

# *The Princess Bella-Flor*

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

Spanish

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*Intermediate*

*17 min read*

Once upon a time there lived a man who had two sons. When they grew up the elder went to seek his fortune in a far country, and for many years no one heard anything about him. Meanwhile the younger son stayed at home with his father, who died at last in a good old age, leaving great riches behind him.

For some time the son who stayed at home spent his father's wealth freely, believing that he alone remained to enjoy it. But, one day, as he was coming down stairs, he was surprised to see a stranger enter the hall, looking about as if the house belonged to him.

'Have you forgotten me?' asked the man.

'I can't forget a person I have never known,' was the rude answer.

'I am your brother,' replied the stranger, 'and I have returned home without the money I hoped to have made. And, what is worse, they tell me in the village that my father is dead. I would have counted my lost gold as nothing if I could have seen him once more.'

'He died six months ago,' said the rich brother, 'and he left you, as your portion, the old wooden chest that stands in the loft. You had better go there and look for it; I have no more time to waste.' And he went his way.

So the wanderer turned his steps to the loft, which was at the top of the storehouse, and there he found the wooden chest, so old that it looked as if it were dropping to pieces.

‘What use is this old thing to me?’ he said to himself. ‘Oh, well, it will serve to light a fire at which I can warm myself; so things might be worse after all.’

Placing the chest on his back, the man, whose name was Jose, set out for his inn, and, borrowing a hatchet, began to chop up the box. In doing so he discovered a secret drawer, and in it lay a paper. He opened the paper, not knowing what it might contain, and was astonished to find that it was the acknowledgment of a large debt that was owing to his father. Putting the precious writing in his pocket, he hastily inquired of the landlord where he could find the man whose name was written inside, and he ran out at once in search of him.

The debtor proved to be an old miser, who lived at the other end of the village. He had hoped for many months that the paper he had written had been lost or destroyed, and, indeed, when he saw it, was very unwilling to pay what he owed. However, the stranger threatened to drag him before the king, and when the miser saw that there was no help for it he counted out the coins one by one. The stranger picked them up and put them in his pocket, and went back to his inn feeling that he was now a rich man.

A few weeks after this he was walking through the streets of the nearest town, when he met a poor woman crying bitterly. He stopped and asked her what was the matter, and she answered between her sobs that her husband was dying, and, to make matters worse, a creditor whom he could not pay was anxious to have him taken to prison.

‘Comfort yourself,’ said the stranger kindly; ‘they shall neither send your husband to prison nor sell your goods. I will not only pay his debts but, if he dies, the cost of his burial also. And now go home, and nurse him as well as you can.’

And so she did; but, in spite of her care, the husband died, and was buried by the stranger. But everything cost more than he expected, and when all was paid he found that only three gold pieces were left.

‘What am I to do now?’ said he to himself. ‘I think I had better go to court, and enter into the service of the king.’

At first he was only a servant, who carried the king the water for his bath, and saw that his bed was made in a

particular fashion. But he did his duties so well that his master soon took notice of him, and in a short time he rose to be a gentleman of the bedchamber.

Now, when this happened the younger brother had spent all the money he had inherited, and did not know how to make any for himself. He then bethought him of the king's favourite, and went whining to the palace to beg that his brother, whom he had so ill-used, would give him his protection, and find him a place. The elder, who was always ready to help everyone spoke to the king on his behalf, and the next day the young man took up his work at court.

Unfortunately, the new-comer was by nature spiteful and envious, and could not bear anyone to have better luck than himself. By dint of spying through keyholes and listening at doors, he learned that the king, old and ugly though he was, had fallen in love with the Princess Bella-Flor, who would have nothing to say to him, and had hidden herself in some mountain castle, no one knew where.

'That will do nicely,' thought the scoundrel, rubbing his hands. 'It will be quite easy to get the king to send my brother in search of her, and if he returns without finding her, his head will be the forfeit. Either way, he will be out of MY path.'

So he went at once to the Lord High Chamberlain and craved an audience of the king, to whom he declared he wished to tell some news of the highest importance. The king admitted him into the presence chamber without delay, and bade him state what he had to say, and to be quick about it.

'Oh, sire! the Princess Bella-Flor—' answered the man, and then stopped as if afraid.

