

The Punishment of Gangana

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

French

Advanced
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Once upon a time there lived a king and queen who ruled over a country so small that you could easily walk round it in one day. They were both very good, simple people; not very wise, perhaps, but anxious to be kind to everybody; and this was often a mistake, for the king allowed all his subjects to talk at once, and offer advice upon the government of the kingdom as well as upon private matters. And the end of it all was, that it was very difficult to get any laws made, and, still more, to get anyone to obey them.

Now, no traveller ever passed through the kingdom without inquiring how it came to be so small. And this was the reason. As soon as Petaldo (for that was the king's name) had been born, his father and mother betrothed him to the niece of their friend the fairy Gangana — if she should ever have one. But as the years passed on, and Gangana was still without a niece, the young prince forgot all about his destined bride, and when he was twenty-five he secretly married the beautiful daughter of a rich farmer, with whom he had fallen violently in love.

When the fairy heard the news she fell into a violent rage, and hurried off to tell the king. The old man thought in his heart that his son had waited quite long enough; but he did not dare to say so, lest some dreadful spell might be thrown over them all, and they should be changed into birds or snakes, or, worst of all, into stones. So, much against his will, he was obliged to disinherit the young man, and to forbid him to come to court. Indeed, he would have been a beggar had it not been for the property his wife had had given her by the farmer, which the youth obtained permission to erect into a kingdom.

Most princes would have been very angry at this treatment, especially as the old king soon died, and the queen was delighted to reign in his place. But Petaldo was a contented young man, and was quite satisfied with arranging his tiny court on the model of his father's, and having a lord chamberlain, and a high steward and several gentlemen in attendance; while the young queen appointed her own ladies-in-waiting and maids of honour. He likewise set up a mint to coin money, and chose a seneschal as head of the five policemen who kept order in the capital and punished the boys who were caught in the act of throwing stones at the palace windows.

The first to fill this important office was the young king's father-in-law, an excellent man of the name of Caboche. He was much beloved by everyone, and so sensible that he was not at all vain at rising at once to the dignity of seneschal, when he had only been a common farmer, but went about his fields every day as usual. This conduct so struck his king that very soon he never did anything without consulting him.

Each morning Caboche and his son-in-law had breakfast together, and when they had finished, the king took out of his iron chest great bundles of state papers, which he desired to talk over with his seneschal. Sometimes they would spend two hours at least in deciding these important matters, but more often after a few minutes Caboche would say:

'Excuse me, sire, but your majesty does not understand this affair in the least. Leave it to me, and I will settle it.'

'But what am I to do, then?' asked the king. And his minister answered:

'Oh, you can rule your wife, and see after your fruit garden. You will find that those two things will take up all your time.'

'Well, perhaps you are right,' the king replied; secretly glad to be rid of the cares of government. But though

Caboche did all the work, Petaldo never failed to appear on grand occasions, in his royal mantle of red linen, holding a sceptre of gilded wood. Meanwhile he passed his mornings in studying books, from which he learned the proper seasons to plant his fruit trees, and when they should be pruned; and his afternoons in his garden, where he put his knowledge into practice. In the evening he played cards with his father-in-law, and supped in public with the queen, and by ten o'clock everybody in the palace was fast asleep.

The queen, on her side, was quite as happy as her husband. She loved to be in her dairy, and nobody in the kingdom could make such delicious cheeses. But however busy she might be, she never forgot to bake a little barley cake, and make a tiny cream cheese, and to put them under a particular rose-tree in the garden. If you had asked her whom they were for, and where they went to, she could not have told you, but would have said that on the night of her marriage a fairy had appeared to her in a dream, and had bidden her to perform this ceremony.

After the king and the queen had six children, a little boy was born, with a small red cap on his head, so that he was quite different from his brothers and sisters, and his parents loved Cadichon better than any of them.

The years went on, and the children were growing big, when, one day, after Gillette the queen had finished baking her cake, and had turned it out on a plate, a lovely blue mouse crept up the leg of the table and ran to the plate. Instead of chasing it away, as most women would have done, the queen pretended not to notice what the mouse was doing, and was much surprised to see the little creature pick up the cake and carry it off to the chimney. She sprang forwards to stop it, when, suddenly, both the mouse and cake vanished, and in their place stood an old woman only a foot high, whose clothes hung in rags about her. Taking up a sharp pointed iron stick, she drew on the earthen floor some strange signs, uttering seven cries as she did so, and murmuring something in a low voice, among which the queen was sure she caught the words, 'faith,' 'wisdom,' 'happiness.' Then, seizing the kitchen broom, she whirled it three times round her head, and vanished. Immediately there arose a great noise in the next room, and on opening the door, the queen beheld three large cockchafers, each one with a princess between its feet, while the princes were seated on the backs of three swallows. In the middle was a car formed of a single pink shell, and drawn by two robin red-breasts, and in this car Cadichon was sitting by the side of the blue mouse, who was dressed in a splendid mantle of black velvet fastened under her chin. Before the queen had recovered from her surprise, cockchafers, red-breasts, mouse and children had all flown, singing, to the window, and disappeared from view.

