

FOLKTALE OF MEGHALAYA

This story is part of the Khasi Folktales unit . Story source: Folk-Tales of the Khasis by Mrs. K. U. Rafy (1920). “Why the Goat lives with Mankind”

In early times, the goat lived in the jungle, leading a free and independent life, like all the other animals. The following story gives an account of her flight from the animals to make her dwelling with Man. One fine spring day, when the young leaves were sprouting on the forest trees, Ka Blang, the goat, went out in search of food. Her appetite was sharpened by the delicious smell of the spring, which filled the air and the forest, so, not being satisfied with grass, she began to pluck the green leaves from a bush. While she was busy plucking and eating, she was startled to hear the deep growl of the tiger close beside her. The tiger asked her angrily, “What are you doing there?” Ka Blang was so upset by this sudden interruption, and in such fear of the big and ferocious beast, she began to tremble from head to foot, so that even her beard shook violently, and she hardly knew what she was doing or saying. In her fright she quavered: “I am eating khla” (a tiger), instead of saying, “I am eating sla” (leaves). The tiger took this answer for insolence and became very angry. He was preparing to spring upon her when he caught sight of her shaking beard, which appeared to him like the tuft of hair on a warrior’s lance when it is lifted against an enemy. Looking at the shaking beard, He thought that Ka Blang must be some powerful and savage beast able to attack him, and he ran away from her in terror. Now Ka Blang, having an ungrateful heart, instead of being thankful for her deliverance, grew discontented with her lot and began to grumble because she had not been endowed with the strength attributed to her by the tiger, and she got disappointed. One day, in her wanderings, she climbed to the top of an overhanging cliff, and there she lay down to chew the cud, and, as usual, to dwell on her grievances. It happened that the tiger was again prowling in the same vicinity, but when he saw the goat approaching he fled in fear and hid himself under the very cliff on to which she had climbed. There he lay very still for fear of betraying his presence to the goat, for he was still under the delusion that she was a formidable and mighty animal. Ka Blang, all unconscious of his presence, began to grumble

aloud, saying: "I am the poorest and the weakest of all the beasts, without any means of defense or strength to withstand an attack. I have neither tusks nor claws to make an enemy fear me. It is true that the tiger once ran away from me because he mistook my beard for a sign of strength, but if he had only known the truth, he would have killed me on the instant, for even a small dog could kill me if he clutched me by the throat." The tiger, beneath the rock, was listening to every word, and, as he listened, his wrath was greatly kindled to find that he had disgraced himself by running away from such a weak creature, and he determined now to avenge himself for that humiliation. He crept stealthily from his hiding-place, and, Ka Blang was clutched by the throat and killed. In order to restore his prestige, the tiger proclaimed far and wide how he had captured and killed the goat, and after that, other tigers and savage beasts began to hunt the goats, and there followed such a general slaughter of goats that they were nearly exterminated. Driven to great extremity, the few remaining goats held a tribal council to consider how to save themselves from the onslaughts of the tigers, but, finding themselves powerless to offer any resistance, they determined to ask help to mankind for protection. When they came to him, Man said that he could not come to the jungle to defend them, but they must come and live in his village if they wished to be protected by him. So the goats ran away from the jungle forever and came to live with mankind.