



# *The Enchanted Canary*

Andrew Lang'S Fairy Books

Slavic

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*Intermediate*  
*29 min read*

I

Once upon a time, in the reign of King Cambrinus, there lived at Avesnes one of his lords, who was the finest man—by which I mean the fattest—in the whole country of Flanders. He ate four meals a day, slept twelve hours out of the twenty-four, and the only thing he ever did was to shoot at small birds with his bow and arrow.

Still, with all his practice he shot very badly, he was so fat and heavy, and as he grew daily fatter, he was at last obliged to give up walking, and be dragged about in a wheel-chair, and the people made fun of him, and gave him the name of my Lord Tubby.

Now, the only trouble that Lord Tubby had was about his son, whom he loved very much, although they were not in the least alike, for the young Prince was as thin as a cuckoo. And what vexed him more than all was, that though the young ladies throughout all his lands did their best to make the Prince fall in love with them, he would have nothing to say to any of them, and told his father he did not wish to marry.

Instead of chatting with them in the dusk, he wandered about the woods, whispering to the moon. No wonder the young ladies thought him very odd, but they liked him all the better for that; and as he had received at his birth the name of Desire, they all called him d'Amour Desire.

‘What is the matter with you?’ his father often said to him. ‘You have everything you can possibly wish for: a

good bed, good food, and tuns full of beer. The only thing you want, in order to become as fat as a pig, is a wife that can bring you broad, rich lands. So marry, and you will be perfectly happy.'

'I ask nothing better than to marry,' replied Desire, 'but I have never seen a woman that pleases me. All the girls here are pink and white, and I am tired to death of their eternal lilies and roses.'

'My faith!' cried Tubby; 'do you want to marry a negress, and give me grandchildren as ugly as monkeys and as stupid as owls?'

'No, father, nothing of the sort. But there must be women somewhere in the world who are neither pink nor white, and I tell you, once for all, that I will never marry until I have found one exactly to my taste.'

## II

Some time afterwards, it happened that the Prior of the Abbey of Saint Amand sent to the Lord of Avesnes a basket of oranges, with a beautifully-written letter saying that these golden fruit, then unknown in Flanders, came straight from a land where the sun always shone.

That evening Tubby and his son ate the golden apples at supper, and thought them delicious.

Next morning as the day dawned, Desire went down to the stable and saddled his pretty white horse. Then he went, all dressed for a journey, to the bedside of Tubby, and found him smoking his first pipe.

'Father,' he said gravely, 'I have come to bid you farewell. Last night I dreamed that I was walking in a wood, where the trees were covered with golden apples. I gathered one of them, and when I opened it there came out a lovely princess with a golden skin. That is the wife I want, and I am going to look for her.'

The Lord of Avesnes was so much astonished that he let his pipe fall to the ground; then he became so diverted at the notion of his son marrying a yellow woman, and a woman shut up inside an orange, that he burst into fits of laughter.

Desire waited to bid him good-bye until he was quiet again; but as his father went on laughing and showed no signs of stopping, the young man took his hand, kissed it tenderly, opened the door, and in the twinkling of an eye was as at the bottom of the staircase. He jumped lightly on his horse, and was a mile from home before Tubby had ceased laughing.

`A yellow wife! He must be mad! fit for a strait waistcoat!' cried the good man, when he was able to speak.  
`Here! quick! bring him back to me.'

The servants mounted their horses and rode after the Prince; but as they did not know which road he had taken, they went all ways except the right one, and instead of bringing him back they returned themselves when it grew dark, with their horses worn out and covered with dust.

### III

When Desire thought they could no longer catch him, he pulled his horse into a walk, like a prudent man who knows he has far to go. He travelled in this way for many weeks, passing by villages, towns, mountains, valleys, and plains, but always pushing south, where every day the sun seemed hotter and more brilliant.

