

Baring Maurice

The Blue Rose Fairy Book



Maurice Baring

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NOTE

One of these stories, "The Glass Mender," appeared first in *The English Review*, and six of the shorter stories in *The Morning Post*. I wish to thank the editors and proprietors concerned for their kindness in letting me republish them. The rest of the stories are new.

M. B.

THE GLASS MENDER

Once upon a time there lived a King and a Queen who had one daughter called Rainbow. When she was christened, the people of the city were gathered together outside the cathedral, and amongst them was an old gipsy woman. The gipsy wanted to go inside the cathedral, but the Beadle would not let her, because he said there was no room. When the ceremony was over, and the King and Queen walked out, followed by the Head Nurse who carried the baby, the gipsy called out to them:

"Your daughter will be very beautiful, and as happy as the day is long, until she sees the Spring!" And then she disappeared in the crowd.

The King and the Queen took counsel together and the King said: "That gipsy was evidently a fairy, and what she said bodes no good."

"Yes," said the Queen, "there is only one thing to be done: Rainbow must never see the Spring, nor even hear that there is such a thing."

So an order was issued to the whole city, that if any one should say the word "Spring" in the presence of Princess Rainbow he would have his head cut off. Moreover, it was settled that the Princess should never be allowed to go outside the palace, and during the springtime she should be kept entirely indoors.

The King and the Queen lived in a city which was on the top of a hill, and had a wall round it, and the King's palace was in the middle of it. In the springtime Rainbow was taken to a high tower which looked on to the little round city, and from her window you could see the spires of the churches, the ramparts, and the broad green plain beyond. But a curtain made of canvas was fastened outside Rainbow's window, so that she could see nothing, and she was not allowed to go outside her tower until the springtime was over.

Rainbow grew up into a most beautiful Princess, with grey eyes and fair hair, and until she was sixteen all went well, and nothing happened to interfere with her happiness.

It was on her sixteenth birthday, which was in April, and she was sitting alone in her room, looking at her birthday presents, when she began to wonder for the first time why she was shut up in her tower during three months of the year, and why a curtain was placed outside her window, so that she could see nothing outside. Her mother and her nurse had told her that this was done so that she might not fall ill, and she had always believed it; but on that day, for the first time, she began to wonder whether there might be any other reason as well. It was a lovely Spring day, and the sun shone through the canvas curtain which was stretched outside Rainbow's open window; a breeze came into her room from the outside world, and Rainbow felt a great longing to tear aside the curtain and to see what was happening out of doors.

At that very moment, a sound came into her room from the city: it was the sound of two or three notes played on some small reed or pipe, unlike those of any of the musical instruments she had heard in the palace, more tuneful and more artless and more gay. As she heard the few reedy notes of this little tune, she felt something which she had never known before. The whole room seemed to be full of a new sunshine, and she smelt the fragrance of the grass; she heard the blackbird whistling, and the lark singing; she saw the apple orchards in blossom, the violets peeping from under the leaves, the hedges covered with primroses, the daffodils fluttering in the wind, the fern uncrumpling her new leaves, the green slopes starred with crocuses; fields of buttercups and marigolds; forests paved with bluebells; lilac bushes; the trailing gold of the laburnums; and the sharp green of the awakening beech-trees; and she heard the cuckoo's note, and a thousand other unknown sounds of meadow, wood, and stream; and before her passed the whole pageant of the Spring, with its joyous music and its thousand and one sights.

The vision disappeared and she cried out: "Let me go into the world and let me taste and see this wonderful new thing!"

Rainbow said nothing about her vision, either to her parents or to her nurses, but she resolved to steal out of the palace as soon as she could, and to see in the world what her vision had shown her; but that very evening she fell ill, and she was obliged to go to bed. The next day she was no better, and a week passed and she was just as ill as ever. All the wisest physicians of the land examined her, but not one of them could say what was the matter with her; some of them prescribed medicines, and others strange things to eat and drink; but none of them did her the least good. The months went by, and Rainbow was still lying in bed, suffering from a strange malady which nobody could even find a name for. When the Spring was past, Rainbow was borne on a couch into the garden of the palace; but she got no better.

At last the Queen sent for a Wise Woman who lived in a wood near the city, and asked her advice. The Wise Woman was told Rainbow's history and what the gipsy had said, and after she had looked at Rainbow and spoken to her, she said to the Queen:

"I understand quite well what has happened. Your daughter has seen the Spring."

"But that's impossible," said the Queen, "for during the whole of the Spring months she has never left her room."

"Somehow or other the Spring has reached her," said the old woman, and then she asked Rainbow some more questions, and the end of this was that Rainbow told her about the tune she had heard on her birthday, and the vision she had seen.

"I knew it," said the old woman, "she heard somebody playing the Spring's own tune, and she won't get well until she hears it again, and even then her troubles will be far from ended." So saying the old woman went away.

The King at once sent for the court musicians and told them to play the Spring's Song. They fiddled, and they blew upon every kind of pipe and flute; they beat the cymbals and struck the harp; but none of these tunes kindled the slightest interest in Rainbow or roused her from her listlessness. The King then issued a proclamation saying that whoever should play the song that cured Rainbow would receive any reward he should ask for, and even, if he wished it, his daughter's hand.

The news was spread far and wide, and people came from the four corners of the world to play to the Princess.

First of all a lad came from the northern country, where he had slain a huge dragon in single combat, and he said that if any one knew the Song of Spring he did, for the birds themselves had taught it him; and when he was shown into the Princess's room he blew a blast on his horn, so strong that the rafters trembled, and so sweet that the palace seemed to be full of the scent of the northern forests. But Rainbow paid no heed, and the lad went his way.

