

## The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf

A shepherd boy tended his master's sheep near a dark forest not far from the village. Soon, he found life in the pasture very dull. All he could do to amuse himself was talk to his dog or play on his shepherd's pipe. One day, as he sat watching the sheep and the quiet forest and thinking what he would do should he see a wolf, he thought of a plan to amuse himself. His master had told him to call for help should a wolf attack the flock, and the villagers would drive it away. So now, though he had not seen anything that even looked like a wolf, he ran toward the village shouting at the top of his voice, "Wolf! Wolf!"

As he expected, the villagers who heard the cry dropped their work and ran in great excitement to the pasture. But when they got there, they found the boy doubled up with laughter at the trick he had played on them. A few days later, the shepherd boy again shouted, "Wolf! Wolf!" Again, the villagers ran to help him, only to be laughed at again.

Then one evening as the sun was setting behind the forest and the shadows were creeping out over the pasture, a wolf really did spring from the underbrush and fall upon the sheep. In terror, the boy ran toward the village shouting, "Wolf! Wolf!" But though the villagers heard the cry, they did not run to help him as they had before.

"He cannot fool us again," they said. The wolf killed a great many of the boy's sheep and then slipped away into the forest.

**Moral:** Liars are not believed, even when they speak the truth.

## The Donkey in the Lion's Skin

A donkey found a lion's skin left in the forest by a hunter. He dressed himself in it and amused himself by hiding in a thicket and rushing out suddenly at the animals who passed that way. All took to their heels the moment they saw him. The donkey was so pleased to see the animals running away from him, just as if he were King Lion himself, that he could not keep from expressing his delight by a loud, harsh bray. A fox, who ran with the rest, stopped short as soon as he heard the voice. Approaching the donkey, he said with a laugh, "If you had kept your mouth shut, you might have frightened me, too. But you gave yourself away with that silly bray."

**Moral:** A fool may deceive by his dress and appearance, but his words will soon show what he really is.

## Mercury and the Woodman

A poor woodman was cutting down a tree near the edge of a deep pool in the forest. It was late in the day and the woodman was tired. He had been working since sunrise and his strokes were not as sure as they had been early that morning. Thus it happened that the axe slipped and flew out of his hands into the pool. The woodman was in despair. The axe was all he possessed with which to make a living, and he had not money enough to buy a new one. As he stood wringing his hands and weeping, the god Mercury suddenly appeared and asked what the trouble was. The woodman told what had happened, and straightway the kind Mercury dived into the pool. When he came up again, he held a wonderful golden axe.

“Is this your axe?” Mercury asked the woodman.

“No,” answered the honest woodman, “that is not my axe.”

Mercury laid the golden axe on the bank and sprang back into the pool. This time, he brought up an axe of silver, but the woodman declared again that his axe was just an ordinary one with a wooden handle. Mercury dived down for the third time, and when he came up again, he had the very axe that had been lost. The poor woodman was very glad that his axe had been found and could not thank the kind god enough.

“I admire your honesty,” Mercury said, “and as a reward, you may have all three axes, the gold and the silver as well as your own.”

The happy woodman returned to his home with his treasures, and soon the story of his good fortune was known to everybody in the village. Now there were several woodmen in the village who believed that they could easily win the same good fortune. They hurried out into the woods—one here, one there—and, hiding their axes in the bushes, pretended they had lost them. Then they wept and wailed and called on Mercury to help them. And indeed, Mercury did appear, first to this one, then to that one. To each one he showed an axe of gold, and each one eagerly claimed it to be the one he had lost. But Mercury did not give them the golden axe. Oh no! Instead, he gave them each a hard whack over the head with it and sent them home. And when they returned next day to look for their own axes, they were nowhere to be found.

**Moral:** Honesty is always best.

## The Shipwrecked Impostor

The shipwrecked chimpanzee had been clinging for a long time to a piece of wood when a dolphin came up and offered to carry him ashore. This kind proposition was immediately accepted, and as they moved along, the chimp commenced to tell the fish many marvelous tales, every one of them a bundle of falsehoods.

“Well, well, you are indeed an educated chap,” said the dolphin in admiration. “My schooling has been sadly neglected, as I went to sea when I was but a week old.”

Just then they entered a large bay and the dolphin, referring to a path there, said, “I suppose you know Herring Roads?”

The chimp, taking this for the name of a fellow and not wishing to appear ignorant, replied, “Do I know Rhodes? Well, I should almost think so! He’s an old college chum of mine, and related to our family by—” This was too much for the dolphin, who immediately made a great leap and then, diving quickly, left the impostor in the air for an instant before he splashed back and disappeared.

**Moral:** A liar deceives only himself.

## The Thief and the Innkeeper

A thief hired a room in a tavern and stayed a while in the hope of stealing something that should enable him to pay his reckoning. When he had waited some days in vain, he saw the innkeeper dressed in a new and handsome coat and sitting before his door. The thief sat down beside him and talked with him. As the conversation began to flag, the thief yawned terribly and, at the same time, howled like a wolf. The innkeeper said, “Why do you howl so fearfully?”

“I will tell you,” said the thief, “but first let me ask you to hold my clothes, or I shall tear them to pieces. If I yawn for the third time, I actually turn into a wolf and attack men.”

With this speech, he commenced a second fit of yawning and again howled like a wolf, as he had the first. The innkeeper, believing what he said, became greatly alarmed and, rising from his seat, attempted to run away. The thief laid hold of his coat, yawned a third time, and set up a terrible howl. The innkeeper, frightened lest he should be attacked, left his new coat in the thief’s hand and ran as fast as he could into the inn for safety. The thief made off with the coat and did not return again to the inn.

**Moral:** Not every tale is to be believed.