

Why Opossum's Tail is Bare

a Cherokee Pourquoi Tale

A long, long time ago Opossum's tail was long and bushy.

He loved his tail and spent all day cleaning and brushing it. When anyone came to visit him, he made them listen to his latest song or poem about his tail. And when all the animals got together for a dance he demanded a special seat so everyone could admire his beautiful tail.

Wow! He was so boring!

Rabbit couldn't stand it anymore. He decided to play a trick on Opossum. The next dance was booked for tomorrow night. He went to Opossum's house to invite him personally. "I must have a special seat" said Opossum. "Everyone must be able to see my beautiful bushy tail."

"Of course you'll have a special seat" said Rabbit. "Everyone will see and admire your tail. No other animal has one as beautiful as yours."

Opossum swished his tail proudly, not realizing Rabbit was making fun of him.

"As a special treat" said Rabbit, "Cricket the barber will comb and trim your tail tomorrow afternoon, so it will look more beautiful than ever."

Opossum was very pleased and Rabbit ran off as fast as he could, because he couldn't stop laughing.

The next day Cricket came to Opossum's house. "Thank you for letting me groom your beautiful tail, Opossum. I will be able to tell my grandchildren."

"Yes, combing my tail is a great honor for your family" said vain Opossum.

Cricket took his comb and scissors and a long shiny red ribbon from his bag. "This is special ribbon" said Cricket. "When I've combed and trimmed your sumptuous tail I'll wrap it in this ribbon so it won't pick up any dust on your way to the dance."

"That's an excellent idea" said Opossum "My tail mustn't get dirty."

Cricket's gentle combing of his tail soon made Opossum sleepy.

He started to snore loudly and didn't stir until Cricket woke him. Opossum looked at the bright shiny ribbon wrapped around his tail. "All the other animals will envy my beautiful tail when I unwrap it" he said.

When he arrived at the dance, Rabbit led Opossum to his special seat. When the music started he stood up and said to the others "When I remove this ribbon, you can admire my beautiful tail as I dance. There is no other tail as beautiful as mine."

Without looking behind him, Opossum loosened the ribbon, wriggled his tail free and then vainly pranced around the dance floor in time to the music.

Rabbit put a hand over his mouth to smother his laughter. Cricket began to laugh in his little high pitched voice and all the other animals joined in. Finally vain Opossum could hear them over the music.

He looked at the other animals. They were laughing and pointing at his tail! He looked down, horrified. His long beautiful bushy tail was now as bald and scaly as a lizard's tail. Cricket had cut off every hair with his sharp scissors.

Opossum was so surprised and embarrassed he couldn't speak. All he could do was roll over on his back - which is what Opossums do today if you surprise or embarrass them.