Toimatetni (The Hen)

A folk-tale of the Rupini tribe of Tripura

Once upon a time a cat and a hen were on very friendly terms with each other. One evening when the hen was having her dinner, the cat came and asked: “Where will you sleep tonight? I want to bring you some vegetables”. The hen replied: “I will sleep in my basket”.

Actually she did not sleep in the basket but slept in the khacha (the bamboo under the sloping roof). When it was dark, the cat, thinking the hen was in the basket, attacked it there. Not finding the hen there, it returned disappointed.

Next day the cat asked the hen: “Where were you last night? I went to the basket to give you some vegetables but had to return with them. Where will you sleep tonight?” The hen replied: “Tonight I will sleep in the khacha”. Actually she slept in the basket and the cat, which came at dark and attacked the khacha, had to again return disappointed.

Like this many days passed and the hen went on deceiving the cat till one day the cat got wise to the trick and succeeded in catching the hen. Before the hen was caught she laid an egg. The chick inside the egg vowed to take revenge on the cat that had deceived his mother and devoured her.

The chick came out of the egg and strode out to kill the cat. On the way he met a dog who asked: “Where are you going, young’un?” The chick replied: “I am going to kill the cat who deceived and devoured my mother”. The chick added: “Yes, and I have vowed to take revenge. The dog said: “You are young and will not be able to kill the cat alone. I will come with you”.

So both of them went together. On the way they had to cross a cherra. As they were crossing the cherra the singhi (a fish with two sword-like horns sticking out of her head) fish came out and enquired: “Where are you two going?” The chick replied: “We are going to kill the cat who deceived and devoured my mother”. The singhi fish said: “I will also come with you to help you.”

So the three went together. On the way they met boroí (a fishing rod with hook) who asked: “Where are you three going?” The chick said: “We are going to kill the cat who deceived and devoured my mother”.

The boroí said: “I will also come with you to help you”. So all four went on together. On the way they met wanthar (a type of blade made of bamboo) who enquired: “Where are you four going?” The chick replied: “We are going to kill the cat who deceived and devoured my mother”. The wanthar said: “I will also come with you to help you”.

So all five went together to the cat’s house.

The chick knocked at the cat’s door. The cat came out and enquired: “Why have you come here? What do you want?” The chick said: “You are my mother’s
friend. So I have come with my friends to stay with you”. The cat said : “It is a
great pleasure! Come stay and eat with me”.

After taking their food, the friends took to their beds. When the cat had retired,
they got up and had a conference on how to trap him. The chick entered the egg
and hid himself in the fire-place. The dog went and stood outside the door, the
fish entered a utensil full of water, the buroi hung on the door, and the wanthar
hid himself in the woven bamboo wall.

The wife of the cat, who was old and could not see clearly in the dark, got up at
midnight with a view to check up if her guests were comfortable. To rekindle the
fire she went to the fire place and blew into it. With the force of the blow egg
burst and her face was spattered with its contents.

She wiped her face with her hands. As she was trying to wipe her hands against
the wall, her hands were cut by the blade. She cried in pain and rushed towards
the utensil of water. As she dipped her hands in the water, the singhi’s pincers bit
deep into them and she shrieked with pain. She rushed out of the room with
horror.

As she was crossing the door, the tackle of the buroi stuck into her eye-lids. With
great difficulty she managed to remove it. As she rushed out, the dog attacked her
and tore her into two pieces.

The five friends happily went back having taken revenge for the hen’s cruel
murder.

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