Then an uncouth minstrel came from Greece; he had furry ears and a pointed beard, and he played on a double pipe and he said: "I know the Song of Spring if any one knows it, for the bees taught it me." He breathed on his pipe and the whole room seemed to be full of the smell of thyme, the murmur of reeds, and the drone of bees. But Rainbow paid no heed to him, and the uncouth minstrel went his way.

Then there came a man who carried a lyre. His face was beautiful and sad, and he said: "I know the Song of Spring if any one knows it, for I heard it played in the happy fields." And he struck his lyre and sang a song which was so lovely and so plaintive that the horses neighed in their stalls, the dogs came to listen, and the trees of the garden bent over the palace windows, and the King and the Queen and all the courtiers wept: but Rainbow paid no heed, and the man with the lyre went his way.

Then came a knight from over the sea, from the West Country; and he was the most splendid knight ever seen, and he carried neither harp nor pipe, and he said: "I know the Song of Spring if any one knows it, for I learnt it in the forests of Tintagel: " and he sang the song that only those who dwell in the forests of the West know, and it was a song of love. But Rainbow paid no heed, and the knight went his way.

Then Prince Charming came from the Golden Isles and said: "I know the Song of Spring if any one knows it, for my fairy-godmother gave me a flute, and when I play on it the elves dance round me in a ring": and he played a tune on his flute, and the lights and rainbows of the golden islands seemed to twinkle in the room. But Rainbow paid no heed, so Prince Charming went his way.

Then there came a Prince who was a changeling and who had been brought up in Fairyland itself, and he said: "I know the Song of Spring if any one knows it, for Proserpine, the Queen of the Fairies, herself taught me the song she heard in the Vales of Enna, when she was picking flowers in the Spring." And he sang of the Sicilian fields, a song of the swallow and the corn; and the song was like a vision, and the room seemed to be full of the sound of the southern seas; but Rainbow paid no heed, and the changeling went his way.

Then Prince Apollo himself came from Italy with his fiddle, and he said: "If I do not know the Song of Spring, who can know it? For my music excels that of all mortal men."

Prince Apollo struck up a tune on his fiddle and the room was filled with a glory; but Rainbow paid no heed, and Prince Apollo went away in a rage, saying that the Princess had no ear.

After this people gave up the quest, for they said: "If all these great people fail, how should we succeed?" Now it happened one day, when the springtime came round again, that two tumblers were playing at ball in the Princess's room to try and amuse her, and one of them in throwing, threw the ball and broke the pane of her casement; so a glass mender was sent for to mend the window, and there happened to be one that day just outside the palace.

The glass mender was a youth, and his eyes were blue and his cheeks fresh, and as he strode up the staircase to the Princess's room, he whistled on a small glass pipe the tune that glass menders have always whistled ever since the beginning of the world. Directly Rainbow heard this sound, she leaped from her bed and cried out:

"That is it! I hear it, the Song of Spring!" And as the glass mender came into the room with his basket and his tools, she said: "At last you've come! You've cured me, and I am now quite well again."

There was no doubt about it. Rainbow from that moment was cured, and the glass mender went to the King and claimed his reward.

At first the King was vexed that his daughter should have to wed a humble glass mender, but he did not dare play any tricks with his daughter's life after what had happened, for fear she should fall ill again; and besides, Rainbow was determined to marry him, and as he was so young, so handsome, and so well-spoken, the King told the Queen that he was very likely a Prince in disguise.

But the glass mender made two conditions about his marriage: the first was that he was to continue to be a wandering glass mender who earned his living by going from city to city, and from village to village, mending glass, and the second was that Rainbow was never to ask him where he came from nor who were his parents, and that she should call him Blue Eyes, nor ever ask him whether he had another name.

This convinced the King that Blue Eyes was a Prince in disguise, and the conditions were readily agreed to, and Rainbow and Blue Eyes were married without further delay. The King gave them each a white pony for a wedding present and they started off on their travels.

They rode through the fields and the woods, from village to village, sleeping now in a house and now out of doors, and for the first time in her life Rainbow tasted and saw the Spring; and no words can tell how happy they were: all day long Blue Eyes played a tune on his glass pipe, and he showed Rainbow the haunts of the birds and the beasts; and whenever they came to a village it was as though they brought the sunshine of the morning with them, for as soon as any one looked at Blue Eyes, they could not help being happy, and when he played on his pipe people danced for joy. They wandered over the wide world, and they saw every kind of country and city, and wherever they went smiling faces met them and they made sad people happy, and happy people happier still.

When they were in the woods or meadows the birds and beasts seemed to know Blue Eyes, and he talked with them just as if they were real people; and the most savage beasts – wolves and bears

and wild boars – were as tame as lap-dogs when he spoke to them; and the nightingales used to perch on Blue Eyes' shoulder in the evening, and sing, as he rode with Rainbow through the forest; the bees and butterflies used to fly in front of them and show them the way.

The years went by and they had a little son who was called Blue Boy, who grew up just like his father, and talked with the birds and beasts directly he could speak, and they were all three of them together as happy as the day is long.

One Spring evening they arrived rather late in a wood, and after they had made a fire and cooked their supper, Rainbow and Blue Boy went to sleep, and Blue Eyes sat by the fire for he said he wasn't sleepy.

