

## GROUSE AND PARTRIDGE

Once upon a time, Grouse and Partridge lived at the edge of a forest. Grouse was a constant, diligent worker and always roamed the edge of the village picking up some pieces of grain and stockpiling them. But Partridge, after she had eaten her fill, was lazily inattentive every day and would never do any long-range task.

One day Grouse advised Partridge, “Hey, little friend. Now winter is drawing near. Wouldn’t it be better if you prepared some grain? What will you do when it snows?” Partridge mocked her, replying, “You’re so stupid! Won’t I eat the Food of Emptiness?” Astonished, Grouse went back. Shortly after the weather got colder and colder and eventually a whole cubit of snow fell.

Grouse stayed in her warm pleasant nest, eating the grain she had stockpiled before. Partridge could not stand it for more than half a day, and, unable to tolerate it, thinking of a way to deceive Grouse, she went there and said, “Elder Sister Grouse, today’s the festival when the chief of a hundred birds goes to the fields. I’ve built a stupa to represent my faith, but I’m a few grains short. Lend me sixteen kernels of grain and I’ll return them tomorrow.”

Grouse did not know what the meaning of this was, but pretending she was a broad-minded householder, she said, “O, yes, yes. Since that’s the case, it’s really good,” and she lent Partridge sixteen kernels of grain. After thanking her, Partridge went to her own nest and ate up the grain like a madwoman. Even after a few days, Partridge had not come to return the grain, so Grouse went to tell her that she had to return the loan. Partridge said heedlessly, “Oh, I’ve finished using all your barley grains temporarily for a religious food gift, so don’t be angry and you’ll get the repayment soon for sure.”

From then on, many, many days went by, but Partridge’s repayment was like throwing a stone in the water. Whenever Grouse went by Partridge’s nest, she said, “Sixteen, sixteen,” reminding her that she had to repay the loan, but Partridge, other than saying, “Take it easy, take it easy,” did not give back a single grain.

From then on it has become a habit for Grouse to always say, “Sixteen, sixteen,” and Partridge to say, “Take it easy, take it easy.”<sup>1</sup>

—Khyung Thar rgyal, *Qinghai Folk Literature* 2, 1991

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<sup>1</sup> The words imitate the bird calls: *bcu drug* /juʈuù/ ‘sixteen’ & *drag* /ʈaà/ ‘it’s ok’; ‘take it easy.’