

BEAR AND RABBIT (I)

G.yu lha

G.yu lha writes:

I recorded this folktale from Thub bstan (b. 1936), the reincarnate lama in Siyuewu Village (Puxi Township, Rangtang County, Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province) when I visited him in the winter of 2009-2010. Thub bstan learned this folktale from his mother. I heard this tale when I was around six years old from my great grandfather when my family was having dinner near the stove one evening.

A black bear mother and her daughter, and a rabbit mother and her daughter, lived in the same forest. The two mothers went to the grassland every day to dig *gro ma*.¹

One evening, the mother bear arrived home without the mother rabbit.

"A ma dred mo,² did you see my mother? Is she coming?" asked the baby rabbit.

"She will come if you make the fire bigger and boil some tea," replied the mother bear. Then the rabbit made the fire as big as she could and boiled the tea, but her mother still didn't come.

"Is my mother coming soon?" she asked the mother bear.

"Make the fire smaller, and then she'll come," the mother bear said.

¹ This small, red-skinned tuber grows on high altitude

² Mother Bear.

After a long time, the baby rabbit asked the mother bear again, "Why is my mother still not here? Is she coming or not?"

"If you continue asking me I will eat you! Go to bed and sleep," said the mother bear.

The baby rabbit went to bed and secretly listened to the conversation between the mother black bear and her daughter, and learned that her mother had been eaten by the mother bear.

The mother bear went out as usual to search for *gro ma* the next day. The baby rabbit was very clever and asked the baby bear to play a game with her. The baby rabbit asked the baby bear to put a piece of paper on his chest and she put a flat stone on her chest, and then they shot each other with arrows. The baby rabbit let the baby bear shoot first, and then the rabbit shot the bear and killed him. After that, she fled for her life.

First, she saw a man who was herding sheep on a boundless grassland. "Uncle, is there anywhere that I can hide? My mother was killed by the mother bear and so I killed the mother bear's cub," said the baby rabbit to the shepherd.

"Climb into the oldest and biggest sheep's ear," replied the herder. The baby rabbit climbed into the ear just as the mother bear arrived.

"Did you see a rabbit running across the grassland? Tell me the truth, otherwise I'll swallow you!" said the mother bear to the shepherd.

"It's in the oldest and biggest one's ear," said the shepherd.

The baby rabbit had taken some ash and *gro ma* with her when she left home. She threw the ash into the mother bear's eyes and escaped as the bear wiped her eyes.

Next, the baby rabbit saw a horse herder in a dense forest. "Is there anywhere that I can hide? My mother was

killed by the mother bear and so I killed the bear's cub," said the baby rabbit to the horse herder.

"Get into the biggest horse's ear," he said, and the baby rabbit climbed into the horse's ear just as the mother bear arrived.

"Have you seen a rabbit running past here? Tell me the truth otherwise I'll swallow you," the mother bear yelled at the horse herder.

"It's in the biggest horse's ear!" the horse herder said.

The rabbit took a handful of ash, threw it in the bear's eyes, and escaped as the bear wiped her eyes.

After running a long way, the rabbit met a tiger. "Uncle Tiger, can you hide me from the bear? My mother was killed by the mother bear and so I killed her cub," said the rabbit.

"Get into my ear," said the tiger and so the rabbit climbed into the tiger's ear just as the bear arrived.

"Have you seen a rabbit running through here? Tell me the truth otherwise I'll swallow you!" said the mother bear.

"Swallow me? I'll show you 'swallow you!'" said the tiger angrily to the mother bear, and then opened his mouth and swallowed the bear.

"*Zhi, zhi*,"³ the tiger heard the rabbit chewing something in his ear and asked, "What are you eating?"

"I was so hungry that I took out one of my eyes to eat. Would you like to try some?" said the rabbit and handed some *gro ma* to the tiger.

"It's very delicious. Can you take out one of my eyes also?" said the tiger. The rabbit plucked out one of the tiger's eyes and put it in the tiger's mouth. The poor tiger said, "Mine's not like yours. Mine is bitter."

³*Zhi zhi* is onomatopoeic for chewing.

"That's strange. Try another piece of mine," the rabbit said and gave the tiger another piece of *gro ma*.

The tiger chewed it carefully and wondered why the eye given by the rabbit was sweet but his was bitter. He was curious and decided to try his other eye. "I decided to eat my other eye, but afterwards I'll be blind. You'll have to lead me slowly where the road is rough, and lead me a bit faster when the road is flat," said the tiger.

Rabbit agreed, gouged out the tiger's other eye, and fed it to the tiger.

"My eyes were not as tasty as yours," said the blind tiger. The rabbit then led the tiger faster when the road was bad and slower when the road was better, doing the opposite of what the tiger had asked her to do. Finally, they reached a cliff top and made a fire to warm themselves. The rabbit asked the tiger to sit near the edge of the cliff, pushed the fire towards the tiger, and said, "Uncle Tiger, move back a little otherwise your beautiful skin will be burnt." The rabbit did this several times and eventually the tiger fell from the cliff.

The rabbit continued on her way and arrived at a house where a couple and their baby lived with some cows.

"There is a dead tiger near the foot of the cliff. If you want it, I'll care for your baby and cows while you are away," said the rabbit to the couple.

The couple thought this was a good offer, and headed off to find the tiger. Not long after they left, the rabbit killed the constantly crying baby and the annoying cows. She filled the baby up with ash and laid it in the bed, and then filled the cows with straw and stood them up outside. When the couple returned, the wife tried to nurse the baby but couldn't and ashes came out whenever she patted the baby. She went downstairs and tried to milk the cows but they each fell down one after the other.

"You detestable, cunning rabbit! You can't escape from your death today!" shouted the couple.

"You are right. I ought to die but I want to tell you a way to kill me that will cause me great suffering. You, Wife, take the millstone and wait for me atop the ladder. You, husband, take your bow and arrow and wait for me underneath the ladder. I'll stand halfway up the ladder. When I say 'Go!' you, Wife, drop the millstone on me and you, Husband, shoot at me with your bow and arrow. This way I'll die at both of your hands. Won't that be wonderful!" suggested the rabbit.

The couple followed the rabbit's advice. The wife took the millstone and waited at the top of the ladder, and the husband took his bow and arrow and waited at the bottom of the ladder.

"Go!" said the rabbit and quickly jumped up through a hole in the wall near the ladder and flew up to the moon. The millstone killed the husband and the arrow killed the wife, but each was actually killed by the rabbit.

My story is finished. People say that's why there is a rabbit in the moon today.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

A ma dred mo ཨ་མ་རྩེད་མོ། 熊妈妈

Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture ཨ་བ་བོད་

རིགས་ཆའང་རིགས་རང་སྐྱོང་ཁུལ། 阿坝藏族羌族自治州

G.yu lha གཡུ་ལྷ། 依娜

gro ma རྩོ་མ། 人参果

Puxi ཕུ་ཁ། 蒲西

Rangtang འཇོ་མ་ཐང་། 壤塘

Sichuan སི་ཁྲོན། 四川

Siyuewu སི་ཡུའུ་འུ། 斯跃武

Thub bstan ཐུབ་བསྟན། 头丹