After Rainbow had been sleeping for a few hours she woke up with a start. The moon had risen and the camp-fire had not yet gone out, but the ashes were smouldering and there by the fire sat Blue Eyes. Rainbow could see him distinctly, but he seemed to her to look different from usual; strange, beautiful, and more like a fairy Prince than a glass mender. Sitting with him by the fire was a lovely maiden with roses in her hair and some ears of wheat in her hand, and a silver sickle hanging from her girdle. They were talking together. Rainbow was so surprised that she uttered a cry, and immediately the beautiful maiden vanished into the wood. Blue Eyes at once went to Rainbow, but she turned over on her side and pretended to be asleep.

The next day Blue Eyes said nothing about the strange maiden, and Rainbow began to be jealous and sad. She tried not to think of it, but she could not get rid of the thought that perhaps Blue Eyes loved somebody else. The next evening they again camped out in the wood, and Rainbow said she was tired and lay down to sleep early; but she only pretended to go to sleep, and she was really wide awake.

As soon as Blue Eyes thought that Rainbow was asleep, he blew a note on his glass pipe, and once more the strange maiden came out of the wood, and she and Blue Eyes talked together in a whisper, and once more Blue Eyes seemed to look quite different, and not at all like a glass mender, only, as it was dark that night, Rainbow could not see him distinctly.

The next morning Blue Eyes again said nothing about the strange maiden, and Rainbow was sadder than ever. If Blue Eyes would only explain, she said to herself, everything would be all right. So as they were riding through the wood, Rainbow said to him:

"I saw you in the wood last night talking to a strange maiden; and, Blue Eyes, you looked different. I am sure now that you are not a glass mender; and now that I have seen you talking to that strange maiden, I shall have no peace until you tell me who you are and who she is."

"Alas, alas, alas!" said Blue Eyes. "Oh; Rainbow, why could you not trust me? I must tell you now, whether I wish it or no, but you have destroyed our happiness, and I shall have to leave you. My name is Spring, and I was talking to my sister Summer; and now I shall have to leave you, for I can only take a mortal shape as long as nobody knows who I am."

Then Rainbow wept bitterly, and said:

"Do you mean you must leave me for ever, and that I shall never see you again?"

"There is one hope left," said Blue Eyes. "We shall meet again if you are able to find me. You will have to search all over the world, and you will not find me until you recognise my look and my voice in the speech or the look of a human being; and if you fail to recognise it, when it is there, you will never find me at all."

"And when I recognise you either in the speech or the look of a human being," said Rainbow, "what must I do then?"

"Then," said Blue Eyes, "you must say this:

'Blue Eyes, Blue Eyes, come back to me,
Over the hills and over the sea;
Brother of Summer, husband and friend,
Come and stay till the world shall end.'

"But what will happen," asked Rainbow, "if I make a mistake and say the rhyme to some one who seems to have your look and your speech, when really they are not there?"

"If you make a mistake," said Blue Eyes, "you will never see me again."

Rainbow again began to weep bitterly. She implored Blue Eyes to forgive her, but she no longer begged him to stay, for she knew it was useless; and Blue Eyes kissed her and Blue Boy, and when he had said good-bye, he leapt on to his pony and galloped off into the wood. As he galloped away his appearance changed; his glass mender's clothes fell away from him; instead of his blue cap, there was a crown of dew on his head, and he was clothed with the petals of snowdrops and cowslips; he wore a rainbow for a scarf, which fluttered in the wind; his pony changed into a white horse with silver wings; in his hand he carried a large wand of almond blossom, and a starling perched on his wrist. And as he galloped through the wood, the hoofs of his steed left behind them a trail of twinkling anemones. Thus he galloped on until he disappeared into the heart of the forest, and Rainbow was left alone with Blue Boy.

After she had had a long cry she dried her eyes and began at once to look for Blue Eyes. She wandered on through the wood with Blue Boy until they came to a hermit's cave. The hermit lived there all the year round, and his only companions were the birds and the beasts of the forest, and Rainbow thought if she talked to him she would perhaps hear the voice or see the look of Blue Eyes. But when she spoke to him she saw that he had forgotten what human beings were like, and he gave Rainbow and Blue Boy some bread and milk just as though they were birds. Then he opened his big book and began reading in it, and no longer noticed their presence.

The months went by, and Rainbow searched everywhere. She searched all through the summer, and although she met many kind faces, and saw many a happy smile, and heard many a young voice, nowhere did she meet any one who in the least reminded her of Blue Eyes.

When the winter came, they went to a city, and Blue Boy, who was growing up into a big boy, was apprenticed to a glass mender, and Rainbow and he lived together in a little room in the glass mender's house. The glass mender had a pretty daughter called Joan, and she had a tame blackbird which she kept in a wicker cage. All through the winter the city had been muffled in snow, and it had been bitterly cold; at last the snow melted; and March came with his boisterous wind and his cold showers of sleet and rain.

But one day the rain stopped; the sun shone in the blue sky, and Joan cried out:

"This is the first Spring day!" She ran out of doors with her bird cage and hung it up on the wall outside the house, and although there were as yet no green leaves anywhere, the blackbird knew that the spring had come, and he began to sing. While Joan was looking at the blackbird, Rainbow was watching her from her window, and was thinking to herself. "Surely now I shall hear the voice of Blue Eyes or see his look!" She was on the point of calling out:

"Blue Eyes, Blue Eyes, come back to me,"

when Joan looked up at her and met her gaze; and laughed, and blushed, and ran away. Rainbow knew that it was neither the voice nor the look of Blue Eyes; and she cried from disappointment.

By the time the spring was over, Blue Boy had learned his trade, and he was able to work on his own account and to support his mother, so they left the city together when the summer came, and they went from village to village and from city to city, mending broken window panes.

