

## THE BANDITS

One night Jack was reading a book with his father.

'This story reminds me of the time Tashi was captured by some bandits,' said Jack.



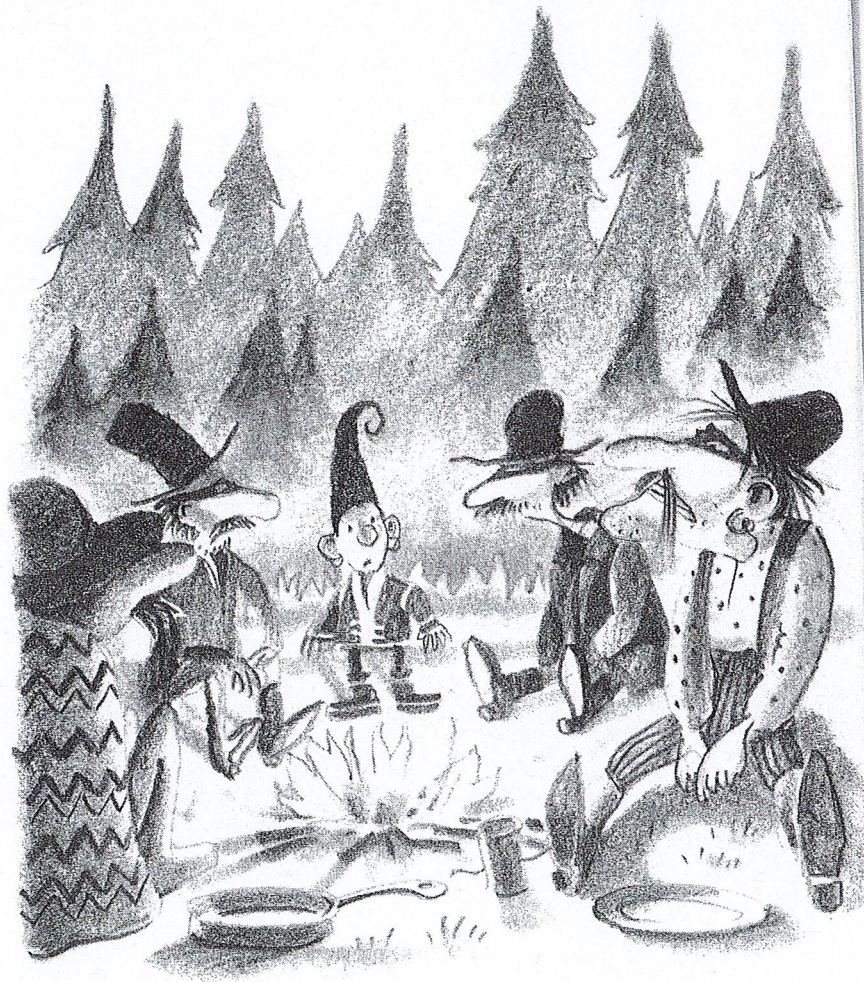
'Oh good, another Tashi story,' said Dad. 'I suppose Tashi finished up as the Bandit Chief.'  
'No, he didn't,' said Jack. 'It was like this. One wet and windy night a band of robbers rode into Tashi's village. They were looking for some shelter for the night.'



‘But next morning, just as they were leaving, the wife of the Bandit Chief saw Tashi. He reminded her of her son, who had sailed away on a pirate ship, and she said to her husband, “That boy looks just like our son, Mo Chi. Let’s take him with us.”’



‘So Tashi was picked up and thrown on to one of the horses and away they went. He sneaked a good look about him, but he was surrounded by bandits, and it was impossible to escape. So Tashi had to think up one of his cunning plans.’



'The first night when the bandits were still sitting around the fire after their dinner, the Bandit Chief said to Tashi, "Come, boy, sing us a song as Mo Chi did, of treasure and pirates and fish that shine like coins in the sea."

