

forest and hills, then up into the mountains until he finally reached Da Son Mountain at the edge of the sea. There, beside the cliff, lay the body of Mi Chau. Trong Thuy fell to his knees and covered his face in his hands.

Two days later, Trieu Da, his soldiers, and all the people of Loa Thanh saw Trong Thuy riding slowly back to the rampart with the body of Mi Chau. Although his father and all his friends tried to get the young man to speak, he said nothing, and he wouldn't allow anyone to go near the body of his beloved wife. Silently, he buried her beside the white rock where the two lovers had always sat looking at the stars. Then, before anyone could stop him, he threw himself into the palace well and drowned.

Nowadays, at Co Loa village just outside Hanoi, the well called Trong Thuy sits in front of An Duong Vuong's temple. According to Vietnamese legend, when the king killed his daughter, her blood flowed into the sea. Oysters drank those drops of blood and produced pearls that were large, but glowed only dimly. Local people say that if the pearls are washed in the water of Trong Thuy's well, they will shine with a transluence as bright and beautiful as the moon.

The contemporary Vietnamese poet Anh Ngoc wrote a poem that recalls the tragedy of Mi Chau and Trong Thuy:

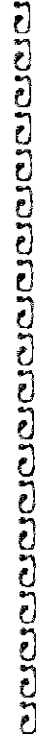
*Tears become the other side of trust
Ultimately love is death
But the beautiful girl, even headless, still has beauty
And love, even with betrayal, is still love.*

Note

1. Many Vietnamese folktales contain young women by the name of Mi Chau or Mi Nuong. These are honorary titles given to the daughters of high-ranking officials, similar to "princess" in English.

*Nguyen Nguyen Cam and Dana Sachs, eds.
Two Cakes Fit for a King (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 2003)*

THE ANGER OF THE WATERS



A LONG TIME AGO, the land we now know as Vietnam was governed by a series of rulers known as the Hung Kings. During the dynasty of the Eighteenth Hung King, the Viet people lived in peace and happiness.

The king lived with one sorrow. His wife had died young, leaving the heartbroken husband to raise their little girl. Although the king had a palace full of diamonds and pearls, his daughter was his life's joy. Her name was Mi Nuong, and when she grew up she was so beautiful that no one could see her without falling in love with her. Her skin was as smooth and white as the freshest milk. Her lips were as scarlet as the coral that lies at the depths of the ocean. Her eyes shone like deep, dark velvet, and her hair was as soft as clouds in the sky.

Mi Nuong was not only very beautiful. She was also intelligent and talented. She sang beautifully, and she knew how to play all kinds of musical instruments. She also loved her father dearly, and, understanding his sorrow, she did whatever she could to please him.