The years went by. Blue Boy was almost a man, and still Rainbow had not come across any one who had reminded her of Blue Eyes. She was sad, because she knew that in a year's time Blue Boy would be a man, and that it would be time for him to marry, and that she would then be left all alone. She knew that this was the last year that she and Blue Boy would be together.

One day they were walking through a grassy wood which was yellow with cowslips. It was a lovely April morning, and in the wood a lot of children were playing, and making chains and wreaths with the cowslips.

"Now, at last," thought Rainbow, "I shall hear the voice of Blue Eyes." She ran up to the children, but when the children saw her running towards them, they were frightened, and they ran away into the wood, and although she called and called they would not come back.

A little further on they came to a lovely village on a hill, overlooking a river which was a small arm of the sea. The hill was covered with orchards which were in full blossom, and in front of the little white straw-thatched cottages the neat flower-beds were full of sweet-smelling violets.

Rainbow and Blue Boy stayed in this village, and found plenty of work. One evening Rainbow was strolling in a lane on the top of the hill; the steep lane had on each side of it two grassy banks, on the top of which bushes and brambles and nut-trees grew so thickly that the ends of their boughs almost met across the lane, and the banks were covered with primroses. Walking along this lane, with their faces towards the sunset, Rainbow met a youth and a maiden; they were whispering to each other little broken words, with many sighs and smiles, and their talk was like the talk of two birds.

Rainbow's heart leapt as she heard them, and she was just going to cry out:

"Blue Eyes, Blue Eyes, come back to me,"

when they caught sight of her and stopped talking, and Rainbow knew that Blue Eyes was not there.

Then came the month of May, and the woods grew green and the lilac blossomed, and Rainbow grew sadder and sadder. One night she could not sleep, and she got up and walked through the moonlit village, right down to the quay by the river-side where the fishermen kept their boats and their nets. Many of the fishermen were out fishing on the sea, and one of them, a young lad, was setting the brown sail of his boat on the river, and as he did so, he sang a song which was like this:

"I have a cottage I love well,
In the sweet west countree:
And there my love and I shall dwell,
When I come back from sea.

We'll stow the sail and stow the oar,
And oh, how glad she'll be
To mend the nets upon the shore,
When I come back from sea.

I have a cottage on the hill,
Just right for her and me,
And she will say 'I love you still,'
When I come back from sea."

The fisherman's voice was so glad and joyous as he sang this song, that Rainbow thought Blue Eyes must be there, and she ran to the shore. At that moment the moonlight fell full upon the fisherman, so that Rainbow could see his face, and she stopped herself calling out just in time, for she saw he was not at all like Blue Eyes.

During that same month Blue Boy fell in love with a Dairy Maid called Cherry-Ripe, and it was arranged that they should be married at Michaelmas. But as Michaelmas drew near, Rainbow grew sadder and sadder, because she could not bear to think what she would do without Blue Boy.

September came, and the corn was carried, and the leaves began to turn gold. On Michaelmas Eve, Rainbow was sitting in her garden watching the autumn sunset. Not far from her garden, which was on the side of a steep hill, there was a quarry in which there was an old seat, and this was a favourite spot for lovers, for from this place you could see the little river, all the village and the sea beyond, and the view was beautiful. Rainbow thought she would walk to the quarry, so as to get a better view of the sunset.

When she got there, she saw an old couple sitting on the seat. The man was a fisherman; his face was bronzed and wrinkled by the wind and the waves, and the woman's hair was grey and silvery. They did not notice Rainbow coming, and the old woman said to the man:

"Do you remember how we used to meet here in the days when you were courting me?"

And the old man said: "It was in the spring, and the apple-trees were out."

And the old woman said: "Ah! I was a comely lass then. There was no one like me in the village. Folks wouldn't believe it now, what with my white hair and my wrinkles."

And the old man said: "I see no difference in you, lassie. You've the same lovely blue eyes as you always had, and if your hair has turned silver, it's none the less fair for that."

And the old woman said: "And I see no difference in you, Sweetheart; you're just as strong and as brave as ever."

And the old man said: "Why, it's forty years ago, but it makes nought to us, for as long as I've got you, and you've got me, we shan't see any change in each other, for with us it has always been springtide and courting time, and it always will be."

And the old man looked at the old woman, and smiled and took her hand, and her eyes filled with tears. And when Rainbow saw this, before she knew what happened, she had called out:

"Blue Eyes, Blue Eyes, come back to me,
Over the hills and over the sea.
Brother of Summer, husband and friend,
Come and stay till the world shall end."

As soon as she had said this, Blue Eyes stood before her just as he had been when he rode away, clothed in snowdrops and cowslips, wearing the rainbow for a scarf, and carrying a branch of blossom in his hand.

Rainbow was so glad to see Blue Eyes that she almost fainted. She led him to her cottage, and there she wept a long time for joy. Then Blue Eyes told her that he would never leave her again, but that he could not live on the earth a second time in the guise of a glass mender. During the spring they would ride through the world, scattering sunshine, laughter, and hope; mortals would see them, but they would not know who they were. During the summer and the autumn they would be invisible to mortals, and during the winter they would slumber in the Diamond Palace of his mother, the Snow Queen.

They waited to see Blue Boy and Cherry-Ripe married, and Blue Eyes gave them as a wedding present a little glass pipe, which, whenever he played it, brought the spring into the hearts of all who heard it. And Blue Eyes promised that whenever Blue Boy whistled on the pipe, he and Rainbow would immediately answer his call and come to him.

