

## **The Disastrous Results of a Lie – An Aesop’s fable retold**

A weary wolf limps along the forest path with a throbbing foot and an empty stomach. The last time he’d been hunting, a few days ago, there’d been an unfortunate incident.

The deer he’d singled out for the kill had turned on him and kicked out just as he’d launched himself towards it. A bony hoof had caught him on his head and so dazed him that he’d dropped to the ground like a pinecone flung from a tree in a storm. The deer, of course, had escaped unscathed.

At least the headache has left him, but the wolf is desperate for food. With his injury, even a squirrel has evaded him, and then tormented him, by sitting on a branch out of reach, jeering and chittering. The thought makes anger rise and the wolf vows he will eat by nightfall.

He stops, sniffs the cool air and listens. Grinning then, he licks his paw and begins moving steadily towards the sound. The edge of the forest is near and if he isn’t mistaken, that was sheep he’d heard.

One snag – there’ll probably be a shepherd with them. He’ll have to resort to trickery since he can’t hunt. As the trees thin out, the wolf is gratified to see a fine flock of about fifty sheep, black heads and feet, grazing between the trees and in the meadows beyond. The shepherd sits on a fallen log, whittling a stick.

How is he going to do this?

He retreats a little, biding his time until the sun drops lower in the sky. He finds the hide of a long-dead sheep, balding in patches, picked clean by small animals and a plan comes to him. He locates a stout stick that looks like a shepherd’s crook.

The shepherd is whistling for his sheep now to return to the fold. The timing is right.

Thinking about his transformation and his appearance, the wolf shudders, stretches up and stands on his two hind legs. He drapes the balding hide around him, balances with his staff and limps towards the shepherd, busily directing his flock in to a pen created for the night, woven from supple green branches between stakes in the ground.

The wolf clears his throat and words emerge gruffly.

“Good evening to you, young man.”

The shepherd glances up at the shaggy hermit bent over a staff and grunts in reply.

“Fine flock of sheep you have.”

“None better,” answers the shepherd, keeping watch as his flock dawdle towards the fold.

“Is this the way to the next village?” enquires the wolf, not wishing to engage long in conversation.

“Yes. Follow yonder stream and you’ll reach it in a couple of hours.”

“Many thanks, young sir. Stay safe for the night. I wish you well.”

The wolf hobbles off, hoping the gathering dusk will aid his plan.

Out of sight, he drops on all fours again, abandons his stick and turns his thoughts from being a man to becoming a cunning wolf again.

He covers himself with the sheepskin and returns uphill, joining the last of the flock into the safety of the pen, deceiving the shepherd completely.

“I’m in,” the wolf thinks jubilantly. “Which one looks the juiciest? I’ll wait until dark though, when the shepherd settles down by his fire although it’s a wonder he doesn’t hear my stomach growling.”

The shepherd, whose name is Andreas, had been away from the town now for several days. The lush grass has kept his flock fed longer than he’d expected. Now his supply of bread and cheese and apples is finished and he’s hungry.

“I’m going to have to take one of my sheep,” he thinks. “It’s a nuisance, but it will have to be done. Which one looks the scruffiest? Ah, that one.”

Without delay, Andreas seizes the one with the bald patches on its coat, and dispatches it straight away with his sharp knife.

*He who uses deception to gain his own ends finds himself suffering the consequences.*