

# Gray Bear

*This was told to me by my grandmother, Mary Tiger. The bear was the biggest animal in the woods, and there were a lot of them around in those days. Every once in a while, my uncles would go hunting for bear, and we'd have a nice warm rug to sleep on. Remember never to put salt on bear meat—Seminoles say he'll come get you if you do.*

—Betty Mae Jumper

Once there lived an Indian man who loved to hunt and bring food home for his new bride.

Most of the time he would go with the hunters and hunt. But he would only stay away for a short time. One day the man thought it would be good to take his new bride along so he could hunt for a few weeks. She could dry or barbecue the meat as he brought it in.

The hunting was good. After they had been there a week, they had so much meat that the man said to his wife, "If this keeps up, we can go home in another week or so." They both smiled to think that they didn't have to stay in the forest too much longer.

Another week passed, and the wife began to act funny. When the man returned from each hunt, he noticed his wife would be all dressed up, like when they married. At times, she would act mad and didn't want to be around him. She was not as happy as before.

He thought there must be something going on, so he pretended to be heading for Big Forest. But instead he hid and turned back to watch her from a distance.

She looked to make sure he was gone, then put on her new clothes and fixed herself up. She headed for the other side of Big Forest, and he followed. She then stopped by a big tree and stood. A big gray husky bear appeared. The big bear walked slowly toward her.

Big bear stood up beside her and pushed her. She flipped over, and suddenly there landed a beautiful lady bear the same color as the big bear. The two gray bears started running and playing until they disappeared.



The hunter returned to the camp, packed all the meat he had, and put it all into the canoe. The wife returned later that afternoon, thinking that she would beat her husband back to camp. But surprise! He was there!

The wife said she had gone for a walk. He then told her that he hadn't gone hunting but instead had watched her. "You can go on and do whatever you wish to do because I am leaving in a few minutes. I'm already packed. You could go back to the village and have the medicine man doctor you. But that's up to you."

He continued to pack up his things as she looked at him. Without saying a word, she ran toward Big Forest. As the man was going home, he passed through an open field. There he saw the two bears roaming around. He knew then she had chosen to stay with the bear.