

Giant Fish Lake

Wang Zifu, a young man of Luodian Village in Ju County, lost his father at an early age. He was a brilliant youth, and successfully took his first degree at the age of fourteen. His mother doted on him and seldom allowed him to go on excursions out into the country. She betrothed him a girl of the Xiao family, but the girl died before the marriage could be celebrated. He had looked for a suitable wife since that time, so far without success.

Our tale begins one Lantern Festival, on the first full moon of the year, when Wang's maternal cousin, a young man by the name of Wu, invited him out for a stroll. No sooner had they reached the outskirts of the village than a family servant came hurrying up to summon Wu home. Wang continued on his own. He had seen how many good-looking girls there were out taking the air, and felt in the mood for a promenade.

One young lady was out walking with her maid and had just picked a spray of plum-blossom. She had the prettiest face imaginable, with a great beaming smile. Wang stared at her utterly captivated, mindless of the usual rules of modesty and propriety. She walked a few steps past him and then turned to her maid: "Who is that young man staring at me, with those burning burglar's eyes?"

She dropped the plum-blossom on the ground and walked on, talking and laughing animatedly as she went. Wang retrieved the blossom from the ground with a melancholy air and stood there a while musing abstractedly, before returning home in a mood of profound dejection.

When he reached home, he hid the plum-blossom beneath his pillow, and lay disconsolately down to sleep. As days went by Wang became more and more absent-minded, neglected his studies and spent most of his days wandering through the family estates, keeping the plum-blossom beneath his gown, his mind endlessly revolving around his encounter with the smiling girl, hopelessly infatuated. Soon his mother became very anxious about him. She had elaborate rituals of exorcism performed, but despite all her efforts her son would not return to his studies but sit all day under a plum tree instead.

One night, the tree was already carrying fruits Wang awoke by a delicate voice, tender and vibrant with feeling that seemed to be coming from beneath his pillow. Immediately he reached under his pillows to produce nothing more than the withered plum-blossom. Unable to go to sleep again he went into the garden that was bathed in bright moonlight and started to wander around aimlessly. He had but walked a few paces when he heard a whispering sound coming from behind the eastern wall of the property, and looking up, in one of the trees on the other side, there was the girl. She was an exquisite vision at one and the same time ethereally graceful and sensual alluring. He stared at her, and she beamed at him. He, thinking that she was leading him on, became more aroused than ever. Still with a broad smile on her face, the girl pointed to a spot on his side of the wall, before climbing back down on to her own side. The young man was beside himself with joy at what he took to be an assignation, and returned to the same

spot the next night, to find her waiting for him.

He wasted no time, and began to make love to her at once. From that moment on they would meet every night to make love and sit under the plum tree in deep conversation until the first light of morning when the girl vanished behind the wall, just to return the following evening. One night, she was sitting with Wang when suddenly she began to weep. He was greatly puzzled. "There's something I have never told you," she sobbed. "I haven't told you about it before, because we hadn't known each other very long and I didn't want to frighten you. But now that I know you better, and I know how much you love me, I must tell you the truth. I am a fox and can only take on human form during the night. At cockcrow I shall go back to the woods to roam among my own kind. As well I am betrothed to a fox and shall move to the southern mountains to dwell in his hole by the end of the summer"

Devastated with grief, the next morning Wang decided to confide in his mother and his cousin Wu, telling them the whole story of his infatuation with the smiling girl that had turned out to be a fox. "Oh you foolish fellow!" said Wu, laughing, but pleasantly. "Let me seek you a young lady to marry and you shall have company during the day and a wife to take care of your household and comfort your mother and family. At nighttime you can still see your fox and keep her as a concubine." Deeply in love with his nighttime companion Wang would not listen to his cousin's advice and instead urge him to find a way to relief his love from her dreadful burden. "Truly I can not cure a fox", Wu replied. "But I can tell you of one who may be able to do so. Go to him, ask him, and I dare say he will be able to help you." Wang's mother asked him whom he was referring to. "He is a madman who frequents the marketplace and sleeps on a dunghill. You must go down on your knees and beg him to help you. If he insults you, you must on no account go against him or be angry with him."

