

AARON THE FOX

狐狸阿聰

Have you ever been told that you're "too smart for your own good"? Aaron the fox fits that description perfectly. He's a clever little fellow, especially adept at getting what he wants with the minimum of effort, no matter how hard his elders try to teach him. His teacher, the wise Master Fox, possesses many magical objects that can do incredible things – things Aaron really wants – but at a price.

In this multi-part tale reminiscent of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, we watch Aaron get his hands on all sorts of powerful devices, like the Magic Menu Pencil and the Heart's Desire Hat, then learn all too late what happens when one lets one's desires extend beyond the reach of self-control. Whether or not he'll learn from his mistakes isn't the question, however; the question is, how will the rest of the village stand him?!

Wang Mei-Hui's delightful story, brought into living color by the illustration prodigy Chen Pin-Rui, excites and entertains as it spins a parable about self-control and forbearance.

Author: Wang Mei-Hui 王玄慧

Over the course of more than twenty years, Wang Mei-Hui has published over a hundred books, as well as sixteen titles for children. A lover of rural life, her children's books emphasize loving what one has and the ability to share with others.

Illustrator: Chen Pin-Rui 陳品睿

Chen Pin-Rui is nine years old. He loves to draw, collect model cars and play soccer. This is his first illustrated book.



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Text by Wang Mei-Hui, illustrated by Chen Pin-Rui. Translated by Eleanor Goodman.

1. The Magic Menu Pencil

Aaron the fox had walked a long way to come pay his respects to his teacher, Master Fox. Master Fox had given him a pencil as a present.

“Master, can I have something else?” Aaron said unhappily. “I don’t need a pencil.”

“This isn’t any ordinary pencil,” Master Fox said, shaking his head. “Once you’ve carried forty-nine buckets of water for me, it will become a Magic Menu Pencil.”

“A Magic Menu Pencil?” Aaron said incredulously.

Aaron wanted to see the pencil’s magic, so in just five days, he carried forty-nine buckets of water, filling all five of the water basins in the courtyard.

Having fulfilled his duty, Aaron asked Master Fox how to use the Magic Menu Pencil.

“All you have to do is draw what you want to eat on a piece of paper.”

“I’ve been drawing for days, and it doesn’t work.” Thinking himself very smart, Aaron had long since tried to make it work, but without success.

Master Fox replied calmly, “There’s no such thing as a free lunch. Before the pencil’s magic can be activated, a price has to be set.”

“I’ve already carried forty-nine buckets of water!” Aaron thought that was quite a heavy “price.”

Master Fox laughed. “That was just your master testing you.”

Did that mean all his work had been for nothing? Aaron hid his annoyance and pretended to ask humbly for advice, “Master, please tell me!”

“The ‘price’ is an exchange of one thing for another, and it has to be something that you have on you.” Master Fox couldn’t help but remind him, “When you use the Magic Menu Pencil to create food, you’ll pay whatever ‘price’ you set. And what you owe will accumulate. Don’t forget that.”

“Oh, so that’s how it works.” Aaron nodded knowingly, then looked down at his body. “Hey, I’ve got lots of fur on my body. Let’s set fur as the price.”

With Master Fox’s guidance, Aaron the fox performed a spell on the Magic Menu Pencil. After he had set a “price,” he impatiently drew a steak on a piece of paper and said a few magic words over it. To his surprise, a real live steak appeared before his eyes. “Wow! It worked! Master, the Magic Menu Pencil really works!”

Wild with joy, Aaron drew a cake on the paper and said the magic words. A cake appeared.

“Aaron, remember, all of this food comes at a cost. It’s best not to use it if you don’t really need it.” The master smiled at Aaron’s pleasure.

“I know, Master.”

“Then stop messing around. Go up into the mountains and bring back some firewood.”

“Ouch, Master, my stomach really hurts. I’m going to the bathroom first.”

Pretending that he was going to the bathroom, Aaron grabbed the Magic Menu Pencil, and snuck away while Master Fox sipped his tea.

With his pencil in hand, Aaron didn’t go back to learn from his teacher Master Fox. Each day he ate his fill, slept late, and lived the good life. He thought: I’m not going to be dumb enough to go work for that old fox spirit again.

In just one month, Aaron got very fat. As soon as he woke up, he’d draw something to eat, and as

soon as he took a bite, he'd think of something else he wanted. He drew and drew and ate and ate, and wasted more and more food.

"Let me think...what else is there to eat...hey, how about some chocolate!"

But this time, no matter how he drew or how many times he said the magic words, it was no use. He had to search through the piles of old food to find something that hadn't gone spoiled. When all of the food that had been blocking his full-length mirror was gone, to his great surprise he caught sight of a fat, hairless "pig" in the mirror.

