



Tonight's Bedtime Story

Fairy Tales for Sleepy Children

presents

The Blue Bird

From "The Fairy Book" by Miss Mulock



powerful and wealthy king, having lost his wife, was so inconsolable, that he shut himself up for eight entire days, in a little cabinet, where he spent his time in knocking his head against the wall, until the courtiers were afraid he would kill himself! They accordingly placed stuffed mattresses over every wall, and allowed all his subjects, who desired, to pay him a visit, trusting that something would be said to alleviate his grief. But neither grave nor lively discourse made any impression upon him; he scarcely heard what was spoken. At last there presented herself before him a lady, covered from head to foot in a long crape veil, who wept and sobbed so much that the king noticed her. She told him that she did not come, like the rest, to console him, but rather to encourage his grief. She herself had lost the best of husbands, and here she began to weep so profusely, that it was a wonder her eyes were not melted out of her head. The king began to weep in company, and to talk to her of his dear wife—she did the same of her dear husband: in fact they talked so much, that they talked their sorrow quite away. Then, lifting up her veil, she showed lovely blue eyes and dark eyelashes. The king noticed her more and more—he spoke less and less of the departed queen; by and by he ceased to speak of her at all. The end was, that he courted the inconsolable lady in the black veil, and married her.

By his first marriage he had one daughter, called Florina, or the little Flora, because she was so fresh and lovely; at the time of his second marriage she was quite fifteen years old. The new queen also had a daughter, who was being brought up by her godmother, the fairy Soussio—her name was Troutina, because her complexion was all spotted like a trout's back. Indeed, she was altogether ugly and disagreeable; and when contrasted with Florina, the difference between the two made the mother so envious, that she and Troutina spared no pains to make the princess's life unhappy, and to speak ill of her to her father.

One day the king observed that both girls were now old enough to be married, and that he intended to choose for one of them the first prince who visited his court.

"Be it so," said the queen; "and as my daughter is older, handsomer, and more amiable than yours, she shall have the first choice." The king disputed nothing; indeed, he never did—the queen ruled him in all things.

Some time after, news came that King Charming would shortly arrive, and that he was as charming as his name. When the queen heard this news, she sent for milliners, dressmakers, jewellers, and decked Troutina from head to foot; but to Florina she allowed not a single new frock. The poor princess had to put on her old one, which was very old and shabby indeed, she was so much ashamed of it, that she hid herself in a corner of the saloon, lest King Charming should see her. But he did not, being overwhelmed with the ceremonious reception given him by the queen, who presented to him Troutina, all blazing with jewels, yet so ugly that King Charming involuntarily turned away his eyes.

"But, madam, is there not another princess called Florina?"

They pointed to the corner where Florina was hidden, and she came out, blushing so much, that the young king was dazzled with her beauty, in spite of her shabby gown. He rose, and made her a profound reverence, paying her besides so many elegant compliments, that the queen became very much displeased. King Charming took no heed, but conversed with Florina for three hours without stopping. Indeed, his admiration of her was so plain, that the

queen and Troutina begged of the king that she might be shut up in a tower during the whole time of his visit; so, as soon as she had returned to her apartment, four men in masks entered, and carried her off, leaving her in a dark cell, and in the utmost desolation.

Meantime King Charming eagerly awaited her re-appearance, but he saw her no more; and by the queen's orders, every one about him spoke all the evil they could of poor Florina, but he refused to believe one word. "No," said he, "nature could not have united a base nature to such a sweet innocent face. I will rather suppose that she is maligned by her stepmother and by Troutina, who is so ugly herself that no wonder she bears envy towards the fairest woman in the world."

Meanwhile Florina, shut up in her tower, lamented bitterly. "Ah, would I had been sent here before I saw this amiable prince, who was so kind to me! It is to prevent my meeting him again, that the queen treats me so cruelly. Alas! the little beauty I have has cost me sore!"

The queen, to win King Charming for her daughter, made him many presents; among the rest an order of knighthood, a golden heart, enamelled in flame-colour, surrounded with many arrows, but pierced by one only, the motto being, "She alone." The heart was made of a single ruby, as big as an ostrich's egg. Each arrow was a diamond, a finger's length, and the chain was of pearls, each weighing a pound. When the young king received this very handsome present, he was much perplexed, until they told him it came from the princess whom he had lately seen, and who requested him to be her knight.

