

The Mink and the Wolf

Brothers Grimm

Native American/north American

Intermediate
9 min read

In a big forest in the north of America lived a quantity of wild animals of all sorts. They were always very polite when they met; but, in spite of that, they kept a close watch one upon the other, as each was afraid of being killed and eaten by somebody else. But their manners were so good that no one would ever had guessed that.

One day a smart young wolf went out to hunt, promising his grandfather and grandmother that he would be sure to be back before bedtime. He trotted along quite happily through the forest till he came to a favourite place of his, just where the river runs into the sea. There, just as he had hoped, he saw the chief mink fishing in a canoe.

'I want to fish too,' cried the wolf. But the mink said nothing and pretended not to hear.

'I wish you would take me into your boat!' shouted the wolf, louder than before, and he continued to beseech the mink so long that at last he grew tired of it, and paddled to the shore close enough for the wolf to jump in.

'Sit down quietly at that end or we shall be upset,' said the mink; 'and if you care about sea-urchins' eggs, you will find plenty in that basket. But be sure you eat only the white ones, for the red ones would kill you.'

So the wolf, who was always hungry, began to eat the eggs greedily; and when he had finished he told the mink he thought he would have a nap.

‘Well, then, stretch yourself out, and rest your head on that piece of wood,’ said the mink. And the wolf did as he was bid, and was soon fast asleep. Then the mink crept up to him and stabbed him to the heart with his knife, and he died without moving. After that he landed on the beach, skinned the wolf, and taking the skin to his cottage, he hung it up before the fire to dry.

Not many days later the wolf’s grandmother, who, with the help of her relations, had been searching for him everywhere, entered the cottage to buy some sea-urchins’ eggs, and saw the skin, which she at once guessed to be that of her grandson.

‘I knew he was dead—I knew it! I knew it!’ she cried, weeping bitterly, till the mink told her rudely that if she wanted to make so much noise she had better do it outside as he liked to be quiet. So, half-blinded by her tears, the old woman went home the way she had come, and running in at the door, she flung herself down in front of the fire.

‘What are you crying for?’ asked the old wolf and some friends who had been spending the afternoon with him.

‘I shall never see my grandson any more!’ answered she. ‘Mink has killed him, oh! oh!’ And putting her head down, she began to weep as loudly as ever.

‘There! there!’ said her husband, laying his paw on her shoulder. ‘Be comforted; if he IS dead, we will avenge him.’ And calling to the others they proceeded to talk over the best plan. It took them a long time to make up their minds, as one wolf proposed one thing and one another; but at last it was agreed that the old wolf should give a great feast in his house, and that the mink should be invited to the party. And in order that no time should be lost it was further agreed that each wolf should bear the invitations to the guests that lived nearest to him.

Now the wolves thought they were very cunning, but the mink was more cunning still; and though he sent a message by a white hare, that was going that way, saying he should be delighted to be present, he determined that he would take his precautions. So he went to a mouse who had often done him a good turn, and greeted

her with his best bow.

'I have a favour to ask of you, friend mouse,' said he, 'and if you will grant it I will carry you on my back every night for a week to the patch of maize right up the hill.'

'The favour is mine,' answered the mouse. 'Tell me what it is that I can have the honour of doing for you.'

'Oh, something quite easy,' replied the mink. 'I only want you—between to-day and the next full moon—to gnaw through the bows and paddles of the wolf people, so that directly they use them they will break. But of course you must manage it so that they notice nothing.'

'Of course,' answered the mouse, 'nothing is easier; but as the full moon is to-morrow night, and there is not much time, I had better begin at once.' Then the mink thanked her, and went his way; but before he had gone far he came back again.

'Perhaps, while you are about the wolf's house seeing after the bows, it would do no harm if you were to make that knot-hole in the wall a little bigger,' said he. 'Not large enough to draw attention, of course; but it might come in handy.' And with another nod he left her.

The next evening the mink washed and brushed himself carefully and set out for the feast. He smiled to himself as he looked at the dusty track, and perceived that though the marks of wolves' feet were many, not a single guest was to be seen anywhere. He knew very well what that meant; but he had taken his precautions and was not afraid.

The house door stood open, but through a crack the mink could see the wolves crowding in the corner behind it. However, he entered boldly, and as soon as he was fairly inside the door was shut with a bang, and the whole herd sprang at him, with their red tongues hanging out of their mouths. Quick as they were they were too late, for the mink was already through the knot-hole and racing for his canoe.

The knot-hole was too small for the wolves, and there were so many of them in the hut that it was some time before they could get the door open. Then they seized the bows and arrows which were hanging on the walls and, once outside, aimed at the flying mink; but as they pulled the bows broke in their paws, so they threw them away, and bounded to the shore, with all their speed, to the place where their canoes were drawn up on

the beach.

Now, although the mink could not run as fast as the wolves, he had a good start, and was already afloat when the swiftest among them threw themselves into the nearest canoe. They pushed off, but as they dipped the paddles into the water, they snapped as the bows had done, and were quite useless.

'I know where there are some new ones,' cried a young fellow, leaping on shore and rushing to a little cave at the back of the beach. And the mink's heart smote him when he heard, for he had not known of this secret store.

After a long chase the wolves managed to surround their prey, and the mink, seeing it was no good resisting any more, gave himself up. Some of the elder wolves brought out some cedar bands, which they always carried wound round their bodies, but the mink laughed scornfully at the sight of them.

'Why I could snap those in a moment,' said he; 'if you want to make sure that I cannot escape, better take a line of kelp and bind me with that.'

'You are right,' answered the grandfather; 'your wisdom is greater than ours.' And he bade his servants gather enough kelp from the rocks to make a line, as they had brought none with them.

'While the line is being made you might as well let me have one last dance,' remarked the mink. And the wolves replied: 'Very good, you may have your dance; perhaps it may amuse us as well as you.' So they brought two canoes and placed them one beside the other. The mink stood up on his hind legs and began to dance, first in one canoe and then in the other; and so graceful was he, that the wolves forgot they were going to put him to death, and howled with pleasure.

'Pull the canoes a little apart; they are too close for this new dance,' he said, pausing for a moment. And the wolves separated them while he gave a series of little springs, sometime pirouetting while he stood with one foot on the prow of both. 'Now nearer, now further apart,' he would cry as the dance went on. 'No! further still.' And springing into the air, amidst howls of applause, he came down head-foremost, and dived to the bottom. And through the wolves, whose howls had now changed into those of rage, sought him everywhere, they never found him, for he hid behind a rock till they were out of sight, and then made his home in another forest.

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