

M463

The man who went digging and found a fine son-in-law.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

There is a story that, once upon a time, there was Miao man who went out digging. He dug to the middle of the plot and there was a very large rock that the Miao man could not roll away. The Miao man said, "I have three daughters, and I will give one of them to whoever will come and roll away the rock from the middle of the plot for me". A snake came out and said, "Old man, if I roll it away for you, will you give me one?" The Miao man said, "If you roll it away I will give you one". The snake encircled the rock and rolled it away. The Miao man said, "I was only joking". So the snake went and rolled it back again into its place. Then the Miao man said, "I am telling the truth, You roll it away, and this time I will certainly give one to you". So the snake rolled the rock away.

In the evening the Miao man brought the snake and arrived home. The Miao man said, "Big sister, bring a stool for son-in-law to sit on". The eldest said, "That snake! Who is going to bring a stool for him to sit on?" The Miao man then said, "Second sister, bring a stool for son-in-law to sit on. The second one said, "That snake! Who is going to bring a stool for him to sit on?" The Miao man then said, "Youngest sister, bring a stool for son-in-law to sit on". The youngest said, "My mother and my father have cared for me so much. Why yes! I will bring one for him to sit on". The youngest sister brought a stool for the snake to sit on. The snake climbed up and coiled himself on the top. When it was time to sleep, the Miao man said, "Big sister, take son-in-law to sleep". The eldest said, "That snake! Who is going to take him to sleep?" The Miao man said, "Second sister, take son-in-law to sleep, now!" The second sister said, "That snake! Who is going to take him to sleep?" The Miao man then said, "Youngest sister, take son-in-law to sleep, now!" The youngest said, "My mother and my father have cared for me so much. Why yes! I will take him to sleep". The youngest sister and the snake went to sleep in the other room of the house.

In the middle of the night his mother and father-in-law were going to kill the snake. When they were ready, mother-in-law lit the torch while father-in-law shouldered the walling ram. They went and saw that the snake had changed into a fine young man who was sleeping with the youngest sister. So the pair went back again. After a number of days the snake wanted to take his bride and leave. The snake said to his father-in-law, "Father-in-law, let us compete in singing". His father-in-law replied, "Son-in-law you sing first". The snake sang,

"The woman, she lit a torch,
The man he shouldered a walling ram,
Together they went to kill the snake in the other room of the house".

His father-in-law was so ashamed that he was unable to say anything. So the snake took his bride away.

As they were going, the couple carried some cabbage seed and scattered it along the road they were travelling, so that later their parents would be able to follow them. They went on and came to a pool of water. The snake said to his wife, "You stay here while I go up yonder, but if the water runs cloudy, do not touch it". The snake went and

washed himself and changed into a man a little way up stream. Now as the water grew cloudy his wife went and touched the cloudy water and snake skin wrapped all round her hand. When her husband returned and saw that his wife was keeping her hand bent, he asked her, "What is the matter with your hand?" She said, "There is nothing the matter". But her husband wanted to have a look and saw the snake skin wrapped all round it. He had to come and lick it and then it got right again.

After the couple had left, the cabbage grew well. Their mother longed for them, so she followed the road where the cabbages were growing, in order to go to her daughter and son-in-law. She followed to the end of the road where it just disappeared into a hole in the rock. There was nothing their mother could do, so she sat down there and cried. As she was crying she let her head bump against a hole in the rock. The hole in the rock broke open and their mother saw that there was an entrance there. She followed the cabbages until she reached a set of fine houses, timber framed and tiled. So she stayed with her daughter and son-in-law. Having stayed as long as she wanted, mother-in-law returned home and told the other two daughters everything. As a result these two wanted to copy their younger sister. They went and brought snakes back to sleep, but the snakes bit them and they died.