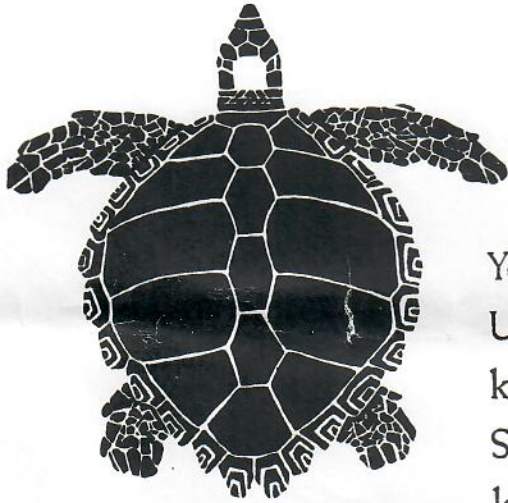


CHINESE FAIRY TALES
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THE TORTOISE PRINCE



Young Feng was too good-hearted. All his friends said so. Unfortunately, many of his friends took advantage of his kindness. They borrowed his money and never paid it back. Soon Feng had nothing left to lend. Indeed, he had nothing left at all.

One man, just one, tried to repay him. This was a poor fisherman. Since the fisherman had no money, he tried to pay his debt by sending Feng every tortoise he happened to catch in his net.

One day, the tortoise he sent was most unusual. It was very large and had a white mark on its head.

"I have never seen such a wonderful tortoise!" Feng said to himself. "It is as handsome as a work of art. It would be wrong to eat this rare creature," he thought. He gave the tortoise its freedom and did without supper that night.

One evening, months later, Feng was walking home along the river on a foot-path so narrow it could hold only one person at a time.

All of a sudden, he saw a dignified gentleman approaching, attended by four young servants.

"Can't you see I want to pass? Step down!" the gentleman demanded haughtily.

"I can't," replied Feng reasonably. "Your extreme rudeness won't let me."

The gentleman shouted furiously at his servants, "Seize this obstinate young man and beat him properly! Find out his name, and I shall file a complaint."

"Call back your servants sir, or I promise you, you will regret it," said Feng angrily. "I am not a dog, to be beaten at your pleasure. Feng is my name."

As soon as the gentleman heard the name of Feng his great fury turned into great joy. He knelt in the muddy path and bowed low, joyously crying, "You are the man who saved my life! I beg you to forgive me for what happened. Please do me the honor of coming with me and letting me explain."

Feng did not understand the gentleman's sudden change of heart. He forgave the rudeness but wanted no explanations. For he had no liking for changeable characters. But although he protested, the changeable gentleman took him firmly by the hand and led him quickly along, smilingly deaf to his objections.

Before long, they came to the gentleman's house, which Feng found very beautiful. It had broad, cool porches and restful, richly furnished rooms.

Finally, the unknown gentleman sat down and said, "Welcome, Feng. You are by far the most welcome of any guest I can imagine. I am the eighth Prince of Tiao River. I was coming back from a garden party on the western hill when we met just now. I was fleeing the ugly, illiterate snobs who posed in front of the beautiful flowers at this party. The rage they caused me exploded most wrongly on you. Do forgive me, I beg you."

Feng realized his host was a genie. Only a silly man takes offense at a genie's manners. Besides, the nice way the genie was treating him now put him at his ease. Feng decided to enjoy himself. Servants soon set a wonderful dinner before them. They ate and talked, and the time passed quickly.

At last, a bell sounded in the distance. The prince got up and took Feng by the arm. "You are good company," he said. "But I am sorry to say that we will have to leave each other for the bell has summoned me away. Allow me to give you something you may find useful. You will not be able to keep it forever, but I will not come to take it back until your every wish is fulfilled."

Smiling benevolently, he pinched Feng's arm with so mighty a pinch that



Feng cried out and tears sprang to his eyes. "There you are, dear friend, and now you may leave," said the prince. Then he saw Feng out with a bow of profound respect.

As he walked away, Feng took a look at his arm. Neat and clear as a tattoo, just where the prince had pinched him was a perfect thumb-sized image of a tortoise with a white mark on his head.

