

## **"The Bear Who Lived on the Mountain"**

A Folktale from the Himalayan Mountains

"Help, help! I am freezing to death!"

These words were heard by a big black bear. This bear had been sleeping on a bed of leaves, in a cave on the side of a mountain. This story takes place high in the Himalayan mountains. Outside the cave, snow was falling thickly. In fact, it was a snowstorm. In a snowstorm, you can only see a few inches in front of you. Everything is white.

The bear had been sleeping soundly, but now he had been woken up.

"Help, help!", the voice called again. It sounded like a man.

"Oh yes!", the bear thought to himself, "This is probably the voice of a man who has come hunting for me. I have heard that the king in the valley has offered a huge reward, one crore rupees, for my fur. He wants to make a rug from my fur. Well, what should I do? If I rescue that man, he would likely tell the king where I live, and I would have to run for my life. But if I do not rescue him, it seems he's going to die. The sun is going down. It is going to get very cold out there. What should I do?"

The bear decided to get up, get out of bed, and save the man. The bear went out into the snowstorm, and found the man.

You can imagine the man's shock, when he saw, suddenly appearing out of the snow, the big face of a bear. The bear said, "Come with me". The man followed him. The bear led the man back to his cave.

The man asked, "Could I have a cup of water?" The bear said, "We will have to melt some snow". So the bear made a fire, put some snow in a cup, and held the cup over the fire. The snow melted, and the man drank the water. Then the man and the bear went to sleep.

In the morning, the bear said to the man, "I saved your life last night. Now, please go down the mountain, and don't tell people where I live. Don't even tell anyone you met me. Do you promise?"

"I promise," said the man. And so the man climbed down the mountain, and returned to his farm. For he was a farmer, a poor farmer. He grew just a small amount of vegetables. His wife was waiting at the gate, and when she saw him she waved, and called out in joy. When he reached the gate, she said, "What happened? When you didn't come home last night we were so worried. Where did you sleep last night?"

"I can't tell you", the man said.

You can't tell me? You have to tell me! I am your wife!", she said.

"Ok", the man said, "I slept in the bear's cave. He saved me. But I promised not to tell anyone I met him".

The man and his wife sat and thought about things. Most of all, they wanted to be able to send their daughter to a good school. But they didn't have the money for tuition, or uniforms, or books. So finally they decided the man would go to the king, and tell him where the bear lived, and ask for the reward.

So that is what the man did. The king sent his soldiers to get the bear, and indeed they found him. They grabbed him, and dragged him down the mountainside.

The bear was thrown at the king's feet. The bear stood up on his back legs, and said to the king, "King, if you are a good and just king, you will let me go. I am only here because I saved that man's life. Please let me go."

The king thought for a moment and said, "You are right. And you know, I don't really need another fur rug to walk on. I have learned my lesson. Go back to your mountain. No one will bother you".

So the bear went back up the mountain.

But the farmer went to the king, and said, "King, it is very nice that you decided to let the bear go, but what about my reward? Please give it to me."

But the king said, "Reward? I think you should be punished. You lied to that bear. You betrayed him."

"Oh king, I did it for you, to get what you wanted", said the man.

"I think you did it for yourself", said the king.

"Please", said the man, "Please give the reward you promised!"

"Ok", said the king. "I will give you the reward. One crore rupees. But, I will also fine you one crore rupees, for lying to the bear. So you end up with nothing."

"Oh no, no!", the man sobbed.

The king felt mercy towards the man. He said, "Well, I understand you would like your daughter to attend one of our finest schools. I will arrange it. All expenses will be covered. This way, she can study, and learn the difference between right and wrong, just like I have."

Oh, thank you, thank you!", said the man.

And all lived happily ever after.