"Florina!" cried he, enchanted.

"No, Troutina."

"Then I am sorry I cannot accept the honour," replied King Charming. "A monarch is surely at liberty to form his own engagements. I know what is a knight's duty to his lady, and should wish to fulfil it; as I cannot fulfil it to Troutina, I would rather decline the favour she offers me than become unworthy of it."

Civil as this answer was, it irritated the queen and her daughter exceedingly; and when, since in all his audiences with their majesties he never saw Florina, he at last inquired where the younger princess was, the queen answered fiercely, that she was shut up in prison, and would remain there till Troutina was married.

"And for what reason?" asked King Charming.

"I do not know; and if I did, I would not tell you," replied the queen, more angrily than ever; so that King Charming quitted her presence as soon as ever he could.

When he was alone, he sent for one of his attendants, whom he trusted very much, and begged him to gain information from some court lady about the princess Florina. This scheme succeeded so well, that Florina was persuaded to promise she would speak to him for a few moments next night, from a small window at the bottom of the tower. But the faithless lady-in-waiting betrayed her to the queen, who locked her up in her chamber, and determined to send her own daughter to the window instead. The night was so dark that King Charming never found out the difference, but made to Troutina all the tender speeches that he meant for Florina, offering her his crown and his heart, and ending by placing his

own ring on her finger, as a pledge of eternal fidelity. He also made her agree to fly with him next night, in a chariot drawn by winged frogs, of which a great magician, one of his friends, had made him a present. He thought she talked very little, and that little not in quite so pleasant a voice as formerly; still, he was too much in love to notice much, and departed very joyful in having obtained her promise.

Next night Troutina, thickly veiled, quitted the palace by a secret door. King Charming met her, received her in his arms, and vowed to love her for ever. Then he lifted her into the fairy chariot, and they sailed about in the air for some hours. But as he was not likely to wish to sail about for ever, he at last proposed that they should descend to earth, and be married. Troutina agreed with all her heart, but wished that the ceremony should be performed at her godmother's, the fairy Soussio. So they entered together into the fairy-palace, and she told her godmother privately how all had happened, and how she had won King Charming, begging the fairy to pacify him when he found out his mistake.

"My child," replied the godmother, "that is more easily said than done; he is too deeply in love with Florina."

Meantime the king was left waiting in a chamber with diamond walls, so thin and transparent, that through them he saw Troutina and Soussio conversing together. He stood like a man in a dream: "What! am I betrayed? Has this enemy to my peace carried away my dear Florina?"

How great was his despair, when Soussio said to him in a commanding voice, "King Charming, behold the princess Troutina, to whom you have promised your faith: marry her immediately!"

"Do you think me a fool?" cried the king; "I have promised her nothing. She is—"

"Stop—if you show me any disrespect—"

"I will respect you as much as a fairy deserves to be respected, if you will only give me back my princess."

"Am not I she?" said Troutina. "It was to me you gave this ring; to me you spoke at the window."

"I have been wickedly deceived!" cried the king; "come, my winged frogs, we will depart immediately."

"You cannot," said Soussio; and, touching him, he found himself fixed as if his feet were glued to the pavement.

"You may turn me into stone!" exclaimed he; "but I will love no one, except Florina."

Soussio employed persuasions, threats, promises, entreaties. Troutina wept, groaned, shrieked, and then tried quiet sulkiness; but the king uttered not a word. For twenty days and twenty nights he stood there, without sleeping, or eating, or once sitting down—they talking all the while.

At length, Soussio, quite worn out, said, "Choose seven years of penitence and punishment, or marry my goddaughter."

"I choose," answered the king; "and I will not marry your goddaughter."

"Then fly out of this window, in the shape of a Blue Bird."

Immediately the king's figure changed. His arms formed themselves into wings; his legs and feet turned black and thin, and claws grew upon them; his body wasted into the slender shape of a bird, and was covered with bright blue feathers; his eyes became round and beady; his nose an ivory beak; and his crown was a white plume on the top of his head. He began to speak in a singing voice, and then uttering a doleful cry, fled away as far as possible from the fatal palace of Soussio.

