

THE WICKED WOLVERINE

FROM THE BROWN FAIRY BOOK, EDITED BY ANDREW LANG

One day a wolverine was out walking on the hill-side, when, on turning a corner, he suddenly saw a large rock.

‘Was that you I heard walking about just now?’ he asked, for wolverines are cautious animals, and always like to know the reasons of things.

‘No, certainly not,’ answered the rock; ‘I don’t know how to walk.’

‘But I SAW you walking,’ continued the wolverine.

‘I am afraid that you were not taught to speak the truth,’ retorted the rock.

‘You need not speak like that, for I have SEEN you walking,’ replied the wolverine,

‘though I am quite sure that you could never catch ME!’ and he ran a little distance and then stopped to see if the rock was pursuing him; but, to his vexation, the rock was still in the same place. Then the wolverine went up close, and struck the rock a blow with his paw, saying: ‘Well, will you catch me NOW?’

‘I can’t walk, but I can ROLL,’ answered the rock.

And the wolverine laughed and said: ‘Oh, that will do just as well’; and began to run down the side of the mountain.

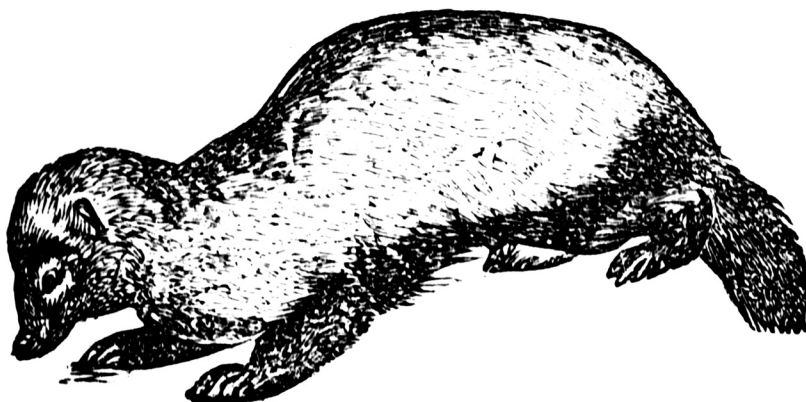
At first he went quite slowly, ‘just to give the rock a chance,’ he thought to himself; but soon he quickened his pace, for he found that the rock was almost at his heels. But the faster the wolverine ran, the faster the rock rolled, and by-and-by the little creature began to get very tired, and was sorry he had not left the rock to itself. Thinking that if he could manage to put on a spurt he would reach the forest of great trees

at the bottom of the mountain, where the rock could not come, he gathered up all his strength, and instead of running he leaped over sticks and stones, but, whatever he did, the rock was always

close behind him. At length he grew so weary that he could not even see where he was going, and catching his foot in a branch he tripped and fell. The rock stopped at once, but there came a shriek from the wolverine:

‘Get off, get off! Can’t you see that you are on my legs?’

‘Why did you not leave me alone?’ asked the rock. ‘I did not want to move—I hate moving. But you WOULD have it, and I certainly sha’n’t move now till I am forced to.’



‘I will call my brothers,’ answered the wolverine. ‘There are many of them in the forest, and you will soon see that they are stronger than you.’ And he called, and called, and called, till wolves and foxes and all sorts of other creatures all came running to see what was the matter.

‘How DID you get under that rock?’ asked they, making a ring round him; but they had to repeat their question several times before the wolverine would answer, for he, like many other persons, found it hard to confess that he had brought his troubles on himself.

‘Well, I was dull, and wanted someone to play with me,’ he said at last, in sulky voice, ‘and I challenged the rock to catch me. Of course I thought I could run the fastest; but I tripped, and it rolled on me. It was just an accident.’

‘It serves you right for being so silly,’ said they; but they pushed and hauled at the rock for a long time without making it move an inch.

‘You are no good at all,’ cried the wolverine crossly, for it was suffering great pain, ‘and if you cannot get me free, I shall see what my friends the lightning and thunder can do.’ And he called loudly to the lightning to come and help him as quickly as possible.

In a few minutes a dark cloud came rolling up the sky, giving out such terrific claps of thunder that the wolves and the foxes and all the other creatures ran helter-skelter in all directions. But, frightened though they were, they did not forget to beg the lightning to take off the wolverine’s coat and to free his legs, but to be careful not to hurt him. So the lightning disappeared into the cloud for a moment to

gather up fresh strength, and then came rushing down, right upon the rock, which it sent flying in all directions, and took the wolverine’s coat so neatly that, though it was torn into tiny shreds, the wolverine himself was quite unharmed.

