

# *Fox-Fire*

The Chinese Fairy Book

Chinese

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*Intermediate*  
*3 min read*

Once upon a time there was a strong young farmer who came home late one evening from market. His way led him past the gardens of a wealthy gentleman, in which stood a number of tall buildings. Suddenly he saw something shining floating in the air inside the gardens, something which glowed like a ball of crystal. He was astonished, and climbed the wall around the gardens, but there was not a human being in sight; all he saw was, at a distance, something which appeared to be a dog, looking up at the moon. And whenever it blew its breath out a ball of fire came out of its mouth, and rose to the moon. And whenever it drew its breath in the ball sank down again, and it caught it in its jaws. And so it went on without a stop. Then the farmer realized that it was a fox, who was preparing the elixir of life.

He hid in the grass and waited until the ball of fire came down again, at about the height of his own head. Then he stepped hastily from his hiding-place, took it away and at once swallowed it. And he could feel it glow as it passed down his throat into his stomach. When the fox saw what had happened he grew angry. He looked furiously at the farmer, but feared his strength. For this reason he did not dare attack him, but went angrily on his way.

From that time on the farmer-boy could make himself invisible, was able to see ghosts and devils, and had intercourse with the spirit-world. In cases of sickness, when people lay unconscious, he could call back their souls, and if some one had committed a sin he could plead for them. He earned much money owing to these gifts.

When he reached his fiftieth year, he withdrew from all things and would no longer exercise his arts. One summer evening he was sitting in his courtyard, enjoying the cool air. While there he drank a number of goblets of wine, and by midnight had fallen fast asleep. Suddenly he awoke, feeling ill. It seemed as though some one were patting him on the back, and before he knew it, the ball of fire had leaped out from his throat. At once a hand reached for it and a voice said: "For thirty long years you kept my treasure from me, and from a poor farmer-lad you have grown to be a wealthy man. Now you have enough, and I would like to have my fire-ball back again!"

Then the man knew what had happened, but the fox was gone.

Note: The thought underlying the story is the belief that the fox prepares the elixir of life out of his own breath, which he allows to rise to the moon. If a thief can rob him of the elixir he gains supernatural powers.

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