That was surprising, but only half as surprising as what happened when Feng looked down at the ground he stood upon. The earth had become as transparent as crystal to his eyes. And under about a foot of earth, at his feet, he could see a huge pearl.

Feng knelt and dug. After digging for awhile, he reached the pearl and found that it was real. Feng looked around him in wonderment. The earth no longer hid its treasures, but disclosed them plainly to his sight. Wherever he looked on the ground, he saw jewels and other precious objects.

Right then and there, he promised himself that he would put the prince's fine

arting gift to some sort of good use. Then he continued home in excellent spirits.

When Feng got back to his dilapidated old house, the first thing he saw was a large pile of silver buried beneath it. He dug it out, and was poor no more. Soon after, he heard that there was another rickety wreck of a house for sale. He went to look at it, and saw another pile of silver buried under the chimney. After he made this discovery, he bought the place at once.

In no time at all Feng became enormously rich. Jewels and precious stones of all colors and sizes filled the rooms of his many houses.

As he walked one day on the grounds of his summer house, Feng discovered a remarkable mirror which had a design in beaten gold and silver on the back of it. The glass in this mirror did not show the person who stood before it. Instead, on its clear surface it showed the image of whatever truly beautiful girl it had last reflected. The image remained until a still more beautiful girl passed before it.

Feng experimented a little and proved that the mirror really worked, even at a distance. It became the most precious of his possessions and he allowed no one to touch it.

One day, news came to Feng's village that the third daughter of Prince Su, the marvelously beautiful Lotus Crown, planned to visit a pool in the neighboring hills. The pool was famous for the quality of its spring water.

Hearing this news, Feng packed his magic mirror in a protective covering and left for the hills at once. When he came to the pool, he hid himself behind a rock above it, made himself comfortable, and sat down to wait.

The royal procession arrived. The porters, carrying the princess' canopied sedan chair, halted just below the rock behind which Feng was hidden. The curtains were drawn aside and in all her beauty, lighter than a feather, Lotus Crown stepped out.

For an instant the hidden mirror reflected her smiling face. Feng put the mirror back in its protective cover, and taking great care not to be seen, he returned home.

At home, he put the mirror on a small table. When he uncovered it, he gasped at the beauty of the face that smiled at him from the glass. The image was so true he half expected it to speak, and he half hoped the lowered eyes would lift to look into his.



With a sigh, Feng covered the mirror and hid it well. It would have been joy to gaze endlessly on that faultless face, but Feng was prudent. He allotted himself one hour a day before the mirror to gaze at the princess. At those times he made absolutely sure he was alone.

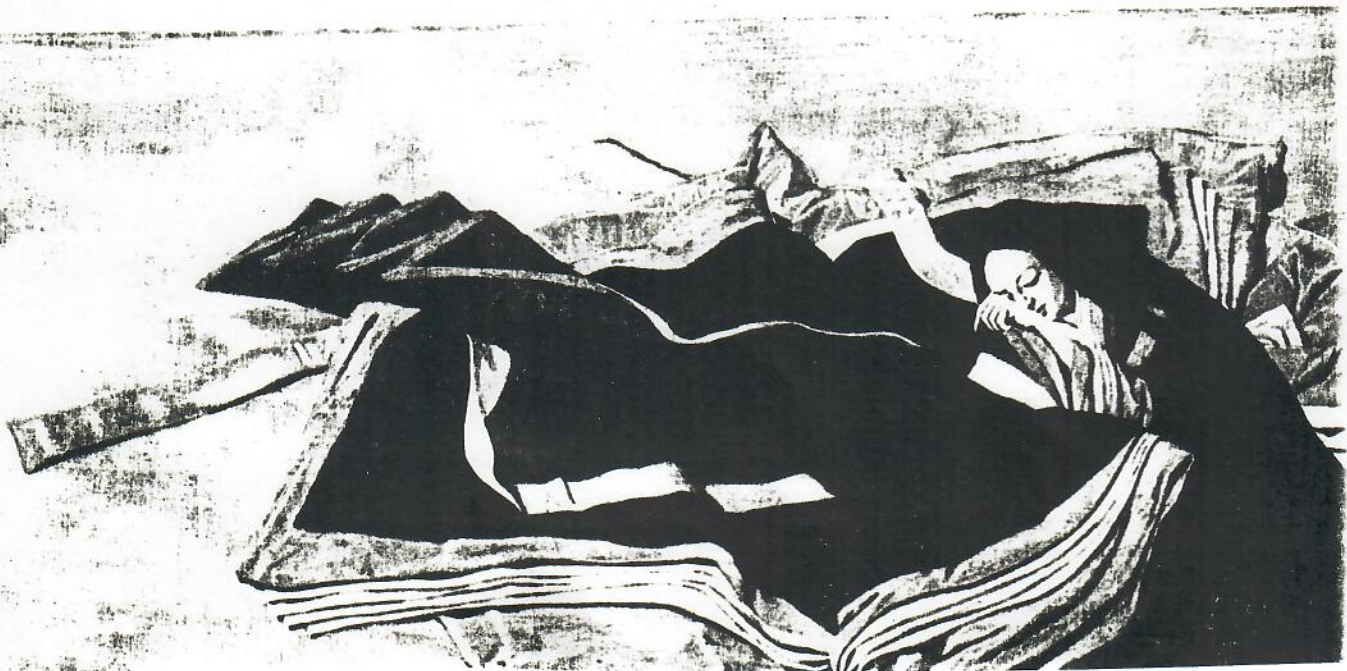
Yet somehow the word got around that young Feng had fallen utterly in love with the third daughter of Prince Su, Lotus Crown, whose portrait he kept hidden in his room. Finally, the rumor reached the prince's palace and finally, the prince himself heard about it and flew into a rage. He ordered the mirror to be taken and Feng to be brought before him.