When the wedding was over, Blue Eyes gave Rainbow his scarf, and they mounted on two winged steeds and galloped off through the lanes. Now if you ever meet in a wood or by a river a man with blue eyes, on a winged horse, with a crown of dew, and a tunic of snowdrops and cowslips, and by his side, on a white pony, a beautiful woman wearing the rainbow for a scarf, and holding a branch of blossom in her hand, you will know it is Blue Eyes and Rainbow.

And if ever you hear on a spring morning, in a city or a village, three little notes played on a pipe which make your heart dance for joy, you will know that Blue Boy is calling for his father and his mother; for he does this very often.

THE BLUE ROSE

Once upon a time there lived in China a wise Emperor, whose daughter was remarkable for her perfect beauty. Her feet were the smallest in the world; her eyes were long and slanting, and as bright as brown onyxes, and when you heard her laugh it was like listening to a tinkling stream, or to the chimes of a silver bell. Moreover, the Emperor's daughter was as wise as she was beautiful, and she chanted the verse of the great poets better than any one in the land. The Emperor was old in years; his son was married and had begotten a son; he was, therefore, quite happy about the succession to the throne, but he wished before he died to see his daughter wedded to some one who should be worthy of her.

Many suitors presented themselves at the palace, as soon as it became known that the Emperor desired a son-in-law, but when they reached the palace, they were met by the Lord Chamberlain, who told them the Emperor had decided that only the man who found and brought back the Blue Rose should marry his daughter. The suitors were much puzzled by this order. What was the Blue Rose, and where was it to be found? In all a hundred and fifty suitors had presented themselves, and out of these, fifty at once put away from them all thought of winning the hand of the Emperor's daughter, since they considered the condition imposed to be absurd.

The other hundred set about trying to find the Blue Rose. One of them – his name was Ti-Fun-Ti, he was a merchant and immensely rich – went at once to the largest shop in the town and said to the shopkeeper: "I want a blue rose, the best you have."

The shopkeeper, with many apologies, explained that he did not stock blue roses. He had red roses in profusion, white, pink, and yellow roses, but no blue rose. There had hitherto been no demand for the article.

"Well," said Ti-Fun-Ti, "you must get one for me. I do not mind how much money it costs, but I must have a blue rose."

The shopkeeper said he would do his best, but he feared it would be an expensive article and difficult to procure.

Another of the suitors, whose name I have forgotten, was a warrior and extremely brave; he mounted his horse, and taking with him a hundred archers and a thousand horsemen he marched into the territory of the King of Five Rivers, whom he knew to be the richest king in the world and the possessor of the rarest treasures, and demanded of him the Blue Rose, threatening him with a terrible doom should he be reluctant to give it up.

The King of the Five Rivers, who disliked soldiers, and had a horror of noise, violence, and every kind of fuss (his bodyguard was armed solely with fans and sunshades), rose from the cushions on which he was lying when the demand was made, and, tinkling a small bell, said to the servant who straightway appeared, "Fetch me the Blue Rose."

The servant retired and returned presently bearing on a silken cushion a large sapphire which was carved so as to imitate a full-blown rose with all its petals.

"This," said the King of the Five Rivers, "is the Blue Rose. You are welcome to it."

The warrior took it, and after making brief, soldier-like thanks, he went straight back to the Emperor's palace, saying that he had lost no time in finding the Blue Rose. He was ushered into the presence of the Emperor, who as soon as he heard the warrior's story and saw the Blue Rose which had been brought, sent for his daughter and said to her: "This intrepid warrior has brought you what he claims to be the Blue Rose. Has he accomplished the quest?"

The Princess took the precious object in her hands, and after examining it for a moment, said: "This is not a rose at all. It is a sapphire; I have no need of precious stones." And she returned the stone to the warrior, with many elegantly-expressed thanks. And the warrior went away in discomfiture.

When Ti-Fun-Ti, the merchant, heard of the warrior's failure, he was all the more anxious to win the prize. He sought the shopkeeper and said to him: "Have you got me the Blue Rose? I trust you have; because if not, I shall most assuredly be the means of your death. My brother-in-law is chief magistrate, and I am allied by marriage to all the chief officials in the kingdom."

The shopkeeper turned pale and said: "Sir, give me three days, and I will procure you the Blue Rose without fail." The merchant granted him the three days and went away. Now the shopkeeper was at his wit's end as to what to do, for he knew well there was no such thing as a blue rose. For two days he did nothing but moan and wring his hands, and on the third day he went to his wife and said: "Wife, we are ruined!"

But his wife, who was a sensible woman, said: "Nonsense! If there is no such thing as a blue rose we must make one. Go to the apothecary and ask him for a strong dye which will change a white rose into a blue one."

So the shopkeeper went to the apothecary and asked him for a dye, and the chemist gave him a bottle of red liquid, telling him to pick a white rose and to dip its stalk into the liquid and the rose would turn blue. The shopkeeper did as he was told; the rose turned into a beautiful blue and the shopkeeper took it to the merchant, who at once went with it to the palace, saying that he had found the Blue Rose.

He was ushered into the presence of the Emperor, who as soon as he saw the blue rose sent for his daughter and said to her: "This wealthy merchant has brought you what he claims to be the Blue Rose. Has he accomplished the quest?"

The Princess took the flower in her hands, and after examining it for a moment said: "This is a white rose; its stalk has been dipped in a poisonous dye and it has turned blue. Were a butterfly to settle upon it, it would die of the potent fume. Take it back. I have no need of a dyed rose." And she returned it to the merchant with many elegantly-expressed thanks.

