

The Adventures of Mouse Deer

Tales of Indonesia and Malaysia

Told by Aaron Shepard

Reader's Theater Edition #35

Adapted for reader's theater (or readers theatre) by the author, from his [story book](#) published by Skyhook Press, 2005

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PREVIEW: Mouse Deer is small, and many animals want to eat him—but first they have to catch him!

GENRE: Folktales, trickster tales

READERS: 9 or more

CULTURE: Indonesian, Malaysian

READER AGES: 7–10

THEME: Wits vs. power

LENGTH: 20 minutes (3 + 7 + 4 + 6 + 1)

ROLES: Narrators 1–4, Mouse Deer, Tiger, Crocodile, Farmer, Dog, (Other Crocodiles), (Scarecrow)

NOTES: For best effect, place NARRATORS 1 and 2 at far left, and 3 and 4 at far right, as seen from the audience. TIGER, FARMER, and DOG can double as OTHER CROCODILES. To increase the number of readers, a different reader can play MOUSE DEER in each story. The conversations among the NARRATORS and between them and MOUSE DEER will be more believable if the readers learn those speeches by heart and don't look at their scripts. Below is the tune for "Mouse Deer's Song," an original composition of the author's.



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NARRATOR 1: Today we re going to tell you three stories about Mouse Deer.

NARRATOR 2: *(to NARRATOR 1, suspiciously)* Wait a minute. Did you say Mouse Deer ?

NARRATOR 1: That s right!

NARRATOR 4: I never heard of a Mouse Deer ! *(to NARRATOR 3)* Did you?

NARRATOR 3: Not me! What *is* he? A mouse?

NARRATOR 1: No.

NARRATOR 2: A deer?

NARRATOR 1: No.

NARRATOR 4: *(accusingly)* Hey, are you trying to trick us?

NARRATOR 1: No! He *s* a real animal!

NARRATOR 3: *(skeptically)* Yeah? Then how big is he?

NARRATOR 1: About as big as a cat.

NARRATOR 2: And where does he live?

NARRATOR 1: In the jungles of Asia and Africa.

NARRATOR 4: And what does he look like?

NARRATOR 1: His legs and tail look like a deer *s*.

NARRATOR 2: *(starting to believe)* Well, all right.

NARRATOR 1: But his face and body look like a mouse *s*.

NARRATOR 3: *(accusingly again)* You *re* tricking us!

NARRATOR 1: It *s* true! That *s* why he *s* called Mouse Deer!

NARRATOR 4: *(grudgingly)* Well, *maybe* we believe you.

NARRATOR 2: Tell us some more.

NARRATOR 1: *(to other NARRATORS and audience)* Mouse Deer eats only plants, but lots of animals eat Mouse Deer. To stay alive, he has to be quick and smart. He also has to be tricky just like Brer Rabbit and Anansi, the spider man from Africa. Mouse Deer even plays some of the same tricks.

NARRATOR 2: *(to NARRATOR 1)* You know what *I* think? I think *you're* the tricky one!

NARRATOR 4: Me too!

NARRATOR 3: That's right!

NARRATOR 1: No, I'm not! There are *lots* of stories about Mouse Deer.

NARRATOR 3: *(sarcastically)* And I bet you want us to believe they're true!

NARRATOR 1: Of course they are! *All* stories are true even if they didn't happen.

NARRATORS 2, 3, & 4: *(confused, to audience)* Huh?

NARRATOR 1: *(to audience)* Mouse Deer has his own song too, and you can help sing it. Here's how it goes.

I'm quick and smart as I can be.
Try and try, but you can't catch me!

Now you try it. *(helps the audience practice)*

NARRATORS 2, 3, & 4: *(join in on the practice)*

NARRATOR 1: Good! Now we're ready to go.

NARRATOR 1: In our first story, Mouse Deer meets one of his most dangerous enemies. This story is called,

MOUSE DEER: *(brightly, to audience)* Mouse Deer . . .

NARRATOR 1: and

TIGER: *(ferociously, to audience, showing claws)* . . . Tiger.

MOUSE DEER: *(to audience)* Ready to sing? *(drawing out the first note to help them join in)*

I m quick and smart as I can be.
Try and try, but you can t catch me!

