oochigeaskw helped prepare the evening meal, and when the sun was nearly down, the Invisible One's sister led her to the lake.

"My brother comes," she said, "Do you see him?"

Little Oochigeaskw gazed along the shore. "I'm not sure..."

Then her eyes lit in wonder. "Yes, I see him! But how can there be such a one?"

The sister looked at her curiously. "What is his shoulder strap made from?"

"His shoulder strap is...is a Rainbow!"

The sister's eyes grew wide. "And his bowstring?"

"His bowstring is...the Milky Way!"

His sister smiled. "Let us return to the wigwam."

When they reached the wigwam, the Invisible One's sister took the strange clothes off Oochigeaskw, and washed her with water from a special jar. Under her gentle hands, the young woman's scars disappeared, leaving her skin shining and smooth. She also combed Oochigeaskw's hair, and as she did, it grew to her waist, black and gleaming as a raven's wing and ready for braiding. Oochigeaskw had not been treated with such kindness since her mother had passed on, and the joy in her face transformed it into one of surpassing beauty.

Then the sister opened a chest and took out a beautiful wedding outfit, and asked Oochigeaskw to wear it. She had just put it on when a deep voice said, "Greetings, my sister."

Oochigeaskw turned to the entrance and stared at the magnificent young hunter. She saw surprise light his face when their eyes met.

"Greetings, my brother," said the sister. "You are discovered at last!"

The Invisible One walked over to Oochigeaskw and took her hands in his. "For years I have waited to find a woman of pure heart and brave spirit. Only such a one could see me. And now that I have found you, you shall be my bride."

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And so they were married. And from then on, Oochigeaskw had a new name: the Lovely One. Like her husband, she too had kept herself hidden, waiting for the right person to find her, and now that she had that person's love, she was hidden no more.