

BLUE FAIRY BOOK EDITED BY Andrew Lang THE BRONZE RING

On upon a time in a certain country there lived a king whose palace was surrounded by a spacious garden. But, though the gardeners were many and the soil was good, this garden yielded neither flowers nor fruit, not even grass or shady trees. The king was in despair about it, when a wise old man said to him: "Your gardeners do not understand their business; but what can you expect of men whose fathers were cobblers and carpenters? How should they have learned to cultivate your garden?" "You are quite right," cried the king. "Therefore," continued the old man, "you should send for a gardener whose father and grandfather have been gardeners before him, and very soon your garden will be full of green grass and gay flowers, and you will enjoy its delicious fruit." So the king sent messengers to every town, village, and hamlet in his dominions, to look for a gardener whose forefathers had been gardeners also, and after forty days one was found. "Come with us and be gardener to the king," they said to him. "How can I go to the king," said the gardener, "a poor wretch like me?" "That is of no consequence," they answered. "Here are new clothes for you and your family." "But I owe money to several people." "We will pay your debts," they said. So the gardener allowed himself to be persuaded, and went away with his messengers, taking his wife and his son with him; and the king, delighted to have found a real gardener, entrusted him with the care of his garden. The man found no difficulty in making the royal garden produce flowers and fruit, and at the end of a year the park was not like the same place, and the king showered gifts upon his new servant. The gardener, as you have heard already, had a son, who was a very handsome young man, with most agreeable manners, and every day he carried the best fruit of the garden to the king, and all the prettiest flowers to his daughter. Now this princess was wonderfully pretty and was just sixteen years old, and the king was beginning to think it was time that she should be married. "My dear child," said he, "you are of an age to take a husband, therefore I am thinking of marrying you to the son of my prime minister. Father," replied the Princess, "I will never marry the son of the minister." "Why not?" asked the king. "Because I love the gardener's son," answered the Princess. On hearing this the king was at first very angry, and then he wept and sighed, and declared that such a husband was not worthy of his daughter; but the young Princess was not to be turned from her resolution to marry the gardener's son. Then the king consulted his ministers. "This is what you must do," they said. "To get rid of the gardener you must send both suitors to a very distant country, and the one who returns first shall marry your daughter." The king followed this advice, and the minister's son was presented with a splendid horse and a purse full of gold pieces, while the gardener's son had only an old lame horse and a purse full of copper money, and every one thought he would never come back from his journey. The day before they started the Princess met her lover and said to him: "Be brave, and remember always that I love you. Take this purse full of jewels and make the best use you can of them for love of me, and come back quickly and demand my hand." The two suitors left the town together, but the minister's son went off at a gallop on his good horse, and very soon was lost to sight behind the most distant hills. He traveled on for some days, and presently reached a fountain beside which an old woman all in rags sat upon a stone. "Good-day to you, young traveler," said she. But the minister's son made no reply. "Have pity upon me, traveler," she said again. "I am dying of hunger, as you see, and three days have I been here and no one has given me anything." "Let me alone, old witch," cried the young man; "I can do nothing for you," and so saying he went on his way. That same evening the gardener's son rode up to the fountain upon his lame gray horse. "Good-day to you, young traveler," said the beggar-woman. "Good-day, good woman," answered he. "Young traveler, have pity upon me." "Take my purse, good woman," said he, "and mount behind me, for your legs can't be very strong." The old woman didn't wait to be asked twice, but mounted behind him, and in this style they reached the chief city of a powerful kingdom. The minister's son was lodged in a grand inn, the gardener's son and the old woman dismounted at the inn for their baggage. The next day the gardener's son heard a great noise in the street, and the king's heralds passed, blowing all kinds of instruments, and crying: "The king, our master, is old and infirm. He will give a great reward to whoever will cure him and give him back the strength of his youth." Then the old beggar-woman said to her benefactor: "This is what you must do to obtain the reward which the king promises. Go out of the town by the south gate, and there you will find three little dogs of different colors: the first will be white, the second black, and the third red. You must kill them and then burn them separately, and gather up the ashes. Put the ashes of each dog into a bag of its own color, then go before the door of the palace and cry out, 'A celebrated physician has come from Janina in Albania. He alone can cure the king and give him back the strength of his youth.' The king's physicians will say, 'This is an impostor, and not a learned man,' and they will make all sorts of difficulties, but you will overcome them all at last, and will present yourself before the sick king. You must then demand as much wood as three mules can carry, and a great cauldron, and must shut yourself up in a room with the Sultan, and when the cauldron boils you must throw him into it, and thence leave him until his flesh is completely separated from his bones. Then arrange the bones in their proper places, and throw over them the ashes out of the three bags. The king will come back to life, and will be just as he was when he was twenty years old. For your reward you must demand the bronze ring which has the power to grant you everything you desire. Go, my son, and do not forget any of my instructions." The young man followed the old beggar-woman's directions. On going out of the town he found the white, red, and black dogs, and killed and skinned them, gathering the ashes in three bags. Then he ran to the palace and cried: "A celebrated physician has just come from Janina in Albania. He alone can cure the king and give him back the strength of his youth." The king's physicians at first laughed at the unknown wayfarer, but the Sultan ordered that the stranger should be admitted. They brought the cauldron and the loads of wood, and very soon the king was boiling away. Toward mid-day the gardener's son arranged the bones in their places, and he had hardly scattered the ashes over them than half his treasures? "No," said the gardener's son. "My daughter's hand?" "No." "Take half my kingdom." "No. Give me only the half, you shall have it." And he gave it to him. The gardener's son went back to say good-bye to the old beggar-woman; then he sailed of brocade: let the crew consist of twelve young men of noble appearance, dressed like kings. St. Nicholas will be at the helm in every particular the description given by the gardener's son, and, stepping on board, he continued his journey. The gardener who had spent all his money and was reduced to the disagreeable employment of a carrier of dust and rubbish. The gardener's son said to him: "What is your name, what is your family, and from what country do you come?" "I am the son of the prime minister," he answered. "I am willing to help you. I will give you a ship to take you back to your own country upon one condition." "What condition?" "The gardener's son made a sign to his slaves, who completely undressed the new arrival. "Now, young man," said the rich stranger, "I am going to give you a vessel which will take you back to your own country." And, as he said, he painted black, let the sails be in rags, and the sailors infirm and sickly. One shall have lost a leg, another an arm, the third an eye, and the fourth a nose. The minister's son embarked in this old vessel, and thanks to favorable winds, at length reached his own country. He was the first to arrive, and he was the first to be received by his father and mother, and he was the first to be married to the king's daughter. The king now fulfilled his promise, and gave the princess in marriage. So they at once began to prepare for the wedding feast. The king happened at that moment to be at the palace window. "What will you take for your reward?" he asked. "I shall be charmed to see you," he answered. "What do you desire?" "I desire the bronze ring which I may continue my journey. Let the hull be of fine gold, the masts of silver, the sails of brocade, let the crew consist of twelve young men of noble appearance, dressed like kings. St. Nicholas will be at the helm in every particular the description given by the gardener's son, and, stepping on board, he continued his journey. The gardener who had spent all his money and was reduced to the disagreeable employment of a carrier of dust and rubbish. The gardener's son said to him: "What is your name, what is your family, and from what country do you come?" "I am the son of the prime minister," he answered. "I am willing to help you. 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