

The Greedy Porcupine

A Tale from the Northwestern Band of Shoshone

Cultural Note

According to Shoshone culture, everyone should be proud of who he or she is, not envious of others. Everyone should also be grateful for what they have and avoid complaining. Everyone is given special gifts and talents, which should be used appropriately. If talents are misused, they could be taken away.

Vocabulary

lamented

mangy

instinctively

scampered

chided

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A Tale from the Northwestern Band of Shoshone



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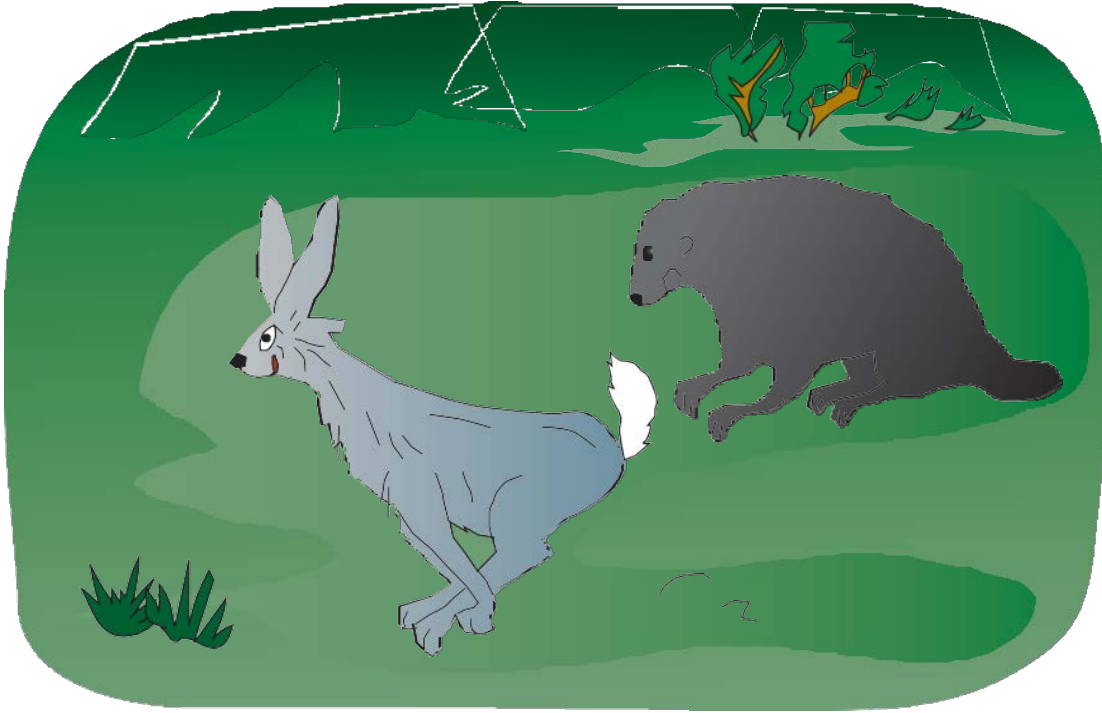
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Yehne, Porcupine, hung his head and dragged his feet back toward his hiding tree, kicking stones along the way. "Oh! I'm so sad! I'm so lonely! What is a porcupine to do?" he lamented.

Just then Tapu, Rabbit, scampered up behind Porcupine. Rabbit gave him a quick nod and hurried on down the path. Porcupine watched Rabbit disappear.

Porcupine fell to the ground and began his moaning again. "Why can't I have strong legs like Rabbit? His legs are sleek and long, and they carry him great distances. Mine are short and stubby. My legs can barely get me back to my hiding tree. And my eyes, they are small and beady. I can hardly see where I am going. And my fur is mangy! Mangy!

Oh! Oh!"



Porcupine surely was in a mess! Because of his grumbling and mumbling and complaining, the animals just left him alone. Hummingbird, who had once been his friend, avoided him. No sooner would she say hello than Porcupine would begin his complaining. Squirrel, who lived by him, tried time and time again to cheer him up. Finally, he decided to move across the woods away from Porcupine's constant grumbling and mumbling. "Makes me tired. I can't do anything for the poor creature," Squirrel had said.

But on this day, Porcupine's life would change. While he rolled around on the ground feeling his lowest, the Creator came by to visit. "Porcupine, stand up and tell me why you are so sad," He commanded.

Porcupine stood up slowly with his head down and his shoulders drooping. He spoke quietly. "I'm not handsome, and I'm not strong. My legs are short and stubby, my eyes are beady, and my fur, is. . . is . . . mangy!"

"Poor Porcupine! Your legs are short because you are a ground creature. Your eyes are beady to help keep the sunlight from blinding you. And your fur is close to your skin to keep it from tangling in the pine needles as you climb trees to get to the bark you like to eat. All these things are meant to help you get along in this world."





While the Creator spoke, Porcupine kept his head down. When he finally looked up, he spotted a beautiful bow and arrow strapped across the Creator's chest. Porcupine's eyes fastened on the shining weapons. "Oh, it would be so nice to have a bow and arrow like yours. Then I wouldn't feel helpless or powerless," Porcupine blurted out.

The Creator looked long at Porcupine, then He stepped up to him, rubbed his back, and left.

Porcupine heaved a heavy sigh. "Not even the Creator can help me," he muttered as he made his way back to his hiding tree. He slowly climbed to his limb and absently chewed on some bark. Suddenly he stood up and said, "Why is my back tingling? What is happening to my fur?" He looked at his back. "It's turning into needles! No, no, they are arrows! Hundreds and hundreds of arrows! And my tail! What is happening to my tail?"

