

FOLK TALES
from
KOREA

COLLECTED AND TRANSLATED

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

ZONG IN-SOB

*Professor at the Central University, Seoul,
and Lecturer at the School of Oriental and African Studies,
University of London.*

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The Fox-Girl and Her Brother

the witch's house. But the witch came out and laughed aloud. 'You went to the Dragon-King for help,' she chortled. 'His magic is nothing to me. Just you watch.' She threw a piece of paper inscribed with magic signs into the air, and immediately three pillars of flame flashed through the air and felled the three dragon brothers to the ground each severed in two parts. Then the sky lightened and the wind dropped.

The witch took the warrior by the hand and said, 'Now you must do as I wish. Come and stay with me and keep me company.' But the warrior wrenched his hand away and asked her to allow him a month to make up his mind. She agreed reluctantly and said, 'If you try to overcome me again, and are defeated, I will not give you a third chance. Do you understand?'

So the warrior returned once more to the palace of the Dragon-King and told him what had happened. The King sighed sadly and replied. 'The witch is too strong for me to overcome. The only thing we can do is to go and ask the Heavenly King to punish her.' So the Dragon-King went to the Heavenly Kingdom attended by his warriors and humbly begged the King to punish the witch. The King granted his request and immediately dispatched three warriors from Heaven.

When they reached the mountain the Heavenly warriors filled the air with raging gales and pelting rain. The witch came out and threw her magic paper into the air, but to no avail. A thunderbolt fell on the house with a deafening crash and immediately a dead fox appeared where the witch had been.

The warrior thanked the Heavenly warriors profusely, and the kind old woman whom he had met in the first place reigned once more as the goddess of the mountain.

Told by Gim Han-Yong; Gimhe (1919).

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The Fox-Girl and Her Brother

LONG ago there lived a rich man who had a son but no daughter. He longed to have a daughter, and so he spent much money consulting fortune tellers and visiting temples to pray. After a few years

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his prayers were rewarded, and a girl was born. Her parents treasured her like a precious jewel. She grew up a healthy child and never suffered a day's illness.

When she was about five years old a strange affliction fell upon the household. They possessed many hundred head of cattle, but now one cow died every night. The bodies showed no sign of disease nor any trace of wounds. So the herdsman reported these mysterious deaths to their master, who ordered that a strict watch be kept at night.

So a herdsman hid in a dark corner of the cow-shed and waited. In the middle of the night his master's daughter came stealthily into the shed and went up to a cow. She greased her hand with sesame oil and slipped it into the belly of the cow. Then she withdrew her hand and the watching herdsman saw that she was holding the cow's liver. She ate it with great relish, while the cow fell down dead on the spot.

The herdsman was horrified to see this incredible sight. In the morning he went to his master and told him what he had seen. But his master refused to believe it. 'Nonsense! What a disgraceful suggestion!' he cried. 'My daughter would never dream of doing such a thing. You shall pay dearly for this falsehood.' So he had the herdsman put to death. Then he ordered another herdsman to keep watch and find the true cause of the mysterious death of the cattle. This servant too saw the girl take the liver from a cow and eat it. But when he reported it to his master he too was disbelieved and put to death. Then a third herdsman brought exactly the same report, and yet his master would not believe. So every night one of the cattle died, and not only cattle but horses and pigs, while the herdsman who reported what they had seen were put to death. In the end there were no more herdsman, for no one in the village would accept employment on the rich man's farm.

So the rich man sent his only son to keep watch. He hid one night in the shed, and saw his sister come in and take the liver from a cow and eat it. He went and told his father, but his mother who was sitting nearby scolded him and said, 'Why must you speak so ill of your sister? Everyone is jealous of her. I can't stand it any longer.' And the father drove his son from the house, though he still lavished all his affection on his daughter.

When all the cattle were dead the evil girl began to kill men in

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the same way. So the villagers were terrified and in the end they all fled from their homes. In the end her father and mother too were found dead, so that the village was completely deserted and haunted by the spirits of the dead.

When his father drove him from the house he wandered off into the mountains. He met an old Buddhist priest and with him studied the laws of magic that governed the world of spirits. A few years went by and one day he began to feel homesick, and longed to see his parents once more. So he took his leave of his master and set out for home. Before he left the old priest gave him three bottles, one red, one white, and one blue. 'These are for you to use if you encounter danger,' he said. So the boy hid the three bottles at his breast and rode on horseback to his native village. He found the village deserted and his own home desolate. He went into his old home and found it overgrown with dense grass and covered with moss. His sister was sitting in the sun catching lice and eating them. She welcomed her brother with a happy smile. She seemed to be very hungry and was apparently waiting for some new victim to fall into her clutches. She looked at her brother with a queer expression and asked, 'Where have you been all these years, Brother? I have missed you so much.'

