

Ndrao-dyu and the Miao girls.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that once upon a time there was a Miao man bringing his bride home along the road. The bride and bridesmaid came and saw Ndrao-dyu working in a rice-field beside the road. So the Miao girls said to one another, "Look at that great Ndrao-dyu there, how disgusting he is!" and they laughed at him.

After this the two Miao girls went on with the bridegroom until they reached the bridegroom's house, but the bridegroom's people had no food to eat. They became so very hungry that the bride and the bridesmaid could not remain there, so they got up and came away. They arrived at the place where Ndrao-dyu was working in the rice-field. When they saw Ndrao-dyu working in the rice-field they said to him, "Where does Ndrao-dyu live, and have you any food to eat?" Ndrao-dyu said,

"I have no food to eat,
For I work with mud and eat mud
I work with mire and eat mire!"

The bride and bridesmaid said, "Ndrao-dyu do not tease us!" Ndrao-dyu replied, "My house is over there where the gi-zhi birds are flocking. You may go on together, but in my house there is a little mouse so when you go be careful. I also have a small clump of wormwood propping my door.

When the bride and bridesmaid arrived at Ndrao-dyu's house there was an ingot of silver propping the door, and there was a fat pig inside. They found some food to eat and then considered together and said, "Let us make trousers and a gown for Ndrao-dyu to wear. One took a girdle and made a gown, and the other made trousers from another girdle. When Ndrao-dyu came in they hung the gown and trousers on a stick for Ndrao-dyu to put on. Ndrao-dyu went and washed himself and took the trousers and gown, but as soon as he had put them on they fell to pieces. Ndrao-dyu went into the other room and took out his silk clothes, put them on, and came out. Then the two girls were too ashamed for words.

The next day Ndrao-dyu said, "Whichever one of you finds my water supply, that one shall be my wife". Now the younger sister was industrious and went out in search of water. Her older sister was lazy and remained in the house. The younger sister searched in vain, and had to dip water from the footprints of cows in the road and carry that home. The elder sister saw the chicken go and drink under Ndrao-dyu's bed, so the elder sister went and dipped water and prepared food in readiness for the other two. Thus the older sister became Ndrao-dyu's wife.

After a considerable time Ndrao-dyu was going in search of game for the younger sister to eat, so that he might send her away. The younger sister said to Ndrao-dyu, "Brother-in-law, when you are on your way, should you shoot anything on the higher side of the road, then go and fetch it, but if you shoot anything on the lower side of the road, then you won't go and fetch it, will you?" Ndrao-dyu shot a deer on the lower side of the road, and he went to fetch it, but a tiger was there and he caught Ndrao-dyu and ate him. The tiger took the deer and carried it back. When the younger sister saw him she said,

“That is not our brother-in-law”. The tiger arrived with his load. He cut off one piece and put it in the pot and cut off the next piece and put it in his mouth. The younger sister said, “Our brother-in-law does not do that!” The tiger said, “I forgot, little bridesmaid”. When night came, the tiger took her sister and ate her. Her sister’s child began to cry. The tiger slapped his own thigh and said, “Mother, get up and nurse the baby!” The younger sister heard the tiger crunching her sister’s bones, so she asked, “Brother-in-law, what is the dog crunching?” The tiger said, “The dog is crunching some hemp stalks”. Then she heard the tiger drinking her sister’s blood, so she asked, “Brother-in-law, what is the dog drinking?” The tiger replied, “The dog is drinking his vegetable water”.

By now the younger sister was certain that the tiger had eaten her brother-in-law and her sister, so she got the bee to go with a message to tell her relatives. The bee flew off and reached her mother who was weaving at the time. The bee went and said,

“Vyu, vyu, vyu,
The tiger has eaten your maid and her man,
And only the little bridesmaid is left!”

But the mother said,

“My maid and her man are quite well.
With my thread I will tie you around
Until into sections you are all split up!”

The younger sister then got the crow to take a message and say,

“A, a, a,
The tiger has eaten your maid and her man,
And only the little bridesmaid is left!”

The mother was making dye at the time, and she said,

“My maid and her man are both well.
A plague on your mouth! I will take you
And plunge in this dye tub of mine!”

The younger sister then got the magpie to go with the message. The magpie reached the mother and father and called

“Zha, zha, zha
The tiger has eaten your maid and her man,
And only the little bridesmaid is left!”

The mother said,

“To test that you are telling the truth,
Into the dye tub I’ll plunge you, and if
You emerge from it pied, we shall know!”

So mother took the magpie and dipped him in the dye and he came out pied. Then the mother told the brothers and uncles.

The brothers and uncles, intending to kill the tiger, arrived where the younger sister was, and made all their preparations. They were going to get the tiger to carry water, but first they fixed the garden fences so there was only just room for the tiger to pass, When this was completed they got the tiger to go for water, giving him a great tub full of mud to carry. Then they threw in a basin of water and a stone. In this way, with the extra water and the stone, the tiger was crushed and died. With the tiger dead the relatives, the brothers and uncles, then brought the younger sister away.

Now the waist of the bee, the blackness of the crow and the pied plumage of the magpie trace their origin from here.