The other ninety-eight suitors all sought in various ways for the Blue Rose. Some of them travelled all over the world seeking it; some of them sought the aid of wizards and astrologers, and one did not hesitate to invoke the help of the dwarfs that live underground. But all of them, whether they travelled in far countries, or took counsel with wizards and demons, or sat pondering in lonely places, failed to find the Blue Rose.

At last they all abandoned the quest except the Lord Chief Justice, who was the most skilful lawyer and statesman in the country. After thinking over the matter for several months, he sent for the most skilful artist in the country and said to him: "Make me a china cup. Let it be milk-white in colour and perfect in shape, and paint on it a rose, a blue rose."

The artist made obeisance and withdrew, and worked for two months at the Lord Chief Justice's cup. In two months' time it was finished, and the world has never seen such a beautiful cup, so perfect in symmetry, so delicate in texture, and the rose on it, the blue rose, was a living flower, picked in fairyland and floating on the rare milky surface of the porcelain. When the Lord Chief Justice saw it he gasped with surprise and pleasure, for he was a great lover of porcelain, and never in his life had he seen such a piece. He said to himself: "Without doubt the Blue Rose is here on this cup, and nowhere else."

So, after handsomely rewarding the artist, he went to the Emperor's palace and said that he had brought the Blue Rose. He was ushered into the Emperor's presence, who as he saw the cup sent for his daughter and said to her: "This eminent lawyer has brought you what he claims to be the Blue Rose. Has he accomplished the quest?"

The Princess took the bowl in her hands, and after examining it for a moment, said: "This bowl is the most beautiful piece of china I have ever seen. If you are kind enough to let me keep it I will put it aside until I receive the blue rose. For so beautiful is it that no other flower is worthy to be put in it except the Blue Rose."

The Lord Chief Justice thanked the Princess for accepting the bowl with many elegantly-turned phrases, and he went away in discomfiture.

After this there was no one in the whole country who ventured on the quest of the Blue Rose. It happened that not long after the Lord Chief Justice's attempt, a strolling minstrel visited the kingdom of the Emperor. One evening he was playing his one-stringed instrument outside a dark wall. It was a summer's evening, and the sun had sunk in a glory of dusty gold, and in the violet twilight one or two stars were twinkling like spear-heads. There was an incessant noise made by the croaking of frogs and the chatter of grasshoppers. The minstrel was singing a short song over and over again to a monotonous tune. The sense of it was something like this: —

"I watched beside the willow trees
The river, as the evening fell;
The twilight came and brought no breeze,
No dew, no water for the well,

"When from the tangled banks of grass,
A bird across the water flew,
And in the river's hard grey glass
I saw a flash of azure blue."

As he sang he heard a rustle on the wall, and looking up he saw a slight figure, white against the twilight, beckoning to him. He walked along under the wall until he came to a gate, and there some one was waiting for him, and he was gently led into the shadow of a dark cedar tree. In the twilight he saw two bright eyes looking at him, and he understood their message. In the twilight a thousand meaningless nothings were whispered in the light of the stars, and the hours fled swiftly. When the East began to grow light, the Princess (for it was she) said it was time to go.

"But," said the minstrel, "to-morrow I shall come to the palace and ask for your hand."

"Alas!" said the Princess, "I would that were possible, but my father has made a foolish condition that only he may wed me who finds the Blue Rose."

"That is simple," said the minstrel, "I will find it!" And they said good-night to each other.

The next morning the minstrel went to the palace, and on his way he picked a common white rose from a wayside garden. He was ushered into the Emperor's presence, who sent for his daughter and said to her: "This penniless minstrel has brought you what he claims to be the Blue Rose. Has he accomplished the quest?"

The Princess took the rose in her hands and said: "Yes, this is without doubt the Blue Rose."

But the Lord Chief Justice and all who were present respectfully pointed out that the rose was a common white rose and not a blue one, and the objection was with many forms and phrases conveyed to the Princess.

"I think the rose is blue," said the Princess. "It is, in fact, the Blue Rose. Perhaps you are all colour blind."

The Emperor, with whom the decision rested, decided that if the Princess thought the rose was blue, it was blue, for it was well known that her perception was more acute than that of any one else in the kingdom.

So the minstrel married the Princess, and they settled on the sea-coast in a little green house with a garden full of white roses, and they lived happily for ever afterwards. And the Emperor, knowing that his daughter had made a good match, died in peace.

THE STORY OF VOX ANGELICA AND LIEBLICH GEDACHT

Once upon a time there was a poor tanner called Hans who lived with his wife Martha in a town in which there were two hundred churches, a hundred chapels, and a huge cathedral.

Hans lived in a wooden house opposite the gates of the cathedral. They had only one son and he was so delicate that they did not know what trade he could learn when he grew bigger. In the meantime they taught him how to read and write. The boy was christened Johan; for he was born on St. John's Day. When Johan was quite a tiny little boy he liked listening to the sound of the organ in the big cathedral, and in the evenings he would sit for hours in the darkness, listening to the organist at his practice.

The organist was an old man called Doctor Sebastian, and he wore a powdered wig and large tortoise-shell spectacles. When he played the organ, which was an immense instrument and had five keyboards, the windows trembled in all the houses which nestled round the cathedral.

Doctor Sebastian soon noticed the little Johan and allowed him to come up into the organ-loft while he was playing, and Johan used to sit as still as a mouse, and watch him pull out the stops, and play with his feet as skilfully as he did with his hands. Doctor Sebastian had a pupil called Frantz, a lad with curly brown hair and large brown eyes. Frantz used to practise on the organ every day; but Doctor Sebastian was severe with him, and Frantz was not allowed to play the organ at High Mass on Sundays. One day Johan asked Doctor Sebastian whether this was because Frantz played badly, and Doctor Sebastian said:

"Frantz has much to learn and he must be trained, but one day, when he has learnt all that I can teach him, he will be able to teach me what I shall not be able to learn."

