



# *The Bird 'Grip'*

Andrew Lang'S Fairy Books

Swedish

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*Advanced*  
*19 min read*

It happened once that a king, who had a great kingdom and three sons, became blind, and no human skill or art could restore to him his sight. At last there came to the palace an old woman, who told him that in the whole world there was only one thing that could give him back his sight, and that was to get the bird Grip; his song would open the King's eyes.

When the king's eldest son heard this he offered to bring the bird Grip, which was kept in a cage by a king in another country, and carefully guarded as his greatest treasure. The blind king was greatly rejoiced at his son's resolve, fitted him out in the best way he could, and let him go. When the prince had ridden some distance he came to an inn, in which there were many guests, all of whom were merry, and drank and sang and played at dice. This joyous life pleased the prince so well that he stayed in the inn, took part in the playing and drinking, and forgot both his blind father and the bird Grip.

Meanwhile the king waited with both hope and anxiety for his son's return, but as time went on and nothing was heard of him, the second prince asked leave to go in search of his brother, as well as to bring the bird Grip. The king granted his request, and fitted him out in the finest fashion. But when the prince came to the inn and found his brother among his merry companions, he also remained there and forgot both the bird Grip and his blind father.

When the king noticed that neither of his sons returned, although a long time had passed since the second one set out, he was greatly distressed, for not only had he lost all hope of getting back his sight, but he had also lost his two eldest sons. The youngest now came to him, and offered to go in search of his brothers and to bring the bird Grip; he was quite certain that he would succeed in this. The king was unwilling to risk his third son on such an errand, but he begged so long that his father had at last to consent. This prince also was fitted out in the finest manner, like his brothers, and so rode away.

He also turned into the same inn as his brothers, and when these saw him they assailed him with many entreaties to remain with them and share their merry life. But he answered that now, when he had found them, his next task was to get the bird Grip, for which his blind father was longing, and so he had not a single hour to spare with them in the inn. He then said farewell to his brothers, and rode on to find another inn in which to pass the night. When he had ridden a long way, and it began to grow dark, he came to a house which lay deep in the forest. Here he was received in a very friendly manner by the host, who put his horse into the stable, and led the prince himself into the guest-chamber, where he ordered a maid-servant to lay the cloth and set down the supper. It was now dark, and while the girl was laying the cloth and setting down the dishes, and the prince had begun to appease his hunger, he heard the most piteous shrieks and cries from the next room. He sprang up from the table and asked the girl what those cries were, and whether he had fallen into a den of robbers. The girl answered that these shrieks were heard every night, but it was no living being who uttered them; it was a dead man, whose life the host had taken because he could not pay for the meals he had had in the inn. The host further refused to bury the dead man, as he had left nothing to pay the expenses of the funeral, and every night he went and scourged the dead body of his victim.

When she had said this she lifted the cover off one of the dishes, and the prince saw that there lay on it a knife and an axe. He understood then that the host meant to ask him by this what kind of death he preferred to die,

unless he was willing to ransom his life with his money. He then summoned the host, gave him a large sum for his own life, and paid the dead man's debt as well, besides paying him for burying the body, which the murderer now promised to attend to.

The prince, however, felt that his life was not safe in this murderer's den, and asked the maid to help him to escape that night. She replied that the attempt to do so might cost her her own life, as the key of the stable in which the prince's horse stood lay under the host's pillow; but, as she herself was a prisoner there, she would help him to escape if he would take her along with him. He promised to do so, and they succeeded in getting away from the inn, and rode on until they came to another far away from it, where the prince got a good place for the girl before proceeding on his journey.

As he now rode all alone through a forest there met him a fox, who greeted him in a friendly fashion, and asked him where he was going, and on what errand he was bent. The prince answered that his errand was too important to be confided to everyone that he met.

'You are right in that,' said the fox, 'for it relates to the bird Grip, which you want to take and bring home to your blind father; I could help you in this, but in that case you must follow my counsel.'

The prince thought that this was a good offer, especially as the fox was ready to go with him and show him the way to the castle, where the bird Grip sat in his cage, and so he promised to obey the fox's instructions. When they had traversed the forest together they saw the castle at some distance. Then the fox gave the prince three grains of gold, one of which he was to throw into the guard-room, another into the room where the bird Grip sat, and the third into its cage. He could then take the bird, but he must beware of stroking it; otherwise it would go ill with him.

