

M484

The orphan who went ploughing.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that once upon a time there was a Miao family. Mother and father were both dead, leaving two brothers. The elder had a wife, but the younger had not yet married. His sister-in-law and elder brother did not treat the younger brother at all well. They gave him buckwheat husks to eat, and made him go out ploughing every day.

One day as he ploughed, on reaching the edge where he had to turn the ox, the orphan said,

“The ox can eat dry grass as relish with fresh grass,
But the orphan must eat buckwheat and husks,
Till his heart is all parched up and dry”.

At the foot of the cliff on the far side of the valley a bride sang in reply to him,

“O orphan!
Orphan fetch the shining sword and come,
Kill the striped tiger on the far side,
Then bring the maid, the young woman away,
And rice you shall eat in plenty”.

The orphan loosed the ox and went home. His brother said, “How far have you got with your ploughing?” He replied, “I have ploughed to the foot of the black rock, but my head was so cold that I loosed the ox”. So his brother gave him a hat to wear.

The following day he went out ploughing again. Having ploughed to the edge where he had to turn the ox, he said again,

“The ox can eat dry grass as relish with fresh grass,
But the orphan must eat buckwheat and husks,
Till his heart is all parched up and dry”.

Again the bride sang in reply to him,

“O orphan!
Orphan fetch the shining sword and come,
Kill the striped tiger on the far side,
Then bring the maid, the young woman away,
And rice you shall eat in plenty”.

The orphan loosed the ox and came home. His brother said, “How far have you reached with your ploughing?” He replied, “I have ploughed to the foot of the black rock, but my body was so cold that I loosed the ox”. So his brother went and bought him a gown to wear.

Again the third day he went ploughing. He ploughed to the edge where the ox was turned, and did as he had done before. The bride again sang in reply to him, so he

loosed the ox and came home. When his brother enquired he said, “My legs were so cold that I loosed the ox”. So his brother went and bought him a pair of leggings to wear.

Again the fourth day, this day too he went out ploughing. He ploughed to the edge where the ox was turned, and did exactly as he had done before. The bride again sang in reply to him, so again he loosed the ox and returned home. When his brother enquired he said, “My feet were smarting so, that I loosed the ox”. His brother bought a pair of sandals for him to wear.

The day which was the fifth day, he went ploughing again, and when he reached the edge where the ox had to be turned he said,

“The ox can eat dry grass as relish with fresh grass,
But the orphan must eat buckwheat and husks,
Till his heart is all parched up and dry”.

Again the bride sang in reply to him,

“O orphan!
Orphan fetch the shining sword and come,
Kill the striped tiger on the far side,
Then bring the maid, the young woman away,
And rice you shall eat in plenty”.

The orphan loosed the ox and came home and said to his brother, “Brother, I have seen a bride over on the other side at the foot of the cliff, who sings in reply to me. Let us go and investigate”. His brother said, “I will go with you and see”. Then he said, “How did you come to see her?” He replied, “It was as I was ploughing and as I turned the ox that she sang in reply to me”. His brother harnessed the ox and ploughed out to the edge, turned the ox and came back, but saw no bride. His brother said, “How was it that I saw no one?” The orphan said, “Let me plough”. The orphan ploughed to the edge, turned the ox and said,

“The ox can eat dry grass as relish with fresh grass,
But the orphan must eat buckwheat and husks,
Till his heart is all parched up and dry”.

The bride sang,

“O orphan!
Orphan fetch the shining sword and come,
Kill the striped tiger on the far side,
Then bring the maid, the young woman away,
And rice you shall eat in plenty”.

His brother said, “Let us get ready, and go and fetch her for you”. The orphan and his brother went away and reached the valley where they had to go. There was a deer there and his brother shot it with his crossbow. As he went to pick it up there was a tiger, which came out, caught and ate him. So the orphan went on alone and reached the place where the bride was. He waited until the tiger came and killed it. Then bringing the bride away he reached home. This day the bride said, “The gold and silver money is

chafing me badly”. So the orphan brought a large flat basket into which to shake it, but it filled two baskets. Henceforward the orphan and the bride became man and wife.