

## Nggu-no's mother and father.

*Told by Yang Xiu-gong*

They tell a story that when Nggu-no's mother and father went out gathering firewood they saw a large clump of tall grass. Nggu-no's mother said, "What a pity I am not a cow to go and eat that clump of grass!" Nggu-no's father said, "Very well, suppose I strike you with this peach branch and make you turn into a cow to go and eat it!" Nggu-no's mother said, "All right". Nggu-no's father struck Nggu-no's mother with the peach branch and Nggu-no's mother changed into a cow and went and ate it.

Some time after this Nggu-no's father married another wife. The new wife already had a daughter who was called Nggu-ntrw. Nggu-no was the daughter of the old wife, Nggu-ntrw was the daughter of the new wife. Every day Nggu-no took the cow, which was her mother, out to graze, and every day her mother took off her cape of cow hide, spread it out to sit on, and helped Nggu-no to join hemp. So it was that Nggu-no joined a great deal of hemp. When Nggu-ntrw saw it Nggu-ntrw said to her, "Sister, how is that you have joined so much hemp?" Her sister said, "When I take the cow to graze, I spread out my hemp, one bunch on a clump of high grass, and another bunch on a clump of wormwood. Then the cow collects and eats it. When the cow passes it out I simply go and wind it up. That is why I join so much". The next day the stepsister said to her elder sister, "Today I will take the cow out to graze and join some hemp". So Nggu-ntrw took the cow out to graze and did as Nggu-no said. She spread one bunch on a clump of high grass and another bunch on a clump of wormwood. The cow gathered, and ate it all, but when the cow passed it out and Nggu-ntrw went to collect it and wind it up, the hemp was just all rotten. Then the cow dragged Nggu-ntrw along and her legs and thighs were all scratched. In the evening when Nggu-ntrw drove the cow home she said, "This cow, let us take and kill it for an ancestral sacrifice".

Some time later Nggu-ntrw's parents took the cow and slaughtered it for sacrifice. When the boiled meat was cooked, and her father was dipping up the meat for his friends to eat, he gave Nggu-no a bowl full to carry around. She went as far as the door of the cow house when she spilt it. Another bowl full was dipped up for her to take around, but it happened just as before. A third bowl full was dipped up to take around but the same thing happened.

About this time people were going to hold a festival. Nggu-ntrw's mother went and picked leaves which she sewed together and made clothes for Nggu-ntrw to wear. Nggu-ntrw's mother then took her along. Nggu-no had no clothes to wear so she sat at home weeping aloud. Nggu-no heard a crow calling from the branch of a tree,

"A, a, a, your gowns are in the cupboard in the cow house!"

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Nggu-no ran and opened the cupboard in the cow house and looked. There together in the cupboard in the cow house were gowns of silk, folded together and rolled up. Nggu-no took one gown to wear and another to carry and set off after Nggu-ntrw's mother and Nggu-ntrw. She arrived at the festival ground. Ndrao-jio-shi-niang had come to choose a bride at this festival. Ndrao-jio-shi-niang played on his pipes,

"Dro, dro, dro, my bride is on the higher side!"

This was because Nggu-no was on the higher side. Nggu-ntrw's mother heard it and led Nggu-ntrw over to the higher side. Ndrao-jio-shi-niang played on his pipes again,

“Dro, dro, dro, my bride is on the lower side!”

So Ngggu-ntrw’s mother led Ngggu-ntrw over to the lower side.

In the evening Ngggu-ntrw’s mother brought Ndrao-jio-shi-niang back home. When the time came to sleep, Ngggu-ntrw’s mother made Ngggu-ntrw sleep next to Ndrao-jio-shi-niang, and Ngggu-no to sleep at Ngggu-ntrw’s back. When Ngggu-ntrw was asleep Ndrao-jio-shi-niang lifted Ngggu-ntrw into the place where Ngggu-no was sleeping and lifted Ngggu-no into the place where Ngggu-ntrw was sleeping. In the middle of the night Ngggu-ntrw’s mother took some wax intending to smear it on Ngggu-no’s eyes so that Ngggu-no would not be able to see. As it was Ngggu-ntrw’s mother smeared it on Ngggu-ntrw’s eyes. Before it was light Ngggu-ntrw’s mother prepared a nice meal and called Ndrao-jio-shi-niang and Ngggu-ntrw to come and eat, before sending them on their way. Ndrao-jio-shi-niang knew that it was Ngggu-no, so he would not let her speak but eat quickly and go. Ngggu-no and Ndrao-jio-shi-niang had gone but Ngggu-ntrw was still asleep upstairs. Ngggu-ntrw’s mother was winding yarn when her winding frame squeaked, “ki-li, ki-li” and she said, my daughter and son-in-law must have reached half way by now”. Ngggu-ntrw replied to her mother from up stairs, “Mother, I am still here”. Her mother said, “I am talking about my daughter and son-in-law, who mentioned you?” Ngggu-ntrw said, “Mother, truly I am still here”. At this her mother went up and saw that she had smeared wax into Ngggu-ntrw’s eyes. Then her mother went and washed Ngggu-ntrw’s face, found some food for her to eat, and made her follow after the others. So Ngggu-ntrw arrived at her sister and brother-in-law’s home.