"Hey pig! What are you doing in my house? Get out!" He cursed furiously. Then he saw that his opponent made the same gestures he did, and he realized that he was the pig!

Totally hairless and so fat he looked like a pig, Aaron hurried to Master Fox to beg for his help.

Showing great mercy, Master Fox said, "Aaron, be a good boy and stay here and train with me. From now on, each time you carry a bucket of water, I'll help you get one hair back. How about it?"

So in order to get his fur back, Aaron could only accept his fate and start carrying water for Master Fox again.

2. The Heart's Desire Hat

The days passed one after another.

One day, Master Fox was leaving on a trip to attend a banquet for a fox spirit classmate on his thousandth birthday. Before leaving, he made a point of warning Aaron not to leave Master Fox's temple. He told him that each day he should practice his lessons, and only go out to collect water and chop wood.

Aaron had only gotten forty-nine hairs back and still looked very bare. He was ashamed to show himself in public. He couldn't go out, but he also didn't want to carry water and chop wood. He couldn't stand the same tedious work day in and day out!

Bored, he wasted his days away in the temple. The temple was large and located in a hidden valley in the foothills of the mountains. It was rare that anyone came by, and most days it was just him and the old fox spirit. How boring was that!

Aaron wandered until he came to a locked side building in the back of the courtyard. Master Fox had told him never to go in unless he was told to.

Aaron guessed that there might be some unusual hidden treasures inside. Otherwise, why would Master Fox have warned him away so many times?

The more he thought about it, the more suspicious it seemed. He tried to look in from every angle, but couldn't see inside, which made him all the more curious. He circled the building, and decided to dig a hole in the back so he could slip inside.

He found a large stonemason's hammer, and pounded at the foundation for half a day before he made a hole big enough for him to enter.

Walking – no, crawling – inside, Aaron was nearly crushed by a huge pile of cardboard boxes. With all his might, he managed to tunnel through. He kicked things left and right, trying to clear enough space to stand in.

"What kind of place is this? It's stuffed with cardboard boxes!"

The boxes were piled up nearly to the ceiling and filled the entire room. Aaron couldn't move a single step, so he grabbed a box next to him and saw that it was labeled: "odors turned sweet."

"Odors turned sweet? What's this?" Aaron sniffed himself. He'd always smelled bad. He was used to it and had never even thought about smelling sweet.

To the other side of him was a little box labeled: "walking on water." The box under it said: "charms for flying."

After looking at a lot of boxes, Aaron suddenly realized that the building did indeed hold hidden treasures – not jewels, but magical charms!

And he had gathered – that is, found – all these treasures!

No wonder the old fox spirit had told him many times not to get close to the building!

Remembering that his fur had disappeared because he'd used the Magic Menu Pencil, he figured there must be a magic charm in the building that would get his fur back.

He pulled out box after box, but didn't see any magic having to do with fur. The last box he found was labeled: "Heart's Desire Hat." He opened it and discovered a large hat with a wide, green brim and a pink heart stuck on top. Taking out the hat, he found a note inside the box with the directions for how to use it.

Aaron looked at it for a moment and chuckled. He'd finally found a way to avoid carrying water and chopping wood, plus a way to get his fur back!

Wearing an overcoat and the hat, Aaron went to Lush Village in the middle of Angel's Forest. The grass in the village grew especially green and tasty. He thought that any little animal that lived there and ate such flourishing grass would surely have lovely luxuriant fur.

He walked for a little while and found a tiger cub rolling around in the grass on his own. He guessed that no one wanted to play with him and he'd been so bored that he'd come to play by himself.

"I want to do a magic trick. Does anyone want to see a magic trick? Anybody? Nobody? That's too bad," Aaron cried loudly, as he looked around him.

The bored tiger cub ran over to him. "I want to watch you do a magic trick."

Aaron looked at the tiger cub's thick glossy coat and smiled. The cub ate meat and grasses and his fur was well-nourished and beautiful. He nodded his head, satisfied.

He thought that he wouldn't necessarily be able to find fox fur right away, and anyway, if he switched to a tiger's pelt, the old fox spirit might not recognize him. Besides, with a tiger's pelt over him, everyone would be afraid of him. The more he thought, the better the idea seemed.

"I'm trying to decide which trick to do," Aaron said, pretending to be thinking.

"That's a weird hat you have!" the tiger cub pointed at his head.

"Oh, this? This is the Heart's Desire Hat."

Aaron took the hat off. He'd covered his bald head with a bandana to keep anyone from seeing it.

"The Heart's Desire Hat?"

Aaron set the hat on the tiger cub's head. "It's a hat that can turn you into a magician."

"I can be a magician?" When he heard that, the cub grew very interested. It was very prestigious to be a magician!