(keeps humming the tune softly to himself)

NARRATOR 1: Mouse Deer sang his song as he walked through the forest.

NARRATOR 4: He was looking for tasty fruits and roots and shoots.

NARRATOR 2: Though he was small, he was not afraid. He knew that many big animals wanted to eat him.

NARRATOR 3: But first they had to catch him!

NARRATOR 1: Then he heard something.

TIGER: *Rowr!*

MOUSE DEER: *(gasps)*

NARRATOR 4: There was Tiger!

TIGER: *(sounding sinister)* Hello, Mouse Deer. I was just getting hungry. Now you can be my *lunch*.

NARRATOR 2: Mouse Deer didn t want to be lunch. He looked around and thought fast.

NARRATOR 3: He saw . . . a mud puddle.

MOUSE DEER: *(makes a face like he s thinking hard, then brightens, turns to TIGER)* I m sorry, Tiger. I can t be your lunch. The King has ordered me to guard his . . . pudding.

TIGER: *(uncertainly)* His pudding?

MOUSE DEER: *(pointing)* Yes. There it is.

NARRATOR 1: Mouse Deer pointed to the mud puddle.

MOUSE DEER: It has the best taste in the world. The King doesn't want anyone else to eat it.

NARRATOR 4: Tiger looked longingly at the puddle.

TIGER: (*struggling with himself, knowing he shouldn't ask but wanting it badly*) I would like to taste the King's pudding.

MOUSE DEER: Oh, no, Tiger! The King would be very angry.

TIGER: (*pleading*) Just one little taste, Mouse Deer! The King will never know.

MOUSE DEER: Well . . . all right, Tiger. But first let me run far away, so no one will blame *me*.

TIGER: All right, Mouse Deer, you can go now.

NARRATOR 2: Mouse Deer ran quickly out of sight.

TIGER: (*delightedly, to audience*) Imagine! The King's pudding!

NARRATOR 3: He took a big mouthful.

TIGER: (*puts a handful in his mouth, freezes in surprise, then makes a horrible face and spits the mud out toward audience*) *Phooey!*

NARRATOR 3: He spit it out.

TIGER: Yuck! Ugh! Bleck! That's no pudding. That's *mud!*

NARRATOR 1: Tiger ran through the forest.

TIGER: *Rowr!*

NARRATOR 4: He caught up with Mouse Deer.

MOUSE DEER: (*gasps*)

TIGER: (*fuming*) Mouse Deer, you tricked me once. But now you will be my *lunch!*

NARRATOR 2: Mouse Deer looked around and thought fast.

NARRATOR 3: He saw . . . a wasp nest in a tree.

NARRATOR 3: At last the wasps went away.

ALL NARRATORS: *(fade out with buzzing)*

NARRATOR 1: Then Tiger jumped out.

TIGER: *Rowr!*

NARRATOR 4: He ran through the forest till he found Mouse Deer.

MOUSE DEER: *(gasps)*

TIGER: *(enraged)* Mouse Deer, you tricked me once. You tricked me twice. But now you will be my *lunch!*

NARRATOR 2: Mouse Deer looked around and thought fast.

NARRATOR 3: He saw . . . a cobra! The giant snake was coiled asleep on the ground.

MOUSE DEER: *(thinks hard, then brightens)* I m sorry, Tiger. I can t be your lunch. The King has ordered me to guard his . . . belt.

TIGER: His belt?

MOUSE DEER: *(pointing)* Yes. There it is.

NARRATOR 1: Mouse Deer pointed to the cobra.

MOUSE DEER: It s the best belt in the world. The King doesn t want anyone else to wear it.

TIGER: *(struggling with himself)* I would like to wear the King s belt.

MOUSE DEER: Oh, no Tiger! The King would be very angry.

TIGER: Just for one moment, Mouse Deer! The King will never know.

MOUSE DEER: Well . . . all right, Tiger. But first let me run far away, so no one will blame *me*.

TIGER: All right, Mouse Deer, you can go now.

NARRATOR 4: Mouse Deer ran quickly out of sight.

TIGER: *(to audience)* Imagine! The King's belt!

NARRATOR 2: He started to wrap it around himself. The cobra woke up.

NARRATOR 3: *Ssssssssssssss. (keeps hissing)*

NARRATOR 1: It didn't wait for Tiger to finish wrapping.

