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ROSABEL

by

David Lowe

inspired by the 1894 Laurence Housman
short story 'Japonel'

Second draft 10 July 2003

AWG Registration No. TBC

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c/- ICS & Associates
Level 5
62 Clarence Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Australia

tel (02) 9232 6955
fax (02) 9221 4091
email belinda@icsassoc.com.au
direct tel (02) 6493 6135
email davidlowe@acr.net.au

1. EXT. FOREST DAY 1.

A gorgeous and joyful young woman, ROSABEL, picks wildflowers in a forest clearing.

NARRATOR (VOICEOVER)
Once upon a time there lived a girl named Rosabel. Of all the things that lived in the forest, Rosabel was the most beautiful.

Rosabel smiles at the flowers, a beautiful glowing smile. A nearby rabbit stops eating and stares.

2. INT. COTTAGE DAY 2.

Rosabel's MOTHER, a sturdy middle-aged woman, stirs a pot on the stove as Rosabel arranges the flowers in a vase on the table.

ROSABEL
Look mother, isn't it lovely?

Rosabel's mother turns and smiles, nodding, but her eyes linger when Rosabel turns back to the flowers. Mother looks worried about something.

3. EXT. COTTAGE DAY 3.

Rosabel's FATHER, a worn, middle-aged man with big honest hands, chops firewood with an axe. MOTHER stands nearby.

ROSABEL sits some distance away, combing her beautiful long hair in the sun while she sings to herself.

MOTHER
Our child is too fair; she will get no good of it.

FATHER
What harm can come to her here, far from anywhere?

MOTHER
If the Pond Spirit sees her, she will become envious.

FATHER
Then we must keep her from the water.

4. EXT/INT. MONTAGE DAY 4.

Rosabel happily scatters grain for the wild birds of the forest. They snatch the seeds eagerly.

NARRATOR

Although the family was poor,
Rosabel always had a hand to
lend and something to share.

With effort, Rosabel lifts a bucket of water from the well.

Rosabel waters the flowers in the cottage garden. They turn their faces to her.

Rosabel rescues a rabbit from a snare.

Later, her father finds the snare empty and scowls.

The family sit around the simple table at breakfast, each with a single apple. While no one is looking, Rosabel hides her apple in her apron.

Alone in the stable with BOBBY the Clydesdale heavy horse, Rosabel produces the apple with a smile. Bobby munches it happily while Rosabel strokes his mane.

5. EXT. FOREST PATH DAY 5.

Rosabel and her mother bump along the forest path in a spring cart pulled by Bobby. The birds sing at the sight of Rosabel, and the beautiful girl whistles back.

NARRATOR

In Rosabel's house there were
no mirrors.

Suddenly a lovely feather falls from the trees and into their path. Rosabel sees the feather.

ROSABEL

Wait!

Rosabel's mother pulls on the reins and stops the cart as Rosabel jumps out to pick up the feather before it's squashed into the mud.

Beside the feather on the ground is a small muddy puddle. Rosabel forgets the feather as she catches sight of her own reflection in the puddle. She stares at herself, amazed.

(CONTINUED)

3.

Mother leaps down from the cart.

MOTHER

Don't go near the water! It's
not safe!

She pulls Rosabel away.

ROSABEL

Not safe? It's not even deep!

Quickly, using the feather, mother stirs up the mud in
the puddle until the reflections disappear.

6. EXT. COTTAGE DAY 6.

An exotic-looking PEDLAR approaches the cottage, his
donkeys loaded with goods of all descriptions.

NARRATOR

But Rosabel's mother remembered
the Pond Spirit. She decided
that unless she did something,
Rosabel would go searching for
her reflection again. Sooner or
later she would find the
enchanted pond.

Rosabel's mother meets the pedlar and offers him a
silver coin.

From his donkey panniers, the pedlar produces a small,
circular mirror with a handle. A snake eating its tail
decorates the edge. He hands it to Rosabel's mother.

7. INT. COTTAGE DAY 7.

With great ceremony, Rosabel's mother and father hand
their daughter a package wrapped in cloth.

Rosabel, sitting, smiles and unwraps the gift. It's the
mirror.

Rosabel stares and stares at herself in wonder. She
forgets her parents, in silent communion with her
beautiful image.

8. INT. COTTAGE NIGHT 8.

Rosabel hasn't moved. A candle gutters. Rosabel, alone,
stares into the mirror, entranced.

9. EXT. FOREST DAY 9.

Rosabel walks through the forest, staring at herself in the hand mirror. The birds call to her, but she doesn't call back.

She passes a rabbit caught in a snare, but pays the animal no heed.