Her sister and brother-in-law had a baby son, and the sister gave her the baby son to carry on her back. She pinched the bottom of her sister’s baby son and he cried. Ngggu-ntrw said, “It is because he wants your jacket”. Her sister took off her jacket for him. Ngggu-ntrw pinched the baby son’s bottom again and the child cried again. Ngggu-ntrw said, “It is because he wants your skirt”. Her sister took off her skirt for him. Ngggu-ntrw pinched the baby son’s bottom and again the child cried. Ngggu-ntrw said, “It is because he wants your leg bands”. Her sister took off her leg bands for him. Ngggu-ntrw pinched the child again and he cried. Ngggu-ntrw said, “Over there, above the pothole, is a clump of flowers, it is because he wants a flower. You go and pick one for him”. Her sister went to pick a flower and Ngggu-ntrw pushed her into the hole. Ngggu-ntrw carried the son back to the house. Ndrao-jio-shi-niang said, “Ngggu-ntrw, where is your sister?” Ngggu-ntrw scolded Ndrao-jio-shi-niang and said, “Don’t you know me then, you old fat legs!” In the evening, at bed time, Ndrao-jio-shi-niang took Ngggu-ntrw’s hair to spread as a pillow, but it was not enough. Then Ndrao-jio-shi-niang said, “Your sister’s hair is very long, but your hair is not long at all”.

A long time afterwards when Ndrao-jio-shi-niang went ploughing, a bird at the mouth of the pothole sang,

“Is the child’s father at home,  
And is the child crying?”

Ndrao-jio-shi-niang said, “Are you spirit or are you human?” Then he spat on his hand and said, “If you are human, fly over and perch on my hand”. The small bird flew over and perched on Ndrao-jio-shi-niang’s hand. Ndrao-jio-shi-niang brought it home. Ngggu-ntrw took it to kill and eat, but it changed into a round stone. Now there was a neighbour who came in to get a light for her fire from the family. Seeing how good that stone was, she said, “Give me this little round stone of yours for me to take home for making oil cakes to eat”. Ngggu-ntrw said, “If you want it, take it”. The neighbour took it along and put it inside a large jar.

When the neighbour shut her door every day and went out to work, this stone came out and changed into a very good looking Miao woman. She came and combed her hair, prepared food in readiness for the neighbour's return, then changed into a stone and went back into the large jar. After this the woman said to her neighbours, "You come every day and prepare food for me in readiness for my return, thank you so much". The neighbours said, "It isn't us! There is a stranger woman in your large jar. Every day when you have gone she comes out, washes her face, combs her hair, and prepares food for you". So she understood. One day she made as though she was going farming. She went outside, shut the door and watched quietly. She saw this stranger woman come out, and she ran and caught her. Thereafter the two of them lived together.

The neighbour went out farming every day, but the stranger woman remained indoors. Her son, whom Nggun-trw had taken, came every day to be with her. She washed him until he was clean all over. Her son went and told his father. He said, "Father, there is a stranger woman, living down there, who behaves like a mother to me. Every day I go to be with her and she treats me very well indeed". His father said to him, "You go and get her to prepare a steamer of food, and pull a hair and wind it round so you can carry it back. We will wind it round our house. If it is long enough to go around three times, then it is your mother". Her son went and talked to her and got his mother to prepare a steamer of food, and to take a hair and wind around the steamer so he could carry the hair back to his father. His father took the hair and wound it round the house. It did go around three times so his father went and fetched his mother home.

When Nggun-no arrived Nggun-trw asked her, "Sister, how is it that your head grows such long hair?" Her sister said, "I went and heated water until it was boiling hard, next I poured it out and filled the tub to the brim. Then I dipped it up and washed. It was when I dipped it up and washed that my hair grew so long". Nggun-trw went to copy, but the water scalded Nggun-trw to death.