The prince took the grains of gold, and promised to follow the fox's directions faithfully. When he came to the guard-room of the castle he threw one of the grains in there, and the guards at once fell asleep. The same thing happened with those who kept watch in the room beside the bird Grip, and when he threw the third grain into its cage the bird also fell asleep. When the prince got the beautiful bird into his hand he could not resist the temptation to stroke it, whereupon it awoke and began to scream. At this the whole castle woke up, and the prince was taken prisoner.

As he now sat in his prison, and bitterly lamented that his own disobedience had brought himself into trouble, and deprived his father of the chance of recovering his sight, the fox suddenly stood in front of him. The prince was very pleased to see it again, and received with great meekness all its reproaches, as well as promised to be more obedient in the future, if the fox would only help him out of his fix. The fox said that he had come to assist him, but he could do no more than advise the prince, when he was brought up for trial, to answer 'yes' to all the judge's questions, and everything would go well. The prince faithfully followed his instructions, so that when the judge asked him whether he had meant to steal the bird Grip he said 'Yes,' and when the judge asked him if he was a master-thief he again answered 'Yes.'

When the king heard that he admitted being a master-thief, he said that he would forgive him the attempt to steal the bird if he would go to the next kingdom and carry off the world's most beautiful princess, and bring her to him. To this also the prince said 'Yes.'

When he left the castle he met the fox, who went along with him to the next kingdom, and when they came near the castle there, gave him three grains of gold—one to throw into the guard-room, another into the princess's chamber, and the third into her bed. At the same time he strictly warned him not to kiss the princess. The prince went into the castle, and did with the grains of gold as the fox had told him, so that sleep fell upon everyone there; but when he had taken the princess into his arms he forgot the fox's warning, at the sight of her beauty, and kissed her. Then both she and all the others in the castle woke; the prince was taken prisoner, and put into a strong dungeon.

Here the fox again came to him and reproached him with his disobedience, but promised to help him out of this trouble also if he would answer 'yes' to everything they asked him at his trial. The prince willingly agreed to this, and admitted to the judge that he had meant to steal the princess, and that he was a master-thief.

When the king learned this he said he would forgive his offence if he would go to the next kingdom and steal the horse with the four golden shoes. To this also the prince said 'Yes.'

When he had gone a little way from the castle he met the fox, and they continued on their journey together. When they reached the end of it the prince for the third time received three grains of gold from the fox, with directions to throw one into the guard-chamber, another into the stable, and the third into the horse's stall.

But the fox told him that above the horse's stall hung a beautiful golden saddle, which he must not touch, if he did not want to bring himself into new troubles worse than those he had escaped from, for then the fox could help him no longer.

The prince promised to be firm this time. He threw the grains of gold in the proper places, and untied the horse, but with that he caught sight of the golden saddle, and thought that none but it could suit so beautiful a horse, especially as it had golden shoes. But just as he stretched out his hand to take it he received from some invisible being so hard a blow on the arm that it was made quite numb. This recalled to him his promise and his danger, so he led out the horse without looking at the golden saddle again.

The fox was waiting for him outside the castle, and the prince confessed to him that he had very nearly given way to temptation this time as well. 'I know that,' said the fox, 'for it was I who struck you over the arm.'

As they now went on together the prince said that he could not forget the beautiful princess, and asked the fox whether he did not think that she ought to ride home to his father's palace on this horse with the golden shoes. The fox agreed that this would be excellent; if the prince would now go and carry her off he would give him three grains of gold for that purpose. The prince was quite ready, and promised to keep better command of himself this time, and not kiss her.

He got the grains of gold and entered the castle, where he carried off the princess, set her on the beautiful horse, and held on his way. When they came near to the castle where the bird Grip sat in his cage he again asked the fox for three grains of gold. These he got, and with them he was successful in carrying off the bird.

He was now full of joy, for his blind father would now recover his sight, while he himself owned the world's most beautiful princess and the horse with the golden shoes.

The prince and princess travelled on together with mirth and happiness, and the fox followed them until they came to the forest where the prince first met with him.

'Here our ways part,' said the fox. 'You have now got all that your heart desired, and you will have a prosperous journey to your father's palace if only you do not ransom anyone's life with money.'

The prince thanked the fox for all his help, promised to give heed to his warning, said farewell to him, and rode

on, with the princess by his side and the bird Grip on his wrist.

