



The Butterfly Lovers



Once upon a time in China, long ago, there lived a young girl who dreamed of learning. Unfortunately she lived at a time when girls were expected to stay at home, marry the man that their father chose for them, and be obedient and quiet.

This young girl was called Zhu Ying Tai, and she yearned to be different. She was so desperate to be educated that she dressed herself up as a young man, and travelled to the city of Hangzhou to go to school.

While she was there, she met a handsome young man named Liang Shan Bo. They became best friends and spent most of their time together, sharing a love of learning and enjoying each other's company. Liang never guessed that Zhu was actually a girl.

Time passed, and soon the young people had finished their studies and were ready to go home. Zhu realised that she had grown to love her best friend, but of course she could not tell him. Instead, she came up with a clever plan. She told Liang that she had a pretty younger sister of 16 years who was sure to please him and make him happy. She suggested that Liang visit the family to meet, and possibly marry, the younger sister. He agreed eagerly. Zhu travelled home, happy that soon she would be seeing her friend again.

A long year passed. Zhu almost gave up hope, but one happy day Liang arrived to meet the family. As soon as Liang saw Zhu he realised who she was, and he was overjoyed to find that she loved him. For a brief time, the couple were happy in each other's love and looked forward to a future together.

Their happiness was short-lived. Zhu's father announced that he had arranged for her to marry a rich man. Zhu pleaded with her father to change his mind, but he would not relent. Liang must leave immediately. Poor Liang left, heart-broken and alone. Soon, in his despair, he grew ill, and died.

Zhu heard of his death and she, too, was heart-broken. But she could do nothing to stop the arrangements for her marriage to the rich man. When the time for the wedding came, she travelled along the road on which Liang had died. Soon, her wedding procession came to Liang's grave.

The skies grew stormy and the winds howled around the wedding procession as Zhu sobbed, wishing that she could join her true love rather than marry the rich man. Suddenly, it seemed that her prayers had been answered. A huge bolt of lightning struck the grave and it split open. In a flash, Zhu threw herself into the grave, so that she could be with Liang forever.

As suddenly as the lightning had struck, the storm disappeared and the skies cleared. Two beautiful butterflies were seen rising out of the grave and dancing together in the sunshine. Liang and Zhu were together, and would never be separated again.