Porcupine had forgotten to pay attention to what he was doing. He lost his balance and fell from the tree. Instinctively, he flipped his tail to try to regain his balance. When he did, dozens of arrows flew into the air. Shaken, shocked and surprised, he looked at his back and tail.

"I have a bow, and I have arrows!" he remarked. "I'm no longer helpless! Yeah! I'm strong, I'm bold, and I am powerful!"



Just then Rabbit scampered by and nodded.

What he saw made him come to a screeching halt. "What has happened to you, Porcupine? Is that really you under all those needles?"

"Ha! Now you talk to me! And they are not needles, they're arrows!" puffed Porcupine. With that, he let go of a few of the arrows, which landed much too close to Rabbit.

"Yikes!" yelled Rabbit. He turned and ran down the path.



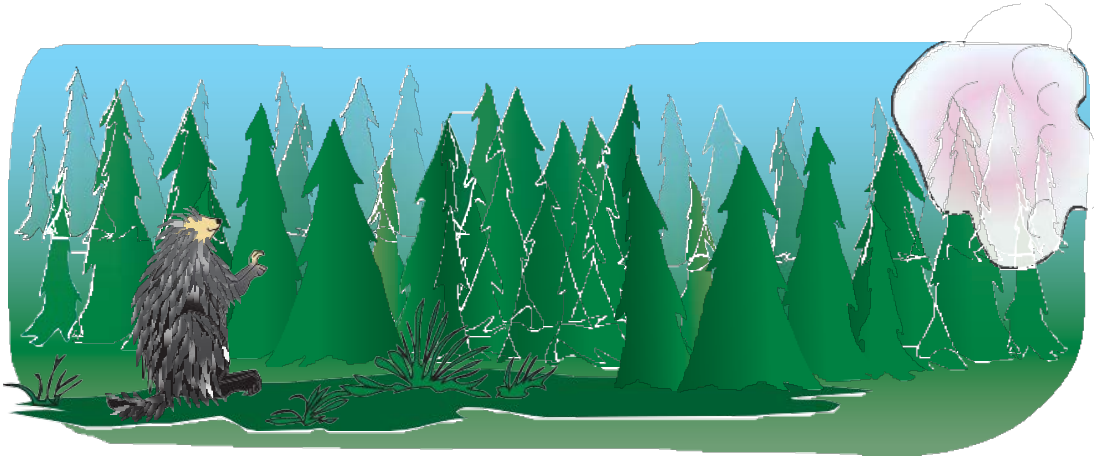


Porcupine became the bully of the forest, and the animals all hid from him. He hunted even when he wasn't hungry, and he used his bow for pleasure.

He shot arrows at Hummingbird, who had once been his friend. "Why do you shoot your arrows at me?" chided Hummingbird. "I was your friend when you weren't so brave!"

"Yeah! I'm strong, I'm bold, and I am powerful!" boasted Porcupine.

When Squirrel was chased up into a tree by one of Porcupine's arrows, Squirrel muttered, "Can't live by him. Can't even live in the same forest as him." Squirrel packed his bags and moved even farther away from Porcupine.



The next time the Creator came to visit, he found a boastful, greedy, extremely undesirable creature. "Porcupine, come and tell me of your experience," said the Creator.

Porcupine strutted before the Creator. "I want sharp claws. I want big eyes, I want long legs," he demanded.

"Sharp claws are for the creatures that hunt for their children. Big eyes are for Elk and Deer to protect their little ones. And long legs are for Rabbit to carry messages between animals. I have given you your gift, and you have not received it well. I might just take the gift back," scolded the Creator.

"No, no! I will change," begged Porcupine. "Very well, you may keep your bow and your

arrows. But they will be fastened to your back, so you can't throw them as you wish. You can only release them when you need protection from your enemies," said the Creator.

"Oh, thank you!" cried Porcupine.

The Creator once more looked long at Porcupine, then stroked the creature's back and left. Porcupine watched the Creator leave. He wasn't quite sure what had just happened.

"Maybe it was all a dream. It could have been. Yes, yes, I think it was. I still have my bow, and my arrows are still on my back," Porcupine said.

Just then Chipmunk happened by on his way home. He had an armful of pinenuts. He saw Porcupine, and he knew of his bullying. He skirted to the left, hoping to avoid him, but Porcupine spotted him.

"Yum! Pinenuts! My favorite! You can just leave those tasty morsels right there, Chipmunk. Yeah!

I'm strong, I'm bold, and I'm powerful," boasted Porcupine.

Porcupine aimed at Chipmunk and flipped the bow with it arrows. Nothing happened. Once more Porcupine aimed. Using all his might, he tried again to shoot his arrows. The arrows stayed attached. Chipmunk, now safe, scampered away.





Porcupine hung his head and dragged himself back to his hiding tree to think about what had just happened.

The animals have come to respect Porcupine, but most leave him alone. They don't know if they can trust him. Rabbit still nods as he passes,

Hummingbird has started to visit again, and Squirrel has moved back into the forest, just not too close to Porcupine.

Porcupine lost his power, but he gained some understanding and humility in the process. He has since given up mumbling, grumbling and complaining.

And so should you!

Glossary

pateheyan - elk

plisi - hummingbird

tapu - rabbit

teheye - deer

yehne - porcupine

Reading Suggestions

- Before you read this story, write your own interpretation of how Porcupine got his quills. You might also want to visit <http://www.ferrum.edu/applit/texts/porcupine.htm> and read an original story about Porcupine that won an award. Publish some of your own stories on the Internet.
- A KWL chart can help with comprehension. Try filling one out about this story:

| Topic: | | |
|-------------|---------------------|----------------|
| What I Know | What I Want to Know | What I Learned |
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