NARRATOR 4: It wrapped itself around Tiger.

NARRATOR 2: Then it squeezed him and bit him.

NARRATOR 3: *Sstt! Ssssssssssssss. (keeps hissing)*

TIGER: Ooh! Ow! Yow! That's no belt. That's a *cobra!* *(into the distance)* Help! Mouse Deer! Help!

NARRATOR 3: *(fades out with hissing)*

NARRATOR 1: But Mouse Deer was far away.

NARRATOR 4: And as he went, he sang his song.

MOUSE DEER: *(to audience)*

I'm quick and smart as I can be.
Try and try, but you can't catch me!

NARRATOR 1: In our second story, Mouse Deer meets another one of his most dangerous enemies. This story is called,

MOUSE DEER: *(brightly, to audience)* Mouse Deer . . .

NARRATOR 1: and

CROCODILE: *(menacingly, to audience, in low, growly voice)*
. . . Crocodile.

NARRATOR 1: One day, Mouse Deer went down to the river.

NARRATOR 4: He wanted to take a drink.

NARRATOR 2: But he knew Crocodile might be waiting underwater to eat him.

NARRATOR 3: Mouse Deer had an idea. He said out loud,

MOUSE DEER: *(to himself, but loud and clear so CROCODILE hears)* I wonder if the water's warm. I'll put in my leg and find out. *(freezes till NARRATOR 1 speaks again)*

NARRATOR 4: *(to NARRATOR 1 and others)* Wait a minute! Stop the story! Mouse Deer said he'd put in his leg?

NARRATOR 2: What a dumb idea!

NARRATOR 3: I thought Mouse Deer was supposed to be smart!

NARRATOR 1: *(to other NARRATORS and audience)* But Mouse Deer didn't put in his leg. Instead, he picked up a stick with his mouth and put in one end.

CROCODILE: *Chomp!*

NARRATOR 4: Crocodile grabbed the stick and pulled it underwater.

NARRATOR 2: Mouse Deer laughed.

MOUSE DEER: *(laughs)* Stupid Crocodile! Don't you know a stick from a leg?

NARRATOR 3: And he ran off to drink somewhere else!

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NARRATOR 1: Another day, Mouse Deer went back to the river.

NARRATOR 4: All he saw there was a floating log.

NARRATOR 2: But he knew Crocodile looked like a log when he floated.

NARRATOR 3: Mouse Deer had an idea. He said out loud,

MOUSE DEER: *(to himself, but loud and clear)* If that log is really Crocodile, it won't talk. But if it's really just a log, it will tell me.
(freezes till NARRATOR 1 speaks again)

NARRATOR 3: *(to NARRATOR 1 and others)* Hold everything! Mouse Deer said Crocodile would be quiet but a log would say something?

NARRATOR 2: Now, that's really dumb!

NARRATOR 4: It sure is!

NARRATOR 1: *(to other NARRATORS and audience)* But then Mouse Deer *listened*.

NARRATOR 4: A rough voice said,

CROCODILE: *(low and growly)* I'm really just a log.

NARRATOR 2: Mouse Deer laughed.

MOUSE DEER: *(laughs)* Stupid Crocodile! Do you think a log can talk?

NARRATOR 3: And off he ran again!

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NARRATOR 1: Another day, Mouse Deer wanted to *cross* the river.

NARRATOR 4: He wanted to eat tasty fruits and roots and shoots on the other *side*.

NARRATOR 2: But he didn't want Crocodile to eat him first!

NARRATOR 3: Mouse Deer had an idea. He called out,

MOUSE DEER: *(brightly)* Crocodile! *(freezes till NARRATOR 1 speaks again)*

NARRATOR 2: *(to NARRATOR 1 and others)* I don't believe this!

NARRATOR 4: Mouse Deer *called* for Crocodile?

NARRATOR 3: How dumb can he get!

NARRATOR 1: *(to other NARRATORS and audience)* But then Crocodile rose from the water.

CROCODILE: *(low and growly)* Hello, Mouse Deer. Have you come to be my breakfast?

MOUSE DEER: Not today, Crocodile. I have orders from the King. He wants me to count all the crocodiles.