10. EXT. COTTAGE DAY 10.

Rosabel sits by the well, staring into the mirror intently. The bucket is empty. The flowers are wilting.

11. INT. STABLE DAY 11.

Bobby the horse whinnies disconsolately, hungry and alone.

12. INT. COTTAGE DAY 12.

Rosabel sits at the kitchen table, staring at herself in the mirror. Her father, disgusted, takes his axe and goes out, slamming the door. Rosabel doesn't blink.

Her mother stands nearby.

MOTHER

Oh my beautiful, my bright
darling, I have made you vain.

Lost in herself, ROSABEL doesn't look up.

ROSABEL

Dear mother, does my mirror
tell me everything of my
beauty, or am I in other eyes
fairer still?

MOTHER

(sadly)
I trust the open eye of God
finds in you a better beauty
than your mirror can tell you
of.

Rosabel puts the mirror down and looks at her mother with a strange smile.

Upset, her mother looks away.

13. EXT. FOREST/POOL DAY/TWILIGHT 13.

Dreamily, Rosabel walks through the mournful, silent forest. In the distance she sees a deep round pond, perfectly still and reflecting the sky.

NARRATOR

When Rosabel saw the pond, she wondered if perhaps this was the place where God would open his eye and reveal her true beauty.

ROSABEL

What harm can it do?

Rosabel follows a path of skin-coloured stones.

When she reaches the pool, she looks up. A little old woman in green is kneeling by the pool, looking into the water. This is the POND SPIRIT.

ROSABEL

Oh! You startled me.

POND SPIRIT

I'm sorry, dear. I thought I was alone.

Rosabel comes closer.

ROSABEL

What have you found in there, that you gaze at so intently?

POND SPIRIT

My own face, but a hundred times younger and fairer.

Excited, Rosabel takes off her shoes. She approaches the pond and kneels beside the old lady. She looks into the water. Her reflection is there, pale and tremulous.

The reflection is mute, but seems to be trying to say: 'Quick! Go away!'

Rosabel stares, confused. She doesn't notice the Pond Spirit slipping into the pond; she's clothed in very long, green, weed-like hair.

The Pond Spirit grabs Rosabel's reflected self and draws her down into the depths of the pool.

(CONTINUED)

Terrified, Rosabel searches for her reflection, but the water is dark and empty. Faintly, her own face appears momentarily, mouth open and beseeching.

Three bubbles break the surface of the water in a ghostly echo of the three syllables of Rosabel's name.

ROSABEL'S REFLECTION
RO... SA... BEL...

Suddenly it's twilight. Frightened, Rosabel wraps her shawl around her shoulders and hurries home.

14. INT. COTTAGE - BEDROOM NIGHT 14.

Rosabel hurries into her room and takes her hand mirror from under the bed. She stares into it. There is no reflection at all. Rosabel falls on the bed, weeping.

15. INT. COTTAGE DAY 15.

Rosabel's father enters the cottage, looking haggard. Mother looks up at him questioningly, still in her night-dress. He holds up Rosabel's shoes.

FATHER
These were by the pool.

Mother bursts into tears. Father sags in gloom, staring at the shoes. Rosabel enters the room. Her parents don't look up.

FATHER
I searched all night. There's
no other sign of her.

ROSABEL
I'm here.

Her parents don't react.

ROSABEL (CONT)
I'm here!

MOTHER
Did you hear that?

FATHER
It's just the wind.

Rosabel moves and stands between them.

(CONTINUED)

7.

ROSABEL

I am here!

But she's invisible to them. Frustrated, Rosabel bangs the table with her fist.

Her parents jump. The vase falls and crashes to the floor, spilling dead flowers.

Frightened, Father takes up his axe, looking about him wildly and brandishing it.

FATHER

Be gone, spirit! Stop
tormenting us!

Upset and horrified, Rosabel runs outside.

16. INT. STABLE DAY 16.

Rosabel enters the stable and lies down in the straw, weeping uncontrollably. Bobby the horse turns his head to her. He speaks telepathically in a Scottish accent.

BOBBY

It's your own fault, you know.

Rosabel sits up with a start and looks around.

ROSABEL

Who is that?

BOBBY

If you hadn't been so vain, and
got so obsessed with yourself,
none of this would have
happened.

Rosabel stares at Bobby in amazement.

ROSABEL

What do you know about my
troubles?

BOBBY

I know plenty.

ROSABEL

You're a horse!

BOBBY

Very observant of you.

(CONTINUED)

8.

ROSABEL

What I mean is, these sorts of things don't happen to horses.

BOBBY

You deserved it.

ROSABEL

What?!

BOBBY

You used to be so kind and cheerful and generous. Ever since you got that mirror you've thought of no one but yourself.