‘That was rather clumsy of you,’ said he, standing up naked in his flesh. ‘Surely you could have split the rock without tearing my coat to bits!’ And he stooped down to pick up the pieces. It took him a long time, for there were a great many of them, but at last he had them all in his hand.

‘I’ll go to my sister the frog,’ he thought to himself, ‘and she will sew them together for me’; and he set off at once for the swamp in which his sister lived.

‘Will you sew my coat together? I had an unlucky accident, and it is quite impossible to wear,’ he said, when he found her.

‘With pleasure,’ she answered, for she had always been taught to be polite; and getting her needle and thread she began to fit the pieces. But though she was very good-natured, she was not very clever, and she got some of the bits wrong. When the wolverine, who was very particular about his clothes, came to put it on, he grew very angry.

‘What a useless creature you are!’ cried he. ‘Do you expect me to go about in such a coat as that? Why it bulges all down the back, as if I had a hump, and it is so tight across the chest that I expect it to burst every time I breathe. I knew you were stupid, but I did not think you were as

stupid as that.' And giving the poor frog a blow on her head, which knocked her straight into the water, he walked off in a rage to his younger sister the mouse.

'I tore my coat this morning,' he began, when he had found her sitting at the door of her house eating an apple. 'It was all in little bits, and I took it to our sister the frog to ask her to sew it for me. But just look at the way she has done it! You will have to take it to pieces and fit them together properly, and I hope I shall not have to complain again.' For as the wolverine was older than the mouse, he was accustomed to speak to her in this manner. However, the mouse was used to it and only answered: 'I think you had better stay here till it is done, and if there is any alteration needed I can make it.' So the wolverine sat down on a heap of dry ferns, and picking up the apple, he finished it without even asking the mouse's leave.

At last the coat was ready, and the wolverine put it on.

'Yes, it fits very well,' said he, 'and you have sewn it very neatly. When I pass this way again I will bring you a handful of corn, as a reward'; and he ran off as smart as ever, leaving the mouse quite grateful behind him.

He wandered about for many days, till he reached a place where food was very scarce, and for a whole week he went without any. He was growing desperate, when he suddenly came upon a bear that was lying asleep. 'Ah! Here is food at last!' thought he; but how was he to kill the bear, who was so much bigger than himself? It was no use to try force, he must invent some

cunning plan which would get her into his power. At last, after thinking hard, he decided upon something, and going up to the bear, he exclaimed: 'Is that you, my sister?'

The bear turned round and saw the wolverine, and murmuring to herself, so low that nobody could hear, 'I never heard before that I had a brother,' got up and ran quickly to a tree, up which she climbed. Now the wolverine was very angry when he saw his dinner vanishing in front of him, especially as HE could not climb trees like the bear, so he followed, and stood at the foot of the tree, shrieking as loud as he could, 'Come down, sister; our father has sent me to look for you! You were lost when you were a little girl and went out picking berries, and it was only the other day that we heard from a beaver where you were.' At these words, the bear came a little way down the tree, and the wolverine, seeing this, went on:

'Are you not fond of berries? I am! And I know a place where they grow so thick the ground is quite hidden. Why, look for yourself! That hillside is quite red with them!'

'I can't see so far,' answered the bear, now climbing down altogether. 'You must have wonderfully good eyes! I wish I had; but my sight is very short.'

'So was mine till my father smashed a pailful of cranberries, and rubbed my eyes with them,' replied the wolverine. 'But if you like to go and gather some of the berries I will do just as he did, and you will soon be able to see as far as me.'

It took the bear a long while to gather the berries, for she was slow about everything, and, besides, it made her back ache to stoop. But at last she returned with a sackful, and put them down beside the wolverine. 'That is splendid, sister!' cried the wolverine. 'Now lie flat on the ground with your head on this stone, while I smash them.'

The bear, who was very tired, was only too glad to do as she was bid, and stretched herself comfortably on the grass.

'I am ready now,' said the wolverine after a bit; 'just at first you will find that the berries make your eyes smart, but you must be careful not to move, or the juice will run out, and then it will have to be done all over again.'

So the bear promised to lie very still; but the moment the cranberries touched her eyes she sprang up with a roar.

'Oh, you mustn't mind a little pain,' said the wolverine, 'it will soon be over, and then you will see all sorts of things you have never dreamt of.' The bear sank down with a groan, and as her eyes were full of cranberry juice, which completely blinded her, the wolverine took up a sharp knife and stabbed her to the heart.

Then he took off the skin, and, stealing some fire from a tent, which his sharp eyes had perceived hidden behind a rock, he set about roasting the bear bit by bit. He thought the meat was the best he ever had tasted, and when dinner was done he made up his mind to try that same trick again, if ever he was hungry.

And very likely he did!