Her brother asked her, 'Where are father and mother?'

'They are in their graves,' she replied. Her brother began to suspect that she might have been in some way responsible for their deaths, and so he made up his mind to run away before she could kill him too. So he said, 'Sister. I am very hungry. Won't you cook something for me, say the leeks in the front garden? They would suit me very well.'

His sister took a reel of thread from her pocket and said, 'You must not run away again, Brother. Tie this thread round your waist and I will hold the other end while I go and get them. So that she might not suspect him he did as she asked. But as soon as she was out of sight he tied the thread to a post and crept away. He got on to his horse and galloped off.

When his sister found he had gone she rushed after him with all speed. 'Brother!' she shouted, 'Stop! Stop!' She almost caught up with the horse and reached out her hand to seize its tail. So her brother took the red bottle from his breast and hurled it straight at her. It burst into a mass of flame, and she was severely scorched. But she managed to pass through, and nearly caught up again. This

The Traveller, the Fox, and the Tiger

time he threw the white bottle, which barred the way with a mass of needles. This obstacle too she managed to pass, and so her brother threw the blue bottle at her. It formed a mighty sea, and she was drowned. When her body floated to the surface he saw that it was a fox, which had taken the form of his sister.

Ondoru Yawa, told by Zo Gyong-Gu; 6nyang (1925).

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The Traveller, the Fox, and the Tiger

ONCE upon a time a traveller went on a journey and lost his way in the mountains. While he was still wandering about he was overtaken by night, and at last made his way to a cottage at the foot of a hill. A pretty woman invited him in and kindly brought him food. She was living alone in the house, and there was no sign of anyone else.

In the middle of the night the traveller awoke to hear the woman grinding a sword in the kitchen. The eerie darkness alone was enough to make his hair stand on end, and this evil sound struck terror into his heart. So he crept noiselessly from the room and out the back door. But the woman heard him go and, half transformed into a fox, pursued him with the sword in her hand. He saw a tall tower in front of him, from which came the strains of music. So he rushed into the tower and shouted for help. But the master of the tower said sternly, 'Why should I help you when you have vexed my mother so?' and ordered his servant to seize him. Then the servant pushed him roughly into a small room and locked the door. The traveller was sure that he must have fallen into the clutches of the son of the fox.

A little later the fox's son came in to kill him with a sword. As his last request the traveller begged him to bring him some water. 'I am terribly thirsty,' he pleaded. 'Won't you bring me a big jar of water?' So the fox's son brought him the water he had asked for, and complained, 'You are a glutton to want to drink such a big jar of water.' Then the fox's son went and waited outside the room while he drank the water. As soon as he was alone the traveller poured the water on the earthen wall of the room to soften it, and then kicked a hole in it

The Toad-Bridegroom

and escaped. But unfortunately the tower stood on the very edge of a steep cliff, and the traveller fell over the edge. As it happened a tiger was passing beneath the cliff at that moment, and he fell fair and square on its back. The tiger was alarmed by this unusual occurrence and ran off to its den with him on its back. There the tiger saw the man and seized him with its claws. The tiger was accustomed to bring its prey back to its den for its cub, and so it scratched the traveller's face that its cub might drink his blood. Then he fell half dead on the floor of the cave, until the tiger went out hunting once more. Then he came to his senses, stood up, and killed the tiger cub. He made his way out of the cave and climbed up a tall tree nearby.

The foxes thought that the tiger must have seized the traveller and carried him off and went into the tiger's den to look for him. At that very moment the mother-tiger came back and found her cub lying dead. She thought at once that the foxes must have killed it, and so she attacked them fiercely. A desperate struggle followed in which the tiger tore the foxes to pieces. But in the fight the tiger too was mortally wounded, and before long it too lay down and died. The traveller climbed down from the tree, and went and explored the foxes' house and tower. There he found much treasure, gold and silver and precious things, so that he became rich and lived in comfort ever after.

Told by o Yun-Sug; Hamhung (1933).

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The Toad-Bridegroom

LONG ago there lived a poor fisherman in a certain village. One day he went fishing in the lake as usual, but found he could not catch as many fish as he was accustomed to. And on each of the following days he found his catch growing smaller and smaller. He tried new baits, and bought new hooks, but all to no avail. At last even the water of the lake began to disappear, until in the end it became too shallow for fishing. One afternoon in the late summer the bottom