But, though he looked only a blue bird, the king was his own natural self still, and remembered all his misfortunes, and did not cease to lament for his beautiful Florina. Flying from tree to tree, he sang melancholy songs about her and himself, and wished he were dead many a time.

The fairy Soussio sent back Troutina to her mother, who was furious. "Florina shall repent having pleased King Charming!" cried she; and dressing her own daughter in rich garments, with a gold crown on her head, and King Charming's ring on her finger, she took her to the tower. "Florina, your sister is come to see and bring you marriage presents, for she is now the wife of King Charming."

Florina, doubting no more her lover's loss, fell down in a swoon, and the queen immediately went to tell her father that she was mad for love, and must be watched closely lest she should in some way disgrace herself. The king said, her stepmother might do with her exactly what she pleased.

When the princess recovered from her swoon, she began to weep, and wept all night long, sitting at the open window of her tower. The Blue Bird, who kept continually flying about the palace, but only at night time, lest any one should see him, happened to come and perch upon a tall cypress opposite the window, and heard her; but it was too dark to see who she was, and at daylight she shut the window. Next night, it was broad moonlight, and then he saw clearly the figure of a young girl, weeping sore, and knew that it was his beloved Florina.

When she paused in her lamentations, "Adorable princess," said he, "why do you mourn? Your troubles are not without remedy."

"Who speaks to me so gently?" asked she.

"A king, who loves you, and will never love any other."

So saying he flew up to the window, and at first frightened the princess very much, for she could not understand such an extraordinary thing as a bird who talked in words like a man, yet kept still the piping voice of a nightingale. But soon she began stroking his beautiful plumage, and caressing him.

"Who are you, charming bird?"

"You have spoken my name. I am King Charming, condemned to be a bird for seven years, because I will not renounce you."

"Ah! do not deceive me. I know you have married Troutina. She came to visit me with your diamonds on her neck, and your ring on her finger, wearing the golden crown and royal mantle which you had given her, while I was laden with iron chains."

"It is all false," sang the Blue Bird, and told her his whole story, which comforted her so much that she thought no more of her misfortunes. They conversed till daybreak, and promised faithfully every night to meet again thus.

Meantime the princess could not sleep for thinking of her Blue Bird. "Suppose sportsmen should shoot him, or eagles and kites attack him, and vultures devour him just as if he were a mere bird and not a great king? What should I do if I saw his poor feathers scattered on the ground, and knew that he was no more?" So she grieved all day long.

The beautiful Blue Bird, hid in a hollow tree, spent the hours in thinking of his princess. "How happy I am to have found her again, and found her so engaging and so sweet." And as he wished to pay her all the attentions that a lover delights in, he flew to his own kingdom, entered his palace by an open window, and sought for some diamond ear-rings, which he brought back in his beak, and, when night came, offered them to Florina. So night after night he brought her something beautiful, and they talked together till day, when he flew back to the hollow tree, where he sang her praises in a voice so sweet that the passers-by thought it was not a bird but a spirit. Rumours went about that the place was haunted, and no one would go near the spot. Thus, for two years, Florina spent her time, and never once regretted her captivity. Her Blue Bird visited her every night, and they loved one another dearly. And though she saw nobody and he lived in the hollow of a tree, they always found plenty to say to one another.

The malicious queen tried with all her might to get Troutina married, but in vain. Nobody would have her. "If it were Florina, now," said the kings, or the kings' ambassadors, "we should be most happy to sign the contract."

"That girl thwarts us still," said the queen. "She must have some secret correspondence with foreign suitors. But we will find her out and punish her."

The mother and daughter finished talking so late that it was midnight before they reached Florina's apartment. She had dressed herself as usual, with the utmost care, to please her Blue Bird, who liked to see her lovely; and she had adorned herself with all the pretty things he had given her. He perched on the window-sill, and she sat at the window, and they were singing together a duet, which the queen heard outside. She burst the door open, and rushed into the chamber.

The first thing Florina did was to open her little window that the Blue Bird might fly away. But he would not. He had seen the queen and Troutina, and though he could not defend his princess, he refused to leave her. The two rushed upon her like furies. Her wonderful beauty and her splendid jewels startled them. "Whence came all these ornaments?" cried they.

"I found them," replied Florina, and refused to answer more.

"Some one has given them to you that you might join in treason against your father and the kingdom.

