

## “Gumbo, the Nutria”

In a time not too long ago, and in a place not too far away, lived Gumbo the Nutria, who was a self-proclaimed treasure hunter. It was just another day, swimming through the canal, and digging up treasures, when he came across a shiny purple coin, floating down in the water. As he swam towards it, he noticed it had strange writing, which he showed to his friend, Audubon the squirrel.

“What’s this say?” he asked.

“It’s a doubloon from the Mardi Gras, a vast treasure trove in New Orleans. My friend Ricky rat told me about it,” said Audubon.

“I must find that treasure! Thanks, Audubon, I’ll be on my way!” exclaimed Gumbo.

He ran to his burrow, packed up his things, and headed for New Orleans, determined to find this “mardi gras.”

He got to the highway and realized that he had no way to get to the city! He walked up to the highway and gave a big thumbs up, hoping that someone would help him, but everyone kept driving, ignoring him. Then, suddenly he heard a squawk up above, loud as thunder. He gazed up at the cloudy blue sky and saw a pelican! He started to run towards the trees, but the pelican swooped down and scooped him up.

Gumbo cried, “Don’t eat me, please!”

“Eat you?” asked the pelican, “I’m not going to eat you, I’m here to help you. I saw that you needed a ride to get somewhere, so I thought I would help.”

“Oh, well in that case, can you take me to New Orleans?” Gumbo asked.

“Sure can!” and then the pelican zoomed off with Gumbo in tow.

The pelican soared over cars, trucks, and buildings, as Gumbo watched New Orleans get closer and closer. He saw majestic birds in trees and minuscule ants on the ground. They got nearer to the ground and Gumbo was mesmerized. He spied king cake, beads, bowls of gumbo, which he was very excited about, and floats.

The pelican put Gumbo on the floor, and Gumbo said, "I never truly got your name."

The pelican said, "The name's Jessie, how about you?"

"My name's Gumbo, and thanks for the ride, I'll see you around."

Gumbo raced towards the floats and all the flashing lights, wondering what the humans were celebrating, but didn't ask, for his mind was set on one thing and one thing alone, the Mardi Gras treasure. He kept running and running until he realized he didn't know where he was going. He had no clue where the treasure was!

Suddenly, someone noticed him racing around in a hurry. It was a human! The person picked him up and said, "What's a little nutria doing in a place like New Orleans? I have to get you to somewhere safe."

Gumbo squirmed and wiggled, trying to get away, but it was no use; the human just wouldn't let go! The person hopped in a car, put Gumbo in a cage, and started driving. After what seemed like forever, they finally got to where they were going, a zoo. The man, who the other people called Dave, rushed into the zoo and handed poor Gumbo to the zookeepers.

"Why am I here?" asked Gumbo, but there was no answer from the humans. The zookeepers walked him towards a caged-in place that looked just like his home. He was dropped in, all alone, and he wondered how he would get out of here to find the treasure.

Then, all of a sudden, came Jessie the pelican, ready to save the day. She quietly landed in the exhibit, like a mouse hiding from a person. She then told him, "I realized I never asked why you came here and I can tell it's a good thing that I came."

Gumbo responded, "I wanted to be here since I heard that there was a treasure called Mardi Gras."

"Mardi Gras? Oh, no Gumbo, it's not a treasure, it's a parade!" she exclaimed.

"Parade?" he questioned, "What's that?"

"It's like a celebration, and Mardi Gras means Fat Tuesday in french. It used to be a break from fasting for lent, but lately, it's evolved into something more."

“Like what?” Gumbo said

“It’s become a holiday to celebrate the good times and live in the moment, there isn’t much treasure, other than a few plastic beads they throw,” stated Jessie.

“Wow, I never thought that a holiday could be more about friends and family than treasure. I wish I could celebrate this, but I’m stuck here,” Gumbo said, downtrodden.

“Well, I could get you out if you want,” Jessie motioned to the sky.

But then, Dave, the human who took Gumbo here, walked over, picked up Gumbo, and put a crown on him. “This is the new king of Mardi Gras, and the most recent addition to the zoo, Gumbo the nutria!”

Gumbo was completely surprised but took his new role as the king of Mardi Gras seriously. He was allowed to visit his old home whenever he wanted and was a fan favorite on his famous gumbo bowl float every Mardi Gras. So, in the end, Gumbo learned that friendship and family mean more than any treasure in the world. The End.