'What of the Princess Bella-Flor?' asked the king impatiently.

'I have heard—it is whispered at court—that your majesty desires to know where she lies in hiding.'

'I would give half my kingdom to the man who will bring her to me,' cried the king, eagerly. 'Speak on, knave; has a bird of the air revealed to you the secret?'

'It is not I, but my brother, who knows,' replied the traitor; 'if your majesty would ask him—' But before the words were out of his mouth the king had struck a blow with his sceptre on a golden plate that hung on the wall.

'Order Jose to appear before me instantly,' he shouted to the servant who ran to obey his orders, so great was the noise his majesty had made; and when Jose entered the hall, wondering what in the world could be the

matter, the king was nearly dumb from rage and excitement.

'Bring me the Princess Bella-Flor this moment,' stammered he, 'for if you return without her I will have you drowned!' And without another word he left the hall, leaving Jose staring with surprise and horror.

'How can I find the Princess Bella-Flor when I have never even seen her?' thought he. 'But it is no use staying here, for I shall only be put to death.' And he walked slowly to the stables to choose himself a horse.

There were rows upon rows of fine beasts with their names written in gold above their stalls, and Jose was looking uncertainly from one to the other, wondering which he should choose, when an old white horse turned its head and signed to him to approach.

'Take me,' it said in a gentle whisper, 'and all will go well.'

Jose still felt so bewildered with the mission that the king had given him that he forgot to be astonished at hearing a horse talk. Mechanically he laid his hand on the bridle and led the white horse out of the stable. He was about to mount on his back, when the animal spoke again:

'Pick up those three loaves of bread which you see there, and put them in your pocket.'

Jose did as he was told, and being in a great hurry to get away, asked no questions, but swung himself into the saddle.

They rode far without meeting any adventures, but at length they came to an ant-hill, and the horse stopped.

'Crumble those three loaves for the ants,' he said. But Jose hesitated.

'Why, we may want them ourselves!' answered he.

'Never mind that; give them to the ants all the same. Do not lose a chance of helping others.' And when the loaves lay in crumbs on the road, the horse galloped on.

By-and-by they entered a rocky pass between two mountains, and here they saw an eagle which had been caught in a hunter's net.

'Get down and cut the meshes of the net, and set the poor bird free,' said the horse.

‘But it will take so long,’ objected Jose, ‘and we may miss the princess.’

‘Never mind that; do not lose a chance of helping others,’ answered the horse. And when the meshes were cut, and the eagle was free, the horse galloped on.

The had ridden many miles, and at last they came to a river, where they beheld a little fish lying gasping on the sand, and the horse said:

‘Do you see that little fish? It will die if you do not put it back in the water.’

‘But, really, we shall never find the Princess Bella-Flor if we waste our time like this!’ cried Jose.

‘We never waste time when we are helping others,’ answered the horse. And soon the little fish was swimming happily away.



“How Jose found the Princess Bella-Flor.” .”Illustration by H.J Ford. Published in The Orange Fairy Book by Andrew Lang (1906), Longmans, Green, and Company.

A little while after they reached a castle, which was built in the middle of a very thick wood, and right in front was the Princess Bella-Flor feeding her hens.

‘Now listen,’ said the horse. ‘I am going to give all sorts of little hops and skips, which will amuse the Princess Bella-Flor. Then she will tell you that she would like to ride a little way, and you must help her to mount. When she is seated I shall begin to neigh and kick, and you must say that I have never carried a woman before, and that you had better get up behind so as to be able to manage me. Once on my back we will go like the wind to the king’s palace.’

Jose did exactly as the horse told him, and everything fell out as the animal prophesied; so that it was not until they were galloping breathlessly towards the palace that the princess knew that she was taken captive. She said nothing, however, but quietly opened her apron which contained the bran for the chickens, and in a moment it lay scattered on the ground.

‘Oh, I have let fall my bran!’ cried she; ‘please get down and pick it up for me.’ But Jose only answered:

‘We shall find plenty of bran where we are going.’ And the horse galloped on.

They were now passing through a forest, and the princess took out her handkerchief and threw it upwards, so that it stuck in one of the topmost branches of a tree.

‘Dear me; how stupid! I have let my handkerchief blow away,’ said she. ‘Will you climb up and get it for me?’ But Jose answered:

‘We shall find plenty of handkerchiefs where we are going.’ And the horse galloped on.

