



Giauna the Beautiful

The Chinese Fairy Book

Chinese

Intermediate

17 min read

Once upon a time there was a descendant of Confucius. His father had a friend, and this friend held an official position in the South and offered the young man a place as secretary. But when the latter reached the town where he was to have been active, he found that his father's friend had already died. Then he was much embarrassed, seeing that he did not have the means to return home again. So he was glad to take refuge in the Monastery of Puto, where he copied holy books for the abbot.

About a hundred paces west of the monastery stood a deserted house. One day there had been a great snowfall, and as young Kung accidentally passed by the door of the house, he noticed a well dressed and prepossessing youth standing there who bowed to him and begged him to approach. Now young Kung was a scholar, and could appreciate good manners. Finding that the youth and himself had much in common, he took a liking to him, and followed him into the house. It was immaculately clean; silk curtains hung before the doors, and on the walls were pictures of good old masters. On a table lay a book entitled: "Tales of the Coral Ring." Coral Ring was the name of a cavern.

Once upon a time there lived a monk at Puto who was exceedingly learned. An aged man had led him into the cave in question, where he had seen a number of volumes on the book stands. The aged man had said: "These are the histories of the various dynasties." In a second room were to be found the histories of all the peoples on earth. A third was guarded by two dogs. The aged man explained: "In this room are kept the secret reports of the immortals, telling the arts by means of which they gained eternal life. The two dogs are two dragons." The

monk turned the pages of the books, and found that they were all works of ancient times, such as he had never seen before. He would gladly have remained in the cave, but the old man said: "That would not do!" and a boy led him out again. The name of that cave, however, was the Coral Ring, and it was described in the volume which lay on the table.

The youth questioned Kung regarding his name and family, and the latter told him his whole history. The youth pitied him greatly and advised him to open a school.

Kung answered with a sigh: "I am quite unknown in the neighborhood, and have no one to recommend me!"

Said the youth: "If you do not consider me altogether too unworthy and stupid, I should like to be your pupil myself."

Young Kung was overjoyed. "I should not dare to attempt to teach you," he replied, "but together we might dedicate ourselves to the study of science." He then asked why the house had been standing empty for so long.

The youth answered: "The owner of the house has gone to the country. We come from Shensi, and have taken the house for a short time. We only moved in a few days ago."

They chatted and joked together gaily, and the young man invited Kung to remain overnight, ordering a small boy to light a pan of charcoal.

Then he stepped rapidly into the rear room and soon returned saying: "My father has come."

As Kung rose an aged man with a long, white beard and eyebrows stepped into the room and said, greeting him: "You have already declared your willingness to instruct my son, and I am grateful for your kindness. But you must be strict with him and not treat him as a friend."

Then he had garments of silk, a fur cap, and shoes and socks of fur brought in, and begged Kung to change his clothes. Wine and food were then served. The cushions and covers of the tables and chairs were made of stuffs unknown to Kung, and their shimmering radiance blinded the eye. The aged man retired after a few beakers of wine, and then the youth showed Kung his essays. They were all written in the style of the old masters and not in the new-fangled eight-section form.

When he was asked about this, the youth said with a smile: "I am quite indifferent to winning success at the state examinations!" Then he turned to the small boy and said: "See whether the old gentleman has already

fallen asleep. If he has, you may quietly bring in little Hiang-Nu.”

The boy went off, and the youth took a lute from an embroidered case. At once a serving-maid entered, dressed in red, and surpassingly beautiful. The youth bade her sing “The Lament of the Beloved,” and her melting tones moved the heart. The third watch of the night had passed before they retired to sleep.

On the following morning all rose early and study began. The youth was exceptionally gifted. Whatever he had seen but once was graven in his memory. Hence he made surprising progress in the course of a few months. The old custom was followed of writing an essay every five days, and celebrating its completion with a little banquet. And at each banquet Hiang-Nu was sent for.

One evening Kung could not remove his glance from Hiang-Nu. The youth guessed his thoughts and said to him: “You are as yet unmarried. Early and late I keep thinking as to how I can provide you with a charming life companion. Hiang-Nu is the serving-maid of my father, so I cannot give her to you.”

Said Kung: “I am grateful to you for your friendly thought. But if the girl you have in mind is not just as beautiful as Hiang-Nu, then I would rather do without.”

The youth laughed: “You are indeed inexperienced if you think that Hiang-Nu is beautiful. Your wish is easily fulfilled.”