At last one day at sunset Desire felt the sun so warm, that he thought he must now be near the place of his dream. He was at that moment close to the corner of a wood where stood a little hut, before the door of which his horse stopped of his own accord. An old man with a white beard was sitting on the doorstep enjoying the fresh air. The Prince got down from his horse and asked leave to rest.

`Come in, my young friend,' said the old man; `my house is not large, but it is big enough to hold a stranger.'

The traveller entered, and his host put before him a simple meal. When his hunger was satisfied the old man said to him:

`If I do not mistake, you come from far. May I ask where you are going?'

`I will tell you,' answered Desire, `though most likely you will laugh at me. I dreamed that in the land of the sun there was a wood full of orange trees, and that in one of the oranges I should find a beautiful princess who is to be my wife. It is she I am seeking.'

`Why should I laugh?' asked the old man. `Madness in youth is true wisdom. Go, young man, follow your dream, and if you do not find the happiness that you seek, at any rate you will have had the happiness of seeking it.'

### IV

The next day the Prince arose early and took leave of his host.

‘The wood that you saw in your dream is not far from here,’ said the old man. ‘It is in the depth of the forest, and this road will lead you there. You will come to a vast park surrounded by high walls. In the middle of the park is a castle, where dwells a horrible witch who allows no living being to enter the doors. Behind the castle is the orange grove. Follow the wall till you come to a heavy iron gate. Don’t try to press it open, but oil the hinges with this,’ and the old man gave him a small bottle.

‘The gate will open of itself,’ he continued, ‘and a huge dog which guards the castle will come to you with his mouth wide open, but just throw him this oat cake. Next, you will see a baking woman leaning over her heated oven. Give her this brush. Lastly, you will find a well on your left; do not forget to take the cord of the bucket and spread it in the sun. When you have done this, do not enter the castle, but go round it and enter the orange grove. Then gather three oranges, and get back to the gate as fast as you can. Once out of the gate, leave the forest by the opposite side.

‘Now, attend to this: whatever happens, do not open your oranges till you reach the bank of a river, or a fountain. Out of each orange will come a princess, and you can choose which you like for your wife. Your choice once made, be very careful never to leave your bride for an instant, and remember that the danger which is most to be feared is never the danger we are most afraid of.’

V

Desire thanked his host warmly, and took the road he pointed out. In less than an hour he arrived at the wall, which was very high indeed. He sprang to the ground, fastened his horse to a tree, and soon found the iron gate. Then he took out his bottle and oiled the hinges, when the gate opened of itself, and he saw an old castle standing inside. The Prince entered boldly into the courtyard.

Suddenly he heard fierce howls, and a dog as tall as a donkey, with eyes like billiard balls, came towards him, showing his teeth, which were like the prongs of a fork. Desire flung him the oat cake, which the great dog instantly snapped up, and the young Prince passed quietly on.

A few yards further he saw a huge oven, with a wide, red-hot gaping mouth. A woman as tall as a giant was leaning over the oven. Desire gave her the brush, which she took in silence.

Then he went on to the well, drew up the cord, which was half rotten, and stretched it out in the sun.

Lastly he went round the castle, and plunged into the orange grove. There he gathered the three most beautiful oranges he could find, and turned to go back to the gate.

But just at this moment the sun was darkened, the earth trembled, and Desire heard a voice crying:

‘Baker, baker, take him by his feet, and throw him into the oven!’

‘No,’ replied the baker; ‘a long time has passed since I first began to scour this oven with my own flesh. YOU never cared to give me a brush; but he has given me one, and he shall go in peace.’

‘Rope, O rope!’ cried the voice again, ‘twine yourself round his neck and strangle him.’

‘No,’ replied the rope; ‘you have left me for many years past to fall to pieces with the damp. He has stretched me out in the sun. Let him go in peace.’

‘Dog, my good dog,’ cried the voice, more and more angry, ‘jump at his throat and eat him up.’

‘No,’ replied the dog; ‘though I have served you long, you never

gave me any bread. He has given me as much as I want. Let him go in peace.’

