

THE THREE FRIENDS

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A FOLK TALE FROM
LAHAUL

Once a wolf, a crow and a rabbit were going along the road when they came upon the body of a man. The man had obviously died due to some accident. A bundle of clothes and a rosary were lying near the body. The three friends, finding the man dead, decided to take away all his possessions.

The rabbit said to the other two: "Friends, you take whatever you like for yourselves and leave the rest to me".

The wolf and the crow were puzzled and did not know which of the articles could be of any use to any of them. However, they were very pleased with the unselfish spirit displayed by their friends, the rabbit. Taking him to be the wisest, they decided to leave the matter entirely in his hands.

The wolf said: "Brer rabbit, you are the wisest of us all. You are also very unselfish, for you have offered us the first choice of the articles. We, therefore, wish to leave the distribution of these goods entirely in your hands".

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The crow expressed his complete agreement with this statement by cawing vociferously. The rabbit, feigning extreme reluctance to take on this onerous task, ultimately agreed. He said to the wolf: "Brother, you are a great hunter. You often have to travel considerable distances in search of game. I, therefore, feel that this pair of long Tibetan boots with fur-lining will be most useful to you in the winter months when there is snow on the ground".

The wolf thought this to be a very good idea and was greatly

pleased with his share of the spoils.

The rabbit then turned to the crow and said to him: "Brother, though you are not a hunter, you have often to fly great distances to search for your food. Often you have to work by intuition. This rosary, which is used by the Lamas to foretell events and for other works of prognostication, will be of great use to you. By putting it around your neck and closing your eyes you will be able to divine the existence of food which is hidden from your eyes".

The crow was greatly pleased with this gift and was sure that it would ease his search for food in future.

The rabbit then turned to the bundle which was the only thing that remained and, looking it over with a very disdainful air, said casually to the other two: "Now only this useless bundle remains and if you agree I will take it".

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The other two friends agreed heartily. Having fairly distributed the articles they all departed for their respective homes. The rabbit went away to his hiding place behind a big rock and enjoyed himself for a number of days on the good food which was tied in the bundle.

Soon the winter came and there was snow all over the hills and meadows. The wolf thought that this would be a very good time to try his new fur boots.

One fine morning he put them on before going hunting. He found that they were very cumbersome and a great handicap but he was determined to wear them. He had hardly run a few yards when he stumbled and rol-

led down a very steep slope. Luckily he was not killed but his bones got a thorough shaking and his body numerous bruises. Cursing the rabbit for his ill-considered distribution and avowing vengeance he abandoned the boots and limped home.

The crow also suffered a mishap with his rosary. He was sitting on a branch one day with the rosary around his neck and trying to forecast the presence of food somewhere when he slipped off the branch. The rosary caught on other branch and almost strangled him. It was by sheer luck that he escaped death. He also cursed the rabbit and determined to take revenge.

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After sometime the crow and the wolf ran into each other. Each related his tale of woe and both were convinced that the rabbit had played a trick. They decided to seek him out and punish him for his treachery.

After many days of search they found the rabbit. The rabbit saw them approaching from a distance, and guessed the worst. He immediately rubbed his nose against a rock so as to cause bleeding, and lay down on the ground moaning with half-closed eyes.

When the crow and the wolf, full of righteous anger, came near, the wolf shouted: "Rabbit, get up. We have discovered your treachery and are going to punish you."

The rabbit however continued to lie on the ground and moan away. Both the wolf and the crow called harshly a number of times but instead of getting up the rabbit only cried more loud-

ly.

Finally they asked him what was the trouble. The rabbit replied: "Brothers, that bundle which I got as my share of the dead man's belongings has been the cause of my misfortunes. I was attacked by some persons who took away the bundle and also beat me soundly."

The wolf and the crow, hearing this, felt convinced that the rabbit was after all not to blame, but there was perhaps some ill-luck attached to the property of the dead man. They then related their stories to the rabbit and all agreed that it was most unlucky to have touched any of the possessions of the dead man.

It is said that the rabbit even to this day has a cut in the middle of his nose because of that rubbing.