

The Dragon-Princess

The Chinese Fairy Book

Chinese

Intermediate

24 min read

In the Sea of Dingtung there is a hill, and in that hill there is a hole, and this hole is so deep that it has no bottom.

Once a fisherman was passing there who slipped and fell into the hole. He came to a country full of winding ways which led over hill and dale for several miles. Finally he reached a dragon-castle lying in a great plain. There grew a green slime which reached to his knees. He went to the gate of the castle. It was guarded by a dragon who spouted water which dispersed in a fine mist. Within the gate lay a small hornless dragon who raised his head, showed his claws, and would not let him in.

The fisherman spent several days in the cave, satisfying his hunger with the green slime, which he found edible and which tasted like rice-mush. At last he found a way out again. He told the district mandarin what had happened to him, and the latter reported the matter to the emperor. The emperor sent for a wise man and questioned him concerning it.

The wise man said: "There are four paths in this cave. One path leads to the south-west shore of the Sea of Dingtung, the second path leads to a valley in the land of the four rivers, the third path ends in a cave on the mountain of Lo-Fu and the fourth in an island of the Eastern Sea. In this cave dwells the seventh daughter of the Dragon-King of the Eastern Sea, who guards his pearls and his treasure. It happened once in the ancient days, that a fisherboy dived into the water and brought up a pearl from beneath the chin of a black dragon.



“It happened once in the ancient days, that a fisherboy dived into the water and brought up a pearl from beneath the chin of a black dragon.” Illustration by George Hood. Published in *The Chinese Fairy Book* by Richard Wilhelm (1921), Frederick A. Stokes Company.

The dragon was asleep, which was the reason the fisherboy brought the pearl to the surface without being harmed. The treasure which the daughter of the Dragon-King has in charge is made up of thousands and millions of such jewels. Several thousands of small dragons watch over them in her service. Dragons have the peculiarity of fighting shy of wax. But they are fond of beautiful jade-stones, and of kung-tsing, the hollowgreen wood, and like to eat swallows. If one were to send a messenger with a letter, it would be possible to obtain precious pearls.”

The emperor was greatly pleased, and announced a large reward for the man who was competent to go to the dragon-castle as his messenger.

The first man to come forward was named So Pi-Lo. But the wise man said: “A great-great-great-great-grandfather of yours once slew more than a hundred of the dragons of the Eastern Sea, and was finally himself slain by the dragons. The dragons are the enemies of your family and you cannot go.”

Then came a man from Canton, Lo-Dsi-Tschun, with his two brothers, who said that his ancestors had been related to the Dragon-King. Hence they were well liked by the dragons and well known to them. They begged to be entrusted with the message.

The wise man asked: “And have you still in your possession the stone which compels the dragons to do your will?”

“Yes,” said they, “we have brought it along with us.”

The wise man had them show him the stone; then he spoke: “This stone is only obeyed by the dragons who make clouds and send down the rain. It will not do for the dragons who guard the pearls of the sea-king.” Then he questioned them further: “Have you the dragon-brain vapor?”

When they admitted that they had not, the wise man said: “How then will you compel the dragons to yield their treasure?”

And the emperor said: "What shall we do?"

The wise man replied: "On the Western Ocean sail foreign merchants who deal in dragon-brain vapor. Some one must go to them and seek it from them. I also know a holy man who is an adept in the art of taming dragons, and who has prepared ten pounds of the dragon-stone. Some one should be sent for that as well."

The emperor sent out his messengers. They met one of the holy man's disciples and obtained two fragments of dragon-stone from him.

Said the wise man: "That is what we want!"

Several more months went by, and at last a pill of dragon-brain vapor had also been secured. The emperor felt much pleased and had his jewelers carve two little boxes of the finest jade. These were polished with the ashes of the Wutung-tree. And he had an essence prepared of the very best hollowgreen wood, pasted with sea-fish lime, and hardened in the fire. Of this two vases were made. Then the bodies and the clothing of the messengers were rubbed with tree-wax, and they were given five hundred roasted swallows to take along with them.