‘Iron gate, iron gate,’ cried the voice, growling like thunder, ‘fall on him and grind him to powder.’

‘No,’ replied the gate; ‘it is a hundred years since you left me to rust, and he has oiled me. Let him go in peace.’

## VI

Once outside, the young adventurer put his oranges into a bag that hung from his saddle, mounted his horse, and rode quickly out of the forest.

Now, as he was longing to see the princesses, he was very anxious to come to a river or a fountain, but, though he rode for hours, a river or fountain was nowhere to be seen. Still his heart was light, for he felt that he had got through the most difficult part of his task, and the rest was easy.

About mid-day he reached a sandy plain, scorching in the sun. Here he was seized with dreadful thirst; he took his gourd and raised it to his lips.

But the gourd was empty; in the excitement of his joy he had forgotten to fill it. He rode on, struggling with his sufferings, but at last he could bear it no longer.

He let himself slide to the earth, and lay down beside his horse, his throat burning, his chest heaving, and his head going round. Already he felt that death was near him, when his eyes fell on the bag where the oranges peeped out.

Poor Desire, who had braved so many dangers to win the lady of his dreams, would have given at this moment all the princesses in the world, were they pink or golden, for a single drop of water.

‘Ah!’ he said to himself. ‘If only these oranges were real fruit— fruit as refreshing as what I ate in Flanders! And, after all, who knows?’

This idea put some life into him. He had the strength to lift himself up and put his hand into his bag. He drew out an orange and opened it with his knife.

Out of it flew the prettiest little female canary that ever was seen.

‘Give me something to drink, I am dying of thirst,’ said the golden bird.

‘Wait a minute,’ replied Desire, so much astonished that he forgot his own sufferings; and to satisfy the bird he took a second orange, and opened it without thinking what he was doing. Out of it flew another canary, and she too began to cry:

‘I am dying of thirst; give me something to drink.’

Then Tubby’s son saw his folly, and while the two canaries flew away he sank on the ground, where, exhausted by his last effort, he lay unconscious.

When he came to himself, he had a pleasant feeling of freshness all about him. It was night, the sky was sparkling with stars, and the earth was covered with a heavy dew.

The traveller having recovered, mounted his horse, and at the first streak of dawn he saw a stream dancing in front of him, and stooped down and drank his fill.

He hardly had courage to open his last orange. Then he remembered that the night before he had disobeyed the orders of the old man. Perhaps his terrible thirst was a trick of the cunning witch, and suppose, even though he opened the orange on the banks of the stream, that he did not find in it the princess that he sought?

He took his knife and cut it open. Alas! out of it flew a little canary, just like the others, who cried:

‘I am thirsty; give me something to drink.’

Great was the disappointment of Desire. However, he was determined not to let this bird fly away; so he took up some water in the palm of his hand and held it to its beak.

Scarcely had the canary drunk when she became a beautiful girl, tall and straight as a poplar tree, with black eyes and a golden skin. Desire had never seen anyone half so lovely, and he stood gazing at her in delight.

On her side she seemed quite bewildered, but she looked about her with happy eyes, and was not at all afraid of her deliverer.

He asked her name. She answered that she was called the Princess Zizi; she was about sixteen years old, and for ten years of that time the witch had kept her shut up in an orange, in the shape of a canary.

‘Well, then, my charming Zizi,’ said the young Prince, who was longing to marry her, ‘let us ride away quickly so as to escape from the wicked witch.’

But Zizi wished to know where he meant to take her.

‘To my father’s castle,’ he said.

He mounted his horse and took her in front of him, and, holding her carefully in his arms, they began their journey.

## VIII

Everything the Princess saw was new to her, and in passing through mountains, valleys, and towns, she asked a thousand questions. Desire was charmed to answer them. It is so delightful to teach those one loves!

Once she inquired what the girls in his country were like.

‘They are pink and white,’ he replied, ‘and their eyes are blue.’

