

Stories from Kalam Kohistan

The witch of Jan Shay

This is a story told by one of my friend Mr. Gul Rehman. This is his own story which I recorded from him. The place Jan Shay which he mentioned in the story is a high summer pasture near Kalam, in Anakar valley.

This is a fifty-year old story. My elder brother and I were each sitting on a side of my elder uncle. In that time we did not know about electricity, kerosene lamps, or lanterns.

We were burning pinewood and in its light we could see each other. I was still very young. My elder brother was making light [a fire], and I was playing with the pieces of wood.

My uncle used to come to our house because my parents had both died. We had become orphans. All of our uncles were looking after us carefully, and in the evening time they were telling us nice stories. They were trying to divert our minds so that we would not think about our father and mother.

Our elder uncle was younger than my father was, but he was elder than my other uncles were. That is why we were calling him elder uncle. God pardon him, now he has also died. But I still remember his story about the witch of Jan Shay.

On that evening he started his story with a novel style. He asked me which type of story he should tell me. I said, "As you wish." He asked, "Should I tell you what I have heard, or should I tell you what I have seen?" I was a small child. I did not understand what he meant. I said: "What is 'heard' and 'seen'?" He said, "The meaning of 'heard' is what I heard from other people, and 'seen' means what I saw myself." I said to him that he should tell me the story of what he had seen himself. Then he started his story like this:

He said: At that time, my brothers and I were not living separate. Together we had a lot of livestock. The cattle we kept in our house during the winter, but the sheep and goats we used to take to the Jan Shay pasture for some time in winter.

One winter, I was living with the livestock in the pasture. In the hut next to mine, the livestock of Mr. Jamroz was kept. The shepherd of Jamroz was living there with the animals. In that year there had been a lot of snowfall, and my dog was also with me. We called him Khamar. He was a very strong dog. He could fight like a bear.

In the evening, he said, when we finished our dinner and were preparing for sleep, we heard a loud scream outside. I listened, but the dog did not bark. In my heart I thought that perhaps someone had come from the village, but then I heard another scream; its loudness was deafening and jolted the hut.

I lighted some pinewood and opened the door, and saw that Khamar was sitting on the doorstep shaking with fear and with his hair standing up. When I told Khamar to catch that thing, he forced himself inside the hut and did not make any sound.

With the light of the pinewood, I saw that something was there. It looked like a human being, but it was so tall that its head was above the pine and deodar trees.

Then I remembered that our elders said that witches are living on the mountains. My heart was struck with fear, and the hair of my head was standing upright.

When my uncle was telling us the story, I was feeling strange. In my mind I had different pictures of jinns and witches. When our uncle told me that the head of the witch reached above the pine trees, I remembered the pine trees of Jan Shay. There one pine tree is more than one hundred feet tall. At that time I had a ticklish feeling in my body. I felt fear in my heart. From my place I moved over and sat in between my brother and uncle. My heart was beating quickly, and I became more and more afraid. I grabbed my uncle's knee and he continued his story.

In those times the people did not have rifles. In our time we had some old kinds of guns. But not everybody had guns and that year I also did not have my rifle with me.

I had no patience, so I asked my uncle, "What did you do?" He said, "What could we do?" The shepherd of Jamroz also came out of his hut and stood next to me. I said to him, "Abdullah why are you not hitting this thing? Throw the burning wood pieces at him." We threw our firewood at the witch. But when the wood went toward the witch and reached the place where she was, we saw her standing in some other place.

During the entire night, some times I was collecting wood and Abdullah was hitting the witch, and some times Abdullah was collecting wood and I was hitting the witch. Because we were throwing the wood powerfully, our arms started to hurt, but we did not succeed in hitting her. As we were still fighting, the dawn came and we were exhausted. The witch also slowly slowly started to move towards the stream.

We could not hit her but we were throwing the pieces of wood towards her and went after her. She went and crossed the stream and Abdullah and I came back to the hut.

Abdullah was the name of Mr. Jamroz's shepherd. He was a very obedient person. He belonged to the Gujar tribe. Gujar people are very brave. In the fight with the witch, no place on our body was left dry. Abdullah collected the firewood, which we had thrown to the witch. We brought the wood and made a fire in the hut to warm ourselves. In those times the people were not used to drinking tea. We put the cold bread of the last dinner on the coals and ate it. Meanwhile, the full daylight had appeared. Abdullah said to me that we should go outside and see the footprints of that thing. We had become very tired, so we rested for a little while and then we went outside. There was snow. In the snow we could clearly see the footprints of the witch and our own footprints. The footprints of the witch were similar to the footprints of human beings, and also the footprints were not bigger than human footprints. But where she had been coming towards us, there her footprints were pointed in the other direction, and where she had been crossing the stream her footprints were pointed in our direction.

My uncle said that their elders had told them that the feet of a witch are pointed in the wrong direction, and that nobody can hit them with stones or guns. That thing I saw myself with my own eyes. After that time I never saw the witch again.

When my uncle finished the story he said that he was going to his house to sleep, and that we should also sleep. When I had heard the story of the witch my sleep was gone. Then with all this fear in my heart I stopped my uncle from going to his house. In the night I slept with him. When I had heard that story I could not sleep at all. Each time a mouse made any noise, I became scared. I would think that the witch of Jan Shay was coming for me. In the morning I told my uncle that he should not tell me any more true stories of witches. They scare me.

Note: This story was recorded by Muhammad Zaman Sagar from Gul Rehman of Asan, Kalam, Swat.