

# **Why The Owl Flies at Night**

## **A Story of Good St. Anthony**

by Elsie Spicer Eells

Long ago there was an image of the good St. Anthony washed ashore by the rough waves of the Bay of Angra. A little chapel was built to receive it on the steep slopes of Monte Brasil overlooking the bay and here it still remains.

Once upon a time a little boy named Pedro lived in a tiny cottage near St. Anthony's shrine. His mother had died and his father had married a new wife who was often cruel to him. She dressed him in ragged, shabby clothes and the other children of the parish often pointed their fingers at him in scorn because of his poor garments.

One day as Pedro knelt before the image of the good saint a strange thing happened. His clothing became new and whole. He was dressed as well as any boy in the parish.

"Where did you get clothes like this?" asked the stepmother when he came home that night. "I always knew you were a good-for-nothing. I believe you have stolen them."

Little Pedro told what had happened, but the woman would not believe him.

"Don't stand there talking any longer!" she cried. "Take the water jars and go to the spring and fill them for me. Hurry, I don't want to be kept waiting for the water!"

Pedro lifted the two great water jars which stood on the floor and slowly climbed up the hill to the little spring which supplied water for the family needs during the greater part of the year. Just now the spring had failed, as the stepmother had found out that very day.

"There is no water in the spring now," said an old man whom little Pedro met on the way. The boy had almost reached the spring and the big jars were growing heavy even though they were empty.

"I'm so nearly there I'll go on and see for myself," decided the lad. "The other spring is so far away and the jars will be so heavy that I can never carry them all the long distance. Perhaps there is still a little water here."

When he reached the spring he was surprised to see the water flowing faster than in many a day. He remembered, too, the new suit of clothes he was wearing.

"Luck is with me to-day!" he cried as he filled the water jars. "The good saint Anthony is my friend. He it is who has given me my handsome clothing and he it is who has blessed the spring for me."

When he returned home with the jars full of water his stepmother stared at him in amazement. He had not been gone long enough to obtain it from the farther spring.

"Where did you get this water?" she asked, as soon as she could find words with which to speak.

Pedro told her that it came from the spring just as it always did.

"That spring is dry to-day!" she cried. "Now I know that you are a liar as well as a thief. Just wait until your father comes home! I'll see that you get the beating you deserve."

Pedro wondered why she had sent him to the spring if she had believed it to be dry, and while he was thinking of this the angry woman gave him a big basket.

"Here," she said. "Go out in the garden and pick up some wood for me. Hurry. Don't keep me waiting. Your slow ways drive me mad."

Pedro knew that all the wood in the garden had been picked up long ago. Now there was nothing in the garden except roses. There were red roses and pink roses and yellow roses and white roses, but not a single stick of wood. High up on the steep slopes of Monte Brasil there might be wood to gather, but the night was dark and the path was steep and long. Little Pedro was very tired, so tired that two great tears rolled down his cheeks.

Suddenly the good saint Anthony from the little chapel stood before him. He smiled kindly at the child. "Why are you crying, my boy?" asked the saint. "I have watched you carefully for a long time and I know you seldom give way to tears, though often your burdens are so heavy that a boy less brave would do little else than weep."

"I have to fill my basket with wood and there is nothing except roses in our garden," replied Pedro. "I'm tired and it is very dark on Monte Brasil to search there for wood."

"Here, dear boy," said the saint, smiling. "Just pick the roses and fill your basket with them. Then take them to your stepmother and see what she will say to you. I'll be with you."

Pedro filled his big basket with the lovely red and yellow and pink and white roses which grew in the garden in such rich abundance. Then he ran into the house with them. As the light from the candles fell upon them, to his amazement he saw that they were no longer roses. The basket was full of wood.

"Where did you get this wood?" cried the woman angrily. "There are only roses in the garden. Where have you been?"

She seized Pedro roughly by the collar of his new coat and shook him until his teeth chattered. He looked up into the saint's eyes. St. Anthony's face was stern.

"Stop, woman!" cried the voice which a moment before had been so kind and gentle. Now it thundered forth in stern accents. "This little lad has done no harm. You have been guilty of a desire to bring harm to him, For this cruelty take the punishment which you so richly merit. It is you who have sent this child out into the night. Now it is I who sends you out into the night."

From that moment Pedro's stepmother was no longer a woman. She was changed into an owl with her eyes the big round circles they had looked when she had gazed up into the fierce face of angry St. Anthony. To this very day the owl has to fly by night.

Source:

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