Wang knew of this beggar. He took his leave and went straight to the marketplace, where he found the man begging by the roadside, singing a crazy song. A good three inches of mucus trailed from his nose, and he was so foul it was unthinkable to go near him. But Wang approached him on his knees. He told him his tale and the beggar laughed loudly. "Any woman may be wife to a man, but he can have but one mother. There are plenty of fine girls in this world for you to marry! Why would you want to marry a spirit from the Nether Worlds?" But Wang pleaded with him: "Speak not of lakes and streams to one / Who knows the splendor of the sea; / The clouds around the magic peaks of Wu / Are the only clouds for me." "You're a strange one!" the old man said. "You want me to release a spirit? Who do you take me for - the King of the Nether Worlds? He struck him with his stick and he bore it without a murmur. By now quite a crowd had gathered around them. Suddenly the old man produced a dagger from within his cloak and ripped his belly open, causing his bowels to spill out. He cut off a large piece from his guts and placed it in the palm of his hand. "Eat!" Wang flushed deeply and could not bring himself to obey his order. Then he remembered what Wu had commanded and steeled himself to swallow the

beggars guts. As it went down his throat it felt hard like a lump of cotton wadding, and even when, after several gulps, he managed to swallow it down, he could still feel it lodge in his chest. The madman guffawed, and was still laughing when he carefully replaced his internal organs in his chest and went away.

Wang returned home, greatly downcast, filled with grief at his lover's fate, and overcome with shame and self-disgust at the treatment he had tolerated from the mad beggar. Exhausted he lay down for a nap in the garden and soon fell asleep, only to wake after just a short while from the strangest feeling. Something was drawing his belly. Opening his eyes he became aware of a cord that had emerged from his navel high into the air, where it remained suspended, as if somehow caught. In terror he witnessed that his stomach was paying out even more rope, which kept rising higher and higher until the top end of it disappeared altogether into the clouds. Terrified Wang cried out for help. "Relax!" said the madmen who had been sitting behind him all along. "In order to relieve your lover I will have to climb up to heaven, into the garden of the Queen Mother of the West and steal from her pond one of the sacred fish. You shall hence have the fish cooked and served to your lover but never must you swallow even the smallest of its bones nor the tinniest of its scales." Saying so the beggar took hold of the rope and went scrambling up it, hand over foot, like a spider running up a thread, finally disappearing out of sight and into the clouds.

There was a long interval, and then down fell a large fish, the size of a bedstead. Immediately Wang called upon his servants to prepare the fish for dinner but advised them not to taste the dish. As night fell he went to the garden and approached the girl who had been waiting for him on the very same spot they first had met, beaming at him brightly. Taking her hand he guided her into the candle lit hall, revealing what would mean the very end of their separation. Delighted and overwhelmed by gratitude she sat down and started to eat until she was full. Wang himself did not touch the meal but drank plenty of wine instead. Then he took her to his private room and the two of them climbed into bed, where they enjoyed to the full the sweet pleasures of love.

In the middle of the night Wang awoke and due to the heavy drinking felt the urge to go outside. On his way he passed the dining room and his empty stomach was drawn towards the remains of his lovers dish. Still half asleep he mindlessly helped himself to some of the fish before continuing into the garden. There he found how ever hard he tried he could not relieve himself.

In the morning, the girl woke as beautiful as she had laid her head to sleep the night before just to find her lovers side of the bed being empty. Out in the garden she discovered him in a quite unusual position. Crouched on the ground, half naked with his belly swollen up to an enormous size he lay dead beneath the flowers, his nether regions being exposed and at the tip of his member the eye of a fish was revolving in its carnal socket.

Soon after Wang's death, his resting place was flooded after a hailstorm had damaged a nearby damn that had been build in one of the gorges of the yellow

river. This accident led to the creation of a new lake that was soon known as Da Yu Hu, Giant Fish Lake.

The Yu Qi uprising in Shandong lasted for much of the first two decades after the Manchu conquest, and was finally suppressed in 1662.

Chang and Chang write:

Over ten thousand of Yu Qi's followers were said to have been brutally slaughtered. Hundreds of innocent people were rounded up and killed by the Manchu soldiers without any evidence of conspiracy. Villages were burned down, crops destroyed and only Luodian village survived, its inhabitants feeding on the supply of fish from Da Yu Hu (Giant Fish Lake) that happened to be particularly substantial in those days.

(Redefining History, p. 258, note 12)

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