

Taking Revenge

By P'u Sung-ling

Hsiang Kao, otherwise called Ch'u-tan, was a T'ai-yuan man, and deeply attached to his half-brother Shêng. Shêng himself was desperately enamoured of a young lady named Po-ssü who was also very fond of him: but the mother wanted too much money for her daughter. Now a rich young fellow named Chuang thought he should like to get Po-ssü for himself, and proposed to buy her as a concubine. "No," said Po-ssü to her mother, "I prefer being Shêng's wife to becoming Chuang's concubine." So her mother consented, and informed Shêng, who had only recently buried his first wife; at which he was delighted and made preparations to take her over to his own house. When Chuang heard this he was infuriated against Shêng for thus depriving him of Po-ssü; and chancing to meet him out one day, set to and abused him roundly. Shêng answered him back, and then Chuang ordered his attendants to fall upon Shêng and beat him well, which they did, leaving him lifeless on the ground. When Hsiang heard what had taken place he ran out and found his brother lying dead upon the ground. Overcome with grief, he proceeded to the magistrate's, and accused Chuang of murder; but the latter bribed so heavily that nothing came of the accusation. This worked Hsiang to frenzy, and he determined to assassinate Chuang on the high road; with which intent he daily concealed himself, with a sharp knife about him, among the bushes on the hillside, waiting for Chuang to pass. By degrees, this plan of his became known far and wide, and accordingly Chuang never went out except with a strong bodyguard, besides which he engaged at a high price the services of a very skilful archer, named Chiao T'ung, so that Hsiang had no means of carrying out his intention. However, he continued to lie in wait day after day, and on one occasion it began to rain heavily, and in a short time Hsiang was wet through to the skin. Then the wind got up, and a hailstorm followed, and by-and-by Hsiang was quite numbed with the cold. On the top of the hill there was a small temple wherein lived a Taoist priest, whom Hsiang knew from the latter having occasionally begged alms in the village, and to whom he had often given a meal. This priest, seeing how wet he was, gave him some other clothes, and told him to put them on; but no sooner had he done so than he crouched down like a dog, and found that he had been changed into a tiger, and that the priest had vanished. It now occurred to him to seize this opportunity of revenging himself upon his enemy; and away he went to his old ambush, where lo and behold! he found his own body lying stiff and stark. Fearing lest it should become food for birds of prey, he guarded it carefully, until at length one day Chuang passed by. Out rushed the tiger and sprang upon Chuang, biting his head off, and swallowing it upon the spot at which Chiao T'ung, the archer, turned round and shot the animal through the heart. Just at that moment Hsiang awakened as though from a dream, but it was some time before he could crawl home, where he arrived to the great delight of his family, who didn't know what had become of him. Hsiang said not a word, lying quietly on the bed until some of his people came in to congratulate him on the death of his great enemy Chuang. Hsiang then cried out, "I was that tiger," and proceeded to relate the whole story, which thus got about until it reached the ears of Chuang's son, who immediately set to work to bring his father's murderer to justice. The magistrate, however, did not consider this wild story as sufficient evidence against him, and thereupon dismissed the case.