

# *The Blue Bird*

A long time ago, in fairytale times, there lived a widowed farmer and her three children: two boys and a girl. Every Wednesday, the widow went to sell her cows' butter at the market, and she took the road to town that went through a forest. One day, she saw a pretty blue bird that hopped around her from branch to branch, approaching her so fearlessly that it seemed like he was tame. Every time she passed by, he appeared to her, and she ended up talking about him to her children.

"I saw the little blue bird today: he is so handsome that the bullfinch and the goldfinch look ugly in comparison."

"You should take him and bring him to us," cried the children; "We would be so happy to have him, and we would take very good care of him."

"If I see him again, I will try to catch him, since you kids want him so badly."

When she returned to market, she saw the blue bird, and passing again through the forest after having sold her butter, she saw him once more. She approached him, and he let her capture him without even trying to fly away.

When the children saw the little bird, they jumped for joy and set about determining whose turn it was to pat him; they put him in a pretty cage, and everyone took great pleasure in looking after him.

Every morning, they found a yellow egg in the cage that shone so bright that it was difficult to look at when the sunlight hit it. The widow collected the eggs, and when she had a dozen, she brought them to an egg vendor to try to convince him to buy them from her.

"These are no ordinary eggs, my dear," responded the egg vendor; "They are made of gold, and I am not rich enough to pay you a fair price for them."

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Some time afterward, the king's son, who was hunting in the forest, went to the farm to ask for a drink, because he was very thirsty. He saw the blue bird, and when he approached the cage to get a closer look, he saw these words written in gold across its feathers:

"He who eats my head will be king, he who eats my heart will find a heap of gold under his pillow every morning.

"Sell me your bird, dear lady," he said; "I will pay you well."

“Oh mama,” cried the children, “don’t give him the bird; we would be so sad if he were no longer here.”

“I will give you 1,000 francs,” said the prince, “if you will let me take it.”

“No, not for gold and not for silver, we don’t want to be separated from this sweet little singer.”

“Fine!” said the king’s son, “I will marry the daughter of the house, on the condition that I will be served the little blue bird for dinner on our wedding day.”

The boys didn’t want to give their consent for their little friend to be killed, but their sister saw that the king’s son was handsome and not at all displeasing to the eye, and she begged her brothers to let her become princess. Since she was crying, the two boys, who loved her like the apple of their eyes, finally consented to the death of their bird.

The wedding day arrived: the poor bird was killed, plucked, and baked into a little casserole, because he was to be served to the king’s son.

The brothers of the bride, astonished by the prince’s desires, wanted to taste the bird; while everyone was busy making preparations for the wedding, they snuck into the kitchen, and after having eaten the blue bird, they put a titmouse in the casserole that was about the same size as their poor dead friend.

At the wedding banquet, the king’s son was served the head and the heart of the titmouse, but on the same day, the widow’s sons, who feared that their trickery would be discovered and punished, ran away and went to hide in the forest. Nightfall caught them by surprise, and they fell asleep at the base of a tree.

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Waking up the next morning, the older of the boys was astonished to find a pile of gold pieces under his head, among the leaves on which they had slept; he nevertheless put them in his pocket, believing them to be sous or liards.

He and his brother left the forest and, after having walked all day, they arrived at dusk at an inn, where they were served food and where they slept. The next day when they were about to pay, they noticed a handful of little yellow pieces under a pillow again, and they concluded that the coins were made of copper.

“Here you go,” they said to their host, “here are some liards and some sous; if this isn’t enough to compensate you, please find it in your heart to give us credit for the rest.”

“You must be pulling a prank on me,” responded the innkeeper; “Even half of one of these gold pieces is more valuable than all that you possibly could have taken here.”

And he took one of the pieces and gave the boys their change in white silver and in sous. From this moment, they were very careful to collect the gold that the older brother found under his pillow every morning.

The brothers continued to travel together, and after having passed through many lands, they came to a town where the people had never heard of gold. At the sight of the shiny yellow metal that the two strangers offered to pay their expenses, the townspeople were very surprised, and word spread to the king, who wanted to see the two brothers for himself. His daughter took a liking to the younger brother, and since he was a handsome boy, the king agreed to marry her to the stranger who possessed the marvelous metal.

The wedding was held, and as a wedding present, the older boy gave his brother all the gold that he had, and since he stayed as a member of the royal court, he kept giving the pieces that he found under his pillow to his brother as long as he was living in the palace.

The princess' husband, who ate the blue bird's head, became king after the death of his father-in-law, and his older brother resumed traveling in search of adventure. He passed through many more lands, and arrived in another town where nobody had ever heard of gold: there, he met the daughter of a noble lord; he fell in love and married her.

