



142

"I knew that my husband loved his friends more than his own brother, and for a long time I have been trying to think of a way to open his eyes. I wanted especially to prove to him that brotherly love is deep and holy. Yesterday, during my husband's absence, my dog died. I made up the entire story to help my husband find out the truth about his friends. And this is the result, O most righteous magistrate."

Each of the friends, who stood there dumbfounded and crestfallen, was sentenced to receive fifty lashes. It is hard to imagine how they could ever hope to look Hai in the face again. Hai fell sobbing on his brother's shoulder in a show of uncontrolled emotion.

From that time on Hai and Ba lived like true brothers and shared every joy and sorrow with each other. This was greatly pleasing to Hai's good wife, whose clever trick had brought them together again.



28

THE STORY OF TAM AND CAM

ONCE UPON a time there lived a man and his wife and their little daughter, Tam. They were good people and lived a happy life until the wife died. After several years, he married again, but the second wife was a wicked woman.

On the first day after the wedding, when there was a big banquet in the house, little Tam was shut up in a room, instead of being allowed to help welcome the guests and attend the feast. Moreover, she was sent to bed without any supper.

Things grew worse when a new baby girl was born. The new child was named Cam, and it was adored by both parents. Poor Tam was now in a worse situation than before, and the stepmother told her husband so many lies about her that he refused to have anything to do with his own daughter.

143

"Stay in the kitchen and do not annoy us, you naughty child," the wicked stepmother would say.

She gave the little girl a dirty wretched place in the kitchen, and it was there that she had to live and work. At night she slept on a torn mat and had only a ragged sheet as coverlet. Tam was forced to scrub the floors, cut the wood, feed the animals, and do the cooking, washing, and many other tasks. Large blisters formed on her soft little hands, but she bore the pain without complaint. Her stepmother would often send her into the deep forest to gather wood in the secret hope that some wild beast would carry her off. She asked Tam to draw water from wells which were dangerously deep, hoping that she would fall in and drown.

Tam worked so hard that her skin became darkened with dirt and grease, and her hair became matted and scraggly. Whenever she went to the well to draw water, she would look at her image and it frightened her to realize how dirty and ugly she had become. She took some water in the palm of her hand, washed her face, combed her long, smooth hair with her fingers, and the soft white skin appeared again.

When the evil stepmother realized how pretty Tam could look, she hated her more than ever and wished to do her more harm. One day she told Tam and her own daughter, Cam, to go fishing in the village pond.

"Try to catch a lot of fish," she said, "if you come back with only a few, you will be whipped, and sent to bed without your supper."



144

Tam knew that these words were meant for her, for the stepmother would never think of beating Cam, who was the apple of her eye. But Tam was now used to hard whippings.

Tam fished diligently, and by the end of the day she had a basketful of fish. On the other hand, Cam spent the day rolling in the tender grass, picking wild flowers, basking in the sun, and dancing and singing. The sun had set before Cam even began to fish. She looked at Tam's full basket and then at her own, which was empty. An idea came to her.

"Sister, sister," she cried, "your hair is full of mud. Why don't you wade into the fresh water and wash your hair. Otherwise, mother is going to scold you."

Tam listened to this advice, and swam out into the water to wash her hair. Meanwhile Cam emptied Tam's fish into her own basket, and ran home.

When Tam returned to the shore and realized that her fish had been stolen, her heart sank, and she began to cry bitterly. She was certain her stepmother would punish her severely.

Suddenly a fresh and balmy wind arose, the sky became clear and the clouds whiter, and she saw in front of her the smiling, blue-robed Goddess of Mercy, carrying a green willow branch.

"What is the matter, dear child?" the Goddess asked in a sweet, pure voice.

Tam related all that had happened and added:

"Most Noble Lady, what am I to do tonight when I



145

return home? I am very frightened, for my stepmother will not believe that the fish were stolen. She will whip me very, very hard."

The Goddess of Mercy consoled her:

"Your misfortunes will soon be over. Have confidence in me and be of good cheer. Now look in your basket to see whether there is anything left."

Tam looked in the basket and saw a lovely little fish with red fins and golden eyes. She uttered a cry of surprise.

