

Chinese Classic
Cultural Stories Series



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中国传说故事

Stories of Chinese Legends

牛郎织女

The Oxherd and the Weaving Maiden



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CONTENTS 目录

一、兄弟分家.....	3
1. The Division of the Family	
二、池畔娶妻.....	31
2. Getting a Wife at the Pondsides	
三、织女思归.....	56
3. Nostalgia of Zhinu	
四、天宫斗法.....	80
4. Fighting in the Palace of Heaven	
五、鹊桥相会	103
5. Meeting at the Magpie Bridge	





夏天的夜晚，一大群孩子聚在庭院里，大家都喜欢仰起头来望天空，那儿繁星闪烁。有一条白茫茫的银河，横穿南北，苍苍茫茫，气势磅礴。银河的东边，有一颗发着青色光辉的星星，边上还紧挨着四颗小星，活像是一台织布机，大伙儿都叫它织女星。银河的西边呢，有一颗亮闪闪的星星和织女星遥遥相对，在它的前一前一后又有两颗小星，看起来就像一个人挑着一副担子似的，大伙儿都叫它牵牛星。

On summer nights, a throng of kids are gathering together in the courtyard, looking up to the starry sky where the Milky Way¹ extends from the north to the south, boundless and overwhelming. To its east, a blue blazed star, nestled by four tiny ones, looks just like a loom. Thus Chinese people call the star Vega the Weaving Maiden (Zhinu). To its west, another brilliant star gazing into the distance, with two tiny ones at its back and front, looks like a man carrying two children in baskets strung from a shoulder pole. Thus Chinese people call the star Altair Oxherd (Niulang).

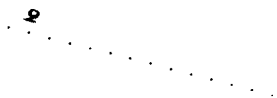
每当这个时候，老人一边指点着天上的牵牛星和织女星，一边就会讲述起《牛郎织女》的故事来。这个动听的故事起码讲了二千多年啦，世代传下来，大伙儿都朝那故事里添加点东西进去，于是故事就变得越来越好听，越来越好听，让人百听不厌。

1. In Chinese, the Milky Way is called "the Silver Way".





Usually at this moment, the grannies will point out into the sky and begin to tell the story of *Niulang and Zhinu*. This story has been told for more than 2,000 years, from generations to generations. Every time when it is told, people would like to add something new to it, making it more attractive to the ears. That is why people are never tired of it no matter how many times they have heard of it.





一、兄弟分家

1. The Division of the Family

从前，山里有一户人家，爹娘死得早，只剩下两兄弟。哥哥已经成了家，有了老婆。弟弟还没成亲，一家三口人，靠种地过日子。

Once upon a time, in the mountains, there lived a family with only two brothers whose parents died when they were young. The elder brother got married while the younger brother remained single all the time. Three of them lived together, on planting.

弟弟不会花言巧语，老实巴交的，只知道埋头干活，别的啥也不琢磨，别人都叫他“傻蛋”。傻蛋干活勤快，所以他的饭量也就特别大，一个顶俩。他嫂子总是嫌他吃得多，心疼粮食，就一天到晚扁着嘴骂他“傻吃”。

The younger brother was a man of few words. He knew nothing but to work hard, thus the nickname “Fool”. Fool always kept his hands full, so he had grand appetite for food. Sometimes he ate twice as much as an ordinary man. His sister-in-law strongly disliked this, thinking that it was a great waste of food. So she cursed him “Fool” every day from morning





till night.

弟弟听老人说，山里躺着一头老黄牛，不吃不喝，躺了好多年啦，怪可怜的。他就决心要进山去把老牛拉回来耕田。他把这事跟哥哥一说，哥哥正想要添一头牛呢。就一口答应了，让他早去早回。

The younger brother had heard old villagers say that there was a yellow ox that had been lying in the mountains without food and drink for many years. He felt greatly pitiful for him, so he determined to go into the mountains and take the ox back home to plough for him. When he talked it over with his elder brother, the elder brother didn't oppose him, since this was exactly what he was considering to have another ox in the family. So the elder brother let him go and told him to come back home as early as possible.

那天，弟弟一个人背了点干粮，就进了大山，翻过九十九道岭，淌过九十九道涧，果然看见那儿有一头瘦骨嶙峋的老黄牛，在一块大平石上躺着呢。他走过去趴下向老牛磕了个头，喊一声：“牛大伯，跟我回家去吧，我来养你。”

On that very day, the younger brother went into the mountains with the solid food alone. After he had tramped over many hills and dales, as expected, he saw a skinny ox lying on a big flat stone. He slowly approached the ox, stooped



and made a bow before him, saying, "Uncle Ox, come back home with me! I will feed you."