"Am I likely to do this? I, a poor princess, kept in captivity for two years, with you as my gaoler?"

"In captivity," repeated the queen. "Why, then, do you dress yourself so fine, and adorn your chamber with flowers?"

"I have leisure enough: I may just as well spend some of it in adorning myself, instead of bemoaning my misfortune—innocent as I am."

"Innocent, indeed!" cried the queen, and began to search the room. In it she found all King Charming's presents—diamonds, rubies, emeralds, amethysts—in short, jewels without end. Meantime, from the window the Blue Bird, who had the eye of a lynx, sang aloud, "Beware, Florina!"

"You see, madam," said Florina, "even the spirits of the air take pity upon me."

"I see that you are in league with demons; but your father shall judge you;" and, very much frightened, the queen left her, and went to hold counsel with Troutina as to what was to be done. They agreed to put in Florina's chamber a waiting-maid, who should watch her from morning till night. When the princess learnt this she was in great grief.

"Alas!" cried she, "I can no longer talk with my bird who loved me so; and our love was consolation for all our misfortunes. What will he do? What shall I do?" And she melted into floods of tears.

She dared not open the window, though she heard continually his wings fluttering round it. For more than a month she waited; but the serving-maid watched her night and day. At last, overcome with weariness, the girl fell asleep, and then Florina opened her little window, and sang in a low voice—

"Blue Bird, Blue Bird,

Come to my side."

The Blue Bird flew to the window-sill, and they lavished on one another a hundred caresses, and talked together till dawn. Next night it happened the same, till they began to hope that the waiting-maid, who seemed to enjoy her sleep so much, would sleep every night to come. But on the third night, hearing a noise, she wakened, and saw by the light of the moon the Princess Florina sitting at the window with a beautiful Blue Bird, who warbled in her ear and touched her gently with his beak. The spy listened and heard all their conversation, very much astonished that a princess could be so fond of a mere bird. When day came she related all to the queen and Troutina, who concluded that the bird could be no other than King Charming. They sent the girl back, told her to express no curiosity, but to feign sleep, and to go to bed earlier than usual. Then the poor deceived princess opened her little window, and sang her usual song—

"Blue Bird, Blue Bird,

Come to my side."

But no Blue Bird appeared. The queen had caused sharp knives to be hung outside the hollow of the tree: he flew against them and cut his feet and wings, till he dropped down, covered with blood.

"Oh, Florina, come to my help!" sighed he, "But she is dead, I know, and I will die also."

At that moment, his friend, the magician, who since he had seen the chariot with flying frogs return without King Charming, had gone eight times round the world in search of him, made his ninth journey, and came to the tree where the poor Blue Bird lay, calling out, "King Charming, King Charming!"

The king recognised the voice of his best friend: whereupon the magician took him out of the hollow tree, healed his wounds, and heard all his history. He persuaded King Charming that, overcome with fear and cruel treatment, Florina must have betrayed him.

"Then do as you will with me!" cried the king. "Put me into a cage and take me back with you. I shall at least be safe there for the five years that are to be endured."

"But," said the enchanter, "can you remain five years in so undignified a position? And you have enemies who will assuredly seize on your kingdom."

"Why can I not return and govern it as before?"

"I fear," replied his friend, "that the thing is difficult. Who would obey a Blue Bird?"

"Ah, that is too true!" cried the king, sadly, "People only judge by the outside."

Meantime Florina, overcome with grief, fell dangerously sick, and in her sickness she kept singing, day and night, her little song—

"Blue Bird, Blue Bird,

Come to my side."

But no one regarded her.

At last a sudden change took place in her fortunes. The king her father died, and the people, who knew she was his heir, began to inquire, with one accord, where was the Princess Florina? They assailed the palace in crowds, demanding her for their sovereign. The riot became so dangerous that Troutina and her mother fled away to the fairy Soussio. Then the populace stormed the tower, rescued the sick and almost dying princess, and crowned her as their queen.

The exceeding care that was taken of her, and her longing to live in order to see again her Blue Bird, restored Florina's health, and gave her strength to call a council and arrange all the affairs of her kingdom. Then she departed by night, and alone, to go over the world in search of her Blue Bird.