After the wood they reached a river, and the princess slipped a ring off her finger and let it roll into the water.

‘How careless of me,’ gasped she, beginning to sob. ‘I have lost my favourite ring; DO stop for a moment and look if you can see it.’ But Jose answered:

‘You will find plenty of rings where you are going.’ And the horse galloped on.

At last they entered the palace gates, and the king's heart bounded with joy at beholding his beloved Princess Bella-Flor. But the princess brushed him aside as if he had been a fly, and locked herself into the nearest room, which she would not open for all his entreaties.

'Bring me the three things I lost on the way, and perhaps I may think about it,' was all she would say. And, in despair, the king was driven to take counsel of Jose.

'There is no remedy that I can see,' said his majesty, 'but that you, who know where they are, should go and bring them back. And if you return without them I will have you drowned.'

Poor Jose was much troubled at these words. He thought that he had done all that was required of him, and that his life was safe. However, he bowed low, and went out to consult his friend the horse.

'Do not vex yourself,' said the horse, when he had heard the story; 'jump up, and we will go and look for the things.' And Jose mounted at once.

They rode on till they came to the ant-hill, and then the horse asked:

'Would you like to have the bran?'

'What is the use of liking?' answered Jose.

'Well, call the ants, and tell them to fetch it for you; and, if some of it has been scattered by the wind, to bring in its stead the grains that were in the cakes you gave them.' Jose listened in surprise. He did not much believe in the horse's plan; but he could not think of anything better, so he called to the ants, and bade them collect the bran as fast as they could.

Then he saw under a tree and waited, while his horse cropped the green turf.

'Look there!' said the animal, suddenly raising its head; and Jose looked behind him and saw a little mountain of bran, which he put into a bag that was hung over his saddle.

'Good deeds bear fruit sooner or later,' observed the horse; 'but mount again, as we have far to go.'

When they arrived at the tree, they saw the handkerchief fluttering like a flag from the topmost branch, and Jose's spirits sank again.

'How am I to get that handkerchief?' cried he; 'why I should need Jacob's ladder!' But the horse answered:

'Do not be frightened; call to the eagle you set free from the net, he will bring it to you.'

So Jose called to the eagle, and the eagle flew to the top of the tree and brought back the handkerchief in its beak. Jose thanked him, and vaulting on his horse they rode on to the river.

A great deal of rain had fallen in the night, and the river, instead of being clear as it was before, was dark and troubled.

'How am I to fetch the ring from the bottom of this river when I do not know exactly where it was dropped, and cannot even see it?' asked Jose. But the horse answered: 'Do not be frightened; call the little fish whose life you saved, and she will bring it to you.'

So he called to the fish, and the fish dived to the bottom and slipped behind big stones, and moved little ones with its tail till it found the ring, and brought it to Jose in its mouth.

Well pleased with all he had done, Jose returned to the palace; but when the king took the precious objects to Bella-Flor, she declared that she would never open her door till the bandit who had carried her off had been fried in oil.

'I am very sorry,' said the king to Jose, 'I really would rather not; but you see I have no choice.'

While the oil was being heated in the great caldron, Jose went to the stables to inquire of his friend the horse if there was no way for him to escape.

'Do not be frightened,' said the horse. 'Get on my back, and I will gallop till my whole body is wet with perspiration, then rub it all over your skin, and no matter how hot the oil may be you will never feel it.'

Jose did not ask any more questions, but did as the horse bade him; and men wondered at his cheerful face as they lowered him into the caldron of boiling oil. He was left there till Bella-Flor cried that he must be cooked enough. Then out came a youth so young and handsome, that everyone fell in love with him, and Bella-Flor most of all.

As for the old king, he saw that he had lost the game; and in despair he flung himself into the caldron, and was fried instead of Jose. Then Jose was proclaimed king, on condition that he married Bella-Flor which he promised to do the next day. But first he went to the stables and sought out the horse, and said to him: 'It is to you that I owe my life and my crown. Why have you done all this for me?'

And the horse answered: 'I am the soul of that unhappy man for whom you spent all your fortune. And when I saw you in danger of death I begged that I might help you, as you had helped me. For, as I told you, Good deeds bear their own fruit!'

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