‘Do you like blue eyes?’ said the Princess; but Desire thought it was a good opportunity to find out what was in her heart, so he did not answer.

‘And no doubt,’ went on the Princess, ‘one of them is your intended bride?’

Still he was silent, and Zizi drew herself up proudly.

‘No,’ he said at last. ‘None of the girls of my own country are beautiful in my eyes, and that is why I came to look for a wife in the land of the sun. Was I wrong, my lovely Zizi?’

This time it was Zizi’s turn to be silent.

## IX

Talking in this way they drew near to the castle. When they were about four stone-throws from the gates they dismounted in the forest, by the edge of a fountain.

‘My dear Zizi,’ said Tubby’s son, ‘we cannot present ourselves before my father like two common people who have come back from a walk. We must enter the castle with more ceremony. Wait for me here, and in an hour I will return with carriages and horses fit for a princess.’

‘Don’t be long,’ replied Zizi, and she watched him go with wistful eyes.

When she was left by herself the poor girl began to feel afraid. She was alone for the first time in her life, and in the middle of a thick forest.

Suddenly she heard a noise among the trees. Fearing lest it should be a wolf, she hid herself in the hollow trunk of a willow tree which hung over the fountain. It was big enough to hold her altogether, but she peeped out,



and her pretty head was reflected in the clear water.

Then there appeared, not a wolf, but a creature quite as wicked and quite as ugly. Let us see who this creature was.

X

Not far from the fountain there lived a family of bricklayers. Now, fifteen years before this time, the father in walking through the forest found a little girl, who had been deserted by the gypsies. He carried her home to his wife, and the good woman was sorry for her, and brought her up with her own sons. As she grew older, the little gypsy became much more remarkable for strength and cunning than for sense or beauty. She had a low forehead, a flat nose, thick lips, coarse hair, and a skin not golden like that of Zizi, but the colour of clay.

As she was always being teased about her complexion, she got as noisy and cross as a titmouse. So they used to call her Titty.

Titty was often sent by the bricklayer to fetch water from the fountain, and as she was very proud and lazy the gypsy disliked this very much.

It was she who had frightened Zizi by appearing with her pitcher on her shoulder. Just as she was stooping to fill it, she saw reflected in the water the lovely image of the Princess.

‘What a pretty face!’ she exclaimed, ‘Why, it must be mine! How in the world can they call me ugly? I am certainly much too pretty to be their water carrier!’

So saying, she broke her pitcher and went home.

‘Where is your pitcher?’ asked the bricklayer.

‘Well, what do you expect? The pitcher may go many times to the well. . . .’

‘But at last it is broken. Well, here is a bucket that will not break.’

The gypsy returned to the fountain, and addressing once more the image of Zizi, she said:

‘No; I don’t mean to be a beast of burden any longer.’ And she flung the bucket so high in the air that it stuck in the branches of an oak.

‘I met a wolf,’ she told the bricklayer, ‘and I broke the bucket across his nose.’

The bricklayer asked her no more questions, but took down a broom and gave her such a beating that her pride was humbled a little.

Then he handed to her an old copper milk-can, and said:

‘If you don’t bring it back full, your bones shall suffer for it.’

## XI

Titty went off rubbing her sides; but this time she did not dare to disobey, and in a very bad temper stooped down over the well. It was not at all easy to fill the milk-can, which was large and round. It would not go down into the well, and the gypsy had to try again and again.

At last her arms grew so tired that when she did manage to get the can properly under the water she had no strength to pull it up, and it rolled to the bottom.

On seeing the can disappear, she made such a miserable face that Zizi, who had been watching her all this time, burst into fits of laughter.

Titty turned round and perceived the mistake she had made; and she felt so angry that she made up her mind to be revenged at once.

‘What are you doing there, you lovely creature?’ she said to Zizi.

‘I am waiting for my lover,’ Zizi replied; and then, with a simplicity quite natural in a girl who so lately had been a canary, she told all her story.

