

## HOW HARE HAD A SLIP OF THE TONGUE

Wolf, Fox, Cock and Hare were good friends. They were as close and harmonious as the Four Harmonious Brothers. Hare was said to be intelligent, very fond of his friends, and Hare himself was overjoyed to be their leader.

One day the four friends went to look for food together. For half a day, they wandered hither and thither but got nothing. They were hungry and when their bellies were growling continuously, Hare saw a monk coming a long way off, carrying a heavy pack on his back. He recalled a plan to mind and called all the others, whispering something to them. They all said the plan was good and went off separately.

According to Hare's plan, Fox hid in the forest and waited for the monk. When the monk drew near, Fox, pretended he was lame, and limped up to the monk.

The monk saw lame Fox coming and thought, "What luck today. Soon I'll be able to wear a fox-fur hat on my head," and he was glad. He bent at the waist, stretched out his arms and when he was about to catch Fox, Fox's swerved a lot. The monk almost caught Fox a few times, but he could not, and Fox ran away. So he followed Fox for a long time, until he was out of breath and dripping with sweat. Finally he flung away his pack, took off his hat and boots, and concentrated on chasing Fox.

Then Hare, Cock and Wolf came and took away the pack with the provisions and whatever things there were. Then, after he had escaped from the monk who was chasing him, Fox returned, and, together with Hare and the others, they divided the spoils.

Hare gave the monk's hat to Cock and said, "Since you always go to peck birdfeed in the fields, I give you the hat. If you wear it, others won't be able to kill you." Cock said, "Good, good," put on the hat and flew away happily.

Hare gave the monk's boots to Wolf. "You always have to go to the grasslands to steal sheep, so I give you these boots. If you wear them, water and mud won't stick to your feet." Wolf said, "Thanks," put on the boots and went off happily.

When Hare opened up the food pack, he took out the cymbals that were there. He said to Fox, "You have a lot of children, so I'll give you the cymbals. If you take them and beat them, then all your children will like it a lot." Fox said, "Thank you," took the cymbals and returned to his den satisfied.

Finally, with a smile, Hare took half a pack full of dzamba and went home to enjoy himself.

Cock put on the monk's hat and went to peck birdfeed in the field. Since the hat was too big, it covered his eyes and a man caught him by the tail. Cock flew

off strongly, and even though it escaped, its tail feathers were completely sheared off.

Wolf wore the boots and went to steal sheep. The shepherd knew that, took a stick, and when Wolf came to chase sheep, it was unable to flee since it was wearing boots. The shepherd beat Wolf with the stick and broke one leg. Wolf took off the boots and ran away, but just got away with his life.

Fox also met with catastrophe. When he got home carrying the cymbals, he saw the kits playing at the door of the den. He beat the cymbals, thinking he would make the kits happy, but they had never heard anything like that, so they fled the den, fell over a cliff and died.

Wolf, Cock and Fox got together and they all got angry, realizing that Hare had brought them harm. They decided to seek damages and went to look for Hare.

Hare was sitting at the door eating dzamba. He saw them coming and that they were angry. Knowing it meant trouble, he picked up a stone from the ground and struck himself strongly in the mouth with a smack, making a cleft on his lip and the blood flowed red. Before Wolf and the others came near, he cried and said, "Oh, ow! The monk has cheated us! Look, all of you! I ate the dzamba and cleaved my mouth!" They all believed him and said, "It seems we've all been cheated by the monk."

Therefore they all thought Hare was not to blame, their anger was pacified, and they all went to their own homes. But from then on, Hare's descendants have had a cleft lip.

—Don grub, *Qinghai Folk Literature* 4, 1988