



# *The Snuff-Box*

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

French

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*Intermediate*

*11 min read*

As often happens in this world, there was once a young man who spent all his time in traveling. One day, as he was walking along, he picked up a snuff-box. He opened it, and the snuff-box said to him in the Spanish language, 'What do you want?' He was very much frightened, but, luckily, instead of throwing the box away, he only shut it tight, and put it in his pocket. Then he went on, away, away, away, and as he went he said to himself, 'If it says to me again "What do you want?" I shall know better what to say this time.' So he took out the snuff-box and opened it, and again it asked 'What do you want?' 'My hat full of gold,' answered the youth, and immediately it was full.

Our young man was enchanted. Henceforth he should never be in need of anything. So on he travelled, away, away, away, through thick forests, till at last he came to a beautiful castle. In the castle there lived a King. The young man walked round and round the castle, not caring who saw him, till the King noticed him, and asked what he was doing there. 'I was just looking at your castle.' 'You would like to have one like it, wouldn't you?' The young man did not reply, but when it grew dark he took his snuff-box and opened the lid. 'What do you want?' 'Build me a castle with laths of gold and tiles of diamond, and the furniture all of silver and gold.' He had scarcely finished speaking when there stood in front of him, exactly opposite the King's palace, a castle built precisely as he had ordered. When the King awoke he was struck dumb at the sight of the magnificent house shining in the rays of the sun. The servants could not do their work for stopping to stare at it. Then the King

dressed himself, and went to see the young man. And he told him plainly that he was a very powerful Prince; and that he hoped that they might all live together in one house or the other, and that the King would give him his daughter to wife. So it all turned out just as the King wished. The young man married the Princess, and they lived happily in the palace of gold.

But the King's wife was jealous both of the young man and of her own daughter. The Princess had told her mother about the snuff-box, which gave them everything they wanted, and the Queen bribed a servant to steal the snuff-box. They noticed carefully where it was put away every night, and one evening, when the whole world was asleep, the woman stole it and brought it to her old mistress. Oh how happy the Queen was! She opened the lid, and the snuff-box said to her 'What do you want?' And she answered at once 'I want you to take me and my husband and my servants and this beautiful house and set us down on the other side of the Red Sea, but my daughter and her husband are to stay behind.'

When the young couple woke up, they found themselves back in the old castle, without their snuff-box. They hunted for it high and low, but quite vainly. The young man felt that no time was to be lost, and he mounted his horse and filled his pockets with as much gold as he could carry. On he went, away, away, away, but he sought the snuff-box in vain all up and down the neighbouring countries, and very soon he came to the end of all his money. But still he went on, as fast as the strength of his horse would let him, begging his way.

Someone told him that he ought to consult the moon, for the moon travelled far, and might be able to tell him something. So he went away, away, away, and ended, somehow or other, by reaching the land of the moon. There he found a little old woman who said to him 'What are you doing here? My son eats all living things he sees, and if you are wise, you will go away without coming any further.' But the young man told her all his sad tale, and how he possessed a wonderful snuff-box, and how it had been stolen from him, and how he had nothing left, now that he was parted from his wife and was in need of everything. And he said that perhaps her son, who travelled so far, might have seen a palace with laths of gold and tiles of diamond, and furnished all in silver and gold. As he spoke these last words, the moon came in and said he smelt mortal flesh and blood. But his mother told him that it was an unhappy man who had lost everything, and had come all this way to consult him, and bade the young man not to be afraid, but to come forward and show himself. So he went boldly up to the moon, and asked if by any accident he had seen a palace with the laths of gold and the tiles of diamond, and all the furniture of silver and gold. Once this house belonged to him, but now it was stolen. And the moon said

no, but that the sun travelled farther than he did, and that the young man had better go and ask him.

So the young man departed, and went away, away, away, as well as his horse would take him, begging his living as he rode along, and, somehow or other, at last he got to the land of the sun. There he found a little old woman, who asked him, 'What are you doing here? Go away. Have you not heard that my son feeds upon Christians?' But he said no, and that he would not go, for he was so miserable that it was all one to him whether he died or not; that he had lost everything, and especially a splendid palace like none other in the whole world, for it had laths of gold and tiles of diamond, and all the furniture was of silver and gold. And that he had sought it far and long, and in all the earth there was no man more unhappy. So the old woman's heart melted, and she agreed to hide him.

When the Sun arrived, he declared that he smelt Christian flesh, and he meant to have it for his dinner. But his mother told him such a pitiful story of the miserable wretch who had lost everything, and had come from far to ask his help, that at last he promised to see him.

So the young man came out from his hiding-place and begged the sun to tell him if in the course of his travels he had not seen somewhere a palace that had not its like in the whole world, for its laths were of gold and its tiles of diamond, and all the furniture in silver and gold.

And the sun said no, but that perhaps the wind had seen it, for he entered everywhere, and saw things that no one else ever saw, and if anyone knew where it was, it was certainly the wind.

Then the poor young man again set forth as well as his horse could take him, begging his living as he went, and, somehow or other, he ended by reaching the home of the wind. He found there a little old woman busily occupied in filling great barrels with water. She asked him what had put it into his head to come there, for her son ate everything he saw, and that he would shortly arrive quite mad, and that the young man had better look out. But he answered that he was so unhappy that he had ceased to mind anything, even being eaten, and then he told her that he had been robbed of a palace that had not its equal in all the world, and of all that was in it, and that he had even left his wife, and was wandering over the world until he found it. And that it was the sun who had sent him to consult the wind. So she hid him under the staircase, and soon they heard the south wind arrive, shaking the house to its foundations. Thirsty as he was, he did not wait to drink, but he told his mother that he smelt the blood of a Christian man, and that she had better bring him out at once and make him ready

to be eaten. But she bade her son eat and drink what was before him, and said that the poor young man was much to be pitied, and that the sun had granted him his life in order that he might consult the wind. Then she brought out the young man, who explained how he was seeking for his palace, and that no man had been able to tell him where it was, so he had come to the wind. And he added that he had been shamefully robbed, and that the laths were of gold and the tiles of diamond, and all the furniture in silver and gold, and he inquired if the wind had not seen such a palace during his wanderings.

And the wind said yes, and that all that day he had been blowing backwards and forwards over it without being able to move one single tile. 'Oh, do tell me where it is,' cried the you man. 'It is a long way off,' replied the wind, 'on the other side of the Red Sea.' But our traveller was not discouraged, he had already journeyed too far.

So he set forth at once, and, somehow or other, he managed to reach that distant land. And he enquired if anyone wanted a gardener. He was told that the head gardener at the castle had just left, and perhaps he might have a chance of getting the place. The young man lost no time, but walked up to the castle and asked if they were in want of a gardener; and how happy he was when they agreed to take him! Now he passed most of his day in gossiping with the servants about the wealth of their masters and the wonderful things in the house. He made friends with one of the maids, who told him the history of the snuff-box, and he coaxed her to let him see it. One evening she managed to get hold of it, and the young man watched carefully where she hid it away, in a secret place in the bedchamber of her mistress.

The following night, when everyone was fast asleep, he crept in and took the snuff-box. Think of his joy as he opened the lid! When it asked him, as of yore, 'What do you want?' he replied: 'What do I want? What do I want? Why, I want to go with my palace to the old place, and for the King and the Queen and all their servants to be drowned in the Red Sea.' He hardly finished speaking when he found himself back again with his wife, while all the other inhabitants of the palace were lying at the bottom of the Red Sea.

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