老黄牛睁开眼来，看了看他，闷声不响，又懒洋洋地把眼睛闭上了。弟弟看着老牛没精打采的样子，好可怜，心里想：它一定是饿了吧。就赶紧去拔草。

The old yellow ox opened his eyes, looked at him dumbly and closed his eyes again languidly. When the younger brother saw that the yellow ox was listless, a sense of sympathy suddenly burst out of his heart. "He must be quite hungry," he thought. Then he rushed to pull grass for the ox.

说来也怪，弟弟拔来的草，老牛总是会大口大口地吃下去。弟弟拔多少，老牛吃多少，弟弟拔了一捆又一捆，老牛张开嘴巴，一会儿工夫就吃完了，总是供不上，这下可把弟弟给累坏了。不过弟弟心里却挺高兴的，既然老牛爱吃，就多拔些吧，拔草也累不着，就一个劲地去拔草。

The younger brother was surprised to see that, the yellow ox almost wolfed down all the grass that he had pulled for him. No matter how much grass the younger brother gave to him, the yellow ox swallowed it up at a gulp. One pile of grass after another, the old ox opened his mouth and ate them all up. The younger brother was exhausted yet he was very happy. "Now that the ox likes eating, I will pull more. I will





never be hurt by pulling grass,” he thought. Then he began to pull more grass with all his strength.

一连喂了三天，老黄牛终于吃饱了，抬起头来，跟他说了一番知心话：“小弟弟，多谢你来喂我，你知道吗？我原先是住在天上的。当初盘古开天辟地的时候，地上没有五谷，全靠着我去偷来了天仓里的五谷种，撒了下来，地上的百姓才能够种上粮食。可这事却让玉皇大帝发觉了，他大发脾气，一脚把我踢下天庭。结果我就摔坏了腿，躺在这儿这么多年了，谁也不来喂我。你是个好孩子，自己还饿着肚子呢。却一连喂了我三天，从此以后，我们就是好朋友了，你说吧，我该怎么谢谢你？”

For the next three days it was like this. Eventually the yellow ox became full. Slowly he raised his head, and started to pour his heart to the younger brother, “Thank you for feeding me, Little Brother. You know, I used to live in the Heaven. At the beginning of the Opening of the Earth, there was no corn growing in the fields. It was I who stole the seeds of the five types of corn from the Barn of Heaven and scattered them down to the Earth so that people could plant grains on the ground. This irritated the Jade Emperor in the Heaven a lot. Knowing this, he flew into a rage, and kicked me out of the Heaven. My legs were broken then. I have been lying here for many years. No one came to feed me except you. Good Boy! If it had not been for you, I would still have been



starving. Now that you have fed me for three days, we have become good pals. How should I thank you? Just tell me.”

弟弟说：“牛大伯，你跟我回家吧，我天天拔草来喂你。”

The younger brother said, “Uncle Ox, come back home with me. I assure you that I will feed you grass every day.”

“好哇！不过眼下还不行，我的伤还没养好呢，得用百花露水涂洗一百天才会好。”

“Good! But not now. My wounds have not been completely healed yet. It needs to be wiped and cleansed with the dew from a hundred flowers for a hundred days.”

弟弟一口答应，也就不急着下山了。他饿了采些野果子吃，渴了就喝泉水，夜里抱着老黄牛睡觉，每天清晨起来，就去采百花，用花朵上的露水给老黄牛洗伤。整整忙了一百天，果然把老黄牛的伤给养好啦。老黄牛站起身，高高兴兴地跟着他回家了。

The younger brother replied to him with a glad “Yes”. He was not in a hurry to go out of the mountains. When he was hungry, he picked up some wild fruits to stuff his stomach; when he was thirsty, he drank some water from the mountain springs. At nights, he embraced the ox and slept together with him. Every morning he got up at dawn to collect the flowers, and with the dews from the flowers he cleansed the wounds





of the yellow ox. This continued for a hundred days. Finally the wounds of the yellow ox were healed, and then he rose up on his feet, following the younger brother home happily.

哥哥嫂嫂见他居然能牵回一头牛来，倒也蛮高兴，就没有骂他。从此以后，放牛的事全都交给了他。弟弟一门心思放牛，待老黄牛就像是自己的亲人一样，白天和老牛一起上山，到了夜里，他把牛棚垫得干干的，自己也睡在牛棚里。一有闲空，就给老牛梳毛，给老牛割草，把老牛侍候得膘满肉肥，毛色闪闪发亮，溜光溜光的，谁见了都要夸上几句。村里人从此都把他叫做“牛郎”。

It was a great surprise for the elder brother and sister-in-law to see the younger brother back home with an ox. They did not scold him. On the contrary, they were very happy. Ever since, the job of ox-herding was on him. The only thing that the younger brother dwelt on every day was to herd the ox. He treated the ox as his own family. In the daytime he went to the mountain with the ox while at night he filled up the ox-shed and slept in it with the ox. Once he had time, he combed the hair for the ox, and cut grass to feed it. The ox was so well-fed and soon it became fat and fleshy with shining and smooth hair. Everyone who saw the ox would like to praise the oxherd. Soon the younger brother got another nickname “Oxherd” (Niulang).