The Goddess told her to take the fish home, put it in the well at the rear of the house, and feed it three times a day with what she could save from her own food. Tam thanked the Goddess gratefully and did exactly as she had been told. Whenever she went to the well, the fish would appear on the surface to greet her, but never showed itself to anyone else.

The stepmother noticed Tam's strange actions and began to spy on her. She went to the well to look for the fish, but it was hidden in deep water. She then plotted against Tam. One day she ordered her to go to a distant spring to fetch water, and taking advantage of her absence, disguised herself in Tam's ragged clothes and went to the well. She called the fish, and when it came to the surface, scooped it up with a net, and ate it for supper.

When Tam returned home, she went at once to the well and called and called, but the golden fish did not appear. Then she noticed that the surface of the water

was stained with blood and realized the truth. Tam leaned her head against the well and wept miserably.

The Goddess of Mercy appeared to her again, and with a face as sweet as that of a loving and compassionate mother, she comforted the child.

"Do not cry," she said. "Your stepmother has killed the fish and eaten it, but you must find the bones and bury them in the ground under your mat. Pray to them and whatever you may wish for will be granted."

Tam followed the Goddess' instructions and began to search for the fish's bones, but could find no trace.

"Cluck! Cluck!" said a hen. "Give me some rice, and I will show you where the bones are hidden."

Tam gave her a handful of rice and the hen said:

"Cluck! Cluck! Follow me."

When she came to the poultry yard, the hen scratched in a dunghill and uncovered the fish's bones. Tam gathered them up and reburied them as she had been told. It was not long before she received gold and jewelry, and dresses of such wonderful materials they would have rejoiced the heart of any young girl.

Soon it came time for the Autumn Festival, but Tam was ordered to stay at home and sort out two big baskets of black and green beans that the wicked stepmother had purposely mixed together.

"When you have finished your work," she said, "you may go to the festival, but not before."

Then the stepmother and Cam put on their most beautiful dresses and went out. When they had been



146



147

gone for some time, Tam lifted her tearful face to heaven and prayed:

"O Benevolent Goddess of Mercy, please help me."

The soft-eyed Goddess appeared at once. With her magic green willow branch, she turned the little flies into sparrows, which sorted the beans for the girl. Tam dried her tears, dressed herself in a glittering, blue-and-silver gown, and went to the festival.

Cam was greatly surprised to see her half-sister at the festival, and whispered to her mother:

"That rich lady is strangely like my sister Tam?"

When Tam realized that her stepmother and Cam were staring at her, she ran away in such a hurry she lost one of her fine slippers.

A court noble discovered the slipper and presented it to the king.

The king examined the slipper carefully and declared he had never before seen such a work of art. He asked the ladies of the Court to try it on, but the slipper was too small for even the smallest foot among the noble ladies. Then he sent messengers throughout the kingdom with orders for all women everywhere to try on the slipper; but it would fit none of them. Finally, word was sent out that the woman whose foot could fit the slipper, would become his queen.

Finally it was Tam's turn to try the slipper. It fitted her foot perfectly. She then appeared in Court wearing both slippers and her glittering glue-and-silver gown, looking extremely beautiful. She was married to the

VIETNAMESE LEGENDS

king at a big wedding attended by many dignitaries, and thenceforth led a brilliant and happy life.

* * *

All this was too much for the stepmother and Cam to accept. They could not bear to see Tam so happy and they would have killed her willingly. But owing to the king's protection they were afraid.

On her father's name's day, Tam returned home to celebrate with her family. At that time, however great and important one might be, one was always expected by one's parents to behave exactly like a young and obedient child. The cunning stepmother took advantage of this custom, and asked Tam to climb an areca tree to obtain some nuts for the guests. As Tam was queen, she could have refused, but she was a very pious and dutiful daughter, so climbed the tree. While there, she felt it swaying to and fro in a strange and alarming manner.

"What are you doing?" she asked her stepmother.

"I am only trying to frighten the ants, which might bite you my dear child," came the reply.

But in fact, the wicked stepmother had obtained an axe, and she cut down the tree, which fell with a crash. Poor Tam was killed instantly.

"Now we are rid of her," said the horrid woman, with an ugly laugh. "She will never come back. We shall report to the king that she died in an accident, and my beloved daughter, Cam, will become queen in her stead!"

