

The Marriage of the Fox's Daughter

By P'u Sung-ling

A President of the Board of Civil Office,¹ named Yin, and a native of Li-ch'êng, when a young man, was very badly off, but was endowed with considerable physical courage. Now in this part of the country there was a large establishment, covering several acres, with an unbroken succession of pavilions and verandahs, and belonging to one of the old county families; but because ghosts and apparitions were frequently seen there, the place had for a long time remained untenanted, and was overgrown with grass and weeds, no one venturing to enter in even in broad daylight. One evening when Yin was carousing with some fellow-students, one of them jokingly said, "If anybody will pass a night in the haunted house, the rest of us will stand him a dinner," Mr. Yin jumped up at this, and cried out, "What is there difficult in that?" So, taking with him a sleeping-mat, he proceeded thither, escorted by all his companions as far as the door, where they laughed and said, "We will wait here a little while, in case you see anything, shout out to us at once." "If there are any goblins or foxes," replied Yin, "I'll catch them for you." He then went in, and found the paths obliterated by long grass, which had sprung up, mingled with weeds of various kinds. It was just the time of the new moon, and by its feeble light he was able to make out the door of the house. Feeling his way, he walked on until he reached the back pavilion, and then went up on to the Moon Terrace, which was such a pleasant spot that he determined to stop there. Gazing westwards, he sat for a long time looking at the moon—a single thread of light embracing in its horns the peak of a hill²—without hearing anything at all unusual; so, laughing to himself at the nonsense people talked, he spread his mat upon the floor, put a stone under his head for a pillow, and lay down to sleep. He had watched the Cow-herd and the Lady³ until they were just disappearing, and was on the point of dropping off, when suddenly he heard foot-steps down below coming up the stairs. Pretending to be asleep, he saw a servant enter, carrying in his hand a lotus-shaped lantern,⁴ who, on observing Mr. Yin, rushed back in a fright, and said to some one behind, "There is a stranger here!" The person spoken to asked who it was, but the servant did not know; and then up came an old gentleman, who, after examining Mr. Yin closely, said, "It's the future President: he's as drunk as can be. We needn't mind him; besides, he's a good fellow, and won't give us any trouble." So they walked in and opened all the doors; and by-and-by there were a great many other people moving about, and quantities of lamps were lighted, till the place was as light as day. About this time Mr. Yin slightly changed his position, and sneezed; upon which the old man, perceiving that he was awake, came forward and fell down on his knees, saying, "Sir, I have a daughter who is to be married this very night, It was not anticipated that Your Honour would be here. I pray, therefore, that we may be excused." Mr. Yin got up and raised the old man, regretting that, in his ignorance of the festive occasion, he had brought with him no present.⁵ "Ah, Sir," replied the old man, "your very presence here will ward off all noxious influences; and that is quite enough for us." He then begged Mr. Yin to assist in 'doing the honours, and thus double the obligation

¹ One of the "Six Boards" (now Seven) at the capital, equivalent to our own War Office, Board of Works, &c.

² Which, of course, is impossible.

³ The Chinese names for certain stars: β Aquilae and α Lyrae.

⁴ Lanterns very prettily made to resemble all kinds of flowers are to be seen at the Chinese New Year.

⁵ This is, as with us, obligatory on all friends invited to a marriage.