嫂子小心眼，单等牛郎出门干活去了，她就在家做烙饼，下饺子，夫妻两人吃香的喝辣的；等牛郎一回家，却喝的是烂菜汤，吃的是糠窝头，天天都是这样。

The sister-in-law was snorty and narrow-minded. She often prepared the flapjack and dumplings when Niulang was working away from home. She and her husband ate the fine food while she had Niulang eat the leftovers and the roughage. Every day it was like this.

这天，牛郎耕地耕到前半晌，老黄牛开口说话了：“牛郎，你嫂子正在包饺子呢，你不回家吃好的去？”

One day, amidst the ploughing, the yellow ox started to speak, “Niulang, your sister-in-law is preparing dumplings. Why don’t you go back and eat?”

“嘿，我这么早就回去，人家会骂的。”

“No! If I go back so early, I will be blamed,” said Niulang.

“哎，你想回就回吧，到家正好饺子也熟了，怕啥？”

“Why! If you’d like to go back, you can. When you arrive at home, it is the right time to eat the dumplings. What are you afraid of?”

“那我怎么回？”



“How can I do this?” Niulang asked.

牛郎一向老实，他觉得没有什么理由，总不能提前收工回家的吧。

Niulang was honest in nature. He thought it was not good to be home ahead of time if no sound excuses could be offered.

老牛眨巴着眼睛，给他出了个主意：“这还不好办？南边地头有块大石头，咱们耕地耕到那里，一使劲把铧子给砸坏了，就一块儿回去吧。”

Then the yellow ox blinked his eyes, and thought up a good idea, “That’s easy! In the south field, there will be a big stone. When we arrive there, we hit the stone with the plough-share. Then we can go home.”

说着说着，他们已经耕到那块大石头跟前了，老牛猛地朝前一冲，牛郎心领神会，赶紧朝前一跟，再往后一拽，只听得“嘣”的一声，就把铧子给砸坏了。好哇！牛郎闷声不响，赶着牛回家。

Right at that moment, they arrived at the big stone. The yellow ox rushed forward, Niulang followed him closely, and pulled back. The plough-share broke with a big crash. My Goodness! Niulang headed for home quietly with the ox.

到家里，果然没错，他嫂子正在左一碗右一碗地忙着往外捞





饺子呢，一抬头，怎么牛郎回来了？倒有点不好意思起来，只好假惺惺地喊他：“兄弟，我正想让人去叫你呢。你真有口福，我刚捞出来，你就到了，快去吃吧。”

As they got home, it was true that the sister-in-law was busy spooning out the dumplings, one bowl after another. She raised her head and was surprised to find that Niulang was there! A little bit embarrassed, she pretended to invite him to have the dumplings together, “Brother! I am thinking of having you back home to have lunch. You really have good luck for good food. The moment I spoon the dumplings out, you are here. Do come and eat with us!”

他哥哥却板着脸盘问起来：“你怎么这么早就收工了？”

However, his elder brother questioned him with a straightened face, “Why do you knock off so early?”

牛郎红着脸说：“不小心，把铧子给砸坏了，没法耕啦。”

“The plough-share was broken out of a sudden. I couldn't plough without it,” Niulang replied with a reddened face.

哥哥过去一看，果然是铧子砸坏了，只好闷声不响，坐在一边抽烟。牛郎老实不客气，坐下来饱饱吃了一顿。吃饱了，抹抹嘴，又赶着牛老老实实干活去了。到了地里，老牛说：“你说那饺子香不香？我没说错吧？下回等她做了好吃的，我再告诉你。”



The elder brother came up to have a look. The ploughshare was truly broken. He had to sit there silently, smoking. Niulang was basically honest. He just sat down and ate. After eating, he wiped his mouth and drove the ox to the field again. When they came back to the field, the old ox started to speak again, "Don't you think that the dumplings are delicious? Next time if she makes more delicious food, I will tell you again."

第二天，牛郎还是早早地就出门去耕地，快晌午的时候，老牛又提醒他了：“牛郎，今天晌午家里人吃包子哩，走吧。”

The next day Niulang went out to plough the field at early hours. When midday came, the old ox reminded him again, "Niulang, today's lunch is *baozi*. Let's go."

“不，今天我不回去了。”

“No! I won't go today.”

“怕什么？回去吧。”

“What are you afraid of? Come on!”

“怎么回？”

“How can I?”

“老办法，北边地头不是还有块大石头吗？咱们耕地耕到那

