

Flock Together

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On a branch in the tallest pine tree of the forest there sat four owls wearing flowers for hats.

The first one had chosen a hat that fit the shape of his head in an appropriate size that balanced well with the proportions of his egg-shaped body. He chose a color that was neither boring nor too flamboyant. A pale yellow. He was neutral on the subject of flowers for hats. It wasn't something he particularly wanted to put on his head, but as it was the thing to wear, he went along with the majority opinion. First Owl was not an owl known to have strong opinions of his own.

The second owl, however, had selected a stem thick with a duster-shaped puff of fuchsia flowers that made him twice as tall. He wore an expression that said, "go ahead, mention the flower on my head." His scowl was as wide as his little face.

The third owl had arranged a collection of elegant grasses interwoven with abstract twigs. In the center of the hat, he had placed a scarlet bee balm flower, artfully off-center. It was clear by the level of effort required to construct such a masterpiece that third owl was into the whole hat thing.

The fourth owl had selected a pointy tipped cone of dense flowers that he wore like a mohawk. Or shark's fin! If he was going to wear a flower for a hat, he was going to wear the most bad-ass flower there was.

A soft breeze fluttered the petals perched on the owls' heads bringing with it a cardinal who came swooping onto the branch beside them.

"What's with the flowers on your heads?" he asked. "Trying to brighten yourselves up?"

Everyone knew that cardinals thought themselves the most attractive bird in the forest because they were so red.

Second Owl scowled at him, far below the tip of his hat.

"What's it to you?" asked Fourth Owl in his badassest voice.

"Nothing; I just think it's neat," the cardinal said, and he swooped off the branch and away.

Second Owl ruffled his feathers. First Owl just hooted, not because he had anything to say, but because owls were supposed to do that sometimes.

The cardinal was back. He was wearing a sprig of forget-me-nots that were quite fetching.

"What do you think you're doing?" asked Third Owl with an affronted sounding hoot. He ruffled his feathers and an artfully placed twig fell off his head.

“This sure is neat!” the cardinal said exuberantly. A red cardinal in a forget-me-not blue flower bonnet was much more striking than a bunch of fat grey and tan owls in ill-matching hats.

Soon all of the colorful birds in the forest were following the trend.

Third Owl was the first to shake off his hat. The trend was no longer elite, and he prided himself too much on being unique. Fourth Owl always did what Third Owl did, so he ditched the floral hawk. Second Owl actually still liked his hat but didn’t want to admit it, so he took it off saying, “Glad I can stop wearing this dumb hat.”

And First Owl flew in line with the majority opinion and placed his perfectly proportionate hat on the branch beside him. Perhaps another bird with an egg-shaped head would like it. “What are we doing now?” he asked.

The third owl looked around. He looked up. He looked down. He turned his head behind him. At last, he picked away a piece of bark from the branch with his mouse-kill-sharp beak and punctured it on the bottom of one of his taloned feet. “We start a new trend!”

All of the owls followed suit, ripping off bark and attaching the pieces to the bottom of their feet.

Good, I am glad I know what we are doing now, thought First Owl.

I liked the flower better, Second Owl thought bitterly.

Let’s see those little talonless birds try and copy this trend, thought Third Owl.

I’ll follow the trend, but I’ll make it my own, thought Fourth Owl. *I’m gonna wear the knottiest, baddest, bark there ever was.*

As soon as they all were wearing their bark shoes another soft breeze blew through the pines.

The owls tried to grip the branch but could not—bark on their feet and all—and all four owls were blown off.

Some trends don’t stick for a reason.