The king Fig Tree

Long, long ago, a young Naga was once walking to a far-off village across a range of hills. On the way he had to pass through a thick jungle which was the home of nasty little demons. These dark, dwarf-like creatures would attack people but only from behind, for iron killed them and they were afraid of knives. One little fellow, with great fangs and bulging eyes, saw the young man. He pounced on him but the young man was ready with his knife. He slashed at the demon and killed him. Then, as it was getting dark, he looked for a place to hide, for all the demons would come out at nightfall. But there was no shelter, only the huge trees. He went up to mountain ebony with its lovely white flowers. “Hide me beneath your branches. The dark devils will come out and kill me,” he pleaded. “No,” rustled the mountain ebony. “I will not hide you.” Then the young man ran up to naka, the iron-wood tree. “Will you hide me? If the demons find me they will tear me to shreds,” cried the young man. “I cannot help you,” said the naka shaking its lance-like leaves. A huge fig tree which was growing nearby felt sorry for the frightened man. “Come here and hide among my branches. When the dark devils come looking for you, stay still. Don’t move or breathe, for the dark ones will not be merciful”.

The young man slipped into the branches which hung low. And just in time. For the forest had grown dark. Only frogs and crickets could be heard. Out came the dark little demons. They went from tree to tree to find the man who had killed their brother. “Where is the man?” they howled. “We don’t know,” whispered all the trees. Then the demons went to the fig tree. But the great fig tree lowered its branches which were heavy with fruit and said, “I don’t know where the man is. Perhaps he’s gone to the other side of the jungle.” The demons gnashed their teeth and howled with rage. Soon their screeching faded, and once more the frog’s song could be heard. The young man stepped out of the branches and touched the tree with gentle fingers. “You saved my life. I will never forget that. I promise in the name of the Heaven and Earth that I and the others of my kind will never cut down a fig tree.” When he reached his village he told all his people how the Fig Tree had saved his life. “I have sworn that none of my people will ever cut down a fig tree,” he said. That night, a feast was held to celebrate his safe return. At the feast the whole village agreed to honour his promise. To this day no Zeliang Naga will ever cut down a Fig Tree, even if it is in the middle of his field.