

Where Glutton the Wolverine Got His Name

by Thornton W. Burgess

Glutton the Wolverine is a dweller in the depths of the Great Forests of the Far North, and it is doubtful if Peter Rabbit would ever have known that there is such a person but for his acquaintance with Honker the Goose, who spends his summers in the Far North, but each spring and fall stops over for a day or two in a little pond in the Green Forest, a pond Peter often visits. This acquaintance with Honker and Peter's everlasting curiosity have resulted in many strange stories. At least they have seemed strange to Peter because they have been about furred and feathered people whom Peter has never seen. And one of the strangest of these is the story of how Glutton the Wolverine got his name.

Of course you know what a glutton is. It is one who is very, very, very greedy and eats and eats as if eating were the only thing in life worth while. It is one who is all the time thinking of his stomach. No one likes to be called a glutton. So when Honker the Goose happened to mention Glutton, it caused Peter to prick up his ears at once.

"Who's a glutton?" he demanded.

"I didn't say any one was a glutton," replied Honker. "I was speaking of Glutton the Wolverine who lives in the Great Forests of the Far North, and whom everybody hates."

"Is Glutton his name?" asked Peter, wrinkling his brows in perplexity, for it seemed a very queer name for any one.

"Certainly," replied Honker. "Certainly that is his name, and a very good name for him it is. But then of course it is because he *is* a glutton that he is named Glutton. Rather I should say that is the reason the first Wolverine was named Glutton. The name has been handed down ever since, and it fits Mr. Wolverine of today quite as well as ever it did his great-great-ever-so-great-grandfather."

"Tell me about it," Peter begged. "Please tell me about it."

"Tell you about what?" asked Honker, pretending not to understand.

"About how the first Wolverine got the name of Glutton," replied Peter promptly. "There must have been a very good reason, and if there was a very good reason, there must be a story. Please, Honker, tell me all about it."

Honker swam a little way out from shore, and with head held high and very still, he looked and listened and listened and looked until he was quite certain that no danger lurked near. Then he swam back to where Peter was sitting on the bank.

"Peter," said he, "I never in all my born days have seen such a fellow for questions as you are. If I lived about here, I think I should swim away every time I saw you coming. But as I only stop here for a day or two twice a year, I guess I can stand it. Besides, you really ought to know something about some of the people who live in the Great Forest. It is shameful, Peter, that you should be so ignorant. And so if you will promise not to ask for another story while I am here, I will tell you about Glutton the Wolverine."

Of course Peter promised. He wanted that story so much that he would have promised anything. So Honker told the story, and here it is just as Peter heard it.

"Once upon a time long, long, long ago, the first Wolverine was sent out to find a place for himself in the Great World just as every one else had been sent out. Old Mother Nature had told him that he was related to Mr. Weasel and Mr. Mink and Mr. Fisher and Mr. Skunk, but no one would have guessed it just to look at him. In fact, some of his new neighbors were inclined to think that he was related to Old King Bear. Certainly he looked more like King Bear than he did like little Mr. Weasel. But for his bushy tail he would have looked still more like a member of the Bear family. He was clumsy-looking. He was rather slow moving, but he was strong, very strong for his size. And he had a mean disposition. Yes, Sir, Mr. Wolverine had a mean disposition. He had such a mean disposition that he would snarl at his own reflection in a pool of water.

"Now you know as well as I do that no one with a mean disposition has any friends. It was so with Mr. Wolverine. When his neighbors found out what a mean disposition he had, they let him severely alone. They would go out of their way to avoid meeting him. This made his disposition all the meaner. He didn't really care because his neighbors would have nothing to do with him. No, he didn't really care, for the simple reason that he didn't want anything to do with them. But just the same it made him angry to have them show that they didn't want to have anything to do with him. Every time he would see one of them turn aside to avoid meeting him, he would snarl under his breath, and his eyes would glow with anger; he would resolve to get even.

"Being slow in his movements because of his stout build, he early realized that he must make nimble wits make up for the lack of nimble legs. He also learned very early in life that patience is a virtue few possess, and that patience and nimble wits will accomplish almost anything. So, living alone in the Great Forest, he practised patience until no one in all the Great World could be more patient than he. No one knew this because, you see, everybody kept away from him. And all the time he was practising patience, he was studying and studying the other people of the Great Forest, both large and small, learning all their habits, how they lived, where they lived, what they ate, and all about them.

"'One never knows when such knowledge may be useful,' he would say to himself. 'The more I know about other people and the less they know about me the better.'

"So Mr. Wolverine kept out of sight as much as possible, and none knew how he lived or where he lived or anything about him save that he had a mean disposition. Patiently he watched the other people, especially those of nimble wits who lived largely by their cunning and cleverness—Mr. Fox, Mr. Coyote, Mr. Lynx and his own cousins, Mr. Mink and Mr. Weasel. From each one he learned something, and at last he was more cunning and more clever than any of them or even than all of them, for that matter.

"Living alone as he did, and having a mean disposition, he grew more and more sullen and savage until those who at first had avoided him simply because of his mean disposition now kept out of his way through fear, for his claws were long and his strength was great and his teeth were sharp. It didn't take him long to discover that there were few who did not fear him, and he cunningly contrived to increase this fear, for he had a feeling that the time might come when it would be of use to him.

"The time did come. As you know, there came a time when food was scarce, and everybody, or almost everybody, had hard work to get enough to keep alive. Mr. Wolverine didn't. The fact is, Mr.

Wolverine lived very well indeed. He simply reaped the reward of his patience in learning all about the ways of his neighbors, of his nimble wits and of the fear which he inspired. Instead of hunting for food himself, he depended on his neighbors to hunt for him. They didn't know they were hunting for him, but somehow whenever one of them had secured a good meal, Mr. Wolverine was almost sure to happen along. A growl from him was enough, and that meal was left in his possession.

"Knowing how scarce food was and the uncertainty of when he would get the next meal, Mr. Wolverine always made it a point on these occasions to stuff himself until it was a wonder his skin didn't burst. If there was more than he could eat, he would take a nap right there, and because of fear of him the rightful owner of the food would not dare take what was left. When he awoke Mr. Wolverine would finish what remained.

"Those who secured more food than they could eat and tried to store away the rest found that no matter how cunningly they chose a hiding-place for it and covered their tracks, Mr. Wolverine was sure to find it. In fact, he made a business of robbing storehouses, and the habit of greediness became so strong that he would stuff himself at one storehouse and immediately start for another. When it did happen that he couldn't eat all he found and yet didn't want to stay until he could finish it, he would tear to bits all that remained and scatter it all about. You know I told you he had a mean disposition.

"Even when good times returned and there was no possible excuse for such greed, Mr. Wolverine continued to stuff himself until it seemed that instead of eating in order to live, as the rest of us do, he lived in order to eat. Of course it wasn't long before some one called him a glutton, and presently he was named Glutton, and no one called him anything else. Glutton by name and a glutton in habit he remained as long as he lived. Both name and habits he handed down to his children and they to their children. So it is that today there is no more cunning thief, no greedier rascal, and no one with a meaner disposition in all the Great Woods of the Far North than Glutton the Wolverine."

"Queer how a habit will stick, isn't it?" said Peter thoughtfully.

"Particularly a bad habit," added Honker.

Source:

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