

M457

Concerning the orphan and the deer.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that once upon a time an orphan went and tilled a patch of millet in the middle of a forest. In this forest there were many deer living, so that his patch of millet was all eaten up by the deer. The Miao lad was very angry. He went and set snares around the edges of the patch. One day when he went to look, he had caught a doe. He was about to kill the doe when she said, "Miao lad, do not kill me and I will go with you". When the Miao lad realised that the doe could speak, he took her, led her home, and tethered her behind the door.

Every day when the orphan had gone out farming, the deer changed into a fine Miao girl and prepared his food in readiness for him, but he did not know. He said to his neighbours, "Thank you! Every day you prepare my food in readiness for me". The neighbours said, "No family among us has been preparing food for you. You must be joking!" So one day the Miao lad pretended that he was going out to work. He ate his food, pulled the door shut, but when he got outside he went and hid in the wood and watched to see who came to prepare food for him. While he was hiding there no one at all came to his house, only he saw that little deer, which he had snared, change into a Miao girl preparing the food for him. Having seen this the Miao lad suddenly rushed out. The doe could not change back because she had been surprised by the Miao lad. So the Miao lad married her.

After a long time the couple had a son. The orphan's wife urged him to go and fetch his mother-in-law to see their son. He said to his wife, "With the forest so large I have no way of fetching her". His wife said, "You make a whistle of bamboo and go and blow it at the top of the cliff, then my mother will come". So the Miao lad made a whistle of bamboo, went and blew it on the top of the cliff, and a doe came. When the Miao lad had brought the doe home he said to his wife, "What shall we prepare for mother-in-law to eat?" His wife said, "Go and find and dig a clump of green grass for mother-in-law to eat, that will be all right". The Miao lad went and found a load of green grass for mother-in-law to eat. After some days mother-in-law was going to leave, so he went and found another load of green grass, which he carried and escorted mother-in-law back to the place from which he fetched her.