



THE FOX'S DAUGHTER

A Tale from China

Retold by Dianne de Las Casas

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Long ago, in the land of fiery red dragons, lived a beautiful girl named Feng-Lien. She was quite lucky for she was born the daughter of a fox. Foxes have magical powers. A fox's child knows just as much magic and can take human form.

One day, a young, lazy student named Liu was boating when he should have been studying. He saw the form of a beautiful girl dancing in the reeds. He quickly docked his boat and tied it to a willow tree. He jumped out of the boat and began searching for the girl.

He heard mocking laughter and tried to follow its sound. He ran in all directions, first tearing his silk robe and then breaking a sandal strap. At last, he found the girl leaning against a tree. She was so beautiful that she took his breath away.

The girl spoke, "If only Master Liu studied as hard as he chased me, he would earn a high place in the Examination Hall." Liu asked her name and how she knew so much about him. She answered, "My name is Feng-Lien and that is all I will tell you. I must go now."

Liu cried, "No, please don't go! Please tell me where we shall meet again." Feng-Lien said, "Look for me in your books." Then she took out a gilded silver mirror and gave it to Liu. The beautiful fox maiden said, "You may see my reflection in the mirror but only through your books." In a moment, she vanished, saying,

If you wish to see my face
You must look in the right place.

Liu was puzzled but he went home with his gift. Each time he looked into the mirror, he only saw the back of Feng-Lien. When he went to his room, he remembered Feng-Lien's words.

If you wish to see my face
You must look in the right place.

He pulled out his books and looked inside but he did not see Feng-Lien's face. Frustrated, he began studying in earnest. He discovered that when he studied and read, he saw Feng-Lien's pretty face in the mirror smiling and nodding. "Ah!" cried Liu, "That is what she meant!"

For more than a month, Liu did nothing but study and study. He buried himself in his books. Each time he looked into the mirror, Feng-Lien smiled, pleased.

Then summer came and the fine weather beckoned him. He put down the books and went boating once more. When he returned home, he looked into the mirror and Feng-Lien's back was to him. She was not pleased! Liu had forgotten her words.

If you wish to see my face
You must look in the right place.

One day, friends came by and asked him to go fishing. Happily, Liu agreed even though in his heart, he knew he would not see Feng-Lien's face if he went. He was out all night. When he came back, he looked in the mirror. It was empty. Feng-Lien had disappeared.

"Oh no!" cried Liu. He then dedicated himself to his books. Day and night, he did nothing but study and read. He studied until the day came to go to the Examination Hall. Liu took his tests and did so well that he took top honors.

When Liu returned home, he looked in the mirror. Sure enough, beautiful Feng-Lien was there smiling at him. Suddenly, the mirror melted and the real Feng-Lien appeared before Liu. She said, "You have proven yourself a worthy man. A man of knowledge is most powerful of all." Feng-Lien and Liu were married. And all because Liu studied hard and remembered Feng-Lien's words.

If you wish to see my face
You must look in the right place.

Liu became one of the most powerful men in China. As for Feng-Lien, she no longer had to use magic to keep Liu in line. All she had to do was give him a look and she could always outfox him!