"All you have to do is follow my instructions." Aaron put on a serious expression. "First, you must hold the hat in your two hands and repeat after me: I eat grass, I eat grass, I love eating grass! Hat, hat, give me my heart's desire, now!"

"I eat grass, I eat grass, I love eating grass! Hat, hat, I want my heart's desire, now!" the tiger cub repeated obediently. Then he had to ask, "What next?"

"Now you have to say: 'I want to give my fur to Aaron the fox.' And that's it."

"Aaron the fox? Is that you?" the cub asked.

"Yup, that's me."

The little tiger cub who wanted to be a magician didn't think twice. "I want to give my fur to Aaron the fox."

In a twinkling, all of the cub's fur switched onto Aaron's body. Aaron suddenly felt very hot in his big overcoat.

"It's hot out here!"

He took off the overcoat, and the tiger cub cried in surprise, "Aaron, aren't you a fox? Why do you have a tiger's pelt?"

Aaron looked down at his body covered in fur. The Heart's Desire Hat really worked!

"Oh no, why am I naked? Where did my fur go?" The tiger cub suddenly felt cold, and looked down at himself in surprise.

"Your fur is over there!" Aaron pointed behind the tiger cub, and when he turned to look, Aaron dashed away.

The tiger cub stared for quite some time.

"No, it's not." When he turned back around, he found that Aaron had disappeared without a trace. The cub thought for a moment, then realized that the magic trick had been played on him!

All of his plush fur had been stripped away. He wasn't used to being bare and he felt embarrassed. He put on the overcoat Aaron had left behind and put the bandana on over his bald head. Then, holding the Heart's Desire Hat, he ran all the way home.

"Give my fur back!"

"Hey wait a minute, give me my fur back!"

"Give my fur back, cheater!"

"You thief, give me my fur back!"

Three days later, something strange had happened in Lush Village. All of the fur on the animals' bodies had switched around, as though it were a game of musical chairs. For example, the little tiger cub was covered in rabbit fur, a monkey was covered in the bristly black and white stripes of a zebra, the zebra had squirrel fur, the squirrel had the fur of a calico cat, and the calico cat was covered in a panda pelt.

Animals across the whole village started to wail with indignation and horror. Mayor Lion, who was preparing to take a nap, couldn't fall asleep with all the noise. He came out to find who was wailing and found a terrible scene!

"My fur! Coco the calico cat stole it!" The bare panda was wearing Aaron the fox's overcoat and the Heart's Desire Hat over Aaron's bandana.

"The cat stole your fur?" Mayor Lion wrinkled his brow. "How did she do that?"

"She used this 'Heart's Desire Hat' I'm wearing." The panda gave him a rough outline of how it had happened, and then asked, "Mr. Mayor, would you...would you like to be a magician? If...if you put this Heart's Desire Hat on your head, you...you can do magic."

Mayor Lion was the tenth animal he'd asked. All the other nine had refused, because the foolish panda had described for them how the calico cat had stolen his fur first.

Mayor Lion stared at him, and the panda looked down guiltily. He didn't want trick anyone out of their fur, but he knew everyone would laugh at his furless body, and that put him in a real bind.

The situation could easily get out of hand if it weren't dealt with right away. Mayor Lion looked at the panda and sighed. "I'm going to figure this out. You wait here."

He went back into his house and turned on the village broadcasting system to make an announcement: "Would Coco the calico cat at Number 7 please come to the Mayor's office right away. The Mayor is looking for you!"

Mayor Lion was the most powerful animal in the village, and no one dared to disobey him. In under 59 seconds, Coco the calico cat had turned up.

"If Darryl the squirrel hadn't stolen my fur, I never would've stolen the panda's," Coco said, hanging her head in shame.

Hearing her confession, Mayor Lion went back into his house and turned on the broadcasting system. "Would Darryl the squirrel at Number 6 please come to the Mayor's office right away. The Mayor is looking for you!"

Darryl the squirrel appeared, and made the same confession the calico cat had. The Mayor made announcement after announcement, and the zebra, monkey, rabbit, and tiger cub appeared one after another before him.

Looking at the animals in a row in front of him, all wearing their neighbor's fur, Mayor Lion couldn't help but get angry. "What a complete mess!" he scolded.

"I only stole somebody else's fur because he stole mine!" they said, pointing at each other.

"You know how wrong it is to steal someone else's fur. Why would any of you do such a thing?" Mayor Lion asked.

They all looked at each other, then lowered their heads and said, "We know it was wrong."

"Right now, starting with Coco the calico cat, you each will put on the hat and give your fur back to its rightful owner."

As soon as Mayor Lion gave the order, the calico cat did as he said. She put on the Heart's Desire Hat and held onto it with two paws.