CROCODILE: *(very impressed)* The King! Tell us what to do.

MOUSE DEER: You must line up from *this* side of the river to the *other* side.

NARRATOR 4: Crocodile got all his friends and family. They lined up across the river.

NARRATOR 2: Mouse Deer jumped onto Crocodile's back.

MOUSE DEER: One.

NARRATOR 3: He jumped onto the next crocodile.

MOUSE DEER: Two.

NARRATOR 1: And the next.

MOUSE DEER: Three.

NARRATOR 4: Mouse Deer kept jumping till he jumped off . . .

NARRATOR 2: on the other side of the river.

CROCODILE: *(calling across the river)* How many are there?

MOUSE DEER: *(calling back)* Just enough! And all stupid!

NARRATOR 3: Then he went off singing his song.

MOUSE DEER: *(to audience)*

I'm quick and smart as I can be.
Try and try, but you can't catch me!

NARRATOR 1: In our last story, Mouse Deer meets his most dangerous enemy of all. *(to other NARRATORS)* Can you guess who it is?

NARRATOR 3: Cobra!

NARRATOR 1: No.

NARRATOR 2: Lion!

NARRATOR 1: No.

NARRATOR 4: Tyrannosaur!

NARRATOR 1: No! This one is called,

MOUSE DEER: *(brightly, to audience)* Mouse Deer . . .

NARRATOR 1: and

FARMER: *(pleasantly, to audience)* . . . Farmer.

NARRATORS 2, 3, & 4: *(confused, to audience)* Huh?

NARRATOR 1: Mouse Deer loved to eat the fruits and roots and shoots of the forest. But he loved something else even more.

NARRATOR 4: He loved the vegetables in Farmer s garden.

NARRATOR 2: One day, Mouse Deer went to the edge of the forest.

NARRATOR 3: He looked out at row after row of vegetables.

MOUSE DEER: *(to himself)* Mmmm. Juicy cucumbers! Yummy yams!

NARRATOR 1: He started into the garden.

NARRATOR 4: *Snap!*

MOUSE DEER: *(in pain and shock, looking at his leg)* Oh!

NARRATOR 4: His leg was caught in a snare!

NARRATOR 2: Mouse Deer pulled and pulled.

NARRATOR 3: But he could not get away.

MOUSE DEER: Oh, no! Farmer will have me for dinner!

NARRATOR 1: Then he saw Farmer coming. Mouse Deer thought fast.

MOUSE DEER: *(makes a face like he s thinking hard, then brightens)*

NARRATOR 4: He lay on the ground and made his body stiff.

FARMER: *(pleasantly, to himself)* Well, well. Look what I caught. A mouse deer! *(looks closer)* But he looks dead.

NARRATOR 2: Farmer pushed him with his foot.

NARRATOR 3: Mouse Deer didn t move.

FARMER: Maybe he s been dead a long time. Too bad! I guess we can t eat him.

NARRATOR 1: He pulled Mouse Deer s leg out of the snare. Then he tossed Mouse Deer back into the forest.

NARRATOR 4: Mouse Deer landed with a soft *plop*. Then he jumped up and ran.

FARMER: *(calling after him angrily)* Hey! You tricked me!

NARRATOR 2: Mouse Deer laughed.

MOUSE DEER: *(laughs, then to audience)* Farmer is smart. But Mouse Deer is smarter!

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NARRATOR 1: A few days passed. Mouse Deer kept thinking about all those vegetables.

NARRATOR 4: One day, he went back to the edge of the forest.

MOUSE DEER: *(to himself)* Mmmm. Tasty gourds! Scrumptious sweet potatoes!

NARRATOR 2: Then he saw something new.

NARRATOR 3: It looked like a man. But its head was a coconut, and its body was rubber.

MOUSE DEER: A scarecrow! That silly Farmer. Does he think he can scare me with that? I'll show him how scared I am!

NARRATOR 1: Mouse Deer marched up to the scarecrow. He gave it a big kick.

MOUSE DEER: Take *this!* (*kicks it with one hand, as a hoof*)

NARRATOR 4: But his leg stuck to the scarecrow. The scarecrow was covered with sticky sap from a rubber tree!

MOUSE DEER: Let me go! (*grunts as he struggles*)

NARRATOR 2: He pulled and he pulled. Then he pushed with his other front leg.

