

best loved lao folk tales



ນິທານພື້ນເມືອງລາວ

Illustration: Noe Garin

The Mango Tree

One upon a time a fine mango tree grew in the jungle near the village. Every year when the fruit was ripe the village children ran into the jungle and picked the fruit. One day, however, when the children went to the tree, they found a fence all around it. At the side of the fence there were two huge, fierce dogs. A stranger came out of the jungle.

"Go away!" he shouted loudly. "This is my tree now."

"No, it is not," the children cried.

"You don't own the jungle. The tree is everybody's tree. Anyone can have the fruit." The children were telling the truth but the stranger did not listen to them. He made his dogs chase the children back to the village. The children went to the village headman and told him what had happened.

The village headman was very wise and, after some thought, he worked out a clever trick to play on the nasty stranger. The next day one of the girls of the village went to the tree again. She threw two pieces of meat to the dogs and climbed over the fence. Then she took a mango from the tree and began to eat it. Again, the stranger ran out of the jungle and he shouted at her, "Stop! You cannot take my mangoes. Go away." The girl took another bite from the mango. Suddenly she screamed out loud and fell to the ground. At that moment, the headman came by and asked, "What have you done to that girl?"

"Nothing!" the man answered. "She took one of my mangoes and fell to the ground!" The headman looked sadly at the little girl.

"She has mango sickness," he said. "Once every ten years, this mango tree has poisonous fruit. This must be the tenth year for this tree. You must not eat the mangoes on it this year."

Then he picked up the girl and carried her back to the village. The next morning, the village headman took the children into the jungle to the mango tree. The stranger had gone, and he had taken his fence and his huge dogs with him. Once again, the children picked up the fruit, and carried them back to the village, laughing and singing because the tree was everybody's tree once more.



Illustration: Suryadi Djasman Kartodiwiryo

Xiangmiang Outwits the King

Xiangmiang is a notorious trickster who was so clever that the king had to hire him to work in court. But the king did not really like Xiangmiang. So he tried to find occasions to outwit Xiangmiang. One day the king thought of a plan. He called a meeting and he made an announcement. "Today, I have a game to play. If anyone could make me jump in the pond, . . . I would give a reward to him." Everyone in the meeting was silent, for the king was the most powerful man in the kingdom. They did not dare to accept the king's challenge.

So the king turned to Xiangmiang: "How about you Xiangmiang? You are so clever; don't you want to try?" Xiangmiang spoke politely and humbly, "Oh, Your Majesty! I am your humble servant. I would not dare to make you jump in the pond at all." The king was delighted; he laughed loudly, slapping his hand on his knee.

But, then Xiangmiang's voice stopped him from laughing. "Your Majesty, I would not dare to make you jump in the pond. But if you were already in the pond, I am sure I could make Your Majesty come out of it." The king then said, "All right," and jumped in the pond. "Now, make me get out of the pond, Xiangmiang." Xiangmiang smiled and said, "Your Majesty, I have just made you jump in the pond."

The king was dumbfounded, but he kept silent, waiting for another chance to outwit this court trickster.

Source: seasite.niu.edu/lao/LaoFolkLiterature



Illustration: Nadiia Havryliuk Kharzhevskia

The Magic White Swan



Illustration: Evgenii Naumov

A farmer went fishing one day. He had a long fishing net. Like other farmers, he wore a piece of cloth around his head. He cast his net, but he got nothing. He did it again and again, but he got nothing. There was not a single fish. He cast his net once, twice, thrice, but he got nothing. He cast his net for the last time and pulled up the net. He pulled and he pulled. "Oh, it is so heavy." Then, he found a white pebble in his net. It was the most beautiful pebble that he had ever seen. So, he took the pebble home and placed it on the shelf above his head. After dinner, he went to sleep.

The next day, the white pebble had turned into a white swan. The swan approached the farmer and said, "I will take you to a place, a beautiful place, full of flowers. You can take whatever you like." So the swan began flapping its wings and flew off to the garden with the farmer sitting on its back. Once there the farmer enjoyed the garden. He picked one flower and felt that it was heavy. He picked the second one and it got heavier. He picked the third one and it was even heavier. "Oh, I don't think I should pick any more flowers. It will be too heavy for the swan to fly and take me home." So, the swan took the farmer back home and disappeared. The flowers were turned into gold! So, the farmer became a rich man.

The news of his wealth reached the ears of his friend, who came to ask the farmer right away about how he had acquired his wealth. The farmer told his friend everything. The next day, his friend went to fish in the river with his long net. He cast his net once, twice, thrice, but he got nothing. He cast his net for the last time and pulled up the net. Then, he found a white pebble in his net. He took the pebble home and placed it in his room. The pebble became the beautiful white swan who said to the second farmer, "I will take you somewhere today, to a flower garden."

So, the man jumped on the swan's back and the swan flew off to the flower garden. Once there the man picked the flowers, one, two, three. "Oh, I have to pick a lot since I have come here already," he said. So he picked two arms' full of flowers and went to the swan. "Take me home now. I will put these away and I will come back for more." He jumped on the swan's back. His flowers were so heavy, the swan almost could not fly. He flew, swaying left and right with weight, but he was able to take the man to his house with difficulty. The man jumped off the swan's back and said, "Now, wait here. Don't go away. I will go back to the garden to pick more flowers." Then he took the flowers into his room.

When he came back, the swan disappeared. He returned to his room, but he found . . . only ordinary flowers, no gold.

The Lion's Lunch



Illustration: Svetlana Foote

King Lion was not happy because he didn't have any friends to play with. All of the other animals were afraid of being eaten by Lion. One day King Lion decreed that, each day, the animals would vote on which one of them were to be his lunch, and the chosen animal would have to pretend to be the Lion's friend in the morning and play with him.

When it was the rabbit's turn to be eaten, he told the lion that he saw a different lion at the watering hole that wanted to eat him, too. The rabbit told the other lion that he could not because he was already King Lion's lunch.

King Lion was not happy to have his territory invaded and demanded that rabbit take him to see this other lion. Rabbit took him to the cliff above the watering hole. King Lion looked down and saw another lion in the pond. He roared at the other lion but the other lion made no sound. King Lion did not like being mocked and jumped from the cliff toward the other lion. As you have already figured out, because *you* are clever, King Lion saw his own reflection in the pond, and jumped in and drowned.

Rabbit became a hero among the animals, none of whom had to become lunch.

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