

How the Beetle Got Her Colors (Brazilian Fable)

Along time ago Beetle was just plain gray. Rat used to make fun of her. “You ugly little thing!” he teased. “Of all the animals in the forest, you are surely the plainest. You don’t have a beautiful brown furry coat like me. You don’t have a gold coat and black spots like the jaguar. You don’t have feathers of gold and green and blue and red like Parrot over there. If I were as plain as you, I’d hide all day in the bushes!”

Now Parrot sat high in a tree, and day after day he listened to Rat tease poor Beetle. Parrot didn’t like what he heard. So one day he said, “I propose a race between Rat and Beetle. The prize will be a beautiful coat of any color the winner wishes.”

“Ho, Ho!” squealed Rat. “This will be an easy race to win. I can run very fast on my four strong legs, while Beetle can only creep along on her six tiny, shiny ones.”

The race began, and as Rat dashed ahead he thought about the coat he would claim when he won the race. “While I like my brown coat,” he thought as he scurried along, “I think I will have parrot add a gold stripe down the back, or maybe a few beautiful green spots on top of my head. No, maybe I’ll ask for blue stripes and red spots.”

Whenever Rat looked back behind him, Beetle was nowhere in sight. Rat felt sure of victory. “Silly little Beetle!” he thought. “What nerve she has to think she can win a race with me!” How I’ll laugh at her when I’m wearing my beautiful new coat!”

But when Rat reached the finish line, there was Beetle waiting for him! “How can this be?” cried Rat. “How did you win, you slow, plain little thing?”

“I *flew*,” said Beetle

“You *flew*?” said Rat angrily. “I didn’t know you could fly!”

Parrot laughed from the treetop. “After this,” he said to Rat, “don’t judge others by their appearance. Even the plainest-looking creatures may have powers that you lack.”

Rat went grumbling off through the forest. As for Beetle, she chose a coat as green as the trees and as gold as the sun. And those are the colors she has to this very day.

Source: *Multicultural Fables and Fairy Tales (Grades 1-4)*. Tara McCarthy. Scholastic Professional Books. 1992.