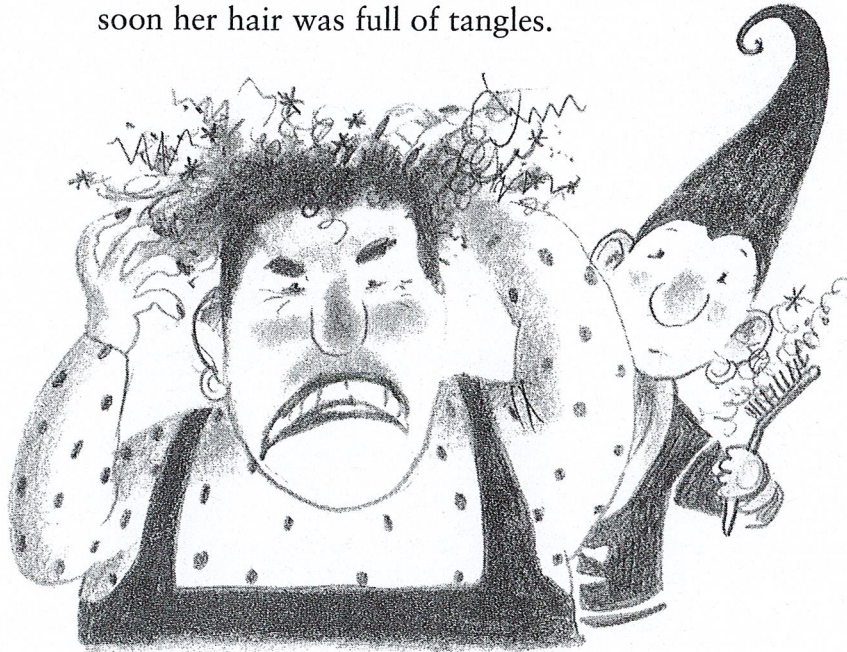
'Tashi saw that this was his chance. So what do you think he did?'



'Sang like a nightingale,' said Dad.  
'Wrong!' said Jack. 'He sang like a crow. The bandits all covered their ears and the Bandit Wife said, "Stop, stop! You sing like a crow.'



You had better come over here and brush my hair like my son used to do.” Tashi bowed politely but as he stepped around the fire, he filled the brush with thistles and burrs so that soon her hair was full of tangles.



“Stop, stop!” cried the Bandit Wife, and her husband told her, “This boy is not like our son. He sings like a crow and he tangles your hair.” Tashi put on a sorrowful face. “I will do better tomorrow,” he promised.



“You’d better,” whispered the Chief’s brother, Me Too, “or I’ll boil you in snake oil.”

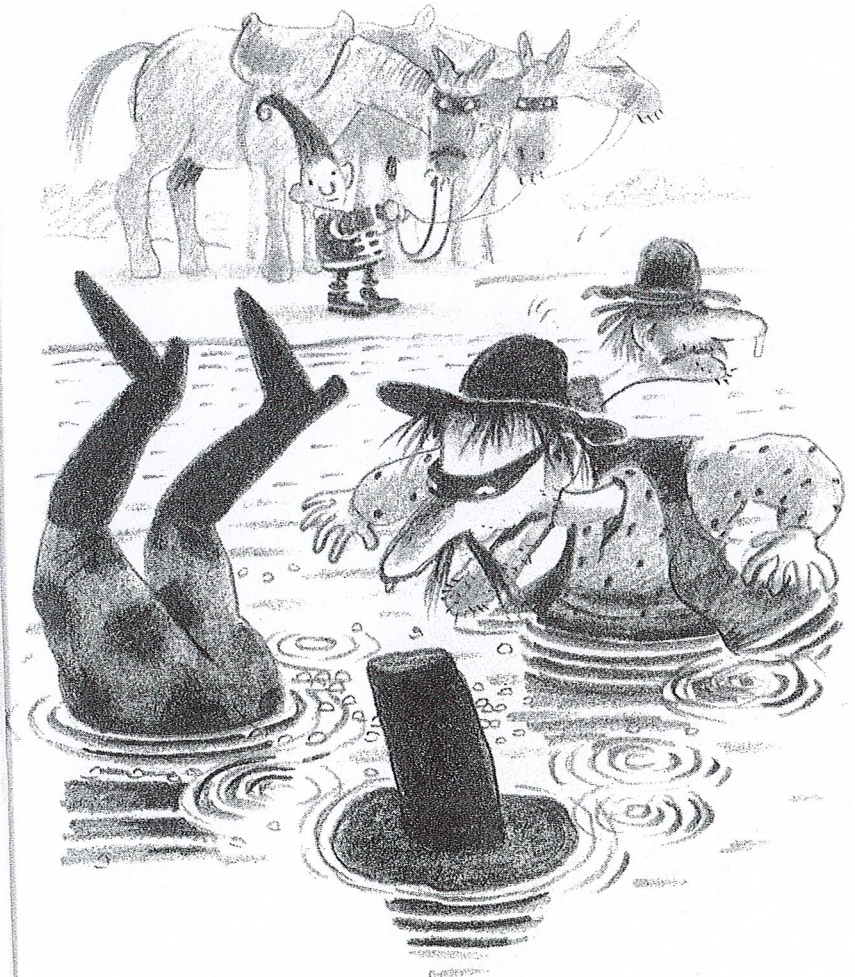
'The next day when the bandits moved camp, they put all the rice into three big bags and gave them to Tashi to carry. When they came to a river, what do you think Tashi did?'