They soon arrived at the inn where the two eldest brothers had stayed, forgetting their errand. But now no merry song or noise of mirth was heard from it. When the prince came nearer he saw two gallows erected, and when he entered the inn along with the princess he saw that all the rooms were hung with black, and that everything inside foreboded sorrow and death. He asked the reason of this, and was told that two princes were to be hanged that day for debt; they had spent all their money in feasting and playing, and were now deeply in debt to the host, and as no one could be found to ransom their lives they were about to be hanged according to the law.

The prince knew that it was his two brothers who had thus forfeited their lives and it cut him to the heart to think that two princes should suffer such a shameful death; and, as he had sufficient money with him, he paid their debts, and so ransomed their lives.

At first the brothers were grateful for their liberty, but when they saw the youngest brother's treasures they became jealous of his good fortune, and planned how to bring him to destruction, and then take the bird Grip, the princess, and the horse with the golden shoes, and convey them to their blind father. After they had agreed on how to carry out their treachery they enticed the prince to a den of lions and threw him down among them. Then they set the princess on horseback, took the bird Grip, and rode homeward. The princess wept bitterly, but they told her that it would cost her her life if she did not say that the two brothers had won all the treasures.

When they arrived at their father's palace there was great rejoicing, and everyone praised the two princes for their courage and bravery.

When the king inquired after the youngest brother they answered that he had led such a life in the inn that he had been hanged for debt. The king sorrowed bitterly over this, because the youngest prince was his dearest son, and the joy over the treasures soon died away, for the bird Grip would not sing so that the king might recover his sight, the princess wept night and day, and no one dared to venture so close to the horse as to have a look at his golden shoes.

Now when the youngest prince was thrown down into the lions' den he found the fox sitting there, and the lions, instead of tearing him to pieces, showed him the greatest friendliness. Nor was the fox angry with him

for having forgot his last warning. He only said that sons who could so forget their old father and disgrace their royal birth as those had done would not hesitate to betray their brother either. Then he took the prince up out of the lion's den and gave him directions what to do now so as to come by his rights again.

The prince thanked the fox with all his heart for his true friendship, but the fox answered that if he had been of any use to him he would now for his own part ask a service of him. The prince replied that he would do him any service that was in his power.

'I have only one thing to ask of you,' said the fox, 'and that is, that you should cut off my head with your sword.'

The prince was astonished, and said that he could not bring himself to cut the head off his truest friend, and to this he stuck in spite of all the fox's declarations that it was the greatest service he could do him. At this the fox became very sorrowful, and declared that the prince's refusal to grant his request now compelled him to do a deed which he was very unwilling to do—if the prince would not cut off his head, then he must kill the prince himself. Then at last the prince drew his good sword and cut off the fox's head, and the next moment a youth stood before him.

'Thanks,' said he, 'for this service, which has freed me from a spell that not even death itself could loosen. I am the dead man who lay unburied in the robber's inn, where you ransomed me and gave me honourable burial, and therefore I have helped you in your journey.'

With this they parted and the prince, disguising himself as a horse-shoer, went up to his father's palace and offered his services there.

The king's men told him that a horse-shoer was indeed wanted at the palace, but he must be one who could lift up the feet of the horse with the golden shoes, and such a one they had not yet been able to find. The prince asked to see the horse, and as soon as he entered the stable the steed began to neigh in a friendly fashion, and stood as quiet and still as a lamb while the prince lifted up his hoofs, one after the other, and showed the king's men the famous golden shoes.

After this the king's men began to talk about the bird Grip, and how strange it was that he would not sing, however well he was attended to. The horse-shoer then said that he knew the bird very well; he had seen it when it sat in its cage in another king's palace, and if it did not sing now it must be because it did not have all

that it wanted. He himself knew so much about the bird's ways that if he only got to see it he could tell at once what it lacked.



“The horse-shoer was led into the king’s chamber.” Illustration by H.J. Ford, published in *The Pink Fairy Book* by Andrew Lang (1897), Longmans, Green and Company.

The king’s men now took counsel whether they ought to take the stranger in before the king, for in his chamber sat the bird Grip along with the weeping princess. It was decided to risk doing so, and the horse-shoer was led

into the king's chamber, where he had no sooner called the bird by its name than it began to sing and the princess to smile. Then the darkness cleared away from the king's eyes, and the more the bird sang the more clearly did he see, till at last in the strange horse-shoer he recognised his youngest son. Then the princess told the king how treacherously his eldest sons had acted, and he had them banished from his kingdom; but the youngest prince married the princess, and got the horse with the golden shoes and half the kingdom from his father, who kept for himself so long as he lived the bird Grip, which now sang with all its heart to the king and all his court.

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