

M485

The orphan marries the bride.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that once upon a time there was an orphan. His mother and father caught typhoid fever and died. His sisters were married so he went to live with his sister-in-law and elder brother. His brother was kind hearted, but his sister-in-law did not like him at all. She made him wear clothes which were all rags and tatters and gave him buckwheat and husks to eat.

One day as he went out ploughing, he had ploughed to the edge where the ox had to be turned, the orphan sang,

“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”.

There was a bride at the foot of the cliff on the further side, who sang in reply,

“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”.

When the orphan heard it he said, “I should like to go and fetch the bride, but with no clothes to wear I am ashamed”. So he loosed the ox and went home. He said to his brother, “My body and my head are so very cold I cannot plough, and my legs and feet are stinging so I cannot walk”. His brother went and found a gown for him to wear and a hat to put on. Then he gave him a pair of leggings and sandals to wear. His brother said to him, “Please do not tell your sister-in-law that I have given you these things”.

The orphan having got sufficient of everything from his brother, went and said to his brother-in-law, “Brother-in-law, I have seen that there is a Miao girl yonder at the foot of the cliff over there. Every day she comes and sings to me”. His brother-in-law said, “In that case let us go and see and bring her back for you”. The two of them went and reached the plot of land where the orphan had been ploughing. The orphan’s brother-in-law said, “What were you doing when the bride sang in reply to you?” The orphan said, “It is when I was ploughing and turned the ox, that the bride sang in reply to me”. The orphan’s brother-in-law harnessed the ox and began to plough. He turned the ox and came back, but there was no one who sang. He said, “There is no one singing. You are joking with me!” The orphan said, “Let me plough”. The orphan began to plough and ploughed to the other side. As he turned the ox he said, “Around you go!”

“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 yonder at the foot of the cliff replied to the orphan and 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”.

When the orphan’s brother-in-law heard it he said to the orphan, “Loose the ox. Let us go and prepare and then go and bring her back for you”.

The orphan and his brother-in-law departed. For three days and nights they were grinding their swords, and got the elder sister to prepare food. When the swords were properly ground and the food was ready, the orphan and his brother-in-law left, and reached the cliff where the Miao girl and the tiger were. It was not yet night, so the tiger had not come. The tiger was sitting on a ledge on the opposite side where he could be seen. The orphan’s brother-in-law stretched his crossbow. He took one shot and hit the tiger, which came rolling down. The bride said, “Thank you my brothers for coming and rescuing me. Here I could not go but dared not stay. See now, I see my brothers, my brothers indeed!” The orphan and his brother-in-law brought the bride away for the orphan. The Miao girl carried silver and gold and bought everything they needed.

Now the orphan and his brother-in-law had become rich men. They bought a horse each and rode to the orphan’s brother’s place. When they arrived there, his sister-in-law and brother did not recognise them at all. They said, “We two are on business and have reached you here, but now it is evening, and we would like to find a place to sleep here with you”. His sister-in-law said to them, “We have no place to sleep, our house is so very narrow that however you squeeze in, there will still be no room for you to sleep”. The orphan’s brother-in-law said, “Whether it is sufficient or not, we shall sleep here!” The orphan’s brother said, “In that case, we have a little house over there, go and have a look. If you can manage to stay there, then stay”. So the orphan and his brother-in-law went and stayed in the little house. They bought from the orphan’s brother all kinds of food which they prepared for eating, then they invited the orphan’s brother to come and eat with them.

The next day the orphan and his brother-in-law prepared food, ate it and left. When they had gone half way the orphan said, “I still want to return and fetch my brother. You stay here and wait for me”. The orphan’s brother-in-law said, “Very well, you go, and come back quickly”. The orphan returned and said to his sister-in-law, “Now I am going to take my brother along, you turn into a wild animal and go and eat grass!” The orphan’s sister-in-law turned into a doe. The orphan lifted his brother on to the horse’s back and left. When they reached the place where his brother-in-law was, they saw a doe on the edge of the wood. The orphan’s brother-in-law took one shot and hit the doe. The three of them went and picked it up to look at, and the orphan’s brother saw that on the doe’s fore foot there was a thimble-ring which he knew belonged to his wife. So they took the doe and buried it and went on their way.