

Frances Hodgson Burnett

The Land of the Blue Flower

Part One

The Land of the Blue Flower was not called by that name until the tall, strong, beautiful King Amor came down from his castle on the mountain crag and began to reign. Before that time it was called King Mordreth's Land, and as the first King Mordreth had been a fierce and cruel king this seemed a gloomy name.

A few weeks before Amor was born, his weak, selfish boy-father — whose name was King Mordreth also — had been killed while hunting, and his fair mother with the clear eyes died when he was but a few hours old. But early in that day she sent for her venerable friend and teacher, who was said to be the oldest and wisest man in the world, and who long ago had fled to a cave in the mountains, that he might see no more of the famine and disorder and hatred in the country spread out on the plains below.

He was a marvelous old man, almost a giant in size, and having great blue eyes like deep sea-water. They, too, were clear eyes like the fair Queen's — they seemed to see all things and to hold in their depths no single thought which was not fine and great. The people

were a little afraid of him when they saw him go striding majestically through their streets. They had no name for him but The Ancient One. The lovely Queen drew aside the embroidered coverlet of her gold and ivory bed and showed him the tiny baby sleeping by her side.

"He was born a King," she said. "No one can help him but you."

The Ancient One looked down at him.

"He has long limbs and strong ones. He will make a great King," he said. "Give him to me."

The Queen held out the little newborn one in her arms. "Take him away quickly before he hears the people quarreling at the palace gate," she said. "Take him to the castle on the mountain crag. Keep him there until he is old enough to come down and be King. When the sun sinks behind the clouds I shall die, but if he is with you he will learn what Kings should know."

The Ancient One took the child, folded him in his long gray robe and strode majestically through the palace gates, through the ugly city and out over the plains to the mountain. When he began to climb its steep sides the sun was setting and casting a golden rose color over the big rocks and the wild flowers and bushes which grew on every side, so that there seemed no path to be found. But the Ancient One knew his way anywhere in the world without a path to guide him. He climbed and climbed, and little King Amor slept

soundly in the folds of his gray robe. He reached the summit at last and pushing his way through a jungle of twisted vines starred all over with pale sweet-scented buds, he stood looking at the castle which was set on the very topmost crag, and looked out over the mountain's edge at the sea and the sky and the spreading plains, below.

The sky was dark blue now and lit by a myriad stars, and all was so still that the world seemed thousands of miles away, and ugliness and squalor and people who quarreled seemed things which were not true. A sweet cool wind blew about them as the Ancient One took King Amor from the folds of his gray robe and laid him on the carpet of scented moss.

"The stars are very near," he said. "Waken, young King, and see how near they are and know they are your brothers. Your brother the wind is bringing to you the breath of your brothers the trees. You are at home."

Then King Amor opened his eyes, and when he saw the stars in the dark blueness above him he smiled, and though he was not yet a whole day old he threw up his small hand and it touched his forehead.

"Like a King and a soldier he salutes them," said the Ancient One; "though he does not know he did it."

The castle was huge and splendid though it had been deserted for a hundred years. For three generations the royal owners had not cared to look out on the world from high places. They knew nothing of

the wind and the trees and the stars; they lived on the plains in their cities, and hunted and rioted and levied heavy taxes on their wretched people. And the castle had lived through its summers and winters alone. It had battlements and towers which stood out clear against the sky, and there was a great banquet hall and chambers for hundreds of guests, and rooms for a thousand men at arms, and the courtyard was big enough to hold a tournament in.

In the midst of its space and splendor the little King Amor lived alone but for the companionship of the Ancient One and a servant as old as himself. But they knew a secret which had kept them young in spite of the years they had passed through. They knew that they were the brothers of all things in the world, and that the man who never knows an angered or evil thought can never know a foe. They were strong and straight and wise, and the wildest creature stopped to give them greeting as it passed, and they understood its language when it spoke. Because they held no dark thoughts in their minds they knew no fear, and because they knew no fear the wild creatures knew none and the speech of each was clear to the other.

Each morning they went out on the battlements at dawn to see the splendid sun rise slowly out of the purple sea. One of the very first things the child King Amor remembered in his life — and he remembered it always — was a dawning day when the Ancient One

wakened him gently, and folding him in his long gray robe carried him up the winding and narrow stone stairway, until at last they stepped forth on the top of the huge castle which seemed to the little creature to be so high that it was quite close to the wonderful sky itself.

