

The Rightful Owner *by Ludu U Hla*



A long time ago, a man left his own village and went to another village in the hope of making money there, but toil as he might he could not save anything. So he returned home penniless. On his way back to his own village, he was resting under a banyan tree when he saw a pot of silver among the roots of the tree. He was delighted, for in spite of three years' hard work, which had brought him nothing, it seemed as if now at last his luck had turned with the discovery of this pot of silver.

He took the pot out from among the roots of the banyan tree. Just as he was doing this, he heard a voice from high up in the tree saying.

"Don't take that pot of silver. It is not meant for you, it's meant for Ngato."

But the oldman did not pay any attention to the voice from up the

banyan tree. He took out the pot of silver and started for home with the pot on his shoulder. When darkness fell, he had covered about half the journey home.

He went to a certain house in a nearby village and asked if he might stay the night

"I am a traveller who has come from very far away," he explained. "Please allow me to put up at your house for the night."

The good - natured houseowner let the old man stay. Now the old man left uneasy about his precious pot of silver, so he pretended to his host that it was only a pot of oil.

"I will keep my pot of oil here," said the old man. "If cats and mice should come, please frighten them away."

Being exhausted after his long journey, the old man fell asleep as soon as his head touched the pillow and nothing woke him. After midnight, houseowner's wife woke her husband up and told him that she was about to give birth. Then, except for the guest, the whole house woke up and made arrangements for the confinement. In due course she gave birth to a son. As the newborn child did not have any fingers, its grandmother said.

"It's a Ngato. Just call him Ngato so that he will be healthy." Thus she gave the baby its name.

As oil was needed in the delivery room, the baby's grandmother told her son: "The pot in the basket under the house is full of oil, but it is difficult to get at it at night. Take a little of the old man's oil for us to use now and we can fill his pot up again in the morning."

When the houseowner opened the old man's pot to get oil, he found that it was full of silver. He took all the old man's silver, and then put oil from the pot under the house into the old man's pot.

In the morning, when the old man was preparing to continue his journey, he took a casual look inside his pot. He was astonished not to find any sign of the silver. The pot was full of oil. How was he to tell his host when he had said from the beginning that the pot was full of oil? Gloomily, he took his pot of oil and left the house.

When he got home, he put the pot of oil aside in one corner with a heavy heart and sat looking miserable. His wife came back from the farm late that night. She did not ask how he had been doing but as soon as she came indoors she said in a rush, "I have something important to tell you. When the banyan tree on the farm fell down, a pot of silver came out of it. As I could not carry the pot by myself, I left it. Please come straight away and bring it in for me."

When the old man caught the words "pot of silver," he said gloomily, "Enough, my wife, don't say anymore about the pot of silver. If it is my rightful property, it will come to my house."

Now there was a thief hiding under the house waiting for an opportunity to rob them. When he heard what the old man couple were saying, it seemed like a stroke of good luck for him, so he went to the old woman's farm to get a pot of silver. He found a big pot near the fallen banyan tree, just as the old woman had said. He opened the pot carefully and looked inside. He found some very poisonous snakes inside, but no silver. The old couple knows that I was hiding under their house, he thought to himself. They are plotting my death. They said it was full of silver not snakes as a cunning way of luring me to the pot. Well, I will take my revenge on them, he thought. The thief then covered the pot full of snake and closed it securely before bringing it back to the old man's house. Then he left it at the old people's door and went away.

His idea was that when morning came, either the old man or the old woman would open the door to come out. When they saw the pot, they would open it to look inside and then one of the snakes from inside the pot would certainly bite and kill them.

When morning came, the old woman opened the door and came out to do her work. Then to her surprise she found the pot, which she had seen inside the hole in the banyan tree the previous day now standing by the door. She went into the house, woke up the old

man and told him joyfully that the pot she had seen the previous day had come to their house.

"Well," he said, "if it is my rightful property it must come to my house." He got up, opened the pot and had a look inside. There was no sign of the snakes the thief had seen. The pot was full of silver.

From Karen Folktales Vol. 4 Page 198 - 199