The loud shrieks of the queen brought her husband and father running into the room, and when at last they

made out from her broken sentences what had really happened, they hastily snatched up some stout sticks that were lying about and set off to the rescue — one going in one direction and the other in another.

For at least an hour the queen sat sobbing where they had left her, when at last she was roused by a piece of folded paper falling at her feet. She stooped and picked it up eagerly, hoping that it might contain some news of her lost children. It was very short, but when she had read the few words, Gillette was comforted, for it bade her take heart, as they were well and happy under the protection of a fairy. ‘On your own faith and prudence depend your happiness,’ ended the writer. ‘It is I who have all these years eaten the food you placed under the rose-tree, and some day I shall reward you for it. “Everything comes to him who knows how to wait,” is the advice given by, — The Fairy of the Fields.’

Then the queen rose up, and bathed her face, and combed her shining hair; and as she turned away. from her mirror she beheld a linnet sitting on her bed. No one would have known that it was anything but a common linnet, and yesterday the queen would have thought so too. But this morning so many wonderful things had happened that she did not doubt for a moment that the writer of the letter was before her.

‘Pretty linnet,’ said she, ‘I will try to do all you wish. Only give me, I pray you, now and then, news of my little Cadichon.’

And the linnet flapped her wings and sang, and flew away. So the queen knew that she had guessed rightly, and thanked her in her heart.

By-and-by the king and his seneschal returned, hungry and tired with their fruitless search. They were amazed and rather angry to find the queen, whom they had left weeping, quite cheerful. Could she really care for her children so little and have forgotten them so soon? What could have caused this sudden change? But to all their questions Gillette would only answer:

‘Everything comes to him who knows how to wait.’

‘That is true,’ replied her father; ‘and, after all, your majesty must remember that the revenues of your kingdom would hardly bear the cost of seven princes and princesses brought up according to their rank. Be grateful, then, to those who have relieved you of the burden.’

'You are right ! You are always right !' cried the king, whose face once more beamed with smiles. And life at the palace went on as before, till Petaldo received a piece of news which disturbed him greatly.

The queen, his mother, who had for some time been a widow, suddenly made up her mind to marry again, and her choice had fallen on the young king of the Green Isles, who was younger than her own son, and, besides, handsome and fond of pleasure, which Petaldo was not. Now the grandmother, foolish though she was in many respects, had the sense to see that a woman as old and as plain as she was, could hardly expect a young man to fall in love with her, and that, if this was to happen, it would be needful to find some spell which would bring back her youth and beauty. Of course, the fairy Gangana could have wrought the change with one wave of her wand; but unluckily the two were no longer friends, because the fairy had tried hard to persuade the queen to declare her niece heiress to the crown, which the queen refused to do. Naturally, therefore, it was no use asking the help of Gangana to enable the queen to take a second husband, who would be certain to succeed her; and messengers were sent all over the neighbouring kingdoms, seeking to find a witch or a fairy who would work the wished-for miracle. None, however, could be found with sufficient skill, and at length the queen saw that if ever the king of the Green Isles was to be her husband she must throw herself on the mercy of the fairy Gangana.

The fairy's wrath was great when she heard the queen's story, but she knew very well that, as the king of the Green Isles had spent all his money, he would probably be ready to marry even an old woman, like her friend, in order to get more. So, in order to gain time, she hid her feelings, and told the queen that in three days the spell would be accomplished.

Her words made the queen so happy that twenty years seemed to fall from her at once, and she counted, not only the hours, but the minutes to the appointed time. It came at last, and the fairy stood before her in a long robe of pink and silver, held up by a tiny brown dwarf, who carried a small box under his arm. The queen received her with all the marks of respect that she could think of, and at the request of Gangana, ordered the doors and windows of the great hall to be closed, and her attendants to retire, so that she and her guest might be quite alone. Then, opening the box, which was presented to her on one knee by the dwarf, the fairy took from it a small vellum book with silver clasps, a wand that lengthened out as you touched it, and a crystal bottle filled with very clear green water. She next bade the queen sit on a seat in the middle of the room, and the dwarf to stand opposite her, after which she stooped down and drew three circles round them with a golden rod, touched each of them thrice with her wand, and sprinkled the liquid over both. Gradually the queen's big

features began to grow smaller and her face fresher, while at the same time the dwarf became about twice as tall as he had been before. This sight, added to the blue flames which sprang up from the three circles, so frightened the queen that she fainted in her chair, and when she recovered, both the page and the fairy had vanished.