The gypsy had often seen the young Prince pass by, with his gun on his shoulder, when he was going after crows. She was too ugly and ragged for him ever to have noticed her, but Titty on her side had admired him, though she thought he might well have been a little fatter.

‘Dear, dear!’ she said to herself. ‘So he likes yellow women! Why, I am yellow too, and if I could only think of a

way—‘

It was not long before she did think of it.

‘What!’ cried the sly Titty, ‘they are coming with great pomp to fetch you, and you are not afraid to show yourself to so many fine lords and ladies with your hair down like that? Get down at once, my poor child, and let me dress your hair for you!’

The innocent Zizi came down at once, and stood by Titty. The gypsy began to comb her long brown locks, when suddenly she drew a pin from her stays, and, just as the titmouse digs its beak into the heads of linnets and larks, Titty dug the pin into the head of Zizi.

No sooner did Zizi feel the prick of the pin than she became a bird again, and, spreading her wings, she flew away.

‘That was neatly done,’ said the gypsy. ‘The Prince will be clever if he finds his bride.’ And, arranging her dress, she seated herself on the grass to await Desire.

## XII

Meanwhile the Prince was coming as fast as his horse could carry him. He was so impatient that he was always full fifty yards in front of the lords and ladies sent by Tubby to bring back Zizi.

At the sight of the hideous gypsy he was struck dumb with surprise and horror.

‘Ah me!’ said Titty, ‘so you don’t know your poor Zizi? While you were away the wicked witch came, and turned me into this. But if you only have the courage to marry me I shall get back my beauty.’ And she began to cry bitterly.

Now the good-natured Desire was as soft-hearted as he was brave.

‘Poor girl,’ he thought to himself. ‘It is not her fault, after all, that she has grown so ugly, it is mine. Oh! why did I not follow the old man’s advice? Why did I leave her alone? And besides, it depends on me to break the spell, and I love her too much to let her remain like this.’

So he presented the gypsy to the lords and ladies of the Court, explaining to them the terrible misfortune which had befallen his beautiful bride.

They all pretended to believe it, and the ladies at once put on the false princess the rich dresses they had brought for Zizi.

She was then perched on the top of a magnificent ambling palfrey, and they set forth to the castle.

But unluckily the rich dress and jewels only made Titty look uglier still, and Desire could not help feeling hot and uncomfortable when he made his entry with her into the city.

Bells were pealing, chimes ringing, and the people filling the streets and standing at their doors to watch the procession go by, and they could hardly believe their eyes as they saw what a strange bride their Prince had chosen.

In order to do her more honour, Tubby came to meet her at the foot of the great marble staircase. At the sight of the hideous creature he almost fell backwards.

‘What!’ he cried. ‘Is this the wonderful beauty?’

‘Yes, father, it is she,’ replied Desire with a sheepish look. ‘But she has been bewitched by a wicked sorceress, and will not regain her beauty until she is my wife.’

‘Does she say so? Well, if you believe that, you may drink cold water and think it bacon,’ the unhappy Tubby answered crossly.

But all the same, as he adored his son, he gave the gypsy his hand and led her to the great hall, where the bridal feast was spread.

### XIII

The feast was excellent, but Desire hardly touched anything. However, to make up, the other guests ate greedily, and, as for Tubby, nothing ever took away his appetite.

When the moment arrived to serve the roast goose, there was a pause, and Tubby took the opportunity to lay down his knife and fork for a little. But as the goose gave no sign of appearing, he sent his head carver to find

out what was the matter in the kitchen.

Now this was what had happened.

While the goose was turning on the spit, a beautiful little canary hopped on to the sill of the open window.

‘Good-morning, my fine cook,’ she said in a silvery voice to the man who was watching the roast.

‘Good-morning, lovely golden bird,’ replied the chief of the scullions, who had been well brought up.

