

‘Rappaccini's Daughter’ by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Part 2

Now, the Special English program, AMERICAN STORIES.

Today, we complete the story "Rappaccini's Daughter." It was written by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Here is Kay Gallant with the second and final part of "Rappaccini's Daughter."

Many years ago, a young man named Giovanni Guasconti left his home in Naples to study in northern Italy. He took a room in an old house next to a magnificent garden filled with strange flowers and other plants.

The garden belonged to a doctor, Giacomo Rappaccini. He lived with his daughter, Beatrice, in a small brown house in the garden. From a window of his room, Giovanni had seen that Rappaccini's daughter was very beautiful. But everyone in Padua was afraid of her father.

Pietro Baglioni, a professor at the university, warned Giovanni about the mysterious Doctor Rappaccini. "He is a great scientist," Professor Baglioni told the young man. "But he is also dangerous. Rappaccini cares more about science than he does about people. He has created many terrible poisons from the plants in his garden."

One day, Giovanni found a secret entrance to Rappaccini's garden. He went in. The plants all seemed wild and unnatural. Giovanni realized that Rappaccini must have created these strange and terrible flowers through his experiments.

Suddenly, Rappaccini's daughter came into the garden. She moved quickly among the flowers until she reached him. Giovanni apologized for coming into the garden without an invitation. But Beatrice smiled at him and made him feel welcome.

"I see you love flowers," she said. "And so you have come to take a closer look at my father's rare collection."

While she spoke, Giovanni noticed a perfume in the air around her. He wasn't sure if this wonderful smell came from the flowers or from her breath.

She asked him about his home and his family. She told him she had spent her life in this garden. Giovanni felt as if he were talking to a very small child. Her spirit sparkled like clear water.

They walked slowly through the garden as they talked. At last they reached a beautiful plant that was covered with large purple flowers. He realized that the perfume from those flowers was like the perfume of Beatrice’s breath, but much stronger.

The young man reached out to break off one of the purple flowers. But Beatrice gave a scream that went through his heart like a knife. She caught his hand and pulled it away from the plant with all her strength.

“Don’t ever touch those flowers!” she cried. “They will take your life!” Hiding her face, she ran into the house. Then, Giovanni saw Doctor Rappaccini standing in the garden.

That night, Giovanni could not stop thinking about how sweet and beautiful Beatrice was. Finally, he fell asleep. But when the morning came, he woke up in great pain. He felt as if one of his hands was on fire. It was the hand that Beatrice had grabbed in hers when he reached for one of the purple flowers.

Giovanni looked down at his hand. There was a purple mark on it that looked like four small fingers and a little thumb. But because his heart was full of Beatrice, Giovanni forgot about the pain in his hand.

He began to meet her in the garden every day. At last, she told him that she loved him. But she would never let him kiss her or even hold her hand.

One morning, several weeks later, Professor Baglioni visited Giovanni. “I was worried about you,” the older man said. “You have not come to your classes at the university for more than a month. Is something wrong?”

Giovanni was not pleased to see his old friend. “No, nothing is wrong. I am fine, thank you.” He wanted Professor Baglioni to leave. But the old man took off his hat and sat down.

“My dear Giovanni,” he said. “You must stay away from Rappaccini and his daughter. Her father has given her poison from the time she was a baby. The poison is in her blood and on her breath. If Rappaccini did this to his own daughter, what is he planning to do to you?”

Giovanni covered his face with his hands. “Oh my God!” he cried. “Don’t worry, the old man continued. “It is not too late to save you. And we may succeed in helping Beatrice, too. Do you see this little silver bottle? It holds a medicine that will destroy even the most powerful poison. Give it to your

Beatrice to drink.”

Professor Baglioni put the little bottle on the table and left Giovanni’s room. The young man wanted to believe that Beatrice was a sweet and innocent girl. And yet, Professor Baglioni’s words had put doubts in his heart.

It was nearly time for his daily meeting with Beatrice. As Giovanni combed his hair, he looked at himself in a mirror near his bed. He could not help noticing how handsome he was. His eyes looked particularly bright. And his face had a healthy warm glow.

He said to himself, “At least her poison has not gotten into my body yet.” As he spoke he happened to look at some flowers he had just bought that morning. A shock of horror went through his body.

The flowers were turning brown! Giovanni’s face became very white as he stared at himself in the mirror.

Then he noticed a spider crawling near his window. He bent over the insect and blew a breath of air at it. The spider trembled, and fell dead. “I am cursed,” Giovanni whispered to himself. “My own breath is poison.”

At that moment, a rich, sweet voice came floating up from the garden. “Giovanni! You are late. Come down.”

“You are a monster!” Giovanni shouted as soon as he reached her. “And with your poison you have made me into a monster, too. I am a prisoner of this garden.”

“Giovanni!” Beatrice cried, looking at him with her large bright eyes. “Why are you saying these terrible things? It is true that I can never leave this garden. But you are free to go wherever you wish.”

Giovanni looked at her with hate in his eyes. “Don’t pretend that you don’t know what you have done to me.”

A group of insects had flown into the garden. They came toward Giovanni and flew around his head. He blew his breath at them. The insects fell to the ground, dead.

Beatrice screamed. “I see it! I see it! My father’s science has done this to us. Believe me, Giovanni, I did not ask him to do this to you. I only wanted to love you.”

Giovanni's anger changed to sadness. Then, he remembered the medicine that Professor Baglioni had given him. Perhaps the medicine would destroy the poison in their bodies and help them to become normal again.

"Dear Beatrice," he said, "our fate is not so terrible." He showed her the little silver bottle and told her what the medicine inside it might do. "I will drink first," she said. "You must wait to see what happens to me before you drink it."

She put Baglioni's medicine to her lips and took a small sip. At the same moment, Rappaccini came out of his house and walked slowly toward the two young people. He spread his hands out to them as if he were giving them a blessing.

"My daughter," he said, "you are no longer alone in the world. Give Giovanni one of the purple flowers from your favorite plant. It will not hurt him now. My science and your love have made him different from ordinary men."

"My father," Beatrice said weakly, "why did you do this terrible thing to your own child?"

Rappaccini looked surprised. "What do you mean, my daughter?" he asked. "You have power no other woman has. You can defeat your strongest enemy with only your breath. Would you rather be a weak woman?"

"I want to be loved, not feared," Beatrice replied. "But now, it does not matter. I am leaving you, father. I am going where the poison you have given me will do no harm. Good bye to you, Giovanni."

Beatrice dropped to the ground. She died at the feet of her father and Giovanni. The poison had been too much a part of the young woman. The medicine that destroyed the poison, destroyed her, as well.

You have just heard the story "Rappaccini's Daughter." It was written by Nathaniel Hawthorne and adapted for Special English by Dona de Sanctis. Your storyteller was Kay Gallant. This is Shep O'Neal.