



Legend of Porcupine

Kāyas, long ago, kākwa, the porcupine, didn't look the way that he looks now. He used to look, we are told, very much like a really large groundhog; he was just bigger than a groundhog but looked very much like a groundhog. He was known to be wide bodied and moved very slowly.

One day, we're told that Trickster had heard something that deeply concerned him about kākwa. He had heard that because kākwa was a plant eater and liked climbing trees and he moved really slow, that māskwa, the bear, had found out that because kākwa moved really slow and he really has no way to fight back or protect himself, māskwa had decided to start hunting and eating kākwa.

This bothered Trickster a lot and he thought about it for a while. "How am I going to help kākwa because right now he's basically just a big groundhog and has no way to fight back; he doesn't really have any large pointy teeth; he's a plant eater; he just moves too slow. How am I going to help this poor animal?" So he thought that he'd watch kākwa for the day just so he could get an idea of kākwa's habits and how he moves around. So he sat on a log.

Kākwa wasn't too far and Trickster started watching him and observed him throughout the day.

Sure enough, along came māskwa. Māskwa was drooling at the mouth, looking at kākwa, probably in his mind thinking, "This is gonna be a nice big meal with kākwa here." He wasn't even really trying to stalk him; he was just quietly walking up to kākwa not even like he was really hunting; he walked right up to kākwa and snatched him up and started eating him.

This bothered Trickster because as he had heard, kākwa had no way to fight back. He couldn't run fast; he moved so slow; he was wide bodied. This bothered Trickster so he thought about it for a while and thought. "What am I going to do? How am I going to help this poor kākwa?" Then he saw another kākwa walking up to the same little area where he was sitting and this one he watched and as he watched, another māskwa came walking up and saw kākwa walking towards him but this time, this kākwa saw māskwa coming and he quickly faced him and started to back up. He backed right up into a rose bush and he backed right into where all the thorns were with just his little head sticking out.



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As Trickster watched, māskwa went walking up and tried to snatch him up but he kept hitting his paws on the thorns on the rose bushes. He'd try to grab him again and he'd hit the thorns, and he'd try to bite him but would get thorns in his mouth. Finally, māskwa just gave up and thought, "It's just not worth it. This kākwa is not playing fair so I'm just gonna leave him alone."

Trickster was really interested in what he was seeing and could see māskwa walking away. Kākwa smiled to himself and came walking out of the rose bush. As soon as he walked out of the rose bush without the protection of the thorns, along came māskwa and quickly snatched him up and had another meal of kākwa.

Trickster thought, "I know what I'm gonna do. I know how I'm going to help this poor little animal."

He went to where he knew kākwa was staying and he said, "Kākwa, āstam kweyaho, come here quickly! I'm going to help you here. I've been watching you and I know what māskwa is doing and I don't like it one bit, but I'm going to help you."

He'd brought some rose bushes with him and he started taking the thorns off, the longest thorns he could find and he was sticking them all throughout the fur using pine pitch and sticking them on the back of kākwa until finally kākwa was completely covered in these long thorns from the thorn bush. Then, Trickster said, "I want you to go walking and pass right in front of that māskwa and see what he does." Kākwa was terrified, "He's gonna eat me!"

Trickster said, "No, no. Just watch this time."

Trickster sat behind the bush there and watched with interest. Kākwa started ambling along, scared and shaking. Suddenly, māskwa noticed him and started quickly walking towards kākwa as though he was just going to scoop him up. This time, kākwa remembered the thorn bushes Trickster had put on his back with the pine pitch and as soon as māskwa came to grab him, kākwa turned his back, facing the thorns towards māskwa. Māskwa went to take a big bite and BANG! He got all those thorns in his mouth. They'd come off, sticking somewhere in his mouth; he was rolling on the ground trying to get the thorns out of his mouth. He got up again and took a swat at kākwa and he got all of those thorns in his paws and he started rolling around in pain, screaming and hollering until finally he ran away.



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Trickster sat there laughing and could see māskwa running away and limping, still screaming from all the thorns in his paw.

Meanwhile, kākwa hadn't been touched. He was safe other than losing a few of the thorns that Trickster had put on his back. Kākwa was very grateful to Trickster and thanked him. Trickster decided then and there and he told kākwa, "From this day forward kahkiyaw kākwa, all porcupines, will be born with these great thorns growing out of their backs to protect themselves from all these animals who are trying to take advantage of these poor animals who can't defend themselves. So now they'll be able to defend themselves."

As nēhiyawak, Cree people, we're told that to this day, kahkiyaw kākwa, all porcupines, are still born with these great thorns growing out of their backs as their only protection against all the other animals. And even today, we're told that kākwa walks very confidently now and slowly because he's not afraid because of how Trickster helped him all those years ago.

So now you know the story of kākwa.

Kinanaskomitinawah kahkiyaw, thanks to you all.
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