

The Princess Nelumbo

By P'ou Song-lin

Gleam-of-day was sleeping; his round face and high forehead denoted the scholar's right intelligence.

All of a sudden he saw a man standing before his bed who appeared to be waiting.

"What is it?" inquired the sleeper, getting up.

"The prince is asking for you."

"Which prince?"

"The prince of the neighbouring territory."

Gleam-of-day, grumbling, got up, put on his court dress and followed his guide. Palanquins were waiting; they started rapidly, and their retinue was soon passing in the midst of innumerable pavilions and towers with pointed roofs.

They at last stopped in the courtyard of the palace; young girls with bright clothing were seen, and looked inquiringly at the new-comer, who was announced with great pomp.

At last Gleam-of-day reached the audience hall. The prince was seated on the throne; he descended the steps and welcomed his guest according to the rites.

"You perfume this neighbourhood," he said. "Your reputation has come to me, and I wished to know you."

The servants brought wine; they began to converse nobly and brilliantly. At last the prince asked:

"Among the flowers, tell me which one you prefer."

"The nelumbo," he replied, without hesitating.

"The nelumbo? it is precisely my daughter's surname. What a curious coincidence! The princess must absolutely know you."

And he made a sign to one of the attendants, who at once went out. A few minutes after, the princess appeared. She was between sixteen and seventeen years old. Nothing could equal her admirable beauty.

Her father ordered her to bow to the scholar and said:

"Here is my daughter Nelumbo."

Gleam-of-day, looking at her, felt troubled to the depth of his soul. The prince spoke to him; he hardly heard, and replied awkwardly. When the princess had retired, the conversation languished; the prince at last rose and put an end to the interview.

During all the way back the young man was ashamed at the same time with his emotion before the girl, as well as his rudeness towards the prince. He was so much troubled that he ordered his retinue to go back to the palace.

When he entered the audience hall, he threw himself to the ground before the prince and begged to be excused for his rudeness.

"You need not excuse yourself; the sentiment that I read in your eyes is powerful and the thought of it is not unpleasant to me."

While Gleam-of-day, happy with this encouragement, was still excusing himself, twenty young girls came running:

"A monster has entered the palace; it is a python ten thousand feet long. It has already devoured thirteen hundred persons; its head is like a mountain peak."

Every one got up; the frightened guard and the courtiers ran hither and thither, looking where they could hide themselves. The princess and her maids-in-waiting were crying for help.

Gleam-of-day at last said to the prince:

“I have only three miserable rooms in a cottage, but you will be safe in them. Will you fly there with your daughter?”

“Let us go as quickly as possible,” replied the prince, seizing the princess by the wrist.

They all three ran across the deserted streets. When they arrived, Nelumbo threw herself on the bed, without being able to stop weeping.

Gleam-of-day was so moved that he suddenly awoke: everything was a dream.

Just then he heard a scream in the next room, where his father slept; there was a struggle, blows, and at last a sigh of satisfaction.

The door opened, and the old man was seen pushing an enormous serpent at the end of a stick. When Gleam-of-day turned back to his bed, he found it covered with bees; on the pillow the queen had alighted.