They went into the cave. When they reached the dragon-castle, the little dragon who guarded the gate smelled the tree-wax, so he crouched down and did them no harm. They gave him a hundred roasted swallows as a bribe to announce them to the daughter of the Dragon-King. They were admitted to her presence and offered her the jade caskets, the vases and the four hundred roasted swallows as gifts. The dragon's daughter received them graciously, and they unfolded the emperor's letter.

In the castle there was a dragon who was over a thousand years old. He could turn himself into a human being, and could interpret the language of human beings. Through him the dragon's daughter learned that the emperor was sending her the gifts, and she returned them with a gift of three great pearls, seven smaller pearls and a whole bushel of ordinary pearls. The messengers took leave, rode off with their pearls on a dragon's back, and in a moment they had reached the banks of the Yangtze-kiang. They made their way to Nanking, the imperial capital, and there handed over their treasure of gems.

The emperor was much pleased and showed them to the wise man. He said: "Of the three great pearls one is a divine wishing-pearl of the third class, and two are black dragon-pearls of medium quality. Of the seven smaller pearls two are serpent-pearls, and five are mussel-pearls. The remaining pearls are in part sea-crane

pearls, in part snail and oyster-pearls. They do not approach the great pearls in value, and yet few will be found to equal them on earth.”

The emperor also showed them to all his servants. They, however, thought the wise man’s words all talk, and did not believe what he said.

Then the wise man said: “The radiance of wishing-pearls of the first class is visible for forty miles, that of the second class for twenty miles, and that of the third for ten miles. As far as their radiance carries, neither wind nor rain, thunder nor lightning, water, fire nor weapons may reach. The pearls of the black dragon are nine-colored and glow by night. Within the circle of their light the poison of serpents and worms is powerless. The serpent-pearls are seven-colored, the mussel-pearls five-colored. Both shine by night. Those most free from spots are the best. They grow within the mussel, and increase and decrease in size as the moon waxes and wanes.”

Some one asked how the serpent and sea-crane pearls could be told apart, and the wise man answered: “The animals themselves recognize them.”

Then the emperor selected a serpent-pearl and a sea-crane pearl, put them together with a whole bushel of ordinary pearls, and poured the lot out in the courtyard. Then a large yellow serpent and a black crane were fetched and placed among the pearls. At once the crane took up a sea-crane pearl in his bill and began to dance and sing and flutter around. But the serpent snatched at the serpent-pearl, and wound himself about it in many coils. And when the people saw this they acknowledged the truth of the wise man’s words. As regards the radiance of the larger and smaller pearls it turned out, too, just as the wise man had said.

In the dragon-castle the messengers had enjoyed dainty fare, which tasted like flowers, herbs, ointment and sugar. They had brought a remnant of it with them to the capital; yet exposed to the air it had become as hard as stone. The emperor commanded that these fragments be preserved in the treasury. Then he bestowed high rank and titles on the three brothers, and made each one of them a present of a thousand rolls of fine silk stuff. He also had investigated why it was that the fisherman, when he chanced upon the cave, had not been destroyed by the dragons. And it turned out that his fishing clothes had been soaked in oil and tree-wax. The dragons had dreaded the odor.

Some twenty miles east of Gingdschou lies the Lake of the Maidens. It is several miles square and surrounded on all sides by thick green thickets and tall forests. Its waters are clear and dark-blue. Often all kinds of

wondrous creatures show themselves in the lake. The people of the vicinity have erected a temple there for the Dragon Princess. And in times of drought all make pilgrimage there to offer up prayers.

West of Gingschou, two hundred miles away, is another lake, whose god is named Tschauna, and who performs many miracles. During the time of the Tang dynasty there lived in Gingschou a mandarin by name of Dschou Bau. While he was in office it chanced that in the fifth month clouds suddenly arose in the sky, piling themselves up like mountains, among which wriggled dragons and serpents; they rolled up and down between the two seas. Tempest and rain, thunder and lightning arose so that houses fell to pieces, trees were torn up by the roots, and much damage was done the crops. Dschou Bau took the blame upon himself, and prayed to the heavens that his people might be pardoned.