THE STORY OF TAM AND CAM



Things happened exactly as she had planned, and Cam became the king's wife.

But Tam's pure and innocent soul could find no rest. She was turned into a nightingale, living in a beautiful grove near the king's garden.

One day, one of the palace maids was airing the king's dragon-embroidered robe, and the nightingale sang in her melodious voice:

"O sweet maid, be careful with my husband's robe and do not tear it by putting it on a thorny hedge."

The nightingale sang so sweetly she moved the hearts of all who heard her. Even the king was attracted by her voice. She sang so sadly that tears came into his eyes. At last the king said:

"Delightful nightingale, if you are the soul of my beloved queen, be pleased to settle in my wide sleeves."

The gentle bird went straight into the king's sleeves, and rubbed her smooth head against his hand.

She was then put in a golden cage in the king's bedroom. The king became so fond of her that he would stay near the cage all day listening to her beautiful melancholic songs.

Cam became jealous of the nightingale and sought her mother's advice. One day, while the king was holding a council with his ministers, Cam killed the bird, and threw the feathers into the royal gardens.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked the king, when he saw the empty cage.

There was great confusion in the palace. Everyone looked for the nightingale, but no one could find it.

VIETNAMESE LEGENDS

"Perhaps she was bored and flew off," said Cam. The king was very sad, but there was nothing he could do about it, other than resign himself to fate.

Once again, however, Tam's restless soul was transformed. This time it became a great, magnificent tree. It bore only a single fruit, but what a wonderful fruit it was! It was perfectly round, large, and had a very sweet smell. An old woman passing by the tree and seeing the beautiful fruit, said:

"Golden fruit, golden fruit,

"Drop into the bag of this old woman.

"This one will never eat you.

"She will keep you and enjoy your beauty."

The fruit at once dropped into the old woman's bag. She took it home to enjoy its appearance and fragrant smell. But the next day, on returning from some errands, to her great surprise she found her house clean and tidy, and a delicious hot meal waiting for her. It was as if some magic hand had done this during her absence.

The following morning the old woman pretended to go out, but she returned stealthily, and watched the house. Soon she beheld a fair and slender lady coming out of the golden fruit. She was even more surprised when the lady began to tidy up the house. The old woman rushed into the room and tore away the peel, so that the fair lady could no longer hide herself within the fruit. The young lady then had to remain in the house and consider the old woman as her mother.

One day the king went hunting and became lost.

THE STORY OF TAM AND CAM

He saw the old woman's house and asked for shelter. According to custom, the latter offered him some tea and betel. The king observed the delicate way in which the betel had been prepared and asked:

"Who made this betel? It looks exactly like that prepared by my late beloved queen."

In a trembling voice, the old woman replied: "Son of Heaven, it was made by my unworthy daughter."

The king then ordered the daughter to be brought before him. When she came in, she bowed low, and he immediately realized that it was Tam, his beloved queen. They both wept bitter tears after such a long separation and so much unhappiness. Tam then returned to the capital with the king, where she took her rightful place as first wife and queen.

Cam was completely forgotten by the king.

She then thought to herself: "If I were as beautiful as my sister, I would win the king's heart." She asked the queen: "Dearest sister, how can my skin become as white as yours?"

"It is very simple," answered the queen, who was now completely aware of Cam's ill-will, "you have only to jump into a vat of boiling water."

Cam believed her and did as she was told.

This was the end of Cam, and she died instantly.

When the wicked stepmother learned of Cam's death, she wept so long that she became blind, and shortly after, died of a broken heart.

Queen Tam was now free of her enemies, and lived the rest of her life in peace and happiness.

VIETNAMESE LEGENDS



THE

GENTLEMAN OF THE FLIES

HERE ONCE lived a gentleman who was very handsome and well-educated. He was pleased to lead an easy life, unburdened by routine cares and tribulations. He had a very easy-going nature, and he had never been known to harm any living creature.

He was particularly generous with the flies who invaded his house. He served them many delicious meals and instructed his servants to set food apart for them. The flies appreciated this consideration and returned his affection. They guarded him carefully, and saw to it that neither mosquitoes nor any other insects disturbed his sleep.

The king of the country in which the gentleman lived, was seeking a husband for his daughter, a princess renowned for her great beauty and talent. The king