Thus half a year went by and the monotonous rainy season had just began. Then a swelling the size of a peach developed in young Kung’s breast, which increased over night until it was as large as a tea-cup. He lay on his couch groaning with pain, and unable to eat or to sleep. The youth was busy day and night nursing him, and even the old gentleman asked how he was getting along.

Then the youth said: “My little sister Giauna alone is able to cure this illness. Please send to grandmother, and have her brought here!”

The old gentleman was willing, and he sent off his boy.

The next day the boy came back with the news that Giauna would come, together with her aunt and her cousin A-Sung.

Not long after the youth led his sister into the room. She was not more than thirteen or fourteen years of age, enchantingly beautiful, and slender as a willow-tree. When the sick man saw her he forgot all his pain and his

spirits rose.

The youth said to his sister Giauna: "This is my best friend, whom I love as a brother! I beg of you, little sister, to cure him of his illness!"

The maiden blushed with confusion; then she stepped up to the sick-bed. While she was feeling his pulse, it seemed to him as though she brought the fragrance of orchards with her.

Said the maiden with a smile: "No wonder that this illness has befallen him. His heart beats far too stormily. His illness is serious but not incurable. Now the blood which has flowed has already gathered, so we will have to cut to cure."

With that she took her golden armlet from her arm and laid it on the aching place. She pressed it down very gently, and the swelling rose a full inch above the armlet so that it enclosed the entire swelling. Then she loosed a pen-knife with a blade as thin as paper from her silken girdle. With one hand she held the armlet, and with the other she took the knife and lightly passed it around the bottom of the ring. Black blood gushed forth and ran over mattress and bed. But young Kung was so enchanted by the presence of the beautiful Giauna that not only did he feel no pain, but his one fear was that the whole affair might end too soon, and that she would disappear from his sight. In a moment the diseased flesh had been cut away, and Giauna had fresh water brought and cleansed the wound. Then she took a small red pellet from her mouth, and laid it on the wound, and when she turned around in a circle, it seemed to Kung as though she drew out all the inflammation in steam and flames. Once more she turned in a circle, and he felt his wound itch and quiver, and when she turned for the third time, he was completely cured.

The maiden took the pellet into her mouth again and said: "Now all is well!" Then she hastened into the inner room. Young Kung leaped up in order to thank her.

True, he was now cured of his illness, but his thoughts continued to dwell on Giauna's pretty face. He neglected his books and sat lost in day-dreams.

His friend had noticed it and said to him: "I have at last succeeded, this very day, in finding an attractive life companion for you."

Kung asked who she might be.

“The daughter of my aunt, A-Sung. She is seventeen years of age, and anything but homely.”

“I am sure she is not as beautiful as Giauna,” thought Kung. Then he hummed the lines of a song to himself:

“Who once has seen the sea close by, All rivers shallow streams declares; Who o'er Wu's hill the clouds watched fly, Says nothing with that view compares.”

The youth smiled. “My little sister Giauna is still very young,” said he. “Besides, she is my father's only daughter, and he would not like to see her marry some one from afar. But my cousin A-Sung is not homely either. If you do not believe me, wait until they go walking in the garden, and then you may take a look at them without their knowing it.”

Kung posted himself at the open window on the look-out, and sure enough, he saw Giauna come along leading another girl by the hand, a girl so beautiful that there was none other like her. Giauna and she seemed to be sisters, only to be told apart by a slight difference in age.

Then young Kung was exceedingly happy and begged his friend to act for him in arranging the marriage, which the latter promised to do. The next day he came to Kung, and told him amid congratulations that everything was arranged. A special court was put in order for the young pair, and the wedding was celebrated. Young Kung felt as though he had married a fairy, and the two became very fond of each other.

One day Kung's friend came to him in a state of great excitement and said: “The owner of this house is coming back, and my father now wishes to return to Shensi. The time for us to part draws near, and I am very sad!”

Kung wished to accompany them, but his friend advised him to return to his own home.

Kung mentioned the difficulties in the way, but the youth replied: “That need not worry you, because I will accompany you.”

After a time the father came, together with A-Sung, and made Kung a present of a hundred ounces of gold. Then the youth took Kung and his wife by the hand, and told them to close their eyes. As soon as they did so off they went through the air like a storm-wind. All Kung could notice was that the gale roared about his ears.

When some time had passed the youth cried: "Now we have arrived!" Kung opened his eyes and saw his old home, and then he knew that his friend was not of human kind.

