



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Blue Castle

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Once upon a time in a far-off country there lived a witch on top of a high mountain, and every year she came down into the country about and appeared at the palace of the King and asked for a bag of gold.

One night when the King and his Queen were making merry and having a big feast in honor of the birth of their little daughter, the Princess Lily, the old witch came to the palace and asked for her bag of gold.

"Tell her to begone," said the King to his servant. "I have used all the gold in the vaults for the feast; she will have to come next year."

Now the old witch was very angry when she heard this message, and she hid in the grounds of the palace until all were asleep that night and then she entered the palace and carried off the baby Princess.

The Queen and the King were beside themselves with grief when they discovered their loss, and they offered big rewards for the return of their daughter, but she could not be found.

"Find the old witch who came here the night of the feast," said one of the King's wise men, "and you will find the Princess."

They hunted far and near, but the witch could not be found, for when any one attempted to climb the mountain where the old witch lived the insects would become as thick as mist and clouds and they could not see where to go.

One after another gave up the attempt, and so after a while the King and Queen mourned their daughter as dead and the old witch never came to the palace again.

The Queen and King never had any more children, and every day they grieved because there would be no one to reign after they were gone.

One day one of the King's wise men said to him: "In a cave in the forest lives an ogre who has a wonderful horse; it is kept in a stable made of marble, and its stall is of gold, and it is fed on corn grown in a field of pearls.

"If we could get this horse we might be able to climb the mountain where the old witch lives, and perhaps the Princess is still alive."

"But how can we get this horse?" asked the King.

"Ah! that is the hard part," answered the wise man. "The enchanted creature can only be caught and mounted by one who can feed him with the magic corn, and it is said that any one who tries to gather the corn from the field of pearls finds himself sinking, and has to run for his life, so that only the ogre, who knows the magic words that keep the pearls from drawing him down, can gather the corn."

When the King heard this he sent for all the princes in the land to come to his palace, and when they came he told them he would give to the one who could catch and mount the ogre's enchanted horse his kingdom if he could find the lost Princess Lily, and she should become his wife.

But all the princes were rich enough, and did not care to take such a risk, especially as they had never seen the Princess Lily.

Then the King sent out word to all the poor young men in his kingdom to come to him, and he made them the same offer, but one by one they turned away, and at last there was only a poor peasant youth left.

"I will try, Your Majesty," he said, "but I will not marry the Princess unless I can love her, and if she does not wish to marry me I will not hold you to that part of the bargain, either, but I will take the kingdom if I bring back your child."

So that night the peasant boy went to a fairy that lived in the woods and asked her to help him.

"You can only enter the field of magic corn by wearing the magic shoes belonging to the ogre, and he sleeps with them under his bed. They are tied to the big toe of his right foot by a silken thread, and no one can cut it or break it without awakening the ogre.

"I will give you a feather, and if you are fortunate enough to enter his chamber without being caught, for he is guarded well by a dog with two heads, use this feather to tickle his left foot and you can cut the silken thread without the ogre knowing it. This is all I can do to help you. The two-headed dog is not in my power to control."

So the peasant took the magic feather and that night he went to the ogre's castle in the woods and waited until he heard his snore, and then he took from his pocket two big bones.

He opened the door to the castle, for the ogre was afraid of no one and did not lock his door at night.

The two-headed dog growled and sprang toward the peasant, but he quickly thrust the bones in the mouth of each and that quieted them.

The two heads began to eat, and while they were eating the peasant crept softly into the room of the sleeping ogre and tickled his left foot, which was sticking out from under the bedclothes.

The old ogre began to laugh, and he laughed so hard and loudly that no other sound could be heard; and the peasant had time to break the slender thread which was tied to the magic shoes with one hand while he kept tickling the ogre's left foot with the feather held in the other hand.

When he had the shoes under his arm he crept softly away from the bed, leaving the ogre still laughing.

The two-headed dog was still eating the bones, and the peasant went out and sat on the steps of the castle to put on the magic shoes.

He had just drawn the shoes on when the two-headed dog finished the bones and set up a bark that the peasant thought at first was thunder.

He ran to the field of pearls where grew the magic corn, and was just pulling the ears when the ogre came dashing out of his castle, followed by the two-headed dog, with both mouths wide open and looking as though he would devour him.

Out of the field ran the peasant, but not before the ogre had entered, and down went the ogre out of sight, the pearls closing over his head, for, of course, he forgot all about his shoes when he heard the two-headed dog bark, and anyway he thought they were tied to the big toe of his right foot.

But though he was rid of the ogre he was not of the two-headed dog, which ran after him, showing his two sets of big teeth and barking all the while. But the peasant was far ahead of the dog, so he reached the stable and fed the magic corn to the enchanted horse, who neighed in the most friendly manner and let the peasant mount him.

He wore a bridle of gold and silver trimmed with rubies, and he was pure white, with a saddle of purple velvet, with gold and silver trimmings.

He was a horse fit for a king to ride, and the poor peasant looked strangely out of place on his back.