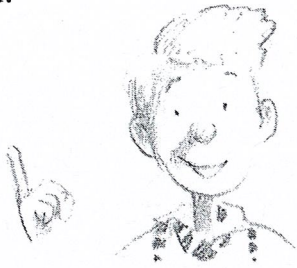
'Well,' said Dad, scratching his chin, 'he's such a clever boy, I expect he carried them over one by one, holding them up high.'



'Wrong!' said Jack. 'He dropped them all into the river. The bandits roared with rage. They called to Tashi to mind the horses. Then they jumped into the water and tried to recover the bags of rice that were sinking further down the river.'



'But Tashi reached them first, I suppose,'  
said Dad.



'No, he didn't,' said Jack, 'and when the  
bandits came back, all angry and dripping,  
they found that he had lost all the horses. The  
robbers began to whisper about the Bandit  
Wife, and Me Too gave Tashi evil looks. It  
took them a whole day to find the horses  
again.'



'Well, that night, the Bandit Chief said to his  
wife, "This boy is not like our son. He sings  
like a crow, he tangles your hair, he loses the  
rice and scatters the horses." Tashi put on a  
sorrowful face. "I will do better tomorrow,"  
he promised.



"You'd better," whispered Me Too, "or I'll  
pluck out your nose hairs, one by one."

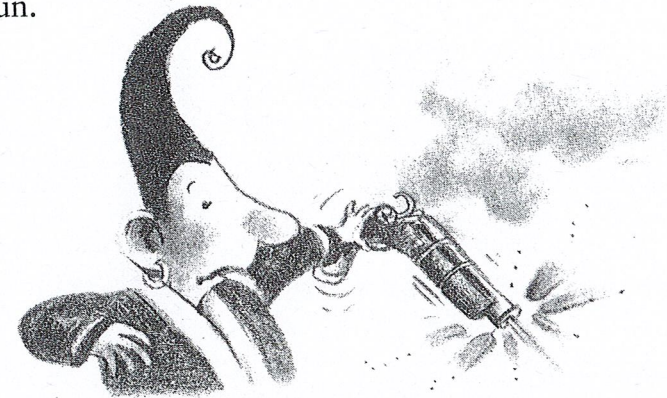


‘On the third day, the bandits decided to attack the village where another band of robbers were staying. Just before dawn they quietly surrounded the camp—and what do you think Tashi did then?’

‘He rode into the village and captured the chief,’ guessed Dad.



‘Wrong!’ cried Jack. ‘They were just preparing to attack, when Tashi accidentally let off his gun.’



‘The enemy was warned and Tashi’s bandits had to gallop away for their lives.’





When they were at a safe distance they stopped. The Chief's brother wanted to punish Tashi—he said he'd tie him up and smother him in honey and let man-eating ants loose upon him—but the Bandit Wife said, "No, let him come back to camp with me. He can help me roast the ducks we stole yesterday and we will have a feast ready for you when you return."



'So she and Tashi worked all day, plucking, chopping and turning the ducks on the spit, and mouth-watering smells greeted the bandits as they drew near the camp that evening. And what do you think Tashi did then?'

'Washed his hands for dinner,' said Dad.



'Wrong!' said Jack. 'Just as the robbers jumped down from their horses, Tashi stumbled and knocked a big pot of cold water over the almost-cooked ducks and put out the fire.'