On the fifth day of the sixth month he sat in his hall of audience and gave judgment; and suddenly he felt quite weary and sleepy. He took off his hat and laid down on the cushions. No sooner had he closed his eyes than he saw a warrior in helmet and armor, with a halberd in his hand, standing on the steps leading to the hall, who announced: "A lady is waiting outside who wishes to enter!" Dschou Bau asked him: "Who are you?" The answer was: "I am your door-keeper. In the invisible world I already have been performing this duty for many years." Meanwhile two figures clad in green came up the steps, knelt before him and said: "Our mistress has come to visit you!" Dschou Bau rose. He beheld lovely clouds, from which fell a fine rain, and strange fragrances enchanted him. Suddenly he saw a lady clad in a simple gown, but of surpassing beauty, float down from on high, with a retinue of many female servants. These were all neat and clean in appearance, and waited upon the lady as though she were a princess. When the latter entered the hall she raised her arms in greeting. Dschou Bau came forward to meet her and invited her to be seated. From all sides bright-colored clouds came floating in, and the courtyard was filled with a purple ether. Dschou Bau had wine and food brought and entertained them all in the most splendid way. But the goddess sat staring straight before her with wrinkled brows, and seemed to feel very sad. Then she rose and said with a blush: "I have been living in this neighborhood for many years. A wrong which has been done me, permits me to pass the bounds of what is fitting, and encourages me to ask a favor of you. Yet I do not know whether you wish to save me!"

"May I hear what it is all about," answered Dschou Bau. "If I can help you, I will be glad to place myself at your disposal."

The goddess said: "For hundreds of years my family has been living in the depth of the Eastern Sea. But we were unfortunate in that our treasures excited the jealousy of men. The ancestor of Pi-Lo nearly destroyed our

entire clan by fire. My ancestors had to fly and hide themselves. And not long ago, our enemy Pi-Lo himself wanted to deliver an imperial letter in the cave of the Sea of Dungting. Under the pretext of begging for pearls and treasures, he wished to enter the dragon-castle and destroy our family. Fortunately a wise man saw through his treacherous purpose, and Lo-Dsi-Tschun and his brothers were sent in his stead. Yet my people did not feel safe from future attacks. For this reason they withdrew to the distant West. My father has done much good to mankind and hence is highly honored there. I am his ninth daughter. When I was sixteen I was wedded to the youngest son of the Rock-Dragon. But my good husband had a fiery temper, which often caused him to offend against the laws of courtesy, and in less than a year's time the punishment of heaven was his portion. I was left alone and returned to the home of my parents. My father wished me to marry again; but I had promised to remain true to the memory of my husband, and made a vow not to comply with my father's wish. My parents grew angry, and I was obliged to retire to this place in view of their anger.

That was three years ago. Who could imagine that the contemptible dragon Tschauna, who was seeking a wife for his youngest brother, would try to force the wedding-gift upon me? I refused to accept it; but Tschauna knew how to gain his point with my father, and was determined to carry out his intention. My father, regardless of my wishes, promised me to him. And then the dragon Tschauna appeared with his youngest brother and wanted to carry me off by sheer force of arms. I encountered him with fifty faithful followers, and we fought on the meadow before the city. We were defeated, and I am more than ever afraid that Tschauna will attempt to drag me off. So I have plucked up courage to beg you to lend me your mercenaries so that I may beat off my foes and remain as I am. If you will help me I will be grateful to you till the end of my days."

Dschou Bau answered: "You come from a noble family. Have you no kinsfolk who will hasten to help you in your need, that you are compelled to turn to a mortal man?"

"It is true that my kinsfolk are far-famed and numerous. If I were to send out letters and they came to my aid, they would rub out that scaly scoundrel Tschauna as one might rub garlic. But my deceased husband offended the high heavens and he has not yet been pardoned. And my parents' will, too, is opposed to mine, so that I dare not call upon my kinsfolk for help. You will understand my need." Then Dschou Bau promised to help her, and the princess thanked him and departed.