The magician, who was King Charming's friend, went to the fairy Soussio, whom he knew, for they had quarrelled and made it up again, as fairies and magicians do, many times within

the last five or six hundred years. She received him civilly, and asked him what he wanted. He tried to make a bargain with her but could effect nothing, unless King Charming would consent to marry Troutina. The enchanter found this bride so ugly that he could not advise. Still, the Blue Bird had run so many risks in his cage: the nail it was hung upon had broken, and the king suffered much in the fall; Minetta, the cat, had glowered at him with her green eyes; the attendants had forgotten his hemp-seed and his water-glass, so that he was half dying of hunger and thirst; and a monkey had plucked at his feathers through the wires as disrespectfully as if, instead of a king, he had been a linnet or a jay. Worse than all, his next heir spread reports of his death, and threatened to seize on his throne.

Under these circumstances the magician thought it best to agree with Soussio that King Charming should be restored to his kingdom and his natural shape for six months, on condition that Troutina should remain in his palace, and that he should try to like her and marry her. If not, he was to become again a Blue Bird. So he found himself once more King Charming, and as charming as ever; but he would rather have been a bird and near his beloved, than a king in the society of Troutina. The enchanter gave him the best reasons for what had been done, and advised him to occupy himself with the affairs of his kingdom and people; but he thought less of these things than how to escape from the horror of marrying Troutina.

Meanwhile the Queen Florina, in a peasant's dress, with a straw hat on her head, and a canvas sack on her shoulder, began her journey: sometimes on horseback, sometimes on foot, sometimes by sea, sometimes by land, wandering; evermore after her beloved King Charming. One day, stopping beside a fountain, she let her hair fall loose, and dipped her weary feet in the cool water, when an old woman, bent, and leaning on a stick, came by.

"My pretty maiden, what are you doing here all alone?"

"Good mother," replied the queen, "I have too many troubles to be pleasant company for anybody."

"Tell me your troubles, and I may be able to soften them."

Florina obeyed, and told her whole history, and how she was travelling over the world in search of the Blue Bird. The little woman listened attentively, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, became, instead of an old woman, a beautiful fairy.

"Incomparable Florina, the king you seek is no longer a bird; my sister Soussio has restored him to his proper shape, and he reigns in his own kingdom. Do not afflict yourself; happiness will yet be yours. Take these four eggs, and whenever you are in trouble, break them, and see what ensues." So saying, the fairy vanished.

Florina, greatly comforted, put the eggs in her sack, and turned her steps towards the country of King Charming. She walked eight days and nights without stopping, and then came to a mountain made entirely of ivory, and nearly perpendicular. Despairing of ever climbing it, she sank down at the foot, prepared to die there, when she bethought herself of the eggs. "Let me see," said she, "if the fairy has deceived me or not." So she broke one, and inside it were little hooks of gold, which she fitted on her feet and hands, and by means of which she climbed the mountain with ease. Arrived at the summit she found new difficulties; for the valley below was one large smooth mirror, in which sixty thousand women stood

admiring themselves. They had need, for the charm of the mirror was that each saw herself therein, not as she was, but as she wished to be; and the grimaces they made were enough to cause a person to die of laughter. Not one of them had ever gained the top of the mountain; and when they saw Florina there, they all burst into angry outcries, "How has this woman got up the hill? If she descends upon our mirror her first footstep will crack it into a thousand pieces."

The queen, uncertain what to do, broke the second egg, and there flew out two pigeons harnessed to a fine chariot, in which Florina mounted, and descended lightly over the mirror to the valley's foot. "Now, my pretty pigeons," said she, "will you convey me to the palace of King Charming?" The obedient pigeons did so, flying day and night till they reached the city gates; when the queen dismissed them with a sweet kiss, which was worth more than her crown.

How her heart beat as she entered, and begged to see the king! "You!" cried the servants mocking. "Little peasant-girl, your eyes are not half good enough to see the king. Besides, he is going to-morrow to the temple with the Princess Troutina, whom he has at last agreed to marry."

Florina sat down on a door-step, and hid her face under her straw hat and her drooping hair. "Alas!" she cried, "my Blue Bird has forsaken me."

She neither ate nor slept, but rose with the dawn, and pushed her way through the guards to the temple, where she saw two thrones, one for King Charming, and the other for Troutina. They arrived shortly; he more charming and she more repulsive than ever. Knitting her brows, Troutina exclaimed, "What creature is that who dares approach so near my golden throne?"

