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Telltale

by Sue Hitchcock

Telltale, tell a tale! Need it be the truth?

Not a word reliable, but meanings are inside.

“Listen, children! In your youth

The way may need a guide.”

The tribe has eaten, sitting round the fire.

Some kids still play, the babies start to tire

Mothers snuggle infants close,

Men stretch out their legs.

Young men nudge each other, eyeing up the girls.

The waiting now is over, the old lady appears.

Young girls sit close, pricking up their ears.

“Wide is the gate and broad is the way”

she warns them.

Is that so?

The tale she tells is winding, where might it go?

“Once upon a time” she says!

“There was a girl like you.”

Girls, wide-eyed, wait to know what might come.

“At first she knew the path, each twist and turn,

But darkness came, lit only by the thinnest moon,”

She pointed up, the girls looked round,

“The new moon gave her little light,

Just like tonight.

“Away she went, away, away.

Was she fleeing anger, fear?

Was it her Self she sought that day?

She felt the air move by her cheek,

Then heard the owl ask, ‘Hooo, who?’

‘Who am I? What do I seek?’

The owl was silent watching only.

The girl felt cold, tired and lonely.

Morning came – it always does –

Encouraged by the sun, on she goes.”

“what did she find?” the listeners ask.

A deep breath to continue the task,

The tale just forming in her mind,

“The daylight showed dangers left behind,

A snake slithering into a ditch,

A spider eyed her, gave a twitch.

“Never mind! Water was her urgent need,

So seeing trees, she walked with speed.
Surely they must grow by a pool.
As she approached she heard a tune,
Not one she knew but high and sweet.
And what a rhythm, what a beat.
Under the trees were women, washing,
Bashing clothes on rocks between their feet,
Just like her mother and her aunts,
Their work was eased by happy chants.
But they looked different, hair hung loose,
Not tied on top, as hers was too.
They stopped to stare, and spoke strange words.
The girl mimed drinking. They point towards
The spring which fed their pool.
She bowed her thanks and drank her fill.
“Do you think it’s what she sought?”

The listeners now were deep in thought.
This was no different from her home.

“ When work was done they took her back
To smaller village , to different shack.
As evening came the circle formed.
They ate, and like her tribe they warmed
and waited for the elder to come
To introduce, to bid the girl ‘welcome’.
Was everything the same as home?
No, strange, but now a wife to become.
She untied her hair and hid her eyes,

While wondering about the boys.
Was there a man for her new life?
Would she be happy, free from strife?"

It wasn't a tale they didn't know,
Young girls need to hear when it's time to go.
They went to bed, as night time came.
Tomorrow a tale for boys to dream.