When he awoke, he sighed long thinking over his strange experience. And the following day he sent off fifteen hundred soldiers to stand guard by the Lake of the Maidens.

On the seventh day of the sixth month Dschou Bau rose early. Darkness still lay before the windows, yet it seemed to him as though he could glimpse a man before the curtain. He asked who it might be. The man said: "I am the princess's adviser. Yesterday you were kind enough to send soldiers to aid us in our distress. But they were all living men, and such cannot fight against invisible spirits. You will have to send us soldiers of yours who have died, if you wish to aid us."

Dschou Bau reflected for a time, and then it occurred to him that of course such must be the case. So he had his field-secretary examine the roster to see how many of his soldiers had fallen in battle. And the latter counted up to some two thousand foot-soldiers and five-hundred horsemen. Dschou Bau appointed his deceased officer Mong Yuan as their leader, and wrote his commands on a paper which he burned, in order thus to place them at the princess's disposal. The living soldiers he recalled. When they were being reviewed in the courtyard after their return, a soldier suddenly fell unconscious. It was not until early the following morning that he came to his senses again. He was questioned and replied: "I saw a man clad in red who approached me and said: 'Our princess is grateful for the aid your master has so kindly given her. Yet she still has a request to make and has asked me to call you.'

I followed him to the temple. The princess bade me come forward and said to me: 'I thank your master from my heart for sending me the ghost soldiers, but Mong Yuan, their leader is incapable. Yesterday the robbers came with three thousand men, and Mong Yuan was beaten by them. When you return and again see your master, say that I earnestly beg him to send me a good general. Perhaps that will save me in my need.' Then she had me led back again and I regained consciousness."

When Dschou Bau had heard these words, which seemed to fit strangely well with what he had dreamed, he thought he would try to see if this were really the case. Therefore he chose his victorious general Dschong Tschong-Fu to take the place of Mong Yuan. That evening he burned incense, offered wine and handed over to the princess this captain's soul.

On the twenty-sixth of the month news came from the general's camp that he had suddenly died at midnight on the thirteenth. Dschou Bau was frightened, and sent a man to bring him a report. The latter informed him that the general's heart had hardly ceased to beat, and that, in spite of the hot summer weather, his body was free from any trace of decay. So the order was given not to bury him.

Then one night an icy, spectral wind arose, which whirled up sand and stones, broke trees and tore down

houses. The standing corn in the fields was blown down. The storm lasted all day. Finally, the crash of a terrific thunderbolt was heard, and then the skies cleared and the clouds scattered. That very hour the dead general began to breathe painfully on his couch, and when his attendants came to him, he had returned to life again.

They questioned him and he told them: "First I saw a man in a purple gown riding a black horse, who came up with a great retinue. He dismounted before the door. In his hand he held a decree of appointment which he gave me, saying: 'Our princess begs you most respectfully to become her general. I hope that you will not refuse.' Then he brought forth gifts and heaped them up before the steps. Jade-stones, brocades, and silken garments, saddles, horses, helmets and suits of mail—he heaped them all up in the courtyard. I wished to decline, but this he would not allow, and urged me to enter his chariot with him. We drove a hundred miles and met a train of three-hundred armored horsemen who had ridden out to escort me. They led me to a great city, and before the city a tent had been erected in which played a band of musicians. A high official welcomed me. When I entered the city the onlookers were crowded together like walls.