"I am a poor peasant-girl," said Florina. "I come from afar to sell you curiosities." And she took out of her sack the emerald bracelets which the Blue Bird had given her.

"These are pretty trinkets," said Troutina; and going up to the king she asked him what he thought of them. At sight of the ornaments he turned pale, remembering those he had given to Florina.

"These bracelets are worth half my kingdom; I did not think there had been more than one pair in the world."

"Then I will buy these," said Troutina; but Florina refused to sell them for money: the price she asked was permission to sleep a night in the Chamber of Echoes.

"As you will; your bargains are cheap enough," replied Troutina, laughing; and when she laughed she showed teeth like the tusks of a wild boar.

Now the king, when he was a Blue Bird, had informed Florina about this Chamber of Echoes, where every word spoken could be heard in his own chamber; she could not have chosen a better way of reproaching him for his infidelity. But vain were her sobs and complainings; the king had taken opium to lull his grief; he slept soundly all night long. Next day, Florina was in great disquietude. Could he have really heard her, and been indifferent to her sorrow; or had he not heard her at all? She determined to buy another night in the

Chamber of Echoes; but she had no more jewels to tempt Troutina; so she broke the third egg. Out of it came a chariot of polished steel, inlaid with gold, drawn by six green mice, the coachman being a rose-coloured rat, and the postilion a grey one. Inside the carriage sat little puppets, who behaved themselves just like live ladies and gentlemen.

When Troutina went to walk in the palace garden, Florina awaited her in a green alley, and made the mice gallop, and the ladies and gentlemen bow, till the princess was delighted, and ready to buy the curiosity at any price. Again Florina exacted permission to pass the night in the Chamber of Echoes; and again the king, undisturbed by her lamentation, slept without waking till dawn.

The third day, one of the palace valets, passing her by, said, "You stupid peasant-girl, it is well the king takes opium every night, or you would disturb him by that terrible sobbing of yours."

"Does he so?" said the queen, now comprehending all. "Then if you will promise to-night to keep the opium cup out of his way, these pearls and diamonds," and she took a handful of them from her sack, "shall assuredly be yours."

The valet promised; and then Florina broke her fourth egg, out of which came a pie composed of birds, which, though they had been plucked, baked, and made ready for the table, sang as beautifully as birds that are alive. Troutina, charmed with this marvellous novelty, bought it at the same price as the rest, adding generously a small piece of gold.

When all the palace were asleep, Florina for the last time, hoping King Charming would hear her, called upon him with all sorts of tender expressions, reminding him of their former vows, and their two years of happiness. "What have I done to thee, that thou shouldst forget me and marry Troutina?" sobbed she; and the king, who this time was wide awake, heard her. He could not make out whose voice it was, or whence it came, but it somehow reminded him of his dearest Florina, whom he had never ceased to love. He called his valet, inquired who was sleeping in the Chamber of Echoes, and heard that it was the little peasant-girl who had sold to Troutina the emerald bracelet. Then he rose up, dressed himself hastily, and went in search of her. She was sitting mournfully on the floor, with her hair hiding her face, and her eyes swollen with tears; but he knew at once his faithful Florina. He fell on his knees before her covered her hands with kisses, and they embraced and wept together. For what was the good of all their love when they were still in the power of the fairy Soussio?

But at this moment appeared the friendly enchanter, with a fairy still greater than Soussio, the one who had given Florina the four eggs. They declared that their united power was stronger than Soussio's, and that the lovers should be married without further delay.

When this news reached Troutina, she ran to the Chamber of Echoes, and there beheld her beautiful rival, whom she had so cruelly afflicted. But the moment she opened her mouth to speak, her wicked tongue was silenced for ever; for the magician turned her into a trout, which he flung out of the window into the stream that flowed through the castle garden.

As for King Charming and Queen Florina, delivered out of all their sorrows, and given to one another, their joy was quite inexpressible, and it lasted to the end of their lives.

To get more stories

Go to www.tonightsbedtimestory.com

License

While the text and the illustrations used in this work are out of copyright, the unique presentation created for those elements is copyrighted. You may use, copy and distribute this work freely but you are not authorized to use this work for commercial purpose and you may not alter, transform, or build upon this work in any way.