Just as the peasant rode into the yard of the castle the two-headed dog dashed at the hind feet of the enchanted horse to bite him, but the horse kicked at him and over he rolled.

The peasant looked back to see what had happened to the dog, but he was nowhere to be seen; in the place where he had lain was a big black-looking rock with a ragged-looking top like a set of huge teeth.

The peasant was rid of both his pursuers now, and he rode off toward the

mountain where the King had told him the witch lived.

Up the mountain dashed the enchanted white horse, as though he had wings instead of feet, and in a few minutes he had carried the peasant to the top.

The peasant looked about him, expecting to see a cave, but to his surprise he saw only a grove of trees with something glistening through their leaves which looked like a house.

When he rode nearer to the grove he saw a deep-blue castle of glass without doors or windows, and inside he could see a girl spinning.

She looked up as the shadow of the horse and rider fell on the glass castle, and her eyes grew big with surprise, but before the peasant could jump from his horse an old woman came up through the floor of the house and tapped the girl on the head with her cane, and she turned into a mouse.



The peasant was too astonished to move for a minute, but the laugh of the old woman brought him to his senses and he knew she must be the witch.

“Ha, ha! you caught the horse, but you cannot bring back the Princess until I will it!” she screamed, and then disappeared through the floor.

The peasant walked around the blue castle, but no door or window could he find, or an opening of any kind.

He was leading the horse by his gold bridle when suddenly it lifted one of its front feet and struck the blue castle.

Crash went the blue glass, and the peasant saw an opening large enough for him to enter.

He was about to do so, leaving the enchanted horse outside, when he heard another crash—the enchanted horse was following him in; it had broken a place large enough for both of them to enter.

The mouse was crouching in one corner of the room and the peasant picked it up carefully and put it in his pocket.

The horse went to the spot where the old witch had disappeared, and tapped on the glass floor three times with one of his front feet, and up from the floor came the old witch. But this time she was not laughing; she looked frightened, and trembled so she had to lean on her cane to keep from falling.

The enchanted horse took her by the dress and shook her three times, and out from her pocket fell a black bean with a white spot on it.

As it dropped the old witch screamed and fell on the floor, and the horse picked up the bean and swallowed it.

The peasant all this time was standing watching all the strange happenings, not daring to move for fear of breaking the spell, and wondering what would happen next.

As the horse swallowed the bean he seemed to shrink away from sight and a blue mist filled the room. When it cleared the peasant beheld a handsome young man where the horse had stood, and where the witch had been was a deep hole.

"Did she fall into it?" asked the peasant, not knowing what else to say.

"No; in that hole we will find the magic charm that will restore the Princess to her own form," said the young man. "The witch disappeared in the blue mist."

"Let us hurry and find the magic charm," he said, dropping into the hole, and the peasant followed him.

There was a ladder down which they climbed, and down they went until it seemed they would never reach the bottom.

But at last their feet touched something firm and soft and they stood in a beautiful room on a carpet of blue velvet.

The room was hung with velvet the color of sapphire, and the chairs were of burnished gold with velvet seats.

A gold fountain played in the middle of the room and the water fell into a basin of sapphire.

"This is the magic fountain," said the youth. "You must throw the little mouse into it if you wish to bring back the Princess."

The peasant took from his pocket the trembling little mouse. "It is frightened," he said. "I hate to throw it into that deep water."

Without replying the youth grabbed the mouse from the peasant and threw it with great force into the fountain and it disappeared from sight.

"Oh, you have killed it!" said the peasant, looking into the deep-blue water with frightened eyes.

Then he saw a head rise slowly from the bottom of the blue basin; then it came above the water; and then a beautiful girl stepped from the fountain, her golden hair all wet and glistening.

A soft warm breeze came through the windows and soon her hair and clothes were dry, and the peasant thought he had never seen any one so beautiful as the Princess.

“I am the Prince who was changed into the horse for the ogre,” said the youth, addressing the Princess. “I was stolen at the same time you were and the ogre who was the husband of the witch took me and the witch took you, but this youth has rescued us, for it was here that the magic bean was kept that restored me to my own form, and if it had not been for a fairy who came to me one night and told me the secret I never should have regained my own form.”

All the time the Prince was speaking the peasant saw the Princess looking at him with loving glance, and he knew the Princess was not for him, and besides that he knew he never would be happy in a palace.

They began to look about and found they were in a beautiful palace that the old witch had lived in, but, now that she was gone for good, the peasant said he would take it as his reward and let the Prince and the Princess return to her father.

In the stables they found beautiful white horses, and on one of them the Prince and Princess rode away after making the peasant promise to come to their wedding and to dance with the bride. “For we will never forget you,” said the Princess, “and we must always be friends.”

The father and mother of the Princess listened to the story the Prince told, and then the Queen said: “I can tell whether this is my lost child or not. Let me see your left shoulder; she bears her name on that shoulder if she be our child.”

The Princess bared her shoulder and there the Queen saw a tiny lily which proved she was her child.

The King gave a great feast in honor of his daughter’s return, and the Prince and Princess were married; and the peasant danced at the wedding as he promised.

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