Servants ran to and fro bearing orders. We passed through more than a dozen gates before we reached the princess. There I was requested to dismount and change my clothes in order to enter the presence of the princess, for she wished to receive me as her guest. But I thought this too great an honor and greeted her below, on the steps. She, however, invited me to seat myself near her in the hall. She sat upright in all her incomparable beauty, surrounded by female attendants adorned with the richest jewels. These plucked lute-strings and played flutes. A throng of servitors stood about in golden girdles with purple tassels, ready to carry out her commands. Countless crowds were assembled before the palace. Five or six visitors sat in a circle about the princess, and a general led me to my place. The princess said to me: 'I have begged you to come here in order to entrust the command of my army to you. If you will break the power of my foe I will reward you richly.' I promised to obey her. Then wine was brought in, and the banquet was served to the sound of music. While we were at table a messenger entered: 'The robber Tschauna has invaded our land with ten thousand footmen and horsemen, and is approaching our city by various roads. His way is marked by columns of fire and smoke!'

The guests all grew pale with terror when they heard the news. And the princess said: 'This is the foe because of whom I have sought your aid. Save me in my hour of need!' Then she gave me two chargers, a suit of golden armor, and the insignia of a commander-in-chief, and bowed to me. I thanked her and went, called together the captains, had the army mustered and rode out before the city. At several decisive points I placed troops in

ambush. The enemy was already approaching in great force, careless and unconcerned, intoxicated by his former victories. I sent out my most untrustworthy soldiers in advance, who allowed themselves to be beaten in order to lure him on. Light-armed men then went out against him, and retreated in skirmish order. And thus he fell into my ambush. Drums and kettledrums sounded together, the ring closed around them on all sides and the robber army suffered a grievous defeat. The dead lay about like hemp-stalks, but little Tschauna succeeded in breaking through the circle. I sent out the light horsemen after him, and they seized him before the tent of the enemy's commanding general.

Hastily I sent word to the princess, and she reviewed the prisoners before the palace. All the people, high and low, streamed together, to acclaim her. Little Tschauna was about to be executed in the market place when a messenger came spurring up with a command from the princess's father to pardon him. The princess did not dare to disobey. So he was dismissed to his home after he had sworn to give up all thought of realizing his traitorous plans. I was loaded with benefits as a reward for my victory. I was invested with an estate with three thousand peasants, and was given a palace, horses and wagons, all sorts of jewels, men-servants and women-servants, gardens and forests, banners and suits of mail. And my subordinate officers, too, were duly rewarded. On the following day a banquet was held, and the princess herself filled a goblet, sent it to me by one of her attendants, and said: 'Widowed early in life, I opposed the wishes of my stern father and fled to this spot.

Here the infamous Tschauna harassed me and well-nigh put me to shame. Had not your master's great kindness and your own courage come to my assistance, hard would have been my lot!' Then she began to thank me and her tears of emotion flowed like a stream. I bowed and begged her to grant me leave of absence, so that I might look after my family. I was given a month's leave and the following day she dismissed me with a splendid retinue. Before the city a pavilion had been erected in which I drank the stirrup-cup. Then I rode away and when I arrived before our own gate a thunder-peal crashed and I awoke."

Thereupon the general wrote an account of what had happened to Dschou Bau, in which he conveyed the princess's thanks. Then he paid no further heed to worldly matters, but set his house in order and turned it over to his wife and son. When a month had passed, he died without any sign of illness.

That same day one of his officers was out walking. Suddenly he saw a heavy cloud of dust rising along the highway, while flags and banners darkened the sun. A thousand knights were escorting a man who sat his horse proudly and like a hero. And when the officer looked at his face, it was the general Dschong Tschong-Fu. Hastily he stepped to the edge of the road, in order to allow the cavalcade to pass, and watched it ride by. The

horsemen took the way to the Lake of the Maidens, where they disappeared.

Note: The expression: "Dschou Bau took the blame upon himself" is explained by the fact that the territorial mandarin is responsible for his district, just as the emperor is for the whole empire. Since extraordinary natural phenomena are the punishment of heaven, their occurrence supposed the guilt of man. This train of thought is in accord with the idea, as in this case, that differences occurring among the spirits of the air lead to misfortune, since where virtue is in the ascendant in the mortal world, the spirits are prevented from giving way to such demonstrations. "Drums and kettledrums sounded together": the kettledrums sounded the attack, and the drums the retreat. The simultaneous sounding of both signals was intended to throw the enemy's army into disorder.

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