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Perfectly Beautiful and Beautifully Perfect

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PERFECTLY BEAUTIFUL AND BEAUTIFULLY PERFECT

My mother was an Oshuna woman. She was perfectly beautiful to herself and to the world. Often she looked into her mirror and said to herself and to all who could hear, "What a perfectly beautiful woman I am. There has never been anyone quite as exquisite as I."

When first I looked at her from the great beyond and saw her perfectly painted red fingernails and her perfectly powdered face with two perfectly arched eyebrows drawn high above her perfect dark eyes, I decided that I wanted this perfectly beautiful woman to be my mother. I submitted my petition to her and she accepted; but only if I would be a perfectly beautiful child. To assure this she obtained from my hard working father to be, a fortune in cowrie shells and mounds of salt to be given to Ajula who guarded the entrance into the world from the Other place. She impressed on me the great sacrifice she was making by giving these riches to obtain me when she could otherwise have used them to purchase more elegant gowns and precious jewelry for her own adornment. Instead I was to be a reflection of her beauty.

I took the cowrie shells and salt to Ajula to obtain the best quality perfectly beautiful human head that he had in stock. He was feeling obstinate however, so I had to be clever and charm him with a little dance before he let me choose my head. At last he said, "OK, you may choose from the hut containing the most beautiful and perfect heads." Entering the hut, I looked over all the heads until I found one that I thought was perfectly beautiful. In a delighted rush to take this head and show

it to my new mother, I tripped over the door step and dropped the beautiful head on the ground. Away it rolled through the sand and dirt coming to rest against a rock. How could I have been so clumsy! I quickly picked up the head and brushed off the grime before Ajula saw what I had done. I fixed it up pretty well. There were a few small pock marks from tiny stones that had stuck to it and a very small crack in the side. It looked perfect as long as no one examined it too closely. When I held my head very still, only I could hear the rattle inside. I wore my head smiling to my mother, although now I went with a heavy heart because I could never tell her that I was not completely perfect. I knew that if she realized I was not perfect she would reject me utterly and Ajula would never give back the cowries and salt for this damaged head. All through my childhood I tried to appear to be perfect but I know my mother was suspicious. She would sometimes get very angry and scream at me, wondering how I could possibly be HER daughter. I did not tell about dropping my head. She trained me carefully in mirror gazing and face painting so that I might trap for myself a husband with many cowrie shells and much salt. My heart wasn't in it because I knew I was not a perfectly beautiful Oshuna woman, but I tried my best.

To please my perfectly beautiful mother, I did find a perfectly beautiful husband who gazed so intently into his own mirror that he didn't notice my cracked head. He gave me cowries and salt for two sons. I was

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delighted with our adorable sons, but he was too intent on his mirror to take much notice. As time passed, the crack in the side of my head became wider and the rattle louder. Then my perfectly beautiful husband did notice and in a rage shouted, "How could you do this to me? I thought you were perfect! I am going out to find a really perfect wife. Do not be here when I return." Blinded by tears and a terrible pain in my less than perfect head, I rushed away taking my two beloved sons with me. We hoped for the protection of my mother, but when she saw the terrible crack in my head, she too screamed, "Get out of my sight, you are no daughter of mine! I have only perfectly beautiful children!"

With my sons I fled to the forest. We wandered in the wilderness for many years. Together we gathered nuts and berries and learned what we could and could not eat. Slowly we became wise about the ways of the forest and its creatures. Occasionally my father came secretly to the woods and taught my sons how to hunt. My sons learned quickly and brought home small animals for food and clothing. As they grew stronger and wiser they were able to bring larger animals for our use. One day they came back with empty hands and astonished faces. They had been stalking deer in the forest. When they approached, two deer looked at them with the eyes of women. The young men froze in their tracks and then the deer spoke silently to their hearts. "Will you come away with us? We will make you happy as kings. Meet us here tomorrow with your answer."

The following day my sons took me with them to meet the deer women who asked me to give them my sons. I responded, "They are men now and thus are not mine to give. They are free to do as they wish and if they choose to go with you, deer women, they go with my blessings."

In exchange for the loss of my sons I received a map that indicates the path to the Mystic Mountain where lives Obatala, the Godmother of us all. The path is meandering and sometimes difficult. The mountain hides in clouds and mist much of the time. But I pursue the path with open eyes, knowing that if I persevere, eventually I will be reunited with Obatala and know myself as I truly am — not perfectly beautiful but beautifully perfect.

— *Pamela B. Lowrie*