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The Farting Snow Leopard
and Other Tales from the Kaffir Kalash

by Carol Rose

One of the advantages of bad weather is that it provides time for sharing stories. During the long rainy days in the Kalash valley of Rumbur, in northern Pakistan, I recently spent many hours sitting by the fire in the home of the Kalash leader, Saifullah Jan, exchanging folk tales and jokes from our respective cultures.

It was during those days that I first began to appreciate the often scatological Kalash sense of humor. Saifullah first told the stories in English, then recited them to the other listeners in his native Kalasha language. I shall relate some of the tales as he told them -- without euphemisms. Some are simply funny anecdotes, while others are fables. Some readers may find offense with these narratives, but I found them amusing as well as revealing of earthy and unpretentious Kalash culture.

The first story-telling session began when I tried to say in the Kalash language that the food was delicious. By mistake, I said "Angar zow e", which translates as "The fire is delicious." Everyone laughed at my mistake. Then Saifullah told the story of a visiting anthropologist who was served goat cheese while in a Kalash home. In his enthusiasm to compliment his host, the man said, "Tai pindor bo zow e" -- which translates as "Your penis is very delicious." (The Kalash word for cheese, pandeer, is similar to the word for penis, pindor.) Everyone laughed uproariously at the story, repeating it time and again throughout the evening, embellishing the punch-line by saying, "Your penis is unbelievably fantastic! It's the best I've ever had! It gets better with age," etc.

But seriously, folks, the following are traditional Kalash stories.

A Kalash Creation Story

Once upon a time God the Creator decided to make the world. First he made the Earth, but everything was wobbly. So he made a bird, who told the gods that the only way to make the Earth

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stable was to create mountains to act as nails in the Earth, holding the world steady.

At this time, Adam and Eve (or Bibi Awa) still lived in heaven with the gods. The gates to heaven were guarded by a chowkidar (guard) who was a drug addict. The devil couldn't open the gates of heaven because the chowkidar was there, so he transformed himself into a snake. The devil, now disguised as a snake, then convinced the drug-abusing chowkidar to try something new by swallowing a snake, but warned him not to swallow the snake's head. The chowkidar agreed. But when he swallowed the snake-devil, the latter pissed into the chowkidar's mouth, forcing the guard to vomit. Hence, the devil got into heaven by this devious act.

Once there, the devil transformed himself into a man and went to see Eve. Telling her that he was a friend of Adam, he gave her some grains of wheat to eat. She did so, and soon thereafter was "made to shit." The gods were so offended by this act by Eve that they cast Adam and Eve out of heaven and on to the Earth.

An Earthquake Story

The Kalash believe that the world sits on top of the horns of a bull. Most of the time, God has appointed an angel to feed the bull constantly so that the animal doesn't need to move. But every once in a while the angel forgets to feed the bull, so he looks around for food. His movement is an earthquake. If the Kalash people experience an earthquake, they immediately place a flower on the fire so that the bull will smell the scent and know that food will be coming shortly.

The Origins of Snow

Long ago, the gods were more generous than they are today and instead of snow, they sent cheese down from the heavens to feed the Kalash people. Living with such abundance, the people soon took for granted all the cheese in their midst.

One day, an old woman took her granddaughter out to "shit" in the open air. Kalash custom dictates that the people wipe their dirty bottoms with a stone or a leaf. But the grandmother instead used a piece of cheese to clean her granddaughter's bottom. The gods were so incensed that they immediately turned the cheese to ice, so that it would be too cold for people to wipe their bottoms with it.

Why the Sky has a Milky Way

One night when Saifullah and I were walking beneath a million stars, I attempted to explain to him that we live in a galaxy known as the Milky Way and that there *are* thousands upon thousands of other planets and galaxies in the universe. I pointed out the two streaks of white that run across the night sky, saying that these were the center of the Milky Way galaxy and that Earth was about two-thirds of the way toward the edge of the galaxy.

We walked on for a few minutes in silence. Finally I asked him what he thought of this theory of the universe.

"I don't believe it," he said. "I thought everyone knew where those two streaks come from. Once upon a time, a horse and a cow were racing across the night sky. The cow was winning the race, so the horse became angry and gave the cow a cloven hoof, so that he would stop running. That is why one streak stops before the other and why the cow no longer can run."

I liked his story better than mine.

Story of the Honey Bees

Honey is among the most sacred of foods for the Kalash, forbidden to women and considered pure food for men. Once upon a time, in the valley of Bumburet, there were some Nooristani Muslims who attacked a Kalash village on the night of a festival. Most of the people were killed, but seven men survived, running away and leaving the valley empty.

They went down the valley to a place called Shadi, where they found a cave in the mountain in which they decided to live. They settled there, three of them hunting, one supplying water, one bringing wood, and two of them cooking. One day, they heard a voice from the sky telling them not to kill so many animals. They ignored the voice and that day they killed an ibex (wild goat).

The next morning, an old man appeared at the cave. He pushed the three hunters inside the cave and sealed it shut by saying magic words. Outside, the other men heard their friends shouting to get out. Unable to help, they used a spear to put a hole in the cave and told their friends, "Now you shall be honey bees." Since then, all honey bees have originated from that cave.

The Farting Snow Leopard

This tale was told as a children's bed-time story one night:

Once upon a time it was raining hard. While the goats were waiting out the rain in their cattle shed, a snow leopard snuck in with the intention of killing one of the goats. As he poised to attack, one of the goats commented about the constant dripping of the rainwater onto their backs, known as cheep-chop. He said: "I'd rather be eaten by a snow leopard than put up with this damned cheep-chop!"

The snow leopard had never heard of a cheep-chop, but realized that it must be something even more dangerous than himself. Just then, a man entered the goat pen with the intention of stealing one of the goats for himself. Feeling his way in the dark for the fattest goat, he accidentally seized upon the snow leopard. Throwing it over his shoulders, he escaped into the night.

The snow leopard dared not to say a word, thinking that the man was a dangerous cheep-chop. But at dawn, the snow leopard accidentally farted. The man stopped, sniffed the air, and exclaimed, "What made that terrible smell?" Seeing the snow leopard on his shoulder, he said, "You snow leopards have terrible-smelling farts!"

Embarrassed by his own odorous outburst, the snow leopard begged the man not to tell a soul that he had farted. "If you promise not to tell anyone, I will bring you an ibex (wild goat) every day," said the snow leopard. "But if you tell anyone that I farted, then I will kill you and eat you."

For two weeks, the man kept his vow of silence and each day the snow leopard threw an ibex down the mountain for the man to eat. But after two weeks, the snow leopard decided to play a trick on the man. Instead of throwing down an ibex, he threw a wooden log down the mountain. The man saw the log and became angry, yelling, "What is this?"

The snow leopard laughed at the man, making him angry. When the man realized the snow leopard was playing a trick on him, he shouted, "Snow leopard! You are nothing but a dirty farter!"

Thereupon, the snow leopard killed the man and ate him.

After Saifullah told this story, his five children were sent to sleep in the two beds they shared in the next room. As the adults sat around the fire, we could hear the children giggling and whispering in the darkened bedroom, more than once accusing one another of being "dirty farters" before Saifullah growled at them to be quiet and go to sleep.

**** The End ****