

M473

The orphan who went fishing.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that once upon a time there was an orphan who lived in a little thatched hut. Every day he went fishing, but only to pass the time. One day he caught a small eel. He reached home and then went in search of firewood to burn. When he returned he saw a bride in his house. He did not like to go in but the bride called him in to sit down and she prepared food, which she served for him to eat.

She said to him, "Tonight my mother and my father will come to build a house for us to live in. If you hear the noise of rain and thunder, and of rain and wind, then you just sleep quietly". The orphan slept until the middle of the night when there came the rushing and roaring of rain and thunder, and of rain and wind. The orphan dared not move at all. When morning came, the orphan went outside to have a look, and all he could see was a house with a tiled roof and a timber frame, all bright and new.

Not long afterwards, his wife said to him, "A mandarin will be passing along this road, you take this flask of wine and give it to him". Later, on another occasion the mandarin was again passing along the road. His wife said to him, "This time you go and persuade the mandarin to come and have a meal". So the Miao lad persuaded the mandarin to come for a meal. The mandarin saw what a fine wife he had and wanted him to exchange her. He went and said to his wife, "The mandarin wants me to exchange you". His wife said, "You exchange with him. My reason for coming was to advance you. Now first you write a note for me to take, and if in the future I have a son, I will come and look for you, but if I have a daughter I shall not come to look for you". So it was that he exchanged with the mandarin. The mandarin remained in the orphan's house while the Miao lad left with the mandarin's soldiers. Now the orphan's homestead, which his wife's mother and father had come and built, disappeared. The orphan's wife went too. All that could be seen here was the orphan's thatched hut, and the mandarin died there.

The orphan went and became a mandarin. Later the Miao lad's wife gave birth to two sons. She brought her two sons to look for their father and arrived at the city where he was. While the mandarin was in his residence, he heard, outside the city, the sound of three gunshots and then three more. The mandarin, who was formerly the woman's husband, ordered his retainers to go and look. The retainers looked and then returned and told him, "We saw nobody except a beggar woman and her two sons at the lower end of the city". After the retainers had looked and returned, then again there was the sound of gunfire. So the mandarin came out to look for himself. He came and reached this woman and her two sons. They were just like Chinese beggars. He did not know that she was his erstwhile wife, for he assumed them to be beggars. The "beggar" woman said to him, "Great mandarin, would you eat this pot of porridge meal of ours?" But the mandarin was unwilling to eat it. The "beggar" woman said, "Though the great mandarin does not eat it, let him turn it out to the bottom and look". The mandarin turned it out to the bottom to look, and saw there the note which he had originally written for his wife to take. Then he understood, and so it was that presently he brought them into the city. Now all the family lived together until they were old.