

The Warrior Prince and the Gentle Prince

Once, in the fair islands by the sea where the sun rises, the Emperor of these lands ruled over a mighty Empire. The Emperor was revered by all in his lands, he had many soldiers and samurai sworn to him, the lands were fertile and rich and poets sang his praises.

The Emperor's heir was also his only child, a daughter, the Princess Moonflower, who was to rule after him. She was the flower of the court, a delight to all and a joy to her father. But the Princess was not only fair of face, she was wise beyond her years, her tutors and teachers had been carefully chosen by her father. Indeed, the Princess had observed his council from the age of ten.

But as the time drew near for his daughter to come of age, the Emperor knew that she should marry. And not just any man, one that would be willing to advise and protect her but not usurp her right to rule.

A great tournament was then declared, with eligible young men coming from all over the land and beyond to try for the Princess's hand. They were tested not only in battle and with the sword, but their intelligence, education and wit. The contest lasted for two days and on the third, two final contestants were declared.

The first was a Warrior Prince, he came from a land constantly at war and lead many armies to victory. He was strong, handsome and hale.

The second was a Gentle Prince, his land was a land of peace and tranquillity famous for poetry and art. Yet they did not entirely neglect the art of war.

The two princes bowed to the Emperor. The Emperor declared that it was his daughter that would set the final tasks. First, the Princess declared that the two would defeat the greatest swordsman in the land in single combat. The swordsman stepped up and the Warrior Prince drew his sword and engaged him at once, attacking him with mighty blows until the swordsman fell to the ground.

"Ha!" Declared the Warrior Prince, waving his sword about. "I guess I am the greatest swordsman now!"

"Then I will challenge you!" Declared the Gentle Prince, entering the ring.

The Warrior Prince laughed, thinking he would play with the Gentle Prince before defeating him. But before the Warrior Prince could blink, the Gentle Prince had drawn his sword and disarmed him.

The Princess then asked for them to bring her a treasure beyond compare.

The Warrior Prince had one of the gifts for her fetched, a chest of pure gold and flawless jewels that he heaped at her feet. "This I will give you and more!"

The Gentle Prince held but a simple farmer's wooden bucket which he gently placed upon the ground. "The treasure of any land is the good soil itself, tilled by the people to raise the crops that fill every rice bowl."

For the last task, the Princess asked to hear the sweetest song.

The Warrior Prince trapped a nightingale and brought it before the Princess. "Not as sweet as you!" It sang sweetly but sorrowfully as it beat its wings against the cage that held it.

The Gentle Prince brought out his shamisen, and strumming the plectrum against the strings, began to play a melody. The song was so pure and true, but as it continued it was accompanied by many birds who were drawn to its beauty.

When the song was ended and the last bird was silent, the Princess nodded to her father.

He called forward the Gentle Prince and declared he had won and that the two were to be married at once.

The two were married and had many children that brought joy and beauty to the land. And when the Emperor retired, the Princess succeeded him and there never was a more splendid Empress in all of history