‘I pray that Heaven may send you to sleep,’ said the golden bird, ‘and that the goose may burn, so that there may be none left for Titty.’

And instantly the chief of the scullions fell fast asleep, and the goose was burnt to a cinder.

When he awoke he was horrified, and gave orders to pluck another goose, to stuff it with chestnuts, and put it on the spit.

While it was browning at the fire, Tubby inquired for his goose a second time. The Master Cook himself mounted to the hall to make his excuses, and to beg his lord to have a little patience. Tubby showed his patience by abusing his son.

‘As if it wasn’t enough,’ he grumbled between his teeth, ‘that the boy should pick up a hag without a penny, but the goose must go and burn now. It isn’t a wife he has brought me, it is Famine herself.’

XIV

While the Master Cook was upstairs, the golden bird came again to perch on the window-sill, and called in his clear voice to the head scullion, who was watching the spit:

‘Good-morning, my fine Scullion!’

‘Good-morning, lovely Golden Bird,’ replied the Scullion, whom the Master Cook had forgotten in his excitement to warn.

‘I pray Heaven,’ went on the Canary, ‘that it will send you to sleep, and that the goose may burn, so that there may be none left for Titty.’

And the Scullion fell fast asleep, and when the Master Cook came back he found the goose as black as the chimney.

In a fury he woke the Scullion, who in order to save himself from blame told the whole story.

‘That accursed bird,’ said the Cook; ‘it will end by getting me sent away. Come, some of you, and hide yourselves, and if it comes again, catch it and wring its neck.’

He spitted a third goose, lit a huge fire, and seated himself by it.

The bird appeared a third time, and said: ‘Good-morning, my fine Cook.’

‘Good-morning, lovely Golden Bird,’ replied the Cook, as if nothing had happened, and at the moment that the Canary was beginning, ‘I pray Heaven that it may send,’ a scullion who was hidden outside rushed out and shut the shutters. The bird flew into the kitchen. Then all the cooks and scullions sprang after it, knocking at it with their aprons. At length one of them caught it just at the very moment that Tubby entered the kitchen, waving his sceptre. He had come to see for himself why the goose had never made its appearance.

The Scullion stopped at once, just as he was about to wring the Canary’s neck.

XV

‘Will some one be kind enough to tell me the meaning of all this?’ cried the Lord of Avesnes.

‘Your Excellency, it is the bird,’ replied the Scullion, and he placed it in his hand.

‘Nonsense! What a lovely bird!’ said Tubby, and in stroking its head he touched a pin that was sticking between its feathers. He pulled it out, and lo! the Canary at once became a beautiful girl with a golden skin who jumped lightly to the ground.

‘Gracious! what a pretty girl!’ said Tubby.

‘Father! it is she! it is Zizi!’ exclaimed Desire, who entered at this moment.

And he took her in his arms, crying: ‘My darling Zizi, how happy I am to see you once more!’

`Well, and the other one?' asked Tubby.

The other one was stealing quietly to the door.

`Stop her! called Tubby. `We will judge her cause at once.'

And he seated himself solemnly on the oven, and condemned Titty to be burned alive. After which the lords and cooks formed themselves in lines, and Tubby betrothed Desire to Zizi.

XVI

The marriage took place a few days later. All the boys in the country side were there, armed with wooden swords, and decorated with epaulets made of gilt paper.

Zizi obtained Titty's pardon, and she was sent back to the brick- fields, followed and hooted at by all the boys. And this is why to- day the country boys always throw stones at a titmouse.

On the evening of the wedding-day all the larders, cellars, cupboards and tables of the people, whether rich or poor, were loaded as if by enchantment with bread, wine, beer, cakes and tarts, roast larks, and even geese, so that Tubby could not complain any more that his son had married Famine.

Since that time there has always been plenty to eat in that country, and since that time, too, you see in the midst of the fair- haired blue-eyed women of Flanders a few beautiful girls, whose eyes are black and whose skins are the colour of gold. They are the descendants of Zizi.

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