Gaily they knocked at the door of his home. His mother opened it and when she saw that he had brought along so charming a wife she was greatly pleased. Then Kung turned around to his friend, but the latter had already disappeared.

A-Sung served her mother-in-law with great devotion, and her beauty and virtue was celebrated far and near. Soon after young Kung gained the doctorate, and was appointed inspector of prisons in Shensi. He took his wife along with him, but his mother remained at home, since Shensi was too far for her to travel. And heaven gave A-Sung and Kung a little son.

But Kung became involved in a dispute with a traveling censor. The latter complained about Kung and he was dismissed from his post.

So it happened that one day he was idling about before the city, when he saw a handsome youth riding a black mule. When he looked more closely he saw that it was his old friend. They fell into each others' arms, laughing and weeping, and the youth led him to a village. In the midst of a thick grove of trees which threw a deep shade, stood a house whose upper stories rose to the skies. One could see at a glance that people of distinction lived there. Kung now inquired after sister Giauna, and was told that she had married. He remained over night and then went off to fetch his wife.

In the meantime Giauna arrived. She took A-Sung's little son in her arms and said: "Cousin, this is a little stranger in our family!"

Kung greeted her, and again thanked her for the kindness she had shown him in curing his illness.

She answered with a smile: "Since then you have become a distinguished man, and the wound has long since healed. Have you still not forgotten your pain?"

Then Giauna's husband arrived, and every one became acquainted. And after that they parted.

One day the youth came sadly to Kung and said: "We are threatened by a great misfortune to-day. I do not know whether you would be willing to save us!"

Kung did not know what it might be; but he gladly promised his aid. Then the youth called up the entire family and they bowed down in the outer court.

He began: "I will tell you the truth just as it is. We are foxes. This day we are threatened by the danger of thunder. If you care to save us, then there is a hope that we may manage to stay alive; if not, then take your child and go, so that you are not involved in our danger."

But Kung vowed that he would share life and death with them.

Then the youth begged him to stand in the door with a sword in his hand, and said: "Now when the thunder begins to roll you must stand there and never stir."

Suddenly dark clouds rose in the sky, and the heavens grew gloomy as if night were closing down. Kung looked about him, but the buildings had all disappeared, and behind him he could only see a high barrow, in which was a large cave whose interior was lost in darkness. In the midst of his fright he was surprised by a thunderbolt. A heavy rain poured down in streams, and a storm wind arose which rooted up the tallest trees. Everything glimmered before his eyes and his ears were deafened. But he held his sword in his hand, and stood as firm as a rock. Suddenly in the midst of black smoke and flashes of lightning, he saw a monster with a pointed beak and long claws, which was carrying off a human body. When he looked more closely he recognized by the dress that it was Giauna. He leaped up at the monster and struck at him with his sword, and at once Giauna fell to the ground. A tremendous crash of thunder shook the earth, and Kung fell down dead.

Then the tempest cleared away, and the blue sky appeared once more.

Giauna had regained consciousness, and when she saw Kung lying dead beside her she said amid sobs: "He died for my sake! Why should I continue to live?"

A-Sung also came out, and together they carried him into the cave. Giauna told A-Sung to hold his head while her brother opened his mouth. She herself took hold of his chin, and brought out her little red pellet. She pressed it against his lips with her own, and breathed into his lungs. Then the breath came back to his throat with a rattling noise, and in a short time he was himself once more.

So there was the whole family reunited again, and none of its members had come to harm. They gradually recovered from their fright, and were quite happy: when suddenly a small boy brought the news that Giauna's

husband and his whole family had been killed by the thunder. Giauna broke down, weeping, and the others tried to comfort her.

Finally Kung said: "It is not well to dwell too long amid the graves of the dead. Will you not come home with me?"

Thereupon they packed up their belongings and went with him. He assigned a deserted garden, which he carefully walled off, to his friend and his family as a dwelling-place. Only when Kung and A-Sung came to visit them was the bolt drawn. Then Giauna and her brother played chess, drank tea and chatted with them like members of the same family.

But Kung's little son had a somewhat pointed face, which resembled a fox's, and when he went along the street, the people would turn around and say: "There goes the fox-child!"

Note: "Not in the new-fangled eight-section form": Ba Gu Wen Dschang, i.e., essays in eight-section form, divided according to strict rules, were the customary theses in the governmental examinations in China up to the time of the great educational reform. To-day there is a general return to the style of the old masters, the free form of composition. "The danger of thunder": Three times the foxes must have escaped the mortal danger of thunder.

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