Rosabel stands up.

ROSABEL

I'm not going to be insulted by a horse.

BOBBY

Oh yes you are!

ROSABEL

No I am not!

Rosabel gets up and slams the door. Bobby chuckles to himself.

17. EXT. FOREST DAY 17.

Rosabel wanders disconsolately through the forest, eating wild berries.

18. EXT. ENCHANTED POND DAY 18.

Rosabel approaches the edge of the pool. All is silent. Rosabel can find no reflection of herself. Silently, she weeps into the pool.

Bubble by bubble, words break through the water's surface.

ROSABEL'S REFLECTION

I am the face of Rosabel,
The beauty and grace of Rosabel
Here under a spell, Rosabel
I dwell, Rosabel...

(CONTINUED)

For a moment, Rosabel glimpses her own reflected self in the depths of the pond, then green weed swirls and all is dark.

19. EXT. COTTAGE TWILIGHT 19.

Rosabel approaches the cottage, lit invitingly from within, but the door is bolted. She turns away. There's no place for her inside.

20. EXT. FOREST NIGHT 20.

Wrapped in her shawl, Rosabel curls up on the forest floor and tries to go to sleep. The trees drop leaves to make a blanket for her.

21. EXT. FOREST DAY 21.

Rosabel wakes to hear some scuffling in the leaves nearby. She goes to investigate, and finds a rabbit caught in one of her father's snares.

She releases the rabbit, and absent-mindedly drops her shawl.

22. EXT. MONTAGE DAY 22.

Rosabel scatters seeds for the birds of the forest.

She draws water from the well near the cottage and waters the flowers, who turn their heads towards her.

Rosabel's father finds the empty snare, and is disappointed. Then he sees Rosabel's shawl lying there. He picks it up and looks about him hopefully.

Rosabel finds a beautiful single apple on a tree deep in the forest. She picks it, and is about to eat it, then thinks twice, and puts it in her apron pocket.

23. INT. STABLE DAY 23.

Rosabel approaches Bobby the horse.

ROSABEL
I brought you something.

Rosabel offers the apple to Bobby, who munches it happily.

(CONTINUED)

10.

BOBBY (SPEAKS TELEPATHICALLY)
Have you got any more?

ROSABEL
There was only one, sorry.

She strokes his mane and withers.

BOBBY
I'm glad you came back.

She smiles at him and keeps stroking.

BOBBY (CONTINUED)
In the cellar there's a bottle
of wine.

ROSABEL
Do you like wine?

BOBBY
It's not for me.

ROSABEL
I don't think I like wine.

BOBBY
It's not for you either!

24. INT. CELLAR/COTTAGE DAY 24.

Deep in the cellar, in the bottom of a rack, right at the back, Rosabel finds an old bottle of wine. It's covered in dust. She gets it out and blows the dust off. The dust makes her sneeze.

Up above in the cottage, Rosabel's mother stops her knitting and cocks her ear to the sound curiously.

25. EXT. FOREST/POND DAY 25.

Carrying the bottle of wine, Rosabel walks towards the enchanted pond, barefoot.

NARRATOR
The horse told Rosabel what to do with the wine, but he didn't say what would happen next. Rosabel would have to see that for herself.

(CONTINUED)

Rosabel reaches the edge of the pond. As usual, her reflection is missing. With difficulty, she uncaps the wine and pours it into the pond.

She waits. Nothing happens. Disappointed, Rosabel turns to go.

Behind her, bubbles rise.

Rosabel stops and turns around. From the depths of the pool rises the Pond Spirit, fast asleep and snoring, surrounded by green tendrils of weedlike hair.

After a few seconds, something else rises from the depths. It's Rosabel's reflection, caught up in a net of green hair.

Rosabel beckons her reflection, who seems delighted to see her, although pale and wan-looking.

The reflection swims higher as Rosabel leans out over the pool, very close to the water, until the two Rosabels are centimetres apart.

Rosabel kisses her reflection. She opens her eyes to see herself a mirror image once more, freed from the Pond Spirit's spell.

Quickly, she steps back away from the pond.

The Pond Spirit wakes and screams with rage. A green slimy hand grabs Rosabel's foot, but the girl wriggles free and darts away.

The Pond Spirit is trapped in the pool. Water swirls as she sinks back into the depths. Then she's gone.

26. INT/EXT. COTTAGE

DAY

26.

Rosabel runs to the door of the cottage and falls into the delighted arms of her mother and father.

NARRATOR

And so Rosabel lived happily ever after, amongst those who loved her so well. She left the mirror under her bed, where it belonged, and found much better things to do than stare at herself all day.