At first she felt vaguely puzzled, not remembering clearly what had happened; then it all came back to her, and jumping up she ran to the nearest mirror. Oh ! how happy she was ! Her long nose and her projecting teeth had become things of beauty, her hair was thick and curly, and bright gold. The fairy had indeed fulfilled her promise ! But, in her hurry and pleasure, the queen never noticed that she had not been changed into a beautiful young lady, but into a very tall little girl of eight or nine years old ! Instead of her magnificent velvet dress, edged with fur and embroidered in gold, she wore a straight muslin frock, with a little lace apron, while her hair, which was always combed and twisted and fastened with diamond pins, hung in curls down her back. But if she had only known, something besides this had befallen her, for except as regards her love for the king of the Green Isles, her mind as well as her face had become that of a child, and this her courtiers were aware of, if she was not. Of course they could not imagine what had occurred, and did not know how to behave themselves, till the chief minister set them the example by ordering his wife and daughters to copy the queen's clothes and way of speaking. Then, in a short time, the whole court, including the men, talked and dressed like children, and played with dolls, or little tin soldiers, while at the state dinners nothing was seen but iced fruits, or sweet cakes made in the shape of birds and horses. But whatever she might be doing, the queen hardly ceased talking about the king of the Green Isles, whom she always spoke of as 'my little husband,' and as weeks passed on, and he did not come, she began to get very cross and impatient, so that her courtiers kept away from her as much as they could. By this time, too, they were growing tired of pretending to be children, and whispered their intention of leaving the palace and taking service under a neighbouring sovereign, when, one day, a loud blast of trumpets announced the arrival of the long-expected guest. In an instant all was smiles again, and in spite of the strictest rules of court etiquette, the queen insisted on receiving the young king at the bottom of the stairs. Unfortunately, in her haste, she fell over her dress, and rolled down several steps, screaming like a child, from fright. She was not really much hurt, though she had scratched her nose and bruised her forehead, but she was obliged to be carried to her room and have her face bathed in cold water. Still, in spite of this, she gave strict orders that the king should be brought to her presence the moment he entered the palace.

A shrill blast outside her door sent a twinge of pain through the queen's head, which by this time was aching

badly; but in her joy at welcoming her future husband she paid no heed to it. Between two lines of courtiers, bowing low, the young king advanced quickly; but at the sight of the queen and her bandages, broke out into such violent fits of laughter that he was forced to leave the room, and even the palace.

When the queen had recovered from the vexation caused by the king's rude behaviour, she bade her attendants to hasten after him and fetch him back, but no promises or entreaties would persuade him to return. This of course made the queen's temper even worse than it was before, and a plot was set on foot to deprive her of the crown, which would certainly have succeeded had not the fairy Gangana, who had only wished to prevent her marriage, restored her to her proper shape. But, far from thanking her friend for this service, the sight of her old face in the mirror filled her with despair; and from that day she hated Gangana with a deadly hatred.

And where were Petaldo's children all this while? Why, in the island of Bambini, where they had play-fellows to their hearts' content, and plenty of fairies to take care of them all. But out of all the seven princes and princesses whom the queen had seen carried off through the window, there was only Cadichon who was good and obedient; the other six were so rude and quarrelsome that they could get no one to play with them, and at last, as a punishment, the fairy changed them all into marionettes, till they should learn to behave better.

Now, in an unlucky moment, the Fairy of the Fields determined to visit her friend the queen of the fairies, who lived in a distant island, in order to consult her as to what was to become of Cadichon.

As she was entering the Hall of Audience, Gangana was leaving it, and sharp words were exchanged between them. After her enemy had flown off in a rage, the Fairy of the Fields poured out the whole story of Gangana's wickedness to the queen, and implored her counsel.

'Be comforted,' answered the fairy queen. 'For a while she must work her will, and at this moment she is carrying off Cadichon to the island where she still holds her niece captive. But should she make an evil use of the power she has, her punishment will be swift and great. And now I will give you this precious phial. Guard it carefully, for the liquid it contains will cause you to become invisible, and safe from the piercing eyes of all fairies. Against the eyes of mortals it has no charm!'