"The sun is going to rise and wake the world," said the Ancient One. "Young King, watch the wonder of it."

Amor lifted his little head and looked. He was only just old enough to be beginning to understand things, but he loved the Ancient One and all he said and did.

Far below the mountain crag lay the sea. In the night, while it slept, it had looked dark blue or violet, but now it was slowly changing its color. The sky was changing too — it was growing paler and paler — next it grew faintly brighter, so did the sea; then a slight flush crept over land and water and all the small floating clouds were rosy pink. King Amor smiled because birds' voices were to be heard in the trees and bushes, and something golden bright was rising out of the edge of the ocean, and sparkling light danced on the waves. It rose higher and higher and grew so dazzling and wonderful that he threw out his little hand with a shout of joy. The next moment he started back because there rose near him a loud whirr and beating of powerful wings as a great bird flew out of a crag near

by and soared high into the radiant morning heavens.

"It is the eagle who is our neighbor," said the Ancient One. "He has awakened and gone to give his greeting to the sun."

And as the little King sat upright, enraptured, he saw that from the dazzling brightness at the edge of the world there leaped forth a ball of living gold and fire, and even he knew that the sun had risen.

"At every day's dawn it leaps forth like that," said the Ancient One.

"Let us watch together and I will tell you stories of it."

So they sat by the battlement and the stories were told. They were stories of the small grains lying hid in the dark earth waiting for the golden heat of the sun to draw them forth into life until they covered the tilled fields with waving wheat to make bread for the world; they were stories of the seeds of fair flowers warmed and ripened until they burst into scented blossoms; they were stories of the roots of trees and the rich sap drawn upward by the heat until great branches and thick leafage waved in the summer air; they were stories of men, women, and children walking with light step and glad because of the gold of the sun.

"Every day it warms, every day it draws, every day it ripens and gives life. And there are many who forget the wonder of it. Lift your head high as you walk, young King, and often look upward. Never forget

the sun."

At every dawning they rose and saw together the wonder of the day; and the first time the sky was heavy with gray clouds and the sun did not leap upward from behind the edge of the world the Ancient One said another thing.

"The burning gold is behind the lowering gray and purple. The clouds are heavy with soft rain. When they break they will drop it in showers or splendid storms and the thirsty earth will drink it up. The grains will drink it and the seed and the roots, and the world will be joyous and rich with fresh life; the springs will bubble up like crystal, and the brooks will rush babbling through the green of the forest. The drinking places for the cattle will be full and clear and men and women will feel rested and cool. Lift your head high when you walk, young King, and often look upward. Never forget the clouds."

So hearing these things every day King Amor learned the meaning of both sun and cloud and loved and felt himself brother to both.

The first time he remembered seeing a storm the Ancient One took him to the battlements again, and together they watched the dark clouds pour down their floods while their purple was riven by the dazzling lances of the lightning; and the thunder rolled and crashed and seemed to rend asunder things no human eye could see; and the wind roared round the castle on

the mountain crag and beat against its towers, and tossed the branches of the hugest trees, and whirled the rain in sheets over the land, — and King Amor stood erect and strong like some little soldier, though he wondered where the small birds were and if the eagle were in his nest.

Through all the tumult the Ancient One stood still. He looked taller than ever in his long gray robe, and his strange eyes were deep as the sea.

At last he said in a slow, calm voice: "This is the voice of the power men know not. No man has yet quite understood — though it seems to speak. Harken to it. Let your soul stand silent. Listen, young King. Hold your head high as you walk and often look upward. Never forget the storm."

So the King learned to love the storm and be one with it, knowing no fear.

But perhaps — it might be because he had been laid on the scented moss and had without knowing it saluted them on the first night of his life— he felt nearest to, and loved most, his brothers the stars.

Every fair night through the King's earliest years the Ancient One carried him to the battlements and let him fall asleep beneath the shining myriads. But first he would walk about bearing him in his arms, or sit with him in the splendid silence, sometimes relating wonders to him in a low voice, sometimes uttering no word, only looking calmly into the high vault above as if the stars

spoke to him and told him of perfect peace.

"When a man looks long at them," he said, "he grows calm and forgets small things. They answer his questions and show him that his earth is only one of the million worlds. Hold your soul still and look upward often, and you will understand their speech. Never forget the stars."