Johan did not understand what this meant, but he guessed that Doctor Sebastian thought well of Frantz, in spite of his being so severe with him. Johan thought that Frantz was the most wonderful player in the world, and whereas Doctor Sebastian only made the organ speak in deep single tones, and only used the open stops and the booming pedal bass-notes, Frantz – when Doctor Sebastian was not there to listen – used to make the organ sigh and speak like a castle full of spirits, and Johan thought this was wonderful.

One day, it was in winter just before Christmas, and Johan was eight years old, Doctor Sebastian was laid up in bed with a bad cold, and he sent for Frantz and said to him:

"I shall never rise from my bed again. I am going thither where I shall hear the music which we only guess at here on earth. You must play the organ on Christmas Day. I have taught you all I know. I have been severe and gruff with you; but being a musician, you know that if I had not thought you worthy of it, I should not have taken any trouble with you at all. I have been spared until you were ready to take my place, and now I can go in peace, for I know that I leave behind me a worthy successor. I have scolded you and pulled your ears, rapped your fingers and blamed your playing, but you have got that which I should never learn if I lived for two hundred years. You have the divine gift, and as a musician I am not worthy to unlatch the shoes of what you will be; for you will play on earth the music that I am now going to hear in Heaven!"

After that Doctor Sebastian squeezed Frantz's hand and said no more. The next day he died.

Frantz was very sad, and he spent the whole day that the Doctor died in the cathedral composing a requiem in memory of his dead master. Little Johan, in a corner of the aisle, listened to the music: he had never heard anything so beautiful; some new power seemed to have come to Frantz, and when he touched the keys the pipes spoke in a way they had never spoken before.

Frantz went on playing until late into the night, and Johan had been carried so far away into dreamland by the music that he did not notice when Frantz stopped, but all at once he became aware that he was alone in the cathedral and that the organ-loft was dark and no sound came from it.

Johan ran up the winding stair into the organ-loft, but Frantz had gone, and Johan knew that he was locked in the cathedral for the night. He made up his mind to sleep there where he was, and he was just taking one of Frantz's missals to use as a pillow when he became aware that he was no longer alone. Sitting on the bench in front of the keys was a strange figure. It was an old man with a grey beard, twinkling eyes, and a deep voice like the buzzing of a hornet. He wore a brown coat and grey stockings, and a black three-cornered hat.

"Who are you?" asked Johan.

"My name is Quint," said the little old man, "and I live in one of the big wooden pipes of the organ."

"Do you always live there?" asked Johan.

"No, not always," said Quint. "We don't live here as a rule, but some of them oblige us to come here and sing –"

"I don't understand," said Johan.

"Well, I will explain it to you," answered Quint. "It's like this: Every one of the stops of the organ has some one who belongs to it and to whom it belongs – but these people do not live in the stops; they live in their own country, which is called Musicland, and they only come to the organs when they are obliged to."

"But who obliges them?" asked Johan.

Quint thought for a moment, and then he said: "Those who have the gift."

"But what is the gift?" asked Johan.

"That I can't tell you," said Quint. "All I know is that some have it and others haven't."

"Did Doctor Sebastian have the gift?" asked Johan.

"No," said Quint, "he was a learned man and a very good man; but he hadn't got the gift. But young Frantz: he's got it. That's why I am here to-day."

"Are the people of the other stops here too?" asked Johan, who was deeply interested in what Quint told him.

"They've all gone home," said Quint. "You see, as long as the player plays, we can stay here and not come out except just when we're wanted; but if we don't get back into the pipes before the player has finished, we can't go home. Now just before Frantz finished I crept out of my pipe because I wasn't wanted, and I wished to look at the cathedral, and then suddenly he stopped playing, before I could get back into my pipe again, and if we are not in our pipes when the organist stops playing we can't get home."

"What will you do then?" asked Johan.

"I shall have to wait till he plays again to-morrow. I can get into a pipe of course, but I can't go home."

"To Musicland?" asked Johan.

"Yes," said Quint, "and it's annoying, because I shall miss the end of the wedding festivities."

"Whose wedding?" asked Johan.

"Vox Angelica's, of course," said Quint. "She was married yesterday."

"Vox Angelica is that lovely soft stop in the swell," said Johan. "I suppose she's going to marry 'Lieblich Gedacht'?"

"Of course she is," said Quint, "but it's a long business. If you like I will tell you all about it."

"Oh, please do!" said Johan.

"Well," began Quint, "Vox Angelica is the most beautiful person you have ever seen. Her eyes are just like blue waters, grave and still, and her hair is long and as bright as the gold on a harp. And as for her voice, well, you can hear that whenever Frantz plays the organ. She is as kind and

gentle as she is beautiful, and everybody in our country loves her. She lives in that part of Musicland where the hills and white mountains are. In the winter it is covered with snow which gleams in the sunshine, whiter and brighter than any snow you have ever seen, but when the spring comes the snow disappears and the slopes of the mountains are covered with millions and millions of flowers which are soft and white and glisten like stars.

"Lieblich Gedacht was the son of a forester, and he lives in the Woods of Melody, right in the heart of our country where the old oak forests grow, which are carpeted with bluebells in the spring so that the enormous stems look as if they rose out of a blue sea, and in the spring and in the summer the woods are full of birds; but no bird there has so sweet a note as Lieblich Gedacht when he sings in the wood. The birds stop singing to listen to him. He sings all the year round: when the woods are green, and in the autumn too, when they are gold and crimson like the tattered banners of our King, and in the winter, when the oak trees spread their bare arms across the clear cold sky.