MOUSE DEER: (*grunts as he pushes forward with other hand/hoof*)

NARRATOR 3: That leg stuck too.

MOUSE DEER: *Turn me loose!* (*grunts as he struggles*)

NARRATOR 1: He pulled and he pulled. Then he pushed with his two back legs.

MOUSE DEER: (*grunts as he hops forward on both feet/hooves*)

NARRATOR 4: They stuck too.

MOUSE DEER: PUT ME DOWN! (*grunts as he struggles*)

NARRATOR 2: He pulled and he pushed and he pulled and he pushed.

NARRATOR 3: But Mouse Deer was trapped.

MOUSE DEER: (*stops and pants*)

NARRATOR 1: Then he saw Farmer.

MOUSE DEER: (*gasps*)

NARRATOR 1: Mouse Deer thought fast.

MOUSE DEER: (*thinks hard, then looks shocked and scared*)

NARRATOR 4: But he didn't have any ideas!

FARMER: (*pleasantly*) Well, well. How nice of you to come back.

NARRATOR 2: He pulled Mouse Deer off the scarecrow and carried him to the house.

NARRATOR 3: He put him outside in an empty chicken coop.

FARMER: (*still pleasantly*) I'll keep you here tonight. And tomorrow you'll be our dinner. (*leaves*)

NARRATOR 1: All that night, Mouse Deer couldn't sleep. He didn't want to be dinner!

NARRATOR 4: When the sun rose, Mouse Deer just lay there sadly. Then he heard something.

DOG: (*in a barking voice*) Why, it's Mouse Deer!

MOUSE DEER: (*perks up and looks*)

DOG: So Farmer caught you at last. It serves you right!

NARRATOR 2: It was Farmer's dog.

NARRATOR 3: Mouse Deer thought fast.

MOUSE DEER: (*thinks hard, then brightens*) What do you mean, Dog? Farmer didn't catch me.

DOG: (*suspiciously*) Then why are you in the coop?

MOUSE DEER: Because there aren't enough beds in the house. You see, Farmer is holding a feast tomorrow. And I'm the guest of honor.

DOG: Guest of honor? That's not fair! I've been his loyal friend for years, and *you're* just a *thief*. The guest of honor should be *me*!

MOUSE DEER: *(thoughtfully)* You know, Dog, you're right. Why don't you take my place? When Farmer sees you in here, he'll make *you* the guest of honor instead.

DOG: *(surprised)* Really? You don't mind?

MOUSE DEER: Not at all. You deserve it.

DOG: Mouse Deer, you're not so bad after all. Thank you!

NARRATOR 1: Dog lifted the latch and opened the door.

MOUSE DEER: You're welcome, Dog. Enjoy the feast.

NARRATOR 4: Mouse Deer ran for the forest. Then he watched from the forest edge.

NARRATOR 2: He saw Farmer come out and stare at Dog.

NARRATOR 3: Then he heard Farmer yell.

FARMER: You stupid dog! You let the mouse deer get away!

NARRATOR 1: Mouse Deer laughed.

MOUSE DEER: *(laughs, then to audience)* Farmer will have to find a *different* dinner now!

NARRATOR 4: Then he went off singing his song.

MOUSE DEER: *(to audience)*

I'm quick and smart as I can be.
Try and try, but you can't catch me!

NARRATOR 1: And there they are—three stories about Mouse Deer.
(to other NARRATORS) Now do you believe in him?

NARRATORS 2, 3, & 4: *(look at each other)*

NARRATOR 3: Well

NARRATOR 2: Uh

NARRATOR 4: We guess so, but

MOUSE DEER: *(to all NARRATORS)* Hey! Who are *you*?

NARRATOR 1: Hi, Mouse Deer. We re the narrators. We help tell the stories.

NARRATOR 3: That s right!

MOUSE DEER: Help tell . . . ?! Hey, are you trying to trick me?

NARRATOR 4: No!

NARRATOR 2: No!

MOUSE DEER: Well, that s good, and you know why? *(to audience)*

I m quick and smart as I can be.
Try and try, but you can t catch me!

(waves to audience) Bye, now!

ALL NARRATORS: *(confused, to audience)* Huh?