The day after the wedding, the bride, while making her husband's bed, found the gold under his pillow, and she kept finding it every subsequent day. She went to consult a knowledgeable healer who practiced magic, and she showed him the shining pieces that she discovered every morning under her husband's pillow. The healer told her that her husband had eaten the heart of the blue bird, and that those who had eaten the bird's heart enjoyed the gift of gold every day. The bride, who was greedy, promised the sorcerer compensation for finding the blue bird's heart and bringing it to her; he gave her a silver thread. He told her that with the string, she could lasso the blue bird's heart while her husband was asleep.

She did it successfully, and now that she had the heart, it was she who woke up with gold beneath her pillow. Every morning her husband searched hard for the gold, he never found anything; but he never suspected that his wife had stolen the magic heart.

However, when the wife had the gold she wished for, she became even greedier, and, fearing that her husband would discover her secret, she decided to do away with him. She suggested that they go on a trip on the sea, and she embarked on a vessel with her husband and her servant. The boat stopped beside an island, and man and wife stepped off the boat to set foot on the island, but as soon as her husband had gone further inland and wasn't watching, the wife hastily got back in the boat that brought them and sailed away.

When the husband returned to the shore, he saw that he had been abandoned in this uninhabited place, and he felt surprised and betrayed. He started to call and yell, but the vessel had already disappeared.

When he became hungry, he set to searching every corner of the island until he found something to eat, and he arrived in a valley where he saw a plant that resembled celery. He ate it, but after a few mouthfuls, he turned into a donkey. A little bit later, he saw another type of celery plant that was prettier than the first; after grazing on some of its leaves, he regained his human form.

He surveyed the whole island, and since there were no herbs, and meager trees that didn't yield fruit, he decided that he would have a better time finding food as a donkey than as a man. He also reasoned that donkeys are less sensitive to extreme temperatures. He returned to the valley where he had found the first celery, he ate it, and soon, he became a donkey again, but he still often went to the seaside to vainly look for boats.

After two years, he saw a ship that was passing near the island; he hastily ate the celery that turned him into a man again, and he signaled at the people on the vessel. They arrived at the island and let him board their boat, but, before they departed, he carefully cut branches from the two species of celery.

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He returned to the land where he was married, and he resolved to get revenge on his wife and her servant, who helped to abandon him on the island. He took his packets of celery and went beneath his wife's window, calling "Celery! Get your celery!" like a street vendor.

The servant, who knew that her mistress was very fond of celery salad, hurried down to the street; she didn't recognize her mistress' husband, since his journey into the wild had left him barely recognizable, yet he himself sold her a branch of celery that transformed people into donkeys. After completing the transaction, he slipped into the house, where he hid so that he could watch his plan in action.

The two women prepared the celery for their dinner, but after the first few mouthfuls, they were transformed into donkeys. When the husband heard the noise of their hooves on the floor, he hastened to appear before them: had told them who he was, and rebuked them for having abandoned him on a wild, deserted island, then he chased after them, hitting them with a switch, and made them go to the stables, where he didn't feed them anything but hay.

The next day, he saw a man who drove two donkeys loaded with bags of coal. The poor animals bent under the burden, and seemed tired.

“Sir,” the husband told him, “Your two donkeys seem worn out. I have two donkeys at the stable that haven’t done anything in a long time, and are so bored that they are always kicking and making noise. Take them for a few days, and let me take yours in the meantime.

“I would appreciate that,” responded the collier.

The husband fetched his donkeys from the stable, put the coal sacks on their backs, and pushed them in front of the collier, hitting them with the switch. Every time they passed in front of their old home, they stopped and seemed to want to enter, but the husband didn’t think that their punishment had been sufficient, and he encouraged the collier to keep them moving along.

For eight days, the donkeys did their taxing job, which made them tired and very thin; their master let them return to the stable to rest for a while, but he often employed them for harder jobs.

After a year, the wife-turned-donkey finally told her husband that it was she who had eaten the heart of the blue bird, and she promised to give it back to him if he restored her to her human form.

Since he reasoned that the punishment had lasted long enough, he decided to have mercy on his wife, and he fetched the celery that would turn her back into a woman. But neither of the donkeys would touch it, in the belief that if they ate it, they would be sent on another maddening adventure. He decided to eat the celery of both types in front of them, and soon after, he appeared before them as a donkey, then as a man again.

They ate the celery and soon became women once more.

Through the use of the silver thread, the husband regained possession of the blue bird’s heart, and once again, it was he who found gold under his pillow every morning.

After that, the couple was reconciled, and they had two handsome sons who would one day marry princesses.

Told by Marie Huchet, from Ercé, 1878.

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Translated by Marjorie Stump.