"One day Lieblich Gedacht put on a green jerkin, a green cap, and taking with him a sword and a pipe he set out on his travels. He wandered through Musicland until he came to a castle which was on the top of a mountain. This castle had a tower with one window in it, and from the window came the sound of a whisper which sounded so soft and wonderful that Lieblich Gedacht thought it must be the voice of a flower speaking to itself: the jessamine perhaps, or the briar rose. Then he looked up and he saw leaning out of the window a maid with gold hair which fell from the window far down the tower, and she was as frail and as lovely as a gentian on the mountains.

"Then Lieblich Gedacht sang a song. He sang of all the beautiful things he had ever dreamed of; he sang of the sun and the moon and the stars, of the spring, the grass, the great woods and their secret; he sang the song the leaves sing when they wake in the dawn, and the song the boughs sing in the evening when they lull the birds and the flowers to sleep. He sang of the love he felt for all the beautiful things in the world, and about how glad he was to be alive in a beautiful country like Musicland.

"Vox Angelica heard him, and answered his song, and they sang a duet together, and Lieblich Gedacht's part said, 'I love you,' and Vox Angelica's part said, 'I love you too.'

"Then Lieblich Gedacht asked Vox Angelica to marry him, and she said she would, and they settled they would start at once for the City of Pleasant Sounds and be married. They started at once. Lieblich Gedacht rode on a grey horse, and Vox Angelica rode on the saddle in front of him. Now their way lay through a perilous wood called the Forest of Discord, which was infested by imps called Chromatics, and by hundreds of gnomes who made a hideous noise, and in the middle of this wood lived Bourdon, who is a wizard.

"When they reached the wood it was already dark, and from every bush and tree came sharp sounds, ugly cries, moans, groans, squeaks, wheezes, and in the distance they could hear a deep buzzing boom.

"Vox Angelica and Lieblich Gedacht were rather frightened, since it was dark and neither of them knew the way, for neither of them had ever been near the Forest of Discord before, and they knew none of the people who belonged to it. So they made up their minds not to go any farther but to sleep under the shade of an oak-tree. It was summer, so it was warm. They made themselves a bed of leaves and lay down; but the Chromatics made such a noise that they could not go to sleep. At last they put moss into their ears so that they could not hear the ugly sounds, and they both fell asleep.

"In the middle of the night Lieblich Gedacht had a bad dream. He dreamed that the trees had come to life and had stretched out their arms and taken Vox Angelica away from him, and that when he tried to keep her they bound him down to the ground.

"When Lieblich Gedacht awoke, it was daylight and the sun was shining through the dark trees. But what was his grief and despair when he saw that Vox Angelica was no longer there! She had gone, disappeared, and left no trace. He looked for her everywhere; he called out her name in a thousand ways till the ugly wood re-echoed with the sweetness of his song, but no Vox Angelica answered. She

was nowhere to be found. Liebligh Gedacht was in despair. He did not know what to do nor where to look. 'But,' he thought to himself, 'one thing is certain: it is no use wasting time in this forest, I must go and find some one who will be likely to help me.'

"So he rode out of the Forest of Discord as quickly as he could, and crossed the plains which lie beyond it, and he rode on until he reached the Wood of Dreams, which is on the other side of the plains.

"In this wood there lives a hermit called Sackbut, who is well known for his goodness and his wisdom, and Liebligh Gedacht made up his mind to go and ask him for his help and advice. Sackbut lives in a cave underground. He is very old, and has a long white beard six times as long as mine. Liebligh Gedacht, after searching for some time in the wood, found a clear space in the thickets, and in the middle of it a circle of built bricks which looked like the top of a well. But when he looked down into what he thought was the well he saw there were steps in it which went down underground. He went boldly down the steps and into the dark, and when he had counted thirty-two of them they stopped and he came to the door. He knocked at this door, and he heard a hoarse voice saying: 'Who is there?'

"It is I, Liebligh Gedacht,' he answered. 'I have come for advice.'

"The door was opened at once, and Liebligh Gedacht found himself in a cell lit by a lantern, and in front of him, sitting at a table and reading a large book, which had nothing but notes in it, was Sackbut the Hermit.

"Well, what do you want?' asked the hermit in a gruff voice. 'Be quick and tell me, because I am busy and I have got no time to waste. I am learning a fugue by one of those new-fangled German musicians, and I must know it by next Sunday, for there's a man in one of their cities who has the gift, and I shall have to go.'

"I have plighted my troth to Vox Angelica,' said Liebligh Gedacht. 'We were travelling together to the City of Pleasant Sounds to be married, and we stopped on the way in the Forest of Discord.'

"That was a silly thing to do,' said Sackbut.

"We slept the night there, and when I woke up in the morning Vox Angelica had disappeared.'

"Did you hear anything in the night?' asked Sackbut.

"No,' said Liebligh Gedacht, 'but I had a bad nightmare. I dreamed the trees were taking her away and strangling me.'

"I see,' said Sackbut, 'it's Bourdon the wizard; he's at his old tricks again. Vox Angelica has been carried away by Bourdon, and he has probably hidden her somewhere. He would not dare keep her in his castle, because the Chromatics are such gossips that the whole kingdom would know it at once. She is a prisoner somewhere; of that you can be sure. But where I cannot tell you. All I can advise you is to go and ask Echo: she hears everything.'

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