

THE CUNNING SNIPE

Once Snipe was very hungry, and from morning until sunset he looked for food but found none. Finally he came to the bank of a pond in a very pretty valley. As soon as he saw the fish constantly swimming in the deep, clear pond, Snipe thought, "Now I can eat fish to my heart's content," but when Snipe leapt into the water, the fish swam away, so he was unable to catch any at all.

After a few days, Snipe went there again, and pretended to be nonchalant. Wearing a high, round religious cap, he strode back and forth on the bank of the pond. The fish saw it, and all were surprised, but they did not know what to make of it. At that time, one fish bravely swam up to Snipe, but he kept walking, pretending he did not see it yet. In a little while Snipe said to the fish:

Listen to me, my children!
From today on
You need not fear me.
I am like a kind god.
I will not do even once
A deed that does not help others.

When the fish heard this they all said in unison:

O gracious priest,
Tell us the holy dharma.
We absolutely trust in you;
We ask you to teach us.

Snipe listened and said again:

Listen here, my children!
Not only am I a best friend
To all creatures,
But I will never
Do you any injury at all.
Hence, it's right that you
Place your trust in me.

So saying, he flew away to his own place.

Again one day, Snipe came to the bank of the pond, pretending to be very unhappy, and not saying a word. As soon as a fish saw the way Snipe appeared, it went over to him and asked:

O gracious priest
What troubles have you had?

Pretending to cry, Snipe said in a piteous voice:

Listen here, my child.
Something unfortunate has happened.
A black-headed person has come
Who'll try to dry out this pond.
So you creatures will have
No way to escape with your lives.
I have no intention of being separated
From you fish.
But there is no way to avert strong previous karma.

The fish listened and they all wept spontaneously. In a little while, a fish said:

O wise priest,
You probably have a way
To save us.
We ask you to think it over carefully.

After Snipe heard this, he became happy, pointed to a mountain in front of the pond and said:

Behind this mountain
I know there's a lake.
It's not possible for you to go there.
I have a good way;
From today on,
I'll take each of you.
Consider whether I may or not.

When he finished, all the fish that were there became happy and later they let Snipe carry them. From then on, after he went there carrying a single fish a day, he ate them. After not too long a time, there was not a single fish in the pond, only a single crab.

One day, Snipe went to the bank of the pond and asked Crab:

Friend Crab, listen to me.
Except for you, in this pond
You do not have a single fish as a friend.
Now I'll take you and go.
Your friends are waiting for you in that place.
What do think of that?

Crab listened to those words and said:

Gracious priest,
What you say is true, but
I have a small wish.
I can go to that place,
But I want to cling to your neck.
Please consider whether I may or not.
If I don't do it that way,
There's no doubt I'll fall to the ground.

Snipe promised to do it that way and flew off, carrying Crab.

As soon as they arrived, Crab saw many fish bones piled up atop a flat rock and he thought, "This one is really such a sinner," but he said nothing. At that time Snipe said:

Hey Brother Crab,
We've come to the place we were going.
Release your claws.
I've something I want to tell you.

Crab said:

Evil-minded sneaky Snipe,
You've eaten all the fish.
Now the life that you cling to
I will not release, even if you take three steps.

Since Crab never loosened its tight crushing grip, Snipe could not bear it and said:

Kind Crab,
Take pity on me.
I beg you not to harm me.

But Crab replied:
Sinful Snipe, listen here.
If you want to escape with your life,
Take me back.
You've no other way than this.

Snipe listened, and very happily carried Crab, flying off in the direction of the pond.

As soon as they got to the shore of the pond, Crab crushed Snipe's throat and said:
Gracious priest,
You wished to set me on the path to freedom,
But because your accumulated sins were too many
You lost the fortune to be free.

So saying, he crushed Snipe's neck tightly and killed him.

—Stobs rgyal dpal ldan, *Qinghai Folk Literature* 1, 1985