already conferred. Mr. Yin readily assented, and went inside to look at the gorgeous arrangements they had made. He was here met by a lady, apparently about forty years of age, whom the old gentleman introduced as his wife; and he had hardly made his bow when he heard the sound of flageolets,⁶ and some one came hurrying in, saying, "He has come!" The old gentleman flew out to meet this personage, and Mr. Yin also stood up, awaiting his arrival. In no long time, a bevy of people with gauze lanterns ushered in the bridegroom himself, who seemed to be about seventeen or eighteen years old, and of a most refined and prepossessing appearance. The old gentleman bade him pay his respects first to their worthy guest; and upon his looking towards Mr. Yin, that gentleman came forward to welcome him on behalf of the host. Then followed ceremonies between the old man and his son-in-law; and when these were over, they all sat down to supper. Hosts of waiting-maids brought in profuse quantities of wine and meats, with bowls and cups of jade or gold, till the table glittered again. And when the wine had gone round several times, the old gentleman told one of the maids to summon the bride. This she did, but some time passed and no bride came. So the old man rose and drew aside the curtain, pressing the young lady to come forth; whereupon a number of women escorted out the bride, whose ornaments went *tinkle tinkle* as she walked along, sweet perfumes being all the time 'diffused around. Her father told her to make the proper salutation, after which she went and sat by her mother. Mr. Yin took a glance at her, and saw that she wore on her head beautiful ornaments made of kingfisher's feathers, her beauty quite surpassing anything he had ever seen. All this time they had been drinking their wine out of golden goblets big enough to hold several pints, when it flashed across him that one of these goblets would be a capital thing to carry back to his companions in evidence of what he had seen. So he secreted it in his sleeve, and, pretending to be tipsy,⁷ leaned forward with his head upon the table as if going off to sleep. "The gentleman is drunk," said the guests; and by-and-by Mr. Yin heard the bridegroom take his leave, and there was a general trooping down-stairs to the tune of a wedding march. When they were all gone the old gentleman collected the goblets, one of which was missing, though they hunted high and low to find it. Some one mentioned the sleeping guest; but the old gentleman stopped him at once for fear Mr. Yin should hear, and before long silence reigned throughout. Mr. Yin then arose. It was dark, and he had no light; but he could detect the lingering smell of the food, and the place was filled with the fumes of wine. Faint streaks of light now appearing in the east, he began quietly to make a move, having first satisfied himself that the goblet was still in his sleeve. Arriving at the door, he found his friends already there; for they had been afraid he might come out after they left, and go in again early in the morning. When he produced the goblet they were all lost in astonishment; and on hearing his story, they were fain to believe it, well knowing that a poor student like Yin was not likely to have such a valuable piece of plate in his possession.

Later on Mr. Yin took his doctor's degree, and was appointed magistrate over the district of Fei-ch'iu, where there was an old-established family of the name of Chu. The head of the family asked him to a banquet in honour of his arrival, and ordered the servants to bring in the large goblets. After some delay a slave-girl came and whispered something to her master which seemed to make him very angry. Then the goblets were brought in, and Mr. Yin was invited to drink. He now found that these goblets were of precisely the same shape and pattern as the one

⁶ The accompaniment of all weddings and funerals in China.

⁷ The soberest people in the world, amongst whom anything like sottishness is comparatively unknown, think it no disgrace, but rather complimentary to get pleasantly tipsy on all festive occasions, and people who are physically unable to do so frequently go so far as to hire substitutes to drink for them. Mandarins specially suffer very much from the custom of being obliged to take "wine" with a large number of guests.

he had at home, and at once begged his host to tell him where he had had these made. "Well," said Mr. Chu, "there should be eight of them. An ancestor of mine had them made, when he was a minister at the capital, by an experienced artificer. They have been handed down in our family from generation to generation, and have now been carefully laid by for some time; but I thought we would have them out to-day as a compliment to your Honour. However, there are only seven to be found. None of the servants can have touched them, for the old seals of ten years ago are still upon the box, unbroken. I don't know what to make of it." Mr. Yin laughed, and said, "It must have flown away! Still, it is a pity to lose an heir-loom of that kind; and as I have a very similar one at home, I shall take upon myself to send it to you." When the banquet was over, Mr. Yin went home, and taking out his own goblet, sent it off to Mr. Chu. The latter was somewhat surprised to find that it was identical with his own, and hurried away to thank the magistrate for his gift, asking him at the same time how it had come into his possession. Mr. Yin told him the whole story, which proves conclusively that although a fox may obtain possession of a thing, even at a distance of many hundred miles, he will not venture to keep it altogether.⁸

⁸ The wedding-party was, of course, composed entirely of foxes, this animal being believed by the Chinese to be capable of appearing at will under the human form, and of doing either good or evil to its friends or foes. These facts will be prominently brought out in several of the stories to follow.