

## **Folk Tales from Siam**

### **The Night of the Full Moon**

*Did you ever see the strange shadows that sometimes move across the face of the moon? This is how they came to be.....*

Nighttime in Siam has always been known for its loveliness. Nights are never cold or snowy, and fireflies appear to dance everywhere, their lights twinkling through the darkness.

People who have visited Siam say it seems as if they are closer to the sky there than any place else in the world. The moon and the stars are so bright you almost feel as if you can reach up and touch them. And at the time of the full moon you can even see the shadows moving across its face.

But this story began a long time ago, with a rabbit, a monkey, a jackal and a seal. They lived near one another next to a pond. The rabbit was their leader. The others listened to everything he said because he was very wise.

Once each week, the rabbit would lead the monkey, the jackal and the seal in prayer. He had explained to them that this was what people did, and if they wanted to please the Gods, this is what they should do too.

Then the rabbit heard of the holy day which occurred once a month at the time of the full moon. On this day people prayed more than ever and tried to honor the Gods in every possible manner. As the next full moon drew near, the rabbit met with the monkey, the jackal and the seal and told them that this holy day was fast approaching.

“If we wish to please the Gods we must honor them as people do at this time,” the rabbit told them. “This means being as kind as we can to everybody. Especially, we must be prepared for any travelers that might pass our way during the full moon. We should gather food for any of them who may be hungry. For one of the ways in which we can most please the Gods is by being as hospitable as possible.”

So they each went out to gather food.

The monkey got many fruits and nuts, for that was what he ate.

The jackal got much meat, for that was what he ate.

The seal got many fish, for that was what he ate.

But all the rabbit could get was some grass and a few vegetables, for that was all he ever ate.

The rabbit realized that not many travelers have an appetite for grass. As for the few vegetables he had been able to find, they seemed very meager compared to the food that the monkey, the jackal and the seal had gathered.

“These few vegetables are not enough on my part,” he thought. “And the holy day is but a few hours away.” So he decided to offer the only other food he had for any hungry traveler who passed by—himself.

Meanwhile, one of the Gods in the heavens heard that the rabbit, the monkey, the jackal and the seal were planning to honor the holy time of the full moon. And he wondered if they really would. So the next evening, when the moon was full, he descended to earth to find out, disguised as a hungry traveler.

First he went to the seal.

“A good evening to you, seal,” he said. “Do you happen to have any food for a hungry traveler?”

“Yes, I do, sir,” said the seal. “I have some nice, fresh fish and you may have as much as you wish.”

“Thank you,” said the God. “Perhaps later I will have some.”

Then he went to the jackal.

“A good evening to you, jackal,” he said. “Do you happen to have any food for a hungry traveler?”

“Indeed, I do, sir,” said the jackal. “I have much fresh meat. You may have all that you want.”

“Thank you,” said the God. “Perhaps later I will have some.”

Then he went to the monkey.

“A good evening to you, monkey,” he said. “Do you happen to have any food for a hungry traveler?”

“I do, indeed,” said the monkey. “Many nuts and fruits. You may have as much as you like.”

“Thank you,” said the God. “Perhaps later I will have some.”

Then he went to the rabbit.

“A good evening to you, rabbit,” he said. “Do you happen to have any food for a hungry traveler?”

The wise rabbit sensed there was something unusual about this traveler and thought he was a monk. And he knew that no monk would ever kill a living creature for a meal.

“I was planning to offer myself to satisfy the hunger of any passing traveler,” he said. “But, good sir, I believe you are a monk and, therefore, would never kill a living creature for food. So I will spare you having to do that. Just light a fire. I will jump into it myself.”

The God found it hard to believe that a rabbit would be willing to pay such honor to the holy time of the full moon as to sacrifice his life. So he built a fire to see if this rabbit was really telling the truth.

As soon as the flames began to rise, the rabbit leaped right into them to roast himself. But the flames did not burn him. The God had made a fire out of cold air that only looked like a real fire.

“I am from the heavens,” he told the rabbit. “And never have I seen anybody willing to so honor the holy time of the full moon.”

“It is no more than anyone should do.” murmured the rabbit humbly.

“Nevertheless, I shall see that people always remember you for this,” said the God. “At every full moon they shall think of the rabbit.”

And to this very day, Siamese people do think of the rabbit at the time of the full moon. For on those evenings, when the moon is full and bright and clear, mothers and fathers in Siam tell their children to look up at the moon and then ask them what they see there.

If they watch closely, they see the shadows moving across the face of the moon—shadows that look like figures.

“Do you see any figure there you know?” their parents ask them.

“Yes,” the children usually answer. “I can see a rabbit.”