

How the Bear Lost his Tail

Judy Paterson has retold this Scandinavian folk tale. She said: 'I've also heard it told about a rabbit where, not only does his tail break-off, but his ears are stretched by birds who try to help pulling him out of the ice'.

Once Bear had a magnificent tail, long and furry. He was so proud of it he bragged about it: 'I've got *THE* most beautiful tail in the whole wide world.'

Now Fox knew that his tail was the most beautiful and one cold bitter evening in winter he took his chance to get even with Bear for his bragging. He sat by a fire frying three fat fish and waited.

As Bear walked through the forest he smelt the fish and when he saw Fox frying his fish his tummy rumbled. 'Please, Fox, spare me one of your fish?'

'Oh, Bear, if you want fish you will have to catch them for yourself and since you have such a fine furry tail that will be a very easy thing to do.'

'Catch fish with my tail?' said Bear.

'Oh, yes,' said Fox. 'Just sit on the riverbank and drop your tail in the water. Fish are attracted to fine tails. Even I caught three! When you feel a kind of pinching you will know they are biting. The longer you keep your tail in the water the more fish you will catch.'

Bear went to the river and sat down with his tail in the water. It was very cold. Soon Bear felt a pinching and he knew the fish were biting.

'Good,' he said, 'I shall sit here all night for I have such a fine tail I will catch many more fish than Fox.'

And that's what he did, even though the night grew colder and colder and colder and the river froze over. It even froze Bear's tail but he didn't know that! In the morning when he tried to get up he couldn't.

'What a lot of fish I must have caught,' said Bear, grunting as he pulled. 'My tail is so heavy I'll have enough fish for breakfast, lunch and dinner! I knew my tail was better than Fox's tail. I've got *THE* most beautiful tail in the whole wide world.'

Bear pulled and pulled and tugged and tugged and finally – POP, he tumbled over free. He turned to look at his tail and the fish but there was nothing there! No tail and no fish. His tail was stuck in the ice and all he had left was the wee stubby end that every bear has today.