"You have dared to look upon my daughter. You are too bold. Tomorrow at dawn your guilty head will be cut off," announced the prince.

Feng replied with dignified calm, "I am guilty. I cannot undo my bold crime, or even regret it. You cannot pardon it. Yet, my lord, consider one other thing: I have a rare gift. I can find the most precious things on earth, no matter how or where they lie hidden. Should you cut off my head, a process of no profit to anyone, the gift would be lost. Spare me, and my gift will provide infinite riches for your pleasure."

"Nonsense," said the prince. "I don't believe one word. You die at dawn."

Feng was hustled off to jail to await his death. Prince Su went to his rooms to recover from his rage. There he found his third daughter, Lotus Crown, waiting



for him. She was the favorite of all his children, and he had no wish to hurt her.

Softly she said, "Father, I have been seen by this Feng. Killing him fifty times won't change that fact. Only one thing can restore my honor. I must marry Feng."

"Never. I forbid it," Prince Su replied.

"Very well. Then honor demands that I die. I shall starve myself," said the beautiful princess in tears.

Prince Su was sure that this was only an idle threat. But just in case she had meant it, he sent word that Feng's execution would be postponed for another three days.

Once an hour during those days he sent for news of his daughter. The news was always the same; she would not eat.

Finally, more enraged than ever, the prince ordered that Feng the prisoner become Feng the free. And he announced the engagement of Feng and Lotus Crown.

As soon as he was set free, Feng ran home to prepare Princess Lotus Crown's engagement presents. A thousand richly uniformed servants, each bearing a great golden vase packed with precious gems, presented themselves and their priceless burdens to Prince Su, as a token of Feng's respect.

Su had to admit that his prospective son-in-law had good qualities as well as bad. He scarcely regretted having let Feng keep his head.

Blessed with happiness, Feng and his royal bride set up housekeeping in a magnificent pavilion. In the place of honor stood the famous mirror, which from then on faithfully reflected the radiant image of Lotus Crown, the mistress of the house.

Feng, alone in his room one evening, turned to see the eighth Prince of Tiao River come in. Bowing, Feng welcomed him and invited him to sit down. The river prince said, "I regret that once more I have very little time. I have come for the gift I gave you. You do not need it, since you will never lack for anything again."

Smiling, he pinched Feng's arm with a mighty pinch. Feng's eyes blurred with pain. By the time he could see again, Prince Tiao had gone. He drew up his silken sleeve, and saw that the mark of the tortoise had disappeared too.

Anxious to thank Prince Tiao again, Feng hurried out. There was no one in sight. There was only a very large tortoise. It trundled patiently down to the river, plunged in, and was seen no more.