With a heart somewhat lighter, the Fairy of the Fields returned to her own island, and, the better to protect the six new marionettes from the wicked fairy, she sprinkled them with a few drops of the liquid, only avoiding just the tips of their noses, so that she might be able to know them again. Then she set off for the kingdom of Petaldo, which she found in a state of revolt, because for the first time since he had ascended the throne he had

dared to impose a tax. Indeed, matters might have ended in a war, or in cutting off the king's head, had not the fairy discovered a means of contenting everybody, and of whispering anew to the queen that all was well with her children, for she dared not tell her of the loss of Cadichon.

And what had become of Cadichon ? Well, the Fairy of the Fields had found out — by means of her books, which had told her — that the poor little boy had been placed by Gangana in an enchanted island, round which flowed a rapid river, sweeping rocks and trees in its current. Besides the river, the island was guarded by twenty-four enormous dragons, breathing flames, and forming a rampart of fire which it seemed as if none could pass.

The Fairy of the Fields knew all this, but she had a brave heart, and determined that by some means or other she would overcome all obstacles, and rescue Cadichon from the power of Gangana. So, taking with her the water of invisibility, she sprinkled it over her, and mounting her favourite winged lizard, set out for the island. When it appeared in sight she wrapped herself in her fireproof mantle; then, bidding the lizard return home, she slipped past the dragons and entered the island.

Scarcely had she done so than she beheld Gangana approaching her, talking loudly and angrily to a genius who flew by her side. From what she said, the fairy learned that Petaldo's mother, the old queen, had died of rage on hearing of the marriage of the king of the Green Isles to a young and lovely bride, and instead of leaving her kingdom to Gangana, had bequeathed it to one of the children of her son Petaldo.

'But all the trouble I have had with that foolish old woman shall not go for nothing,' cried Gangana. 'Go at once to my stables, and fetch out the strongest and swiftest griffins you can find in the stalls, and harness them to the yellow coach. Drive this, with all the speed you may, to the Isle of Bambini, and carry off the six children of Petaldo that are still there. I will see to Petaldo and Gillette myself. When I have got them all safe here I will change the parents into rabbits and the children into dogs. As for Cadichon, I have not quite made up my mind what I shall do with him.'

The Fairy of the Fields did not wait to hear more. No time was to be lost in seeking the help of the fairy queen if Petaldo and his family were to be saved from this dreadful doom. So, without waiting to summon her lizard, she flew across the island and past the dragons till her feet once more touched the ground again. But at that instant a black cloud rolled over her, loud thunder rent the air, and the earth rocked beneath her. Then wild lightnings lit up the sky, and by their flashes she saw the four-and-twenty dragons fighting together, uttering

shrieks and yells, till the whole earth must have heard the uproar. Trembling with terror, the fairy stood rooted to the spot; and when day broke, island, torrent, and dragons had vanished, and in their stead was a barren rock. On the summit of the rock stood a black ostrich, and on its back were seated Cadichon, and the little niece of the fairy Gangana, for whose sake she had committed so many evil deeds. While the Fairy of the Fields was gazing in surprise at this strange sight, the ostrich spread its wings and flew off in the direction of the Fortunate Isle, and, followed unseen by the good fairy, entered the great hall where the queen was sitting on her throne.

Proud and exultant was Gangana in her new shape, for, by all the laws of fairydom, if she succeeded in laying Cadichon at the feet of the queen, and received him back from her, he was in her power for life, and she might do with him as she would. This the good fairy knew well, and pressed on with all her strength, for the dreadful events of the night had almost exhausted her. But, with a mighty effort, she snatched the children away from the back of the ostrich, and placed them on the lap of the queen.

With a scream of baffled rage the ostrich turned away, and Gangana stood in her place, waiting for the doom which she had brought upon herself.

‘You have neglected all my warnings,’ said the queen, speaking more sternly than any fairy had ever heard her; ‘and my sentence is that during two hundred years you lose all your privileges as a fairy, and under the form of an ostrich shall become the slave of the lowest and wickedest of the genii whom you have made your friends. As for these children, I shall keep them with me, and they shall be brought up at my court.’

And so they were, until they grew up and were old enough to be married. Then the Fairy of the Fields took them back to the kingdom of the old queen, where Petaldo was now reigning. But the cares of state proved too heavy both for him and Gillette, after the quiet life they had led for so many years, and they were rejoiced to be able to lay aside their crowns, and place them on the heads of Cadichon and his bride, who was as good as she was beautiful, though she was the niece of the wicked. Gangana! And so well had Cadichon learned the lessons taught him at the court of the fairy queen, that never since the kingdom was a kingdom had the people been so well governed or so happy. And they went about the streets and the fields smiling with joy at the difference between the old times and the new, and whispering softly to each other:

‘Everything comes to him who knows how to wait.’

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