"I eat grass, I eat grass, I love eating grass! Hat, hat, I want my heart's desire, now!" When she had recited the magic words, the cat continued, "I want to give the fur on my body back to the panda."

"Hey, my fur is back!" Seeing that his fur had returned, the panda took off the overcoat and bandana and spun around with delight.

After not too long, the animals all had their original fur back. But when the little tiger cub was preparing to give his fur back to the rabbit, he suddenly began to cry. "But if I give the fur back to the rabbit, I won't have any fur anymore. I want my own fur back..."

"Don't worry, little tiger, I'm going to find Aaron the fox and make him give you your fur back," Mayor Lion promised. And so the tiger cub put on the Heart's Desire Hat and gave his fur back to the rabbit.

After he'd stolen the tiger cub's fur, Aaron had wandered through the other villages in Angels Forest. At first, he'd felt very powerful, since he gave everyone quite a fright when they saw him. But after a few days, no one was afraid anymore, and they even called him a little monster.

When he thought about it, a fox draped in a tiger's fur did seem a little monstrous, after all!

Just as Aaron was beginning to feel uncomfortable in his fur, a high-spirited glossy fox happened to walk by.

"Hello, fellow fox..." Aaron called to him.

The older fox turned to look at him, and narrowed his eyes. "Are you...are you a fox? Or a tiger? What's wrong with you?"

"I am a fox. I'm a magical fox," Aaron said, trying to sound mysterious. "I'm practicing a very advanced kind of magic, and I know how to change my appearance."

"Magic? You mean trickery!" the older fox said half-suspiciously, looking at Aaron's deceptive smile. "Otherwise, you'd change your appearance again so I can see."

Aaron saw that the older fox was interested in magic and thought that he would take the bait. He patted his stomach and said, "I haven't eaten yet, so I don't have the energy to do magic right now. How about this. Come here tomorrow morning, and I'll do a big magic trick for you."

"I'm leaving for a trip tomorrow and I'll be too busy. If you're going to change yourself, just do it now."

"But..."

Aaron was nervous. He'd have to run to Lush Village to find the tiger cub so he could give him his fur back, get the Heart's Desire Hat from him, and come back to trick the fox out of his fur. To do all that would take at least until nighttime.

Just as he was thinking how he could get the fox to stay, he caught sight of the tiger cub in the distance, holding the Heart's Desire Hat and looking this way and that as though searching for someone.

Aaron was delighted. Here he was worrying about how long it would take to find the tiger cub, and along he comes as though the heavens had sent him!

"Wait here, my fox friend. I'm going to go get something and I'll come right back and show you some magic."

"Hurry up, I don't have a lot of patience!"

"I'll be quick, just don't leave!"

Aaron leapt off and in a breath, he was in front of the tiger cub.

"You bad fox, you!" As soon as the tiger cub started to rebuke him, Aaron snatched the Heart's Desire Hat and put it on his head.

"Ok, don't go on and on. I'm going to give you your fur back." Aaron said the magic words, and in the twinkling of an eye, the tiger cub's fur was back on his body. The furless Aaron put on the overcoat and bandana, and carried the Heart's Desire Hat back to the older fox.

"Friend, put this hat on your head." Aaron stuck the hat on the older fox's head impatiently.

“Now say these words after me: ‘I eat grass, I eat grass, I love eating grass! Hat, hat, I want my heart’s desire, now!’”

“I eat meat, I eat meat, I love eating meat! Hat, hat, my heart has no desires!”

“No, you said it wrong! You have to say...”

Aaron was trying to correct him when animals began to show up.

“It’s him! He’s the fox who stole my fur with his hat!” The tiger cub pointed indignantly.

The stunned Aaron received a harsh scolding from Mayor Lion. “As mayor of Lush Village, I will not tolerate someone coming in to swindle my villagers! If you don’t stop it, I’ll lock you up!”

“Exactly. Don’t make us foxes look bad!”

Seeing that Mayor Lion and the older fox were on the same side, Aaron understood that he had been fooled. Mayor Lion had used the older fox as bait to make him give the tiger cub’s fur back.

He could only blame himself for being so eager to get the older fox’s fur. He’d never thought the tiger cub would show up here, and he’d been totally duped.

“Okay, okay. I’ll never cheat anyone ever again,” Aaron promised with a smile. As everyone relaxed, he suddenly pointed and cried, “Look! There’s another furless fox over there!”

Everyone turned to look.

But there was nothing there!

The tiger cub felt something was wrong and turned around. He shouted, “Aaron’s gone!” But it was already too late.

“He’s truly a cunning fox,” the older fox said angrily. Then he said with an awkward smile, “I might be a fox, but I’m not really cunning.”

And at that, everyone roared with laughter.