Because the king valued his daughter above everything

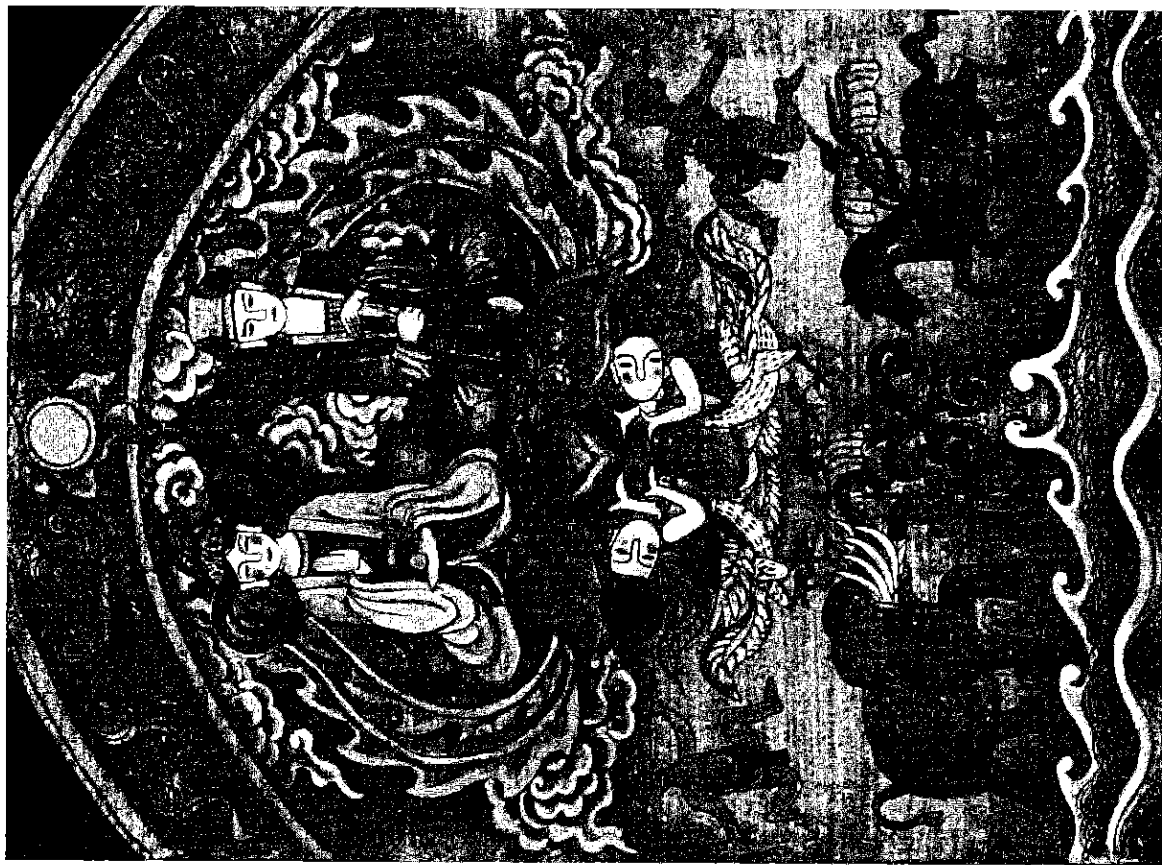
else, he wanted to find the most handsome, talented, and brave man in the world for her to marry. To find the best husband for Mi Nuong, he decided to organize a competition for all the young men in the kingdom. He told his advisers to spread the news that anyone who wanted to marry the princess should come to the palace to show their skills.

Many young men tried. The king met a hunter who could enter the forest after breakfast and bring home a tiger for lunch. He met a swimmer who could stay under water for three hours at a time. He met a scholar who knew how to recite poetry in seventeen different languages. But the hunter couldn't read, the swimmer was too shy to speak, and the scholar sneezed too much. The king didn't give any of them good marks. He began to worry that he would never find any-one good enough for his daughter. Mi Nuong worried that she would never fall in love.

Then one day, two strangers appeared. The first wore clothes that were green as trees in the middle of summer. In his hand was a bow made of rare wood, and an ivory arrow that bore a hundred feathers from a hundred different forest birds. He bowed to the king and said, "Your Highness, I come from the highest point on Tan Vien Mountain. My name is Son Tinh, and I am the Mountain Divine."

The second visitor wore clothes that were as blue as the ocean glowing in the sun. In his hand was a horn made from the shells of a hundred creatures of the sea. He bowed to the king and said, "Your highness, I come from the deepest depths of the Eastern Sea. My name is Thuy Tinh, and I am the Ocean Divine."

The king felt pleased. He had never seen such impressive-looking fellows. Mi Nuong, hiding behind a curtain, felt her heart quickly beating.



But the king was not the sort of person to go by looks alone.

"Show me your talent!" he said.

The visitor dressed in blue stepped forward and bowed. "Your majesty," he said, "because I'm the Water Divine, I control the ponds, lakes, streams, rivers, seas, and oceans. And, even more important, I also control the sky. Watch what I can do!"

He walked out of the palace and blew his seashell horn. Gray clouds rolled in and within minutes covered the whole sky. A big wind churned through the trees, followed by crashing thunder and cracking lightning. Then the clouds opened up and let loose a torrent of rain. Mi Nuong watched it all from the window of the palace. Everything outside became dark and frightening. Even the palace shook.

