

## **THE HARE AND THE PORCUPINE**

Once upon a time . . . an old porcupine lived in a large wood with his twin sons. Apples were their favourite dish, but the youngsters sometimes raided a neighbouring vegetable plot for the turnips Dad loved to munch. One day, one of the young porcupines set off as usual to fetch the turnips. Like all porcupines, he was a slow walker, and he had just reached a large cabbage, when from behind the leaves, out popped a hare.

"So you have arrived at last!" said the hare. "I've been watching you for half an hour. Do you always dawdle? I hope you're quicker at eating, or it will take you a year to finish the turnips!" Instead of going into a huff at being teased, the porcupine decided to get his own back by being very crafty.

Slow on his feet but a quick thinker, he rapidly hit on a plan. So the hare sneered at the slow porcupine, did he? Well, the hare's own turn of speed would be his downfall!

"I can run faster than you if I try," said the porcupine "Ha! Ha!" the hare shrieked with laughter, raising a large paw. "You can't compete with this! My grandad was the speediest hare of his day. He even won a gold penny. He used to be my coach. And you tell me you can run faster than me? Well, I bet my grandad's gold penny that I can win without even trying!"

The porcupine paid little heed to the hare's boastful words and quietly accepted the challenge. "I'll meet you tomorrow down at the ploughed field. We'll race in parallel furrows. And see who wins!"

The hare went away laughing.

"Better stay here all night! You'll never get home and back in time for the race!" he told the porcupine. The porcupine, however, had a bright idea. When he arrived home, he told his twin brother what had happened. Just before dawn next day, he gave his instructions, and off they set for the field. Hare appeared, rudely remarking: "I'll take off my jacket so I can run faster!"

Ready! Steady! Go! And in a flash, the hare streaked to the other end of the field. There, waiting for him was a porcupine, which teasingly said:

"Rather late, aren't you? I've been here for ages!" Gasping and so breathless his throat was dry, the hare whispered: "Let's try again!"

"All right," agreed the porcupine, "we'll run the race again." Never in all his life had the hare run so fast. Not even with the hounds snapping at his heels. But every time he reached the other end of the ploughed field, what did he find but the porcupine, who laughingly exclaimed: "What? Late again? I keep on getting here first!" Racing up and down the field the hare sped, trying to beat the porcupine. His legs grew terribly tired and he began to sag. And every time he came to the end of the field there stood a porcupine calling himself the winner.

"Perhaps I ought to mention, friend hare, that my grandad was the fastest porcupine of his day. He didn't win a gold penny, but he won apples, and after the race, he ate them. But I don't want apples. I'd rather have the nice gold penny you promised me!" said one of the porcupine twins.

The hare slid to the ground, dead tired. His head was spinning and his legs felt like rubber.

"This race is the end of me! I shall die here in this field, where I really believed I was a sprinter! The shame of it! What a disgrace!" The hare staggered home, hot and sticky, to fetch the gold penny that he had never for a moment ever imagined he would lose. His eyes brimming with tears, he handed

it over to the porcupines.

"Thank goodness my grandad isn't alive to see this!" he said. "Whatever would he say? After all his coaching, here I am, beaten by a porcupine!"

That evening, a party was held at the porcupines' house. The twins danced triumphantly in turn, waving aloft the gold penny. Father Porcupine brought out his old accordion for the special occasion, and the fun went on all night.

As luck would have it, the hare never did find out the secret of how the race had been rigged. Which was just as well! . . .