

FOLK TALES

from

KOREA'

COLLECTED AND TRANSLATED

WITH AN INTRODUCTION-

BY

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The Jewel of the Fox's Tongue

month. You must go and wait outside the gate in the dark, and I will put one of the girls in the east room and one in the west room. Then I shall call you, and you may enter whichever of the rooms you may choose. Thus you shall make your own choice, and you will not be able to complain at the result.'

After supper the two boys went and waited outside. After a while the old woman called them to come in. In the summer night the Son of the Tree stood wondering which room he should enter. Just then he heard a big mosquito flying near his head. It came and whispered in his ear, 'Son of the Tree! Go to the east room, the east room!' So he went to the east room, and there he found the old woman's beautiful daughter. And the other boy found her foster-daughter in the west room.

It is said that these two couples had many children, and that they are the ancestors of the whole human race to-day.

Told by Gim Gi-Teg; Tong-Yong (1913).

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The Jewel of the Fox's Tongue

THERE was a big school in a country village long ago. There were a hundred pupils at this school, and they used to study at night, reading aloud at the top of their voices. Sometimes, when it was too late for them to go to their homes, they used to sleep together in a big room.

Late one night they were all sleeping soundly, except the youngest boy, who was just seven years old. He heard strange footsteps outside, and pricked up his ears. Amid the loud snores of his friends he could hear faintly, yet clearly, the voice of a woman counting the shoes outside—one, two, three, four . . . and so on up to one hundred pairs. Then a beautiful girl quietly opened the window and crept stealthily into the room. The youngest boy was very frightened, and crept silently to the furthest corner of the room. He saw the girl begin to count the pupils, starting from the doorway. She kissed each of them on the lips, and then, strange to say, each of them stopped breathing and died as soon as she kissed him. When she came near the corner where the youngest boy was hiding he crept

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over to the opposite corner to escape from her, and there found his friends lying stiff and cold. He lay down among the dead bodies trembling with fear and utterly horror-struck.

When she reached the end the girl turned and sighed, 'Only ninety-nine! There is one missing. It is very strange.' So she went outside and began to count the shoes again, one, two, three, four . . . up to one hundred pairs. She counted them several times, from the right and from the left, so as to make absolutely certain. 'There are exactly one hundred pairs of shoes. Let me count the boys in the room again.' So she came in and counted them again, and still found only ninety-nine, for the youngest boy succeeded in avoiding her again. In the end she gave up, and said with a sigh, 'If only I could find one more, it would make one hundred, and I could go up to Heaven. But they are one short. Whatever shall I do?' Then suddenly a cock crowed. 'Oh, I must be going,' she cried, and rushed out of the room into the fields.

The youngest boy was very brave, despite his tender years, and he followed her to see where she would go. She hastened to the graveyard on the mountain near the village, and disappeared behind a large rock. The boy turned back towards the village, when suddenly the girl appeared in front of him again, and taking him by the hand, led him back to the rock. She seemed very glad to meet him, and taking him on her knee, patted him on the shoulder in a very friendly fashion. He sat and looked at her, wondering who she could be. Her clothes were not very neat or clean, but she was very pretty. 'Who are you?' he asked, but she smiled and made no reply. Then she embraced him and tried to kiss him on the lips. But he had realised that she could not be a real woman, but rather perhaps a goblin or a fox. He thought of his friends who had died of her kiss, and tried to keep her from kissing him, but in vain. Then she rolled a jewel from her mouth to his, and sucked it back. She did this again and again, rolling the jewel from her mouth to his and back again, until his face gradually became pale and wan. She was absorbing human energy from him.

Suddenly the boy remembered an old belief. 'If a man swallows the jewel which a fox always carries on her tongue, then if, before it dissolves, he looks up at the sky, he will possess all the wisdom of Heaven, and if he looks down on the ground he will possess all the wisdom of the Earth.' So a plan formed in his mind, and when the

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jewel rolled into his mouth, he swallowed it and slipped down on to the ground. He meant first to look up at the sky, and then down at the ground, but the frightened girl pulled his chin down to try and get her jewel back, and so he was forced to look only at the ground.

Then the boy shouted at the top of his voice to attract the attention of any of the villagers who might be passing. The girl disappeared immediately. It was still dark, though the dawn was near. There was no answer and no one came. He fell down in a faint, and lay there unconscious for some time.

When he got home in the morning his parents were greatly surprised to hear his story. The other ninety-nine boys were lying dead, but their parents did not believe his explanation of their fate. So he decided to catch the fox that lived in the mountain graveyard, for now he knew all the wisdom of the Earth.

All the villagers followed him with spears and arrows. They surrounded the graveyard, and searched it with great care. The boy told them to examine the rock where he had come during the night. Suddenly a fox with nine long tails, and dressed in woman's clothes, ran out of the cave beneath the rock. They killed it on the spot. In the cave they found a large pile of women's clothes. There were tunnels running underground into the graveyard, so that the fox had been able to go and eat the bodies in the graves. It had taken the beautiful dresses from the women so that it could disguise itself as a pretty girl.

From that day men have possessed the wisdom of the Earth, but not the wisdom of Heaven.

Ondoru Yawa, told by Zong Yong-Ha; Onyang (1913).

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Onions

IN the very earliest days of human history there was a time when men used to eat one another. This was because in those days men often appeared in the form of cattle, and so were slaughtered for food.

At last a certain man set out in quest of a better world. In his wanderings he met a leper, who asked him the reason for his journey. He answered 'This world is horrible and I hate it, for men

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eat one another. I am on my way to seek a better world, where men may not do such evil things.' To this the leper replied, 'Your quest will be in vain, for wherever you may go you will find that men everywhere behave in the same way. So I would advise you to go back to your native place.' Then the wanderer replied, 'I cannot go back now, for if I do they will assuredly kill me. Whatever shall I do?' The leper said, 'My advice to you is that you should eat onions. Any man who does so will thereafter appear in human form, even though he has previously appeared in the form of an ox.'

So then the traveller hastened homewards. As he drew near his home he met some of his friends, and greeted them cheerfully, 'Hullo, how do you do? I haven't seen you for some time.' Thereupon the others said, 'The lowing of this ox is most remarkable,' and instantly they seized him. He was greatly alarmed, and said, 'No! I am not an ox. I am your friend, and my name is . . . ' But the others did not understand what he was saying, and said to one another, 'This ox is bellowing too much. Isn't he making a din? We had better kill him at once.' With these words they tied him to a post.

Just then it happened that a young girl passed by, carrying a basket full of onions on her head. With a great effort he managed to snatch one and swallow it. When he had eaten it all he immediately changed into human form. The others were astonished, and said, 'What, so it is you, our dear friend. We are very sorry indeed. We did not realize it was you.'

So then he told them all about the miraculous powers of onions, and advised them to eat them. From that day men began to eat onions, and thereafter always appeared in human form. And it is said that the cultivation of onions was encouraged in order that men might not eat one another any more.

Told by Zang Yong-Ha; Onyang (1915).

II

The Heavenly Maiden and the Wood Cutter

ONCE upon a time there lived a young man whose home was in northern Gangwon Province, near the foot of the Diamond Mountain. He was very poor indeed, and in order to live he used to go