Just when it seemed the force of the storm would kill them all, the visitor dressed in green ran out of the palace. Braving the wind and rain, he raised his bow and shot the arrow into the air. The storm immediately stopped, and the sky instantly became clear and blue. Birds sang. The water drops on trees and flowers shone like jade. Mi Nuong smiled. Both men came in and knelt down before King Hung, each proud of his accomplishment.

The king was confused. He could see that both of these men possessed a rare talent. How could he say that one was greater than the other? Finally he found a solution—a good one, according to him.

He gestured for the two young men to get up.

"Both of you," said the king, "are young, handsome, and talented. But I only have one daughter. I have to give you one more test. Tomorrow will be the wedding. Whichever one of you brings your engagement presents here first can marry the princess."

The two young visitors bowed and hurried away. They both knew they had a lot to do by the next morning.

Son Tinh, the Mountain Divine, hurried back to Tan Vien Mountain. He ordered his followers to collect all the treasures of the forest and mountains, including ivory, aloë, muskdeer, rare woods, and precious animals. In addition, Son Tinh found three creatures he knew no one at the palace had ever seen: an elephant with nine tusks, a rooster with nine spurs on its feet, and a pink horse with nine different layers of mane. "These animals," he said, "will delight my lovely bride-to-be."

While Son Tinh was collecting everything from the mountains and forests, Thuy Tinh was busy in the Eastern Sea. In hopes of having Mi Nuong come to live in the sea, Thuy Tinh's subjects offered him such treasures as the most delicate coral, the smoothest turtle shells, and the brightest pearls. In addition, Thuy Tinh found three creatures he knew no one at the palace had ever seen, a sea horse as graceful as a Thoroughbred, a starfish that glowed like a star, and a water dragon whose skin shimmered in all the colors of the rainbow. "These sea creatures," Thuy Tinh said, "will delight my lovely bride-to-be."

Early the next morning, while the sun still shone pale on the palace gate and all the people inside were still sleeping, Son Tinh arrived upon his pink horse with nine manes. The elephant followed, bearing all the treasures of the forest and mountain. With its nine spurs, the rooster knocked at the gate.

As soon as the gate opened, the royal wedding music began. Son Tinh and Mi Nuong took each other's hand, walked to the palace altar, and knelt down to pray. Both of them were happy, and all the people who lived between the palace and Tan Vien Mountain were thrilled with joy. The

feast began, and everyone danced to congratulate the happy young couple.

Not ten minutes had passed when Thuy Tinh arrived, bearing the gifts of the sea. You can imagine the disappointment he felt when he realized he'd arrived only ten minutes too late. Seeing Son Tinh and Mi Nuong happily married, he was so furious he decided to get revenge. He gathered his many mysterious powers, and called the clouds, winds, rain, and water to make a flood that would kill everybody, including Mi Nuong and Son Tinh, his rival in love.

Thousands of Thuy Tinh's subjects—huge numbers of turtles, octopus, snakes, and water-ghosts—emerged from the rivers and seas with bloody ideas.

But Son Tinh's followers didn't pause to wait for their deaths. As fast as they could, they cut down trees and threw rocks and soil into the water to keep it from rising and drowning them. The Ocean Divine's soldiers died one after another. At the same time, Son Tinh, with his own mysterious power, made the mountain higher and higher, and kept the people safe.

The higher the water rose, the higher the mountain rose.

Finally, the water soldiers were so exhausted they couldn't fight any more. Reluctantly, Thuy Tinh realized he had to withdraw.

Son Tinh's followers rejoiced. They held parties to celebrate their victory. After that, Son Tinh and Mi Nuong lived a happy life together.

But the ocean god never forgot his great disappointment in love. Once every year, he thinks back on his old hatred, and he causes the waters to rise again and flood. Son Tinh's subjects, who are now the people of Vietnam, developed from that day their traditional ways of fighting the floods. They